



# ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE OF NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITIES

*A Joint Publication of  
Universities New Zealand –  
Te Pūkai Tara & The New Zealand  
Universities Academic Audit Unit*

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*Quality assurance in the university sector ensures that academic processes are of an internationally respected standard. The quality assurance processes use evidence to check that goals are being achieved and that policies and practices are under ongoing review as part of an overall quality enhancement regime.*

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*There are two bodies overseeing the quality assurance of universities: Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara's (Universities NZ's) Committee on University Academic Programmes and the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit.*

« The Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) is charged with setting up and applying qualification and regulation approval, accreditation and programme moderation procedures across universities.

« The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) supports universities in their achievement of standards of excellence in research and teaching through regular institutional audit and the promotion of quality enhancement practices across the sector.

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## ***Background***

« The 1990 amendment of the Education Act (1989) changed the educational landscape in New Zealand. It abolished the University Grants Committee and defined the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (now operating as Universities NZ) as the statutory body with primary responsibility for quality assurance matters in the university sector, including the authority to exercise powers with regard to compliance, approval and accreditation. Following these changes, Universities NZ delegated responsibility for approval and accreditation functions to CUAP, powers that are the responsibility of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) elsewhere in the tertiary sector.

At the same time, several other countries were beginning to establish procedures for the management of standards and quality in universities. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991 with the objective of developing and promoting good practices in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education.

In May 1992, and with an eye to international developments in quality assurance, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee made a collective decision that all universities would be subject to academic audit. The NZUAAU was established in 1993 and the first audits were conducted in 1995. »

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## Key principles

*Quality assurance activities are underpinned by nine principles:*

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### 1. Developed by the universities

CUAP and the NZUAAU were established by the universities and operate with their full support. Their functions and operating procedures are regularly reviewed.

### 2. Evidence-based

Universities are required to provide evidence of how their activities and processes meet their stated standards and objectives. Evidence is examined and assessed by peers throughout the quality assurance process.

### 3. Enhancement-led

Quality assurance is focused on the identification of goals and standards, and the charting of progress towards them. The NZUAAU underpins this process by revisiting previous audit recommendations and by facilitating the sharing of good practice in New Zealand universities and abroad.

### 4. Founded on self-review

Academic quality is ultimately the responsibility of each university. CUAP's moderation processes and the NZUAAU's audit cycles begin with self-review. CUAP and the NZUAAU are regularly evaluated by independent panels in audit processes that also begin with self-review.

## 5. Assured by peer review

National and international peer review is a critical element of teaching and research within a university, and is a fundamental component of the quality assurance system. CUAP uses peer review to evaluate proposals from the universities and to moderate recently introduced programmes. NZUAAU audits are conducted by a panel of auditors comprising peers who are national and international experts.

## 6. Collective and collegial

CUAP and the NZUAAU function with the cooperation of all New Zealand universities and the engagement and expertise of individuals representing key stakeholders such as students, industry and other members of the universities' communities.

## 7. Individually binding

All universities are subject to the requirements, and bound by the decisions, of the quality assurance system.

## 8. Internationally endorsed

International auditors are a feature of every NZUAAU audit panel, and CUAP and NZUAAU procedures are informed by professional relationships with similar international agencies. The New Zealand universities' quality assurance system is consistent with international guidelines for good practice and its quality assurance processes are regularly held up as an exemplar for other countries.

## 9. Independently operated

CUAP (through Universities NZ) and the NZUAAU are independently funded by the universities. The NZUAAU operates autonomously with a separate board, staff and independently appointed auditors.

# Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)

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« CUAP considers academic matters including inter-university course approval and moderation procedures, advice and comment on academic developments, encouragement of the coherent and balanced development of curricula and the facilitation of cross-crediting between qualifications.

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CUAP developed out of the Curriculum Committee of the disestablished University Grants Committee, and has the delegated authority of Universities NZ for academic approval and accreditation functions. CUAP comprises a representative of each university and is chaired by a Vice-Chancellor. Its membership includes a student representative.

CUAP is the body to which universities must submit any proposals to offer new qualifications or to make substantial changes to existing qualifications. Proposals must meet official criteria which are set by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). These criteria apply to all qualifications offered by tertiary education providers and are set after consulting with Universities NZ and others in the tertiary sector. The criteria address the following items:

- Title, aims, learning outcomes and coherence;
- Delivery and learning methods;
- Assessment;
- Acceptability of the course;
- Regulations;

- Resources;
- Evaluation and review; and
- Provision of research facilities and support of staff involved in research (a requirement for degree and related qualifications).

The Committee uses a peer review process to evaluate proposals from the universities, which range from new qualifications and subjects to changed entry requirements and altered subject names. A proposal has to proceed through various deliberative bodies in a university before it reaches CUAP, where it is subjected to peer review. CUAP receives proposals, initiates the peer review process, makes any necessary changes and approves proposals in two annual rounds. Those proposals which at least one university is unable to support are discussed by the Committee. While the outcome is often favourable, there are occasions when the Committee requires some changes or declines the proposal. The Committee's decisions are reported to Universities NZ. Since 1990, CUAP has approved over 1,100 new university qualifications and noted the deletion of over 400.

