



AQA

Academic
QualityAgency
For New Zealand Universities

*Te Pokapū Kōunga Mātauranga
mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*

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Celebrating twenty-five years of AQA and the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU), undertaking independent quality assurance of New Zealand universities.



Introduction

The Academic Quality Agency (AQA), formerly known as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, was established in 1993. As its constitution states, it exists to contribute to the advancement of New Zealand university education by:

- engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality,
- applying quality assurance and quality enhancement processes that assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes, and
- supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities.

To achieve this, it engages in quality assurance activities chiefly through academic audits, which, as set out in its Strategic Framework, 'are robust, independent, fair and perceptive, reflect international best practice, assist universities and their students and give national and international confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities, and through quality enhancement activities in which AQA facilitates and supports an enhancement orientation to quality assurance in New Zealand universities and in its own activities'.

AQA was established by the New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee in order to protect the autonomy of the universities from encroachment by external agencies into the quality assurance and enhancement domains. AQA is funded by the universities and all members of the Board are appointed by the Vice-Chancellors except the Executive Director who is appointed directly by the AQA Board. However, AQA's operational autonomy is clearly set out in its constitution which states that AQA 'is operationally independent of NZVCC in the conduct of its quality assurance activities. Neither the NZVCC nor the individual Vice-Chancellors have authority to amend quality assurance processes or the content of quality assurance reports or otherwise direct the operations of the AQA'. The international panels which have periodically reviewed AQA have interested themselves in this issue and have all concluded that AQA does operate independently of the universities. It could not be otherwise if New Zealand is to have an internationally credible quality assurance system, something which is vital to the international

reputation of our university system and all degrees issued by our universities.

Governance and management responsibility for AQA in its 25 years of existence has lain with the Board and successive Executive Directors. There have been 5 Chairs and 5 Executive Directors (all listed elsewhere in this report) and about 70 Board members. At first the Board had 12 members, including a Vice-Chancellor from an Australian university, but over time this reduced to a more effective group of 8 members, comprising a student (nominated by NZUSA) and a staff (nominated by the Tertiary Education Union) representative, a Vice-Chancellor, 3 community representatives, the Chair and the Executive Director. AQA's core work of academic audit is carried out by the Executive Director and other AQA staff and by the Register of Auditors. There have been about 200 members of the Register of Auditors, drawn mainly from New Zealand universities but including some Australian academics.

Although there has been considerable change over 25 years, there has also been a striking degree of continuity. The basic form and function of AQA's activities today would be recognisable to its founders from 1993. The first annual report refers to the form of external quality assurance as academic audit, the importance of this being an internationally credible approach to quality assurance, students being members of the Board and the need for periodic external review of AQA itself. These features remain important today.

The nature of the core activity of academic audit has varied little over 25 years. AQA has undertaken 5 complete cycles of academic audits of New Zealand universities, all but one of which have been whole of institution audits, covering the whole sweep of academic activity. The exception was Cycle 2 (1999-2000) which focussed on research, postgraduate students and the research/teaching link. In addition, each university selected a particular issue to be reviewed in depth. Cycle 6 which began in 2017 is also a whole of institution audit but includes Maori and Pasifika student achievement as a single enhancement theme chosen and developed by the universities in which best practice will be shared across the whole system. AQA has considered from time to time whether a whole of institution audit is still the most appropriate form of external quality assurance. However, the need for the university sector to demonstrate that it does take a comprehensive and rigorous approach to quality assurance has led to its retention.

This consistency is in marked contrast to how approaches to and models of external quality assurance have changed in other jurisdictions, including those that we would regard as our main reference jurisdictions, Australia and the UK. This reflects deep structural change in the university sectors in Australia and the UK which have become larger and much more diverse and now require a different kind of quality assurance system. New Zealand has not experienced the same degree of structural change in its university sector. Although the number and diversity of students and the profile of qualifications and their mode of delivery have all changed, the only structural change to the system has been the inclusion of AUT.

There is an often-levelled challenge in quality assurance that if it stays that same, it ceases to deliver value or that value diminishes. With the end of every cycle and planning for the next cycle, AQA has sought to ensure that its activities do remain valuable and relevant to NZ universities and their students. Assurance that this is so has been provided by the 4 external reviews of AQA conducted by panels of experienced New Zealand and international academic auditors and by the continued support it receives from the New Zealand university sector.

AQA has made a strong contribution to quality assurance and enhancement in its 25 years of existence. Its independent evaluations of academic processes in New Zealand universities have strengthened domestic and international confidence in the quality of the degrees offered by and the graduates of those universities.



