

Cycle 6 Academic audit of Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University

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. Further information is available on the enhancement themes website.¹ The second phase of Cycle 6 is an audit against a framework of 30 guideline statements. Universities undertake a self-assessment against the audit framework and present a self-review report and portfolio of supporting evidence. Further information about academic audits, including previous audit reports, is available on the AQA website.²

Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University (the University) submitted its self-review portfolio on 2 November 2023 and provided further information on 9 February 2024. The Panel met twice (online) before undertaking an in-person site visit to the University from 4-6 March 2024. During the site visit, the Panel held 23 interview sessions and talked to one Council member, 41 members of staff and 27 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 Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University took place in the context of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; post-earthquake rebuilds and redevelopment of major campus buildings; a relatively new senior leadership team undertaking an update at the midpoint of the University's ten-year strategic plan; and a recent change in the size and shape of the University.

The first section (A) of the audit framework is concerned with leadership and management of teaching and learning, and academic quality. The University has an intentional and multifaceted approach to student engagement and partnership, including co-governance of significant bodies and initiatives. This is further reflected in a relational and personal approach to supporting student success. While a strength of the University, the Panel is concerned that it will come under pressure with growth in student numbers, especially those studying online. The relational approach is not well

¹ <https://www.enhanceunz.com/>

² www.aqa.ac.nz

supported by data and a lack of integrated data for monitoring progress and assessing impact is identified as a challenge in several areas.

The development of the physical campus has been guided by a campus master plan and cultural narrative. The University has a suite of modern teaching and learning facilities. It is also developing its online ecosystem and the development path for online teaching needs to be set out more clearly. The University recognises the learning environment extends beyond its physical and digital environments and is reviewing work-integrated learning to ensure consistency of access and quality of the experience for students.

The University has a comprehensive schedule of delegations and clear management of risks at the strategic level, although academic risks could be more explicit at this strategic level. A SafeLU app contributes to operational management of risk. Work underway on an academic governance framework will strengthen academic decision-making across the University.

Numbers of Māori students and Pacific students are relatively low but they are well supported by a dedicated Te Manutaki unit. The University is paying attention to support and success for Māori students in a comprehensive Manaaki Tauira programme (Learner Success Plan) which includes initiatives to improve access. Further progress can be expected with the recent appointment of a DVC Māori and another initiative (Whanake Ake) to increase numbers of Māori staff.

Numbers of Pacific students and staff are also low. While Pacific student access, progress and success is included in the Manaaki Tauira initiative, clarity in progressing, resourcing and leading the University's Motu Plan is an important precursor to further progress. A strategic approach to recruiting and retaining Pacific staff should be guided by the Motu Plan.

The University's student centric-approach is also evident in the second section of the audit framework—(B) Student life cycle, support and wellbeing—including a commitment to inclusive education. The Disability Action Plan is well connected to and informs other policy settings and initiatives, although further attention to monitoring implementation is warranted. A co-governed Student Experience Board – Te Poari Wheako Tauira provides valuable oversight. Work on transitions would be strengthened by a monitoring framework that allows the effectiveness of initiatives for different groups of students at different stages of their study to be evaluated. The University should consider whether the current academic advising arrangements are serving students and the University well and allowing support to be optimally targeted.

The third section (C) of the audit framework examines curriculum, assessment and delivery. Student engagement is again clearly supported in this section, including in academic programme review processes. Collating themes from academic programme reviews would enable the University to learn more broadly from these reviews. The University has a series of initiatives planned or underway including course enhancement and monitoring, assessment, moderation of assessment standards, and the development of a University Graduate Profile. There are opportunities to strengthen work-in-progress by ensuring course enhancement and monitoring initiatives are aligned, communicating

outcomes to date and further steps from the assessment hui, and including expectations for external validation of assessment standards (especially for taught Master's degrees).

Further consultation with Māori staff on the proposed bicultural competence and confidence attribute in the University Graduate Profile is needed. The University should also give further thought to the curriculum renewal, resource, systems and capabilities that will be required to implement, maintain and assess the attainment of the Graduate Profile. Associated with this, a mechanism needs to be developed to assess whether graduate attributes are being achieved.

The University's centralised approach to managing academic integrity and reporting, and communications from the Proctors seems to be working well. However, guidance on the use of Generative-AI tools is urgently needed, including how these can support learning for disabled students.

Work is also planned in Section D of the audit framework—Teaching quality—with initiatives focused on a formal teaching development programme and a teaching quality framework, both of which would reflect the particular characteristics of teaching at Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University. The teaching quality framework will need to draw on valid and reliable data.

The final section (E) of the audit framework focuses on postgraduate research students. Postgraduate student numbers overall have grown at the University, although most of the growth has been in taught Master's programmes. Comments made above include taught Master's programmes. However, the Panel was advised that the University is considering a postgraduate school that would have oversight over all PhD and Master's programmes, potentially including taught Master's. The opportunity to promote greater consistency in the experiences of postgraduate students across the University should be explored further.

Other recent work has focused on supporting postgraduate research students and supervisors. It includes establishing a Register of Supervisors, a supervisor development programme and centralising progress reporting. Conformance with Register requirements for supervisor appointments, including the completion of training, should be reported to an appropriate committee. Centralised progress reporting presents an opportunity to inform the development of support services for postgraduate students. It would also allow better monitoring of resourcing and inform mechanisms such as service level agreements, which can be calibrated to different types and stages of research to minimise inequity in the experience of postgraduate research students. However, the progress reporting process is not an appropriate mechanism for students to raise concerns or complaints and a confidential channel for these should be established. Finally, with respect to postgraduate research students, there is a need to clarify whether all fifteen-month reporting is taking place as expected.

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 did get a sense of commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi across the University. While the University has a genuine willingness to connect with te ao Māori and the Māori economy, its approach to truly embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi is yet to gain full expression in the delivery of its curriculum and in all its support for Māori students and staff. The University is paying attention to the research-teaching nexus. The increase in postgraduate students and combining the research and teaching plans will strengthen this. Staff are encouraged to contribute to the University's role of critic and conscience of society, but this encouragement is not necessarily consistent across the University.

With respect to the scope components of the audit framework, the Panel gained a sense the University was alert to the changing profile of its student body and the implications of this. The Panel has commented on the need to grow the cohorts of Māori staff and Pacific staff. The Panel also considers the University is paying attention to different modes of delivery and has commented on implications for staff development.

On the basis of the evidence available to it at the time of the audit—and despite some unevenness—overall, the University does meet the outcomes and standards a university of good international standing would be expected to demonstrate. It 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 nine commendations, thirteen affirmations and eighteen recommendations that support and encourage good practices and are intended to assist the University as it progresses its own strategic direction.

Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University 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.

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³ www.aqa.ac.nz