ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER 2014

Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Queen's University

September 2014

The Queen's University's Quality Assurance Processes (QUQAPs) document was ratified by the Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council (Quality Council) and adopted by the University in March 2011. Summarized here are the findings of the quality assurance audit conducted at Queen's under the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which allows for the audit of all publicly-assisted universities in Ontario over an eight-year cycle. The purpose of the audit is to determine whether the University has complied with the terms of its QUQAPs.

A team of three auditors was assigned to conduct the Queen's University audit. The team selected for audit nine programs that had been reviewed, modified or approved under the QUQAPs. The auditors reviewed all the relevant documentation provided by the University and followed up their desk audit with a three-day site visit in February 2014, during which time they met with faculty, staff and students involved in each program and with senior academic leaders of the University. The Executive Director of the Quality Council provided support throughout the process.

The following program reviews were selected for the audit:
- Cyclical Program Reviews in Classics (BAH, MA), Nursing (BNSc, CNP, MScN, PhD) – included at the request of the University, English Language and Literature (BAH, MA, PhD), Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering (BScH, BScE, MASc, PhD)
- New Program Reviews in Environmental Studies (PhD) and Management Analytics (MMA)
- Major Modifications in Indigenous Studies (BA) -- included at the request of the University, Education (PhD) and Computing and Mathematics (BCMCH).

The recommendations and suggestions in the audit report are intended to support the University in achieving its quality assurance goals. Recommendations identify instances in which an institution has failed to comply with its approved institutional quality assurance processes and must be implemented whereas suggestions provide advice on how to improve quality assurance practices. The list of specific recommendations and suggestions from this audit follows below.

Overall, the audit team found that Queen's University is making good progress in implementing the quality assurance processes outlined in the QUQAPs. The auditors noted several examples of particularly good quality assurance practices at the University and