Emeritus Professor Pat Walsh
Chair



AQA Chairs & Directors

AQA Chairs	Term
Dr Norman Kingsbury	1994—1999
Emeritus Professor Wilf Malcolm	2000—2003
Emeritus Professor Les Holborow	2003—2008
Emeritus Professor David Mackay	2009—2015
Emeritus Professor Pat Walsh	2015—Present

AQA Directors	Term
Dr David Woodhouse	1994—2001
Robyn Harris (Acting Director)	2001
Dr John Jennings	2002—2010
Dr Jan Cameron	2010—2016
Emeritus Professor Sheelagh Matear	2016—Present



Current Board

November 2018



Sitting Left to Right: Emeritus Professor Sheelagh Matear (Executive Director AQA), Emeritus Professor Pat Walsh (Chair), Pania Gray (Deputy Chair).

Standing Left to Right: Jonathan Gee (NZUSA), Dr Kaye McAulay, Professor Neil Quigley, Professor Jack Heinemann, Michèle Stanton.



Reflections

Emeritus Professor Les Holborow

Chair (2003–2008)

Although I chaired the Board of the Academic Audit Unit from 2003 to 2008, I was heavily involved in the process of its establishment in the early 1990s. I begin by recalling several of the crucial details. As Chair of the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) from April 1993 to November 1995 and an inaugural member of the AAU Board, I was responsible for convincing the university sector that such a body was a necessary addition to our arrangements, and a step which we needed to take ourselves if we were not to have something much less palatable and helpful imposed on us.

One really helpful source of guidance was provided by the fortuitous fact that the UK had been moving in a similar direction. The Chair of the UK universities' Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) at the time, Professor Stewart Sutherland was an old friend from my Scottish philosophy days. I arranged to meet him for an extended afternoon tea in New Delhi at a conveniently timed Commonwealth conference and obtained not only valuable advice and copies of some key documents but also his support for a visit to New Zealand by the just-appointed Director of the UK unit. This visit greatly assisted our process and helped to convince some of the inevitable sceptics of its value.

We were also fortunate to secure Dr David Woodhouse from Australia as our inaugural Director. David came with some relevant experience in Hong Kong and a workaholic approach needed to get the operation moving quickly, but with sufficient consultation to achieve "buy-in" from relevant parties.

Establishing the Unit's operational independence from the NZVCC required a credible and strong Board and under the respected Norman Kingsbury as Chair we were fortunate to recruit some strong professional members such as the internationally experienced engineer Basil Wakelin and lively union and student representatives. Identifying academically credible and effective chairs for the inaugural

university audit visits was crucial. When finding a suitable New Zealander proved difficult we drew on Australia. We searched hard to find Māori members.

As Chair I worked principally with the energetic and engaging John Jennings as Director (we lost David Woodhouse when he was appointed to direct the Australian AUQA).

I make three comments to explain the success of the agency. The first is its responsiveness to criticism, including its willingness periodically to review its own operations. The second is that it has worked to make available the lessons learnt from reviews, including examples of best practice. Finally, there were always Vice-Chancellors not directly involved in the governance of the Unit ready to defend its independence - I remember one case when an indignant Chancellor attacked a report which commented on some management/governance issues at his university.



Reflections

Emeritus Professor David Mackay

Chair (2009–2015)

My first experience of university academic audit was as Chair of the NZUAAU Panel that descended on Lincoln University in September 2006. I remember an amiable and perceptive audit team that was well looked after by a university challenged by declining student numbers and a tightening funding regime. Whether this experience equipped me to Chair the Board of the NZUAAU two years later is debatable.

It certainly exposed me to issues that were often different from those facing me as DVC at Victoria and, *inter alia*, taught me that at the end of a long day of interviews, a Chair must always remain alert when some other panel members show signs of fatigue and drowsiness.

Soon after becoming Chair I faced the retirement of the Director, Dr John Jennings, and the recruitment of new Board members. There appeared to be more going on in the Unit than I had anticipated. Would this pattern of change continue?

Over the next six years there were a mix of 12 academic audits including 2 of overseas institutions. In 2013 Massey University was the first institution to test the new Cycle 5 regime, followed by Auckland, Canterbury and Victoria the following year. The Unit itself had an external review in 2009 and began planning for another during 2014.

A new Director, Dr Jan Cameron, began work in March 2010 and barely a month later the unit left the isolated and rather scruffy office in Willis Street to move into much improved space alongside Universities New Zealand in Lambton Quay. At the beginning of 2013 the name of the Unit was formally changed to the Academic Quality Agency. Among many other benefits this made the answering of the phone a less ponderous task.

Over my six years as Chair I valued the constructive support and diverse experience of Board members and the efficient and congenial relationship with two Directors who rapidly adjusted to my suspect sense of humour.



Above: David Mackay and Jan Cameron join attendees at the first AQA Support for Quality conference on Wednesday 1 May 2013 in Auckland.



