

Cycle 6 Academic audit of the University of Waikato

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. 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

The University of Waikato submitted its self-review portfolio on 15 May 2023 and provided further information requested by the Panel on 2 August 2023. The Panel found the self-review to be comprehensive and well-supported by evidence. The Panel met twice (online) before undertaking an in-person site visit to the University from 4-6 September 2023. During the site visit, the Panel held 23 interview sessions and met with 74 members of staff and 29 students. Information gained through the interviews supplements that contained in the self-review portfolio.

The Cycle 6 Academic Audit of the University of Waikato took place in the context of ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasingly financially constrained environment for universities. The Panel commends the University for the ways in which it responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, learnt from its experience, and embedded new or revised practices arising from the experience.

Other contextual factors relevant to this audit include the University's adoption of a Treaty of Waitangi Statement and the establishment of a comprehensive work programme (Te Aurei). This seeks to progress outcomes from the Taskforce report, and a University Strategy focused on recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring a sustainable future for the University. The multi-campus nature of the University—with campuses in Hamilton and Tauranga and a joint institute in Hangzhou, China—provide further context for this audit, as does the relatively high proportion of Māori students enrolled at the University. The Panel commends the University for its commitment to equivalence of student experience across the multiple campuses of the University

¹ <https://www.enhanceunz.com/>

² www.aqa.ac.nz

and for ensuring that staff based offshore receive an induction process that reflects both the University and the specific context of their campus and programme. Given the high proportion of Māori students at the University, the Panel recommends that the University consider how Māori models of wellbeing would better support Māori students.

The first section (A) of the audit framework is concerned with leadership and management of teaching and learning, and academic quality. This is an area of strength for the University and the Panel commends the University for its coherent strategic planning framework, commitment to making data available to inform planning and reporting, and developments to the physical and digital learning environments. Since its last academic audit, the University has opened the Tauranga campus and The Pā on the Hamilton campus and developed a flexible mode of delivery. The University has a mature approach to managing risks to the quality and continuity of teaching and learning and the Panel affirms an enhancement initiative to create an Academic Risk Register.

The University has worked effectively with the Waikato Students' Union (WSU) to establish a comprehensive and supported class representative system. The Panel affirms the development and implementation of a Partnership Framework between the University and the WSU. It recommends, however, that training and support for student members of committees and boards is consistent across the University.

Progress on the enhancement theme is also assessed in this section. The Panel commends the University's progress in improving access and achievement for Māori students through a whole-of-system (Ōritetanga) approach to learner success and affirms its commitment to creating a sense of belonging for Pacific students and a holistic support model to improve success for Pacific students.

The second section of the audit framework—Student life cycle, support and wellbeing—is also an area of strength for the University. The Panel commends the University's support for transitions into the University and its commitment to work-integrated learning in strengthening transitions to employment. It also commends Te Whare Pukapuka – The Library for its commitment to the strategic direction of the University and its student-centric approach. With respect to work underway in this section, the Panel affirms plans to develop the University's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to further support consistent academic advising practices, the implementation of the University's Disability Action Plan, and an enhancement initiative to develop facilitated processes for complaints resolution within a Pacific cultural context.

The third section (C) of the audit framework examines curriculum, assessment and delivery. The University has a series of initiatives planned or underway. The Panel commends the Curriculum Design Framework (CDF), which provides an overarching structure for qualifications, and the University's review of this framework to ensure its ongoing fitness for purpose. The CDF is used in assessing new programme proposals and the Panel commends the University, the Māori Academic Board of Studies, and the Pacific Strategic Committee for their robust scrutiny of academic proposals that contribute to strategic direction for the University. It recommends however, that further guidance be provided to assist with peer review of proposals (from other universities) submitted to the Committee on University Academic Programmes.

Reflecting the University's commitment to equivalence of student experiences, the Panel commends the University's consistent use of moderation across campuses and affirms an enhancement initiative to review moderation practices. It also affirms enhancement initiatives to make graduate profiles more visible (and useful), to review assessment guides and resources and to review the University's policy on Use of Māori for Assessment. The Panel considers the University has a comprehensive approach to academic integrity that includes education, assessment design, support and reporting. It encourages the University to continue to develop its thinking on the use of generative AI and other emerging technologies that may have implications for academic integrity.

The fourth section for the audit framework (D) examines teaching quality and includes staff recruitment, induction, development and recognition. The Panel commends the University and Te Puna Ako for the range of teaching development opportunities available and the ways in which these support the University's strategic priorities. However, the Panel also makes several recommendations in this section and suggests the University review its criteria for staff participation in induction programmes and the relationships between teaching expectations and professional development to support capacity and capability building. It affirms the University's initiatives to increase the numbers of Māori and Pacific staff employed at the University and recommends that the work that Māori and Pacific staff undertake in supporting recruitment and induction processes is recognised appropriately. It also affirms changes the University has made to the academic promotions system, particularly explicit inclusion of Mātauranga Māori in the expected teaching narrative. Finally in this section, the Panel recommends the University take steps to increase response rates for student evaluations of papers and teaching.

The final section (E) of the audit framework focuses on postgraduate research students. The Panel commends the University's timely responsiveness to initial enquiries from prospective PhD students and the follow-through with these students to enrolment and orientation. The University has reviewed Master's and Honours qualifications and student experience, and the Panel affirms an enhancement initiative to implement recommendations arising from this review. It also affirms initiatives to support equity for under-served groups, particularly Māori and Pacific students, in postgraduate research studies. While the Panel considers resourcing and support for postgraduate research students to be consistent with expected practices, it recommends the University include questions about the adequacy of resourcing and future needs in progress reporting for PhD students.

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. With respect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Panel commends the University for the ways in which it is enacting its Treaty of Waitangi Statement across the University and the establishment of Te Aurei. The Panel considers that the research-teaching nexus informs both teaching and other developments and heard support for the University's role as critic and conscience of society. With respect to the scope components of the audit framework, the Panel recognises the University is responsive to the needs of its diverse student body. It has specific plans or initiatives and support for Māori, Pacific, international and

disabled students. It gained a sense of positive collegiality and commitment to the University and to student success from staff and considers the University is paying attention to delivery modes.

Based on the evidence available to it at the time of the audit, the Panel considers the University of Waikato meets, and in several instances exceeds, 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. The Panel has made nineteen commendations, fifteen affirmations and eleven recommendations that support and encourage good practices and are intended to assist the University as it progresses its strategic direction.

The University of Waikato 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