

The University of Auckland

**Guidelines for External Review of
Academic Units and
Disciplinary Areas**

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1 Background and guiding principles

1.1 In 2012, the institutional framework for quality assurance of academic units was revised. The new framework has two components:

- ongoing, systematic quality assurance through established processes of monitoring and reporting within departments and faculties, and
- periodic external Reviews having a tight focus on teaching and learning and research performance evaluated against national and international benchmarks.

These guidelines apply to academic units having responsibilities for teaching and research. The unit may be a School, Department, disciplinary area within a Department, a broader disciplinary area across a number of Departments, or a Large Scale Research Unit (LSRU). The unit to be reviewed will be determined by the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Faculty Deans. The guidelines do not apply to faculties (other than Law), programmes, research units, centres and institutes, and administrative units.

1.2 The primary purpose of periodic external reviews is to evaluate performance against key strategic objectives, providing information that will inform strategic planning and resource allocation.

1.3 The academic unit review process is based upon the following guiding principles:

- reviews will be sharply focused, and are intended to allow perspectives to be brought to bear that are not available through routine reporting
- reviews will focus on curricula, teaching delivery and research performance in a comparative context by reference to internationally benchmarked universities
- external academic reviews will be conducted on a 7-10 year cycle. The DVC(A) will maintain a 3-year rolling plan for reviews to facilitate review planning
- the starting point for the review is the preparation of a reflective and analytical portfolio
- reviews are an objective peer assessment by a panel of internal and external colleagues. A senior University of Auckland academic will chair the review
- a short site visit (two days) will be conducted to facilitate discussion among panel members and enable them to secure additional information and conduct any interviews required to clarify issues under consideration
- the panel will submit a written report to the Vice Chancellor. Review Report findings should reflect a consideration of performance in the context of international standards and New Zealand conditions
- implementation of key action areas will be monitored by Education Committee and Research Committee, through a series of progress reports.

2 Size, composition and responsibilities of the Review Panel

2.1 The Panel conducting a review will normally have up to six members:

- two senior academic staff members from the University of Auckland. One member should come from outside the academic unit under review but within the same faculty. The second, who will chair the review, should come from another faculty
- up to three external academic members, one of whom should be from a U21 or Worldwide Universities Network university
- where appropriate, a representative from a related professional group, business or significant client group can be added to the Panel.

- 2.2 Deans of Faculties will not be members of Review Panels.
- 2.3 The Review Panel Chair should be appointed well in advance of the review. The DVC (Academic) will consult with the Vice-Chancellor, the Dean and the Head of the academic unit to be reviewed on possible chairs. The Vice-Chancellor will approve the nomination of the Chair. Following this approval, the Chair will be briefed by the DVC (Academic).
- 2.4 The Academic Head and Dean and the Chair collaborate to provide a list of possible Panel members to the DVC (A). The Vice-Chancellor in consultation with the DVC (A) decides on membership. Before the membership is finalised any reasoned objections which the Dean or the academic unit might have are considered. Prospective members are then asked if they are prepared to undertake the task.
- 2.5 The list of nominations for panel membership should:
- take into account, as far as possible, relevant expertise and experience, appropriate gender and ethnic representation
 - take care to ensure appropriate disciplinary representation in the case of a review where there are a number of disciplines involved
 - ensure persons nominated as external panel members do not have close links with the academic unit concerned. Recent employment at the UoA, or receipt of a Hood Fellowship precludes panel membership. Past and current research collaborations, and service as an External Examiner within the last five years should be disclosed
 - include relevant biographical data (qualifications, research interests, teaching experience, service roles) and contact details (including website address) for potential Panel members. (Lists of publications are not required). Two or three alternatives for each panel position should be provided as it is frequently the case that the first choice is unavailable.
- 2.6 The Chair is responsible for:
- ensuring that the review is conducted in accordance with the Key Questions and the requirements of confidentiality
 - chairing meetings of the Review Panel
 - acting as the main point of contact between the Review Panel and the DVC(A)
 - ensuring that effective means of communication (e.g., email, conference calls) are arranged as necessary between Panel members before and after the site visit
 - co-ordinating requests for additional information
 - co-ordinating the drafting of the Review Panel Report, soliciting comments from the Dean and Academic Head, finalising the report and submitting it to the Vice-Chancellor within agreed deadlines.
- 2.7 Review Panel members will:
- evaluate the self-reflective portfolio, which will be provided three months before the site visit
 - one month before the site visit, request, if necessary, additional information through the Chair, or raise specific questions arising from the portfolio, to be discussed during the site visit
 - attend during the site visit
 - participate, as agreed with the Chair, in writing the final report.
- 2.8 The Academic Administrator in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor will:
- assist the Academic Head, where requested, in the preparation of the portfolio
 - manage the request and receipt of submissions
 - attend Panel meetings and take notes
 - action Panel requests for additional information
 - assist the Chair, where requested, in finalising the Review Panel Report

