

Summary of the 2024 Academic Audit of Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau

Academic audit

Academic audits are part of the external quality assurance arrangements for universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. They are the only external quality assurance process that takes a holistic view of a university's teaching, learning, student support and student outcomes.

Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand are in their sixth cycle of academic audit, which has two main phases. From 2017–2020, universities undertook an enhancement theme focusing on access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori and Pacific students.

The second phase is an audit against a framework of 30 guideline statements. Universities undertake a self-assessment against this framework and present a self-review report and supporting evidence for a panel to consider.

The audit panel comprises senior academics or academic managers in Aotearoa New Zealand, a Māori panel member, a Pacific panel member (where possible), an international panel member and a student or recent graduate

Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau (AUT)

Formed in 2000, AUT is the youngest of Aotearoa New Zealand's eight universities, with a history as an educational institute stretching back to its establishment as the Auckland Technical School in 1895. AUT is the only university of technology in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2024, the University operates across three main campuses (City, North and South) and two specialist locations (AUT Millenium and AUT's Centre for Refugee Education).

Internationally, AUT is ranked at 64 (equal) on the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings and in the top 60 of the QS rankings for universities under 50 years old.

Asian students were the largest ethnic cohort in 2023 (35.8%), followed by NZ European/Pākehā (31.9%) and Pacific students (13.8%). Māori students were 9.4% of enrolments in 2023.

The University's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is set out in Te Aronui, which provides a framework for enacting Te Tiriti responsibilities through four strategic goals:

1. Whakaawe – enabling Māori influence
2. Whakaea – realising Māori aspirations
3. Whakamana – equitable outcomes for all
4. Whakanui – eliminating racism and discrimination.

Te Aronui informs plans—such as the Disability Action Plan—initiatives and organisational development; and the University says it is “on a journey” to become a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-enacting university.

AUT’s strategic plan—Te Kete—sets out the vision for the University as “enriching lives and creating a better world through technology, learnings and discovery”. Its mission as “Aotearoa New Zealand’s university of technology and opportunity [is to] produce graduates the world needs, discover and apply knowledge with purpose, and work in partnership to accelerate ... impact”. Seven strategic areas of activity set out the contribution the University aspires to make:

1. being distinguished as a university of technology
2. being a world-ranked university of opportunity
3. committing to the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in history and the future
4. making a unique and sustainable contribution to the world from its location in the Pacific
5. being student-centred
6. supporting its people
7. collectively building a values-based culture.

Since the Cycle 5 audit, AUT has been through considerable change—including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and appointment of new senior leaders (including a new Vice-Chancellor)—and has moved from a period of growth to one of stable or declining student numbers in most areas.

Ongoing financial impacts from COVID-19 led to a Financial Recovery Programme in 2022/2023, which included reducing staff numbers.

Other initiatives underway or signaled at the time of this audit include:

- a Long-term Academic and Capital Plan (LTACP) – “Building our academic future”
- developing a new Learning and Teaching Plan and refreshing the University’s Graduate Profile
- implementing Te Aronui and the Aronui Ora capability development programme
- developing a Pacific Plan
- implementing Ki Uta Ki Tai (Learner Success Plan)
- an academic portfolio management programme
- implementing a new assessment policy
- creating AUT Online (first programmes to launch in 2025)
- developing a student voice framework
- refreshing the academic expectations framework.

About this report

Based on the evidence available to it at the time of the audit (May-September 2024), the Panel considers the University meets, and in several instances exceeds, the outcomes and standards a university of good international standing would be expected to demonstrate. The University therefore meets the expectations of the Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework.

The 24 commendations, 11 affirmations and 12 recommendations reflect the strategic work underway at AUT. The Panel has made recommendations that encourage further good practice and are intended to assist the University as it progresses its own strategic direction.

Commendations

Commendations refer to examples of exceptionally good or innovative practice that should produce positive impacts on teaching, learning and student experience. The Panel commends the University for the following areas of good practice:

Providing a well-presented and easy-to-use self-review report and portfolio.

Achieving its financial recovery plan and development of Te Aronui and Te Kete, while managing through external and internal changes.