Once a university qualification has been approved by CUAP it is listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) and is eligible for funding from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). Universities apply for funding by submitting details of the new qualification to the TEC. The NZQF is a publicly available, comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand.

CUAP operates a moderation process as a follow-up to the initial approval of qualifications. Universities are required to conduct formal reviews of all new programmes within three years of the graduation of the first cohort of students. These reviews involve an appointed convener and at least one panel member from another disciplinary area. CUAP considers the review and where

the committee has serious concerns about a programme, it has the power to order changes, seek a second report, require a further review or withdraw approval.

In New Zealand, the university entrance standard is set by NZQA. CUAP's Sub-Committee on University Entrance was established to coordinate advice from universities to NZQA with respect to a common standard of entrance to universities. The sub-committee also provides information on the administration of discretionary entrance, coordinates the evaluation of overseas qualifications presented for the purposes of admission, evaluates university foundation programmes offered by non-university providers in New Zealand, offers policy advice on matters related to the secondary-tertiary interface, and ensures university staff are appropriately involved in curriculum development and examination in the senior secondary school.

CUAP was audited in 1996, 1999 and 2005. A further audit is planned for 2011. >>

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# *New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU)*

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« *The NZUAAU is an independent body whose purpose is to contribute to the advancement of 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.
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The NZUAAU aims to support universities in achieving standards of excellence in research and teaching. It does so, primarily, by conducting institutional audits. It also identifies and disseminates information on good practice in developing and maintaining quality in higher education and convenes an annual meeting on quality enhancement in the sector.

The NZUAAU governing Board is appointed by Universities NZ and includes nominations from the Vice-Chancellors, the Tertiary Education Union, students and persons drawn from professional and employer bodies and the wider community. The NZUAAU is operationally independent of Universities NZ.

Academic audits are carried out by panels of auditors who are trained by the NZUAAU and appointed from the NZUAAU's Register of Auditors. Each panel includes an overseas external auditor. Auditors are selected from universities' senior academic staff and other stakeholders or people with knowledge of academic auditing and evaluation. An audit begins with a process of self-

review, creating an audit portfolio that the university uses to evaluate its progress towards achieving the goals and objectives related to the focus of the audit. The audit panel verifies the portfolio through interviews and site visits. Final audit reports, which are publicly available, commend good practice and make recommendations intended to assist the university in its own programme of continuous improvement. Progress on the recommendations is submitted to the NZUAAU Board in a follow-up report 12 months later. A report on progress in implementing the recommendations of the previous audit also forms part of the self-review process in the next audit round.

There have been four cycles of audit since the NZUAAU was established:

- Cycle 1: 1995-1998 – whole of institution;
- Cycle 2: 2000-2001 – research, and a theme chosen by the institution;
- Cycle 3: 2002-2007 – teaching and learning;
- Cycle 4: 2008-2012 – whole of institution.

The NZUAAU maintains professional relationships with all quality assurance bodies working in tertiary education in New Zealand, and with similar agencies internationally. It is a full member of INQAAHE and follows its guidelines in quality assurance conduct.

The NZUAAU is subject to regular independent review by a panel of national and international experts. It was last reviewed in 2009, and before that in 2001 and 1998. >>

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# Quality within the Universities

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« *The quality assurance activities of CUAP and the NZUAAU do not occur in a vacuum.*

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Universities' systems for monitoring and enhancing quality in their teaching and learning, research and administrative activities, and facilities, are ongoing and subject to regular internal and external review including:

- Internal programme approval and review processes;
- Departmental reviews;
- Student course and programme evaluations;
- The use of external examiners;
- Regular review and comparison of course and programme data (such as grades, pass rates, and completion rates);
- Student surveys;
- Staff performance reviews;
- Professional diploma and degree accreditation reviews;
- Engagement with professional, employer, statutory and regulatory bodies; and
- Research funding bodies.

Assessment of universities' research performance is carried out by the TEC via the Performance-Based Research Fund quality evaluations. These have taken place in 2003 and 2006, and the next round is planned for 2012. Universities have regular interactions with government agencies including financial management monitoring undertaken by the Ministry of Education and the TEC. Quality assurance in the sector is aided by Ako Aotearoa – The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, which advises on good teaching practice and activities which facilitate excellent student learning.

More information about universities' quality systems, policies and processes can be found on the websites of the individual universities. »

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## ***Links for more information:***

### ***Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara***

Includes links to the websites of New Zealand's eight universities [www.universitiesnz.ac.nz](http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz)

***Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)*** Includes the CUAP handbook "Committee on University Academic Programmes: Functions and Procedures"

[www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/aboutus/sc/cuap](http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/aboutus/sc/cuap)

***New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU)*** Includes published audit reports, details of upcoming audits, and links to good practice [www.nzuaau.ac.nz](http://www.nzuaau.ac.nz)

***International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)*** Includes the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance [www.inqaahe.org](http://www.inqaahe.org)

***New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)*** [www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)

***New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)*** Comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand [www.nzqf.govt.nz](http://www.nzqf.govt.nz)

***Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)*** [www.tec.govt.nz](http://www.tec.govt.nz)

***Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF)*** [www.tec.govt.nz/Funding/Fund-finder](http://www.tec.govt.nz/Funding/Fund-finder)

***Ako Aotearoa*** [www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz](http://www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz)

