

Cycle 6 Academic audit of Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau

Executive summary

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 whole-of-institution view of a university's teaching, learning, student support and student outcomes. Audits are undertaken by a panel of peers comprising 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.

Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand are currently engaged in their sixth cycle of academic audit. Cycle 6 is a composite audit with two main phases. In the first phase, from 2017-2020, universities engaged in an enhancement theme focusing on access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pacific students.¹

The second phase of Cycle 6 is an audit against a framework of 30 guideline statements in five sections: (1) Leadership and management of teaching and learning, and academic quality; (2) Student life cycle, support and wellbeing; (3) Curriculum, assessment and delivery; (4) Teaching quality; and (5) Supervision of postgraduate research students. Universities undertake a self-assessment against the audit framework and present a self-review report and portfolio of supporting evidence. The university's self-review should also reflect the university's obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the interdependence of university research and teaching, and universities' role as critic and conscience of society. Its assessment should encompass all students, all delivery and all staff who undertake or support teaching or supervision.

Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau (AUT) submitted its self-review portfolio on 17 May 2024. The Panel found the self-review to be well-presented and easy to use. The Panel met twice (online) before undertaking an in-person site visit to the University from 9-11 September 2024. The Panel held 25 interview sessions and met with 66 members of staff and 25 students. Information gained through the interviews supplements that contained in the self-review portfolio and the Panel draws on both sources to reach its findings.

The Cycle 6 Academic Audit of Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau took place in the context of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which included a financial recovery plan for the University and ongoing impacts on student preparation for university study. The University also renewed its strategic leadership, developed a new strategic

¹ <https://www.enhanceunz.com/>

plan, a framework for enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi responsibilities, a Learner Success Plan, and implemented a new learning management system in the period between COVID-19 and this audit. The Panel is impressed with how the University has managed through these external and internal changes. Other work underway at the time of this audit includes a Long-term Academic and Capital Plan and development of a new Learning and Teaching Plan, an Academic Quality Framework, and a refresh of the University's Graduate Profile.

The first section (A) of the audit framework is concerned with leadership and management of teaching and learning. The University has a coherent strategic planning framework and takes a mature approach to change management with the establishment of both management and governance functions for change. The University has strengths in provision and use of data that allow it to assess and respond to needs of different cohorts of students. The already well-developed data systems could be strengthened by inclusion of principles for Māori data sovereignty and Pacific data sovereignty.

The University's student body is diverse, with a relatively high proportion of students from areas with a high deprivation index, and higher proportions of part-time and non-school leaver cohorts compared to other universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the University has a range of mechanisms and good practices that enable student voices to contribute to academic quality. These will be strengthened further by the development of a student voice framework.

The University operates across three main campuses: City, North and South. Future development and use of campuses will be guided by the Long-Term Academic and Capital Plan. The University needs to engage with different mana whenua groups to reflect appropriate tikanga for each campus. Culturally affirming spaces for Māori student and Pacific students are available on all campuses and provide 'bases' for Māori students and Pacific students, with other university services coming to those spaces to engage with students.

Before COVID-19, the University experienced significant growth. A need to be responsive to growth contributed to the development of differential practices. The Panel considers there is now a need for greater consistency of academic decision-making across the University. The role of the Academic Board in guiding and monitoring academic quality should be also reviewed. Work underway to develop a schedule of academic delegations will contribute to both consistency of academic decision making and academic governance.

Section A also contains two guideline statements that examine progress on a university's enhancement theme objectives from phase 1 of the audit cycle. While the context and the University's strategic approach have changed since the enhancement theme objectives were developed, the University's ongoing commitment to addressing the original areas of the enhancement theme objectives are now captured (and extended) in the University's Learner Success Plan – Ku Uta Ki Tai. Restructuring the Office of Pacific Advancement will be important in sustaining the focus on success for Pacific students.