- 2.9 The University Secretariat will provide secretarial support to assist the Chair, the Academic Administrator and the Review Panel in its work.

3 Confidentiality

- 3.1 The self-review portfolio is confidential to the relevant academic unit, to the review panel, the Dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). Permission must be obtained from the academic unit for wider distribution of the portfolio.
- 3.2 A Review Panel may be exposed to or uncover sensitive material during the course of its work. Panel members will treat as confidential any material (both written and verbal) that is sensitive to the career or reputation of individual staff, or is commercially sensitive. Where warranted, the Review Panel may report any matters that emerge outside the Key Questions in a separate confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor.

4 Key Questions

- 4.1 The generic Key Questions (see Annex 1) outline the focus of the review. To take account of a special aspect(s) requiring investigation, the Dean and/or Academic Head may request that the Vice-Chancellor and the DVC(A) include additional Key Questions. Additional Questions may also be included by the Vice-Chancellor, DVC(A) and DVC(R).
- 4.2 External reviews are not intended as resource reviews. Review Panels should only comment on resource levels (e.g., staffing, financial, administrative, physical, etc) in so far as they affect consideration of the Key Questions.

5. Academic unit portfolio

- 5.1 Following agreement on the Key Questions for a review, a self-review portfolio that provides evidence addressing the Key Questions will be prepared.

The preparation process is:

- the Academic Head will have lead responsibility for preparation of the portfolio. Academic Heads are encouraged to make the portfolio preparation process an inclusive one, involving both staff and students. The portfolio should describe how students have participated.
- to minimise workload and duplication, the portfolio will utilise to the maximum extent possible existing sources of data and information.

- 5.2 The portfolio will have two parts - a narrative portion, and appendices containing supporting data and information. Academic units are encouraged to keep their portfolios brief and to the point.

The structure of the narrative part of the portfolio should reflect the Key Questions, and contain an Introduction which gives an overview of the academic unit highlighting:

- special characteristics or factors that have influenced development in teaching and learning and research since the last review
- key matters that are of particular interest or concern
- plans for future development.

The portfolio should go beyond description and be based upon reflection and critical self-analysis. Among the questions that an academic unit should address in its portfolio are:

- what are our current strengths (highlighting good practices, outcomes and impacts) and weaknesses?
- what mechanisms and processes do we have to ensure quality (including benchmarking activities) and tell ourselves how well we are doing?
- what strategies and activities can be used to further improve the academic unit and its performance?

5.3 Examples of supporting information that should be included as appendices to the portfolio are given in Annex 2.

5.4 Copies of the portfolio for each Review Panel member, and one for the Secretariat, will be submitted to the University Secretariat no less than **3 months** prior to the visit of the Review Panel. A copy should also be sent to the relevant Dean at the same time.