Reflections

Dr David Woodhouse

Director (1994–2001)

Having been thrilled by NZ when I visited as a tourist in 1975, I was delighted when the opportunity arose in 1993 to apply for a job there in my new vocation of QA. The short-listed candidates came to Wellington in November, and we were given briefings on the Treaty of Waitangi and on NZQA. Learning that I'm an Oxford graduate, my NZVCC contact person (now Catherine King) mentioned that there was a meeting of the Oxford and Cambridge Society immediately before my interview, and asked if I'd like to attend. Anticipating my possible concerns, she added: "One of your interviewers, Professor Les Holborow, will also be going, and he can bring you from the meeting to the interview". The speaker was long-winded and boring – I was embarrassed that he was going round the world representing Oxford – and Les had many people he wanted to talk to during lunch. As a result, it was after the interview start time before we left the lunch venue. We walked into the NZVCC offices to be met by a flustered Lindsay Taiaroa (NZVCC CEO) who was even more disturbed when he realised that Les was about to walk me straight into the interview room without conferring first with Lindsay and my other interviewer (Professor Wilf Malcom).

The reason for the NZVCC creating the AAU, and hence my job, was that the NZQA had been given authority over higher education, including universities, and the universities did not believe that the NZQA model was right for them. Their only alternative was to create a credible alternative. Those were early days in QA in higher education so there were not many examples for New Zealand to consider, but the NZVCC liked the look of the UK's Academic Audit Unit which had been created by the UK universities for a similar reason – i.e. to avoid something they thought would be worse. My basic brief, therefore, was to establish a version of the AAU that was adapted for NZ.

Visible independence of judgements was essential, and from the start we included reviewers from

overseas and from outside academia on all audit teams; and all audit reports were made public. Within the first year, I wrote an audit manual, selected auditors, trained them (with the help of an experienced UK auditor, Dr Robin Gilmour) and carried out two trial audits (of Auckland and Lincoln Universities).

There was naturally some resistance and suspicion, and the AAU gained a great deal of credibility by committing itself to an independent review in due course. When that review took place after three or four years, the review team found a high level of acceptance of the AAU and appreciation of its work.



New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit

*Te Wāhanga Tātari Kaute Tohungatanga o ngā
Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*



Reflections

Dr Jan Cameron

Director (2010–2016)

When I was appointed to succeed John Jennings as Director in February 2010, NZUAAU had a home in rather decrepit rooms at the back of a building at the “bottom end” of Willis Street. On one side was a group of young computer geeks who seemed to work mainly at night; on the other side was a Chinese tourist agency that opened occasionally. There was no “through traffic”. The opportunity to relocate to rooms alongside Universities NZ in Lambton Quay saw the start of a new life for us. There was light, space, a convenient location and, best of all, the company of like-minded colleagues and lots of “through traffic” from the universities. Most importantly, it was an end to intellectual isolation. The help of Penny Fenwick, then ED of UNZ in facilitating this exercise was invaluable.

Relocation was followed by restructuring of staffing and services. To make best use of its small budget, NZUAAU adopted a service level agreement with UNZ for administrative support and appointed a second, part-time, professional staff member. In the person of Heather Kirkwood, this not only brought new professional skills but also facilitated risk management for staffing: throughout our time together, Heather and I always ensured the other was fully acquainted with work in train such that either could take over for the other in any emergency.

The third major change during this period was the rebranding and renaming. The NZUAAU name was now outdated, the word “unit” conjured up images of Wellington trains, and no one understood what the logo was intended to convey. After much deliberation we settled on “The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities *Te Pokapū Kōunga Mātauranga mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*”, or AQA. We wanted the word “agency” to have a double meaning, of organisation and of facilitating agency for the universities. The harakeke (flax) logo was chosen because of its association with the concept of family, and interdependence (in our case, of the universities). The exercise included the development

of a new website as well as template designs and printed materials.

The other key activities during this period to 2016 included:

- As core business, the completion of the Cycle 4 audits, development of a new methodology for Cycle 5, appointment and training of auditors, implementation of Cycle 5 and analysis and publication of audit findings.
- A review of the previous Quality Enhancement Meetings and introduction of a new “Support for Quality” annual conference.
- Publication of a regular newsletter.
- Development of closer working relationships with students, through NZUSA and also by involving students in the individual university audits.
- Promoting awareness that New Zealand is a Pacific nation and, as such, has a responsibility to other Pacific nations - we carried out audits of two Pacific universities, hosted an intern from Samoa, undertook reviewer training and facilitated workshops in Tonga and Fiji, and hosted a Pacific Forum for quality managers from seven Pacific countries.
- Engagement in international benchmarking, in particular with QAA (Scotland) and HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong). An MoU was also signed with TWAEA (Taiwan).
- A leadership role in the Asia Pacific Quality Network, APQN, through board membership, workshop facilitation and leading the Mutual Recognition Project on quality assurance regimes in the region.
- In 2014 we celebrated our twentieth birthday.