Section B of the audit framework—Student life cycle, support and wellbeing—is an area of strength for the University. The University has well-designed applications and admissions processes and pays thoughtful attention to transitions. There are opportunities to consider how challenges faced by students in completing work placement requirements could be ameliorated. Further attention is also needed to ensure that students have access to accurate and timely course advice. This matter was also raised in the Cycle 5 academic audit of the University. The Panel is pleased to see the University's recent review of its Student Concerns and Complaints policy and associated procedures. Student wellbeing and success is effectively supported by Student Services and Administration, the Office of Māori Advancement and the Office of Pacific Advancement working together. The appointment of professionally qualified staff further strengthens these services.

The third section (C) of the audit framework examines curriculum, assessment and delivery. The University is committed to developing culturally responsive curricula. However, there are opportunities to strengthen the contribution of Pacific voices to formal curriculum development, approval and review processes. The Panel considers the University's intention to implement a curriculum management system to be positive, together with its further attention to data and reporting for learning and teaching. These will contribute to programme review processes that are evidence-informed and responsive. The Panel is also pleased to see new principles, policy and procedures for assessment and the approach the University is taking to understand the impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI) on learning and teaching. Further capacity and capability will be needed to allow greater numbers of students to undertake assessment and be supervised and examined in te reo Māori.

Section D of the audit framework considers teaching quality and the recruitment, development and recognition of staff. The Panel is pleased to see the University's initiatives to recruit staff from under-represented groups, as well as its establishment of mechanisms to enhance opportunities for promotion to senior academic positions for Māori. It anticipates the development of a Pacific Plan will support capacity and capability building for teaching and research supervision for Pacific students. Expectations for academic staff are outlined in an Academic Expectations framework and the Panel endorses the University's intentions to redevelop this. Teaching development is well supported by the Office of Learning, Teaching and Educational Design, although there are opportunities to encourage further staff engagement in professional development.

The final section (E) of the audit framework focuses on postgraduate research students. Comprehensive up-to-date information to support students undertaking research is available in an online handbook, and good training and other supports are available for supervisors. The University's support for innovative and impactful supervision practices is evident to the Panel. However, further attention could be paid to raising awareness of the Register of Supervisors and requirements for maintaining registration, along with reinforcing the need for respectful support and duty of care for postgraduate research students across the University.

The Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework also asks universities to reflect on their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the interdependence of university research and teaching, and universities' role as

critic and conscience of society. Its assessment should encompass all students, all delivery and all staff who undertake or support teaching or supervision.

The Panel recognises the leadership from the Office of Māori Advancement that has contributed to the University's commitment to be a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-enacting university. Te Aronui is being used to guide change across the University, including for postgraduate research students and their supervision, and there is a high level of engagement with a capability-building programme.

The interdependence of research and teaching is reflected in discussion about what it means to be a university of technology. The University has paid recent attention to the importance of academic freedom, which contributes to its role as critic and conscience of society.

With respect to the scope components of the audit framework, the University is clearly aware of and is responsive to the needs of different groups of students. It also recognises the need to support underrepresented groups of staff and has developed programmes and mechanisms to do this. It is working to achieve a staffing complement that reflects its student body. Work is developing with respect to AUT Online, and the learning and teaching plan will contribute further to this.

Based on the evidence available to it at the time of the audit, the Panel considers the University does meet, 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. The University therefore meets the expectations of the Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework. Where it considers further work is required, the Panel has made recommendations or affirmed enhancement initiatives already identified by the University. The Panel has made 24 commendations, 11 affirmations and 12 recommendations that support and encourage good practices and are intended to assist the University as it progresses its strategic direction.

AUT should provide a follow-up report one year after the release of this report. The follow-up report should address progress on both affirmations and recommendations. Once it has been accepted by the AQA Board, the follow-up report should be made publicly available.

Further information about academic audits, including previous audit reports, is available on the AQA website.²

² www.aqa.ac.nz