6 Written submissions

6.1 The Academic Administrator will, on behalf of the Review Chair, call for written submissions addressing the terms of reference from staff members and students of the academic unit. The call for submissions will be circulated 4 months before the site visit. All submissions will be treated as confidential to the Review Committee.

7 Site visit by the Review Panel

7.1 The Review Panel will read the portfolio before the site visit. Panels may request additional information from the academic unit prior to the site visit. In the period leading up to the site visit, there may be informal exchanges between members of the panel to discuss the portfolio, and to identify and disseminate further information that may be useful. No later than one month before the site visit, specific questions may be submitted by panel members to the Chair, who will decide whether these questions can best be clarified by interviews with certain personnel during the site visit, or by other means.

7.2 The site visit is devoted primarily to Panel analysis and discussion, and progressing the draft report. Interviews, either with the entire Panel or individual members, may be used to clarify questions arising from the portfolio. Panel members may also wish to attend lectures or seminars.

7.3 Following the Panel's initial deliberations, the Panel will hold a 2-hr workshop with all staff of the academic unit. This will be an opportunity for the Panel to address points of interest and queries arising from their reading of the portfolio, and for a preliminary discussion of their findings on the range of issues and opportunities facing the academic unit. The workshop may be facilitated professionally.

7.4 At the end of the site visit, the Panel will brief the Academic Head on its findings.

7.5 If the Chair finds it necessary, the Chair may brief the Vice Chancellor or VC's nominee.

8 Indicative review timetable

8.1 Review planning:

- Twenty weeks before the site visit, a meeting is convened of the DVC (Academic), DVC (Research), the Panel Chair, the Dean, the Academic Head and the Academic Administrator. This meeting plans the conduct of the review.
- Four weeks before the site visit, the Chair and Academic Administrator will meet to draft the schedule for the site visit.

8.2 Following the site visit:

- The Chair co-ordinates drafting of the Panel's report. The Academic Administrator will assist. The Chair has the discretion to discuss findings with the Academic Head. The draft review report should be completed within eight weeks of the site visit.

8.3 A typical timeline for key tasks is provided in the table following:

Week No.	Task
-26	Appointment of Chair of Review Panel
26-22	Panel member nomination and recruitment. Finalise Panel membership
-20	Initial meeting of DVC(Academic), DVC (Research), Chair, Dean, Academic Head, and Academic Administrator. Key Questions finalised
-18	Submissions invited from staff and students of the academic unit
-14	Submission of portfolio to Secretariat and Dean.
-4	Chair meeting with Secretariat and Academic Administrator to consider issues and questions posed by Panel members. Proposed site visit schedule and interview list compiled.
0	Site Visit by Review Panel (2 days)
+8	Draft report to Academic Head and Dean
+11	Academic Head/Dean comments to Panel Chair
+13	Finalise report and submit to Vice-Chancellor
6 months after receiving the report	Report and draft Implementation Plan considered by Research Committee. Research Committee forwards comments to Education Committee.
At the next meeting of Education Committee	Education Committee considers Review Report, draft Implementation Plan and comments from Research Committee. Chair of Review Panel and Academic Head attend.
One year later	Year-On Status report on implementation to Education Committee

9 Finalisation and implementation of the review report

9.1 The Review Report should be no more than 10 pages in total, and its contents should conform broadly to the Key Questions. A suggested format is provided in Annex 3. It should provide an overall evaluation for each of the Key Questions and identify key action areas.

9.2 Within eight weeks of the site visit, the Chair of the Review Panel will send the completed draft report in confidence to the Academic Head and the Dean for

correction of matters of fact and wording of matters of substance. At that stage the report is confidential, although the Academic Head may discuss it in the academic unit as he/she thinks appropriate. Comments must be sent back to the Chair within three weeks.

