

Summary of the 2024 Academic Audit of the University of Otago — Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka

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

University of Otago — Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka

The University of Otago — Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka was the first university to be established in Aotearoa New Zealand, in 1869. It is a predominantly 'residential university' and has one of only two medical schools and the only Faculty of Dentistry in the country. The University's main campus is in Dunedin, with campuses that undertake clinical training and other health sciences postgraduate delivery and research in Christchurch and Wellington.

The University's principal Te Tiriti o Waitangi relationship is with Kāi Tahu as mana whenua, with close relationships with three Otago Ngāi Tahu rūnaka (kā rūnaka o Ōtākou, rātou ko Puketeraki, ko Moeraki). The University also has relationships with other iwi and Māori health providers and aspires to be 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led'.

Internationally, the University is ranked at 214 in the QS World University Rankings and in the 401-500 band for the Academic Ranking of World Universities. It is a founding member of the Matariki Network of Universities, and the Otago Business School was reaccredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business in 2022. Thirty-four international and 25 national professional accreditations are held across 46 programmes.

The audit pane recognises the interdependence of teaching and research at the University—including the use of research-based practice. The University also takes its role as critic and conscience of society seriously. This is set out in the University's Vision 2040 and the University supports staff in this, including providing media training.

The University's strategy is set out in two key documents: Vision 2040 and Pae Tata — Strategic Plan to 2030. Vision 2040 sets out strategic imperatives for the University on:

- learning and teaching
- discovery and innovation
- the University's place in the world, including paying particular attention to “being a true university of the Pacific”
- transformative student experiences
- people and culture
- securing [the University's] future.

Pae Tata has five 'domains' for priority action:

1. Education: provide compelling and viable educational offerings
2. Research and Innovation: organise and focus research and innovation
3. Te Tiriti: Whakamana Te Tiriti o Waitangi—strengthen our capability, capacity and culture to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi
4. Global and Connected: become a more global and connected university
5. Our People: support our people to achieve their best.

The University has strengths in student support and is achieving very good educational outcomes—reflected in strong employment rates and educational performance indicators. The University recognises work is needed to put in place a modern digital learning environment and to implement data systems, analytics, more dynamic reporting and targeted evaluation of interventions and initiatives.

The University has experienced financial challenges, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, cost-of-living increases, and Government funding not keeping pace with inflation. Senior leadership changes have also been challenging, with the current Vice-Chancellor starting on 1 July 2024.

Despite the challenging external environment and significant changes within the senior leadership team, the University was able to develop a new strategic direction, including developing and launching a new ikoa Māori, and a renewed commitment to becoming a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led institution and a university of the Pacific.

About this report

Based on the evidence available to it at the time of the audit (March-July 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 in respect of the guideline statements. This is particularly the case for student achievement and student support. The University therefore meets the expectations of the Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework.

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:

Putting in place a new and aspirational strategic direction to become a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led university and university of the Pacific. The University has launched new ikoa Māori and appointed its first DVC (Māori).

Maintaining strategic impetus through a period of significant change in senior leadership.

Leadership and management of teaching, learning and academic quality

Developing coherent and consistent guidance through its strategic documents, including the Māori Strategic framework and the Pacific Strategic Framework.

Developing teaching and learning environments — The University is willing to address racism and to support participation in bi-cultural competency and anti-racism workshops.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

An outstanding track record in achieving the highest educational performance indicators for domestic students.

Transitioning through study and into employment — The University pays continued attention to and provides comprehensive support—academic, residential, cultural and pastoral—for student transitions through their programmes and into employment.

Providing a wide range of learning support services — Service providers within the University ensure cultural appropriateness and respect for different groups of students and foster connections between services.

Providing a robust and comprehensive pastoral care network — Te Whare Tāwharu, the Pacific Islands Centre, Disability Information and Support, Student Health, Te Huka Mātauraka and Campus Watch reflect strong staff commitment to a student-centric and relational approach to supporting the wellbeing of different cohorts of students. The residential colleges also make a major contribution to student safety, wellbeing and academic achievement.

Teaching quality

The emphasis placed on leadership development — The University has a comprehensive range of opportunities for staff to develop their teaching, research, leadership, cultural and technical capabilities.

Recognising and rewarding high-quality teaching — Excellence is recognised throughout the University and by students, and the University has a strong record of success in the national Te Whatu Kairangi Aotearoa Tertiary Educator Awards.

Supervision of postgraduate students

Postgraduate research students achieving high completion rates.

High satisfaction rates reported by both graduate and existing students for postgraduate supervision.

Enabling Māori PhD students to have their oral examinations on a marae — The University is developing guidelines for embedding tikanga Māori in PhD examination processes.

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

Committing to strengthen and formalise engagement with student voices — The University should ensure its commitments to being Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led and a university of the Pacific are embedded in this work, together with including other diverse student voices.

Progressing the work of the Timetabling project — Making better use of existing space is a strategic priority and precedes a more comprehensive plan for teaching space on the Dunedin campus.

Investing in its digital learning environment — This is a priority, as the University’s current digital learning environment is significantly underdeveloped for a university of this size and complexity.

Ongoing commitment and initiatives to achieve equity of outcomes for taura Māori — The Learner Success Plan (LSP) provides an ongoing focus for this work, and support for Māori students is readily available and accessible.