Committing to becoming a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-enacting University, including the leadership from the Office of Māori Advancement that has contributed to this work.

Leadership and management of teaching, learning and academic quality

Taking a mature approach to change management, including establishing the Transformation Management Office and the Academic Transformation Governance Group as part of its well-developed and coherent strategic planning framework.

Using good quality data to understand and respond to different student groups — A University Data Warehouse combines data from more than 20 systems, including a customer relationship management system (CRM). This provides insight and support for a range of student support services, particularly managing student transitions and student wellbeing.

Developing Te Aronui and the ways in which this is being used to guide change across the University.

Having a range of mechanisms and good practices, enabling student voices to contribute to academic quality.

Providing culturally affirming spaces for Māori students and Pacific students, including whānau spaces for Māori students and Vā Pasifika spaces for Pacific students.

The way in which it moved to Canvas as its learning management system — Students were part of design and implementation teams. Canvas is widely used, students are satisfied with their experience, and they have a mostly consistent experience between courses.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

Its well-designed application and admissions processes — Admissions processes for domestic undergraduate and pre-degree programmes were centralised in 2018 to improve processing times and communications, provide consistency and remove barriers.

Paying thoughtful attention to student transitions, including the emphasis placed on work-integrated learning placements.

Supporting undergraduate student success through rich and effective engagement by Student Services, the Office of Māori Advancement and the Office of Pacific Advancement.

Committing to having professionally qualified staff able to support students' safety and wellbeing — Professional, qualified staff use a CRM system and a UniCare model in a case-management approach to guide students and coordinate specialist resources and services.

Curriculum, assessment and delivery

Committing to developing culturally responsive curricula — One goal of the common curriculum architecture is to strengthen mātauranga Māori in curricula. Te Aronui provides an enabling framework for further development and Aronui Ora will support capability building.

Taking an evidence-informed, comprehensive and responsive programme review process — In the first stage (a Graduating Year Review) programmes are reviewed against their original proposal to ensure they are meeting intended objectives and outcomes for graduates. They are then periodically reviewed to ensure they remain consistent with other University priorities and good practice.

Developing assessment principles, policy and procedures — These are comprehensive and reflect University and international contexts. They also address current issues including the potential use and misuse of Gen-AI. An assessment policy implementation project is underway.

Teaching quality

Initiatives to recruit staff from under-represented groups, in particular developing the Eke Tangaroa programme — Eke Tangaroa provides extra funding to faculties to support the recruitment of early career Māori and Pacific academic staff and support for these staff to establish their academic, particularly research, careers.

Supporting teaching development across the University through the Office of Learning, Teaching and Educational Design — LTED's work is strategically aligned with University priorities and responds to emerging needs. It provides learning sessions on educational practice, supports course development and review, has one-on-one sessions and provides online resources to support teaching development.

Developing and rolling-out Aronui Ora, the University's cultural capability development programme that supports implementation of Te Aronui and builds understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Establishing Te Kāhui and making available other advice to support promotion opportunities for Māori, particularly to senior academic appointments — Te Kāhui includes members of AUT's Māori professoriate, an external Māori Professor and a mana whenua representative. This will enhance opportunities for promotion to senior academic positions for Māori, who are under-represented at these levels.

Supervision of postgraduate students

The ways AUT's Research Plan—Rautaki Rangahau—reflects Te Aronui and addresses postgraduate research students and supervision, in supporting Māori and Pacific students to undertake postgraduate research studies.

Providing in its Postgraduate Handbook comprehensive up-to-date information to support students undertaking research — It also covers information for doctoral, Master's and Honour's examinations, and on key boards and committees.

Availability of training and other supports for postgraduate research supervisors — including an introductory supervisor training course and other initiatives forming a 'supervision toolbox'.

Supporting innovative and impactful supervision practices — Increasing numbers of Māori students enrolled in postgraduate research programmes have affected the University's capacity to provide appropriate supervision. Innovative responses to this challenge include developing capacity to supervise in te reo Māori.