- 9.3 After receiving these comments the Chair will finalise the report, consulting Panel members as necessary, and submit the final report to the DVC (Academic).
- 9.4 The DVC (Academic) will refer the report to the Vice-Chancellor who will approve its release through the DVC (Academic) to the academic unit and the Dean for wider circulation and discussion within the academic unit. The report is considered confidential until accepted by Council. Prior to that time, copies are distributed on a need-to-know basis. The DVC (Academic) will also provide a copy of the report to the DVC (Research).
- 9.5 **Six months** after receiving the report the academic unit will submit a draft Implementation Plan.
- 9.6 The draft Implementation Plan and Review report will first be considered by Research Committee. Where necessary it will provide written commentary on the findings of the report and the suitability and viability of the draft Implementation Plan related to the Research Key Questions. This commentary will inform subsequent discussions of the Report and draft Implementation Plan at Education Committee.
- 9.7 The Chair of the Review Panel and the Academic Head will attend Education Committee to discuss the Report, the draft Implementation Plan and any commentary provided by Research Committee. A representative of Research Committee will attend if needed.
- 9.8 The draft Implementation Plan will be revised as necessary in the light of this discussion, and submitted to the DVC(Academic).
- 9.9 The Review Report and finalised Implementation Plan will be sent to Senate, and to Council.
- 9.10 **One year** after initial consideration of the Review Report by Education Committee, the Academic Head (in consultation with the Dean) will provide a status report on progress against the Implementation Plan. The status report will be submitted to the Academic Administrator for review, who will then forward it to Education Committee. The report may also be reviewed by Research Committee as needed. A copy of the report should also be sent to the Chair of the Review Committee. The Academic Head is invited to attend Education Committee to present this status report. Education Committee recommends to Senate and Council the approval of implementation actions or calls for a further report where this is necessary.
- 9.11 The Dean will include progress on implementation as part of the Academic Head's annual performance review.
- 9.12 In special circumstances the Vice-Chancellor may vary these procedures and advise Education Committee of the variation and the reasons for it.

Annex 1: Key Questions for consideration by Review Panels

The University of Auckland Strategic Plan 2013-2020 specifies the University's objectives in teaching and learning and research.

Objective 4 is "A diverse student body of the highest possible academic potential". (Strategic Plan p.8)

Objective 5 is "A student body growing at 1% per annum with increased proportions of international, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students". (Strategic Plan p.9)

Objective 6 is "A substantial increase in annual completions of taught masters, research masters and doctorates". (Strategic Plan p.10)

Objective 7 is "A high quality learning environment that maximises the opportunity for all our students to succeed and provides them with an inclusive, intellectually challenging and transformative educational experience". (Strategic Plan p.10)

Objective 9 is "A growing output of excellent research across all our disciplines". (Strategic Plan p.12)

Objective 10 is "Dissemination of high quality research that has the greatest possible impact on and value for New Zealand and the world". (Strategic Plan p.12)

Objective 11 is "Partnerships in which the University and Māori work together to achieve their shared aspirations". (Strategic Plan p.13)

1. Key Questions for Evaluation of the Academic Programme

Breadth, comprehensiveness and coherence of courses offered

- Does the curriculum embed diverse international and intercultural perspectives and reflect New Zealand and its distinctive place in the Asia-Pacific region?
- Is the range and scope of courses offered consistent with national and international trends in the discipline?
- Are curricula aligned to learning outcomes, the acquisition of disciplinary skills, and to the relevant Graduate Profile?
- Are the academic programmes structured in such a way as to provide effective pathways through the undergraduate degree and to postgraduate study?
- Is appropriate international experience integrated into the curriculum?

Currency of course content

- Is content informed by current national and international research, including research and creative work by staff?
- Are students at all levels provided with opportunities to interact with senior staff and researchers?
- Does the alignment of course curriculum, graduate profile and employability measure up to best practice for the discipline?

2. Key Questions for Evaluation of Teaching

Characteristics and quality of delivery and assessment

- Are innovations in teaching and learning informed by current pedagogical research? What evidence is there for the impact of teaching innovations on enhanced learning?
- Is international best practice in the use of new technologies, innovative or flexible teaching methods being employed?
- Are research-informed initiatives and programmes in place to support equity students?
- How well are assessments aligned with learning objectives?
- Are processes for moderation of assessment robust?