In 2016 AQA looked somewhat different than it did in 2010. It must continue to evolve as the international quality context evolves and domestic exigencies change. The 25th birthday is a significant milestone.



Reflections

Emeritus Professor Sheelagh Matear

Executive Director (2016—present)

I was fortunate to be appointed to the role of Executive Director of AQA in February 2016. Coming into the role I was conscious that AQA was well-respected both in New Zealand and internationally and that the Agency had recently undergone an external review that commended much of its work. I acknowledge my predecessor, Dr Jan Cameron, and the AQA Board in developing AQA to the well-performing agency that I was able to join.

Apart from completing the fifth cycle of academic audit, my major task was to consider the options for a sixth cycle. Any quality assurance system needs to respond to its environment and future needs. An analysis of Cycle 5 audit reports showed that overall New Zealand universities were performing well and there were no systematic matters of concern from a quality assurance perspective. Following consultation with universities a composite model for Cycle 6 was agreed.

Cycle 6 has ten components and two main phases. The first is an enhancement phase from 2017-2019 and the second an audit phase from 2020-2023. 2024 is intended to be a review phase. As has been the case in previous audit cycles, quality assurance and quality enhancement inform one another, and quality assurance will continue to be ‘enhancement-oriented’.

The enhancement phase takes the form of an enhancement theme and has been adopted from the Scottish approach to quality assurance. An enhancement theme is a topic of national significance and important to all universities, that all universities will work on in a common time period.

The topic for the enhancement theme is “Access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students”.

Universities are not expected to all do the same thing or take the same approach to the theme, but they are expected to be working on the theme topic, sharing good practice and providing constructive peer review of developments and plans. The enhancement theme is undertaken by universities and its activities are guided by a Steering Group. AQA's role is to support the Enhancement Theme.

One of the tasks of the Enhancement Theme Steering group is to generate up to two guideline statements to be included in the audit framework for Cycle 6. The Cycle 6 audit framework has 30 guideline statements in five areas of activity: (1) Leadership and management of teaching and learning and academic quality; (2) Student profile, life-cycle, support and well-being; (3) Curriculum, assessment and delivery; (4) Teaching quality; and (5) Postgraduate students. In addressing the guideline statements, universities will be expected to consider **all students, all delivery** and **all staff** who teach or supervise or support teaching or supervision and give emphasis to specific groups as is appropriate to their priorities, student body and delivery profile.

This is an exciting time for AQA and I am looking forward to further engagement with both the enhancement theme and academic audit as Cycle 6 progresses.



Audit Cycles

Over its 25 years, AQA has undertaken 5 complete cycles of academic audits of New Zealand universities:

Cycle 1	1995—1998
Cycle 2	2000—2001
Cycle 3	2002—2007
Cycle 4	2008—2012
Cycle 5	2013—2016



Former Board Members

A—Z by Surname

Mr Warren Allen

Ms Alayna Ashby

Ms Heather Baigent

Dr Tony Baird

Mr Jeremy Baker

Ms Camilla Belich

Ms Helen Bernstone

Mr Neville Blampied

Ms Charlie Chambers

Professor Ian Chubb

Mr Gill Cox

Professor Roger Dean

Mr Pene Delaney

Mr Donald Farr

Mr Chris Finlayson

Ms Fleur Fitzsimons

Ms Angela Foulkes

Professor Graeme Fraser

Mr Paul Goulter

Daniel Haines

Mr Max Hardy

Mr Peter Harris

Ms Liz Hawes

Professor Harlene Hayne

Mr Sam Huggard

Professor Michael Irving

Ms Sue James

Mr Jordan King

Dr Alison Kuiper

Professor Daryl Le Grew

Ms Robyn Leeming

Kent Lloyd

Hon. Steve Maharey

Professor Stuart McCutcheon

Mr Buddy Mikaere

Associate Professor Maureen
Montgomery

Ms Hekia Parata

Mr Joseph Randall

Mr Patrick Rooney

Professor Roy Sharp

Ms Susanne Simmons-Kopa

Ms Gay Simpkin

Mr Duncan Simpson

Mr John Sinclair

Ms Karen Skinner

Paul Smith

Mr Ralph Springett

Dr Ann Trotter

Mr Basil Wakelin

Dr Andy West

Dr Catherine West-Newman

Mr Dick Wilks

Mr Paul Williams

Professor Brian Wilson

Mr Hayden Wilson

Dr Frank Wood

Mr Kim Workman





AQA was known as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) from its establishment in 1993 until 1 January 2013.