Ongoing commitment and initiatives to achieve equity of outcomes for Pacific students — The LSP also signals attention to closing equity gaps in achievement for Pacific students. The University is committed to achieving equity in outcomes, and promoting a pan-university culture of belonging and inclusiveness, where Pacific identities and cultures are respected and valued.

Plans to appoint a senior Pacific role — The Pacific Strategic Framework is also to be aligned with Pae Tata.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

A planned review of pathways programmes — To improve access, particularly for Māori and Pacific students, the University plans to review and update the existing programmes.

An enhancement initiative to monitor the impact of mid-year progress interventions on students’ progress, including for Māori students and Pacific students.

Plans to develop a student wellbeing hub and a university-wide pastoral care network — This includes ensuring that, as well as a hub on the Dunedin campus, online services are available to students based elsewhere. The pastoral care network will link the many service providers and promote their visibility to teaching staff, so they can better direct students to them.

Curriculum, assessment and delivery

Developing a curriculum framework for Otago qualifications — This will reduce curriculum complexity and strengthen the graduate profile.

Refreshing the University Graduate Profile — The current graduate profile has too many attributes, not all of which will necessarily be developed across all degrees. A new graduate profile will be aligned with the development of the curriculum framework.

Considering the current and future roles of Gen-AI — Increasing attention is being paid to the implications of Generative-Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) for academic integrity (and academic endeavours broadly). The University is establishing new roles to provide further guidance.

Reviewing Ngā Kaupapa mō te reo Māori | Māori Language Policy — The University is considering how to improve awareness and normalisation of assessment in te reo Māori. Information could be provided in course outlines, or support for writing in te reo Māori might become part of learning support resources.

Teaching quality

Establishing senior Māori and senior Pacific advisor roles in Human Resources — These roles are expected to provide necessary, valuable capacity and capability to ensure that HR processes are culturally appropriate.

Establishing an Educational Network | Kōkiri ki Tua — This will provide a community of practice for kaimahi (staff) to help lift the bar and shift the conversation and culture around teaching, connecting staff who are passionate about teaching, learning and sharing innovation, ideas and practice

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

Investigating the full range of models, levers and capabilities available to support strategy implementation and change — This includes a bottom-up approach to change and developing the digital environment. Other levers for change could include managing narratives, professional development opportunities, promotion and other recognition, internal controls and regulations, and change management.

Including in the new digital learning environment the data and reporting systems needed to support and monitor strategy implementation and other initiatives — This will support the action identified in the University's LSP to make "effective use of data analytics for teaching, learning and support".

Reflecting in its physical and digital learning environments its aspirations to be Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led and a university of the Pacific — This includes embedding culturally affirming design in future campus planning.

Student life cycle, support and wellbeing

Strengthening pathways and support for students enrolled in postgraduate research studies, especially taurira Māori and Pacific students.

Developing a systemic approach to identifying and supporting students at academic risk — This would be helped by a student management system (SMS) to identify students at academic risk earlier than mid-year (i.e., before they have failed a paper), record interventions, track progress and show how effective interventions are for different groups of students.

Working with both undergraduate and postgraduate students to improve awareness of—and build trust and confidence in—academic complaints, appeals and grievances processes — This should help improve access to the processes and resolve issues.

Curriculum, assessment and delivery

Building on its robust paper and programme approval processes and resources to support systematic curriculum development that addresses the University's aspirations to be Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led and to incorporate te ao Māori and Pacific pedagogies in learning and teaching.

Reintroducing its employer survey to strengthen the information available to internal review panels and the wider university community — Current reviews lack the wealth and quality of information on employer perspectives that are available for student and graduate perspectives, although no concerns about graduate employability were heard.

Whether its existing departmental and organisational review arrangements are adequate to ensure curricula continue to meet strategic objectives — This includes looking at whether they are agile enough, timely, focused on the strategic programme changes sought, and responsive to changing market demand.

How the cultural safety and inclusiveness of special consideration and alternative arrangements policies could be strengthened in future reviews.

Include strategic inputs from Pae Tata, the Māori Strategic Framework, the Pacific Strategic Framework and the Disability Action Plan when reviewing assessment practices.

Looking again at external moderation of assessment for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught papers — External moderation had been suspended for several years (pandemic and a review) and the Panel suggests establishing benchmarking with other members of the Matariki Network as appropriate international comparators of practice.

Developing more detailed and consistent guidance on the use of Generative-Artificial Intelligence and monitoring its use.

Teaching quality

Continuing to increase the number of kaimahi Māori at all levels throughout the University, and supporting their influence, success and wellbeing, necessary to support the strategic priority of becoming a Te Tiriti-led university.

Continuing to increase the number of Pacific staff throughout the University, and supporting their influence, success and wellbeing, giving effect to being a university of the Pacific.

Resolving its debate about how to provide teaching development support to embed te ao Māori and Pacific pedagogies in curricula, and setting out a timeline for implementing this support.

Supervision of postgraduate research students

Reviewing its guidelines for coordinating and managing consistency of requirements for and the experience of research Master's students — This recommendation from the Cycle 5 academic audit needs more attention.

Specifying and monitoring completion of and compliance with core training components by new and ongoing supervisors of postgraduate research — While participants find the current workshops valuable, there appear to be no compulsory requirements for supervisors nor monitoring the currency of supervisors with training.

Improving the transparency of processes and decisions for postgraduate research students, including admission and enrolment procedures, scholarships and other financial support available to students.

What happens next?

The University of Otago — Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka 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