Achievement of Learning Outcomes

- What evidence is there that students are achieving generic and disciplinary specific learning outcomes?

Student engagement

- What strategies does the academic unit use to foster and monitor student engagement, and how are these efforts tailored for diverse student groups?

Extent and quality of engagement in PG supervision

- Is the range of research expertise sufficient to support teaching and supervision?
- What evidence is there of the effectiveness of supervision? (e.g. comparison of completion rates with benchmark institutions, postdoctoral fellowships etc).
- How well does the academic unit tap into the pool of potential international postgraduate students?
- Are the outcomes of student research comparable with disciplinary norms in benchmark institutions?

3. Key Questions for Evaluation of Research

Impact and value of research

- Is there evidence of the impact and value of research for both NZ (including research relevant to Māori and Pacific people) and internationally?

Identification of research opportunities

- Is there evidence that opportunities in research, including funding opportunities, are being identified and taken up?

Quantum and quality of publications and other research outputs

- How does the quantum and quality of publications and other research outputs compare with departments/disciplines in benchmark institutions?
- Is there evidence of international recognition of research e.g. citation rates, measures of impact, rankings, invitations?
- Are staff publishing in high quality, internationally recognised journals and other avenues for publication and dissemination?

Participation in cross-disciplinary/transnational research teams

- What are the outcomes of research alliances and collaborations, internal and external to the University including internationally?
- How effective are the strategies for enhancing the quality of cross-disciplinary research?

Research development and support

- Is succession planning in place for ongoing research success?
- How effective are the academic unit's strategies for supporting research (including both staff and student research) and attracting research funding?
- What are the barriers to enhanced research performance as perceived by the academic unit and the panel?

Annex 2: Supporting documentation (appendices)

Appendices for Academic Programme:

- description of the programmes into which the academic unit teaches, and pathways through these programmes
- complete set of course outlines for the last full academic year (supply electronically)
- complete set of exam papers for the last full academic year (supply electronically)
- samples of student work, at each level (3-4 pieces of work from 50% of courses).

Appendices for Teaching:

- the graduate profile for programmes taught within the academic unit
- graduate destination information, where appropriate
- academic unit policies on teaching and learning.

Appendices for Research:

- numbers of postgraduate research students and their supervisions teams (last 5 years)
- external research funding for the last 5 years
- list of publications and other research outputs (last 5 years)
- quality, citation and impact indicators appropriate to the discipline (last 5 years)
- current national and international collaborations
- short CVs from research database.

Other:

- summary staff profile table

Additional evidence may be included as appendices, or provided in hard copy for perusal by the Panel during the site visit.

Annex 3: Suggested format for the Review Report

Cover page:

The cover page should include:

The University of Auckland
Report of the Committee established to review the [Academic Unit]
Date of the Report
Confidential (until accepted by Senate and Council)

Length and format:

As a general guideline, the Report should not exceed 10 pages. In addition, a limited number of appendices may be included.

It is expected that the major headings of the Report will correspond to the Key Questions. Reports should be constructive, with both critical and complimentary elements as appropriate. An overall evaluation should be provided for each Key Question, and Key Action Areas for improvement or change should be identified. Where the Panel determines that good or exemplary practices exist, these should be highlighted.

Table of contents:

Using the generic Key Questions, the table of contents of a typical Academic Unit Review Report should resemble the following model:

Preamble

Key Questions
Panel membership
Acknowledgements

Findings

Part A: Overall Evaluation of the Academic Programme
Key Action Areas for the Academic Programme

Overall Evaluation of Teaching
Key Action Areas for Teaching

Part B: Overall Evaluation of Research
Key Action Areas for Research

Appendices

- List of exemplary academic unit practices that could be shared with the University community