Affirmations

Affirmations refer to initiatives planned or underway that are likely to have a positive impact but are at an early stage with no data yet available to assess impact. The Panel has made affirmations in the following areas:

Leadership and management of teaching, learning and academic quality

Redeveloping the Learning and Teaching Plan and developing an Academic Quality Framework.

An enhancement initiative to develop an overall framework for student voice(s), reviewing how student feedback is sought and shared, and how changes based on this feedback are reported.

Developing a university-wide schedule of academic delegations — This enhancement initiative is part of a larger project on academic governance.

Restructuring the Office of Pacific Advancement and developing culturally affirming programmes and initiatives that support success for Pacific students.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

Revising policies and procedures that support student complaints, appeals and grievances in culturally respectful ways — An updated Student Concerns and Complaints policy includes principles that parties to the complaint will uphold the University's values of tika, pono and aroha, and act in a way that upholds the principles of Te Aronui.

Curriculum, assessment and delivery

Intending to implement a curriculum management system — AUT is moving to a portfolio approach to managing its programmes.

Reviewing its learning and teaching reporting — This is both to ensure that data related to student achievement, course and programme performance, and curricula are accessible and centrally reported, and that monitoring identifies actionable information for academic leaders to support decision-making and continuous improvement.

Redeveloping its graduate profile to align with Te Aronui and Te Kete.

The University's approach to understanding the impact Generative Artificial Intelligence is having on learning and teaching — The Assessment Policy acknowledges the realities of the impact that Gen-AI is having on and will continue to have on assessment practices.

Teaching quality

Developing a Pacific Plan to support capacity and capability building for teaching and research supervision for Pacific students.

Redeveloping its Academic Expectations framework — This will be reviewed again to ensure it aligns with Te Kete, Rautaki Rangahau and the Learning and Teaching Plan, which also needs revision.

Recommendations

Recommendations refer to areas where the Panel considers the University would benefit from making some improvements or changes. The Panel asked the University to consider:

Leadership and management of teaching, learning and academic quality

How information and data governance could include principles for Māori data sovereignty and Pacific data sovereignty — The Data and Information Governance Group oversees data and information governance, but its terms of reference do not explicitly include issues of sovereignty for Māori data or Pacific data.

How reflecting appropriate tikanga for its teaching spaces on different campuses can support the implementation of Te Aronui and Te Kete.

Urgently addressing a lack of consistency in academic decision-making — This affects the equitable treatment of students in terms of academic advice, academic complaints and appeals, breaches of academic integrity or student discipline. Other areas of inconsistency—including guidance on the use of Gen-AI, support and resourcing for postgraduate research students, and responding to student feedback—should also be addressed. The effectiveness of measures to ensure consistency should be monitored and regularly reported on.

Reviewing the terms of reference for and activities of Academic Board to ensure they are providing adequate guidance and monitoring of academic quality.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

Giving more support to students completing their work placement requirements— particularly those with caring responsibilities or studying part-time—while AUT is progressing its planned work on administration of placements.

Revisiting recommendation 2 from its Cycle 5 academic audit, to ensure students can access accurate, timely course advice that supports the completion of their qualifications in the shortest time possible.

Curriculum, assessment and delivery

Strengthening the contributions of Pacific voices to formal curriculum development, approval and review processes.

Increasing capacity and capability to undertake assessment and supervision in te reo Māori — While initiatives are underway to build capacity, the Panel heard of an increasing gap between demand and the University's capacity to match that demand.

Teaching quality

Encouraging and monitoring engagement in professional development for teaching, and updating its Professional Learning framework.

Supervision of postgraduate research students

Reviewing whether delegations are appropriate and adequate to allow the Graduate Research School to manage its responsibilities for postgraduate research students across the University.

Raising the profile of the Register of Supervisors and considering whether requirements for maintaining registration as a research student supervisor are adequate.

Reinforcing the need for respectful support and showing a duty of care for postgraduate research students across the University.

What happens next?

Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau has been invited to provide a follow-up report one year after the release of the audit report. The follow-up report should address progress on both affirmations and recommendations. Once it has been accepted by the AQA Board, the University's follow-up report should be made publicly available.

Further information

Further information about academic audits, including previous audit reports, is available on the AQA website.¹

¹ www.aqa.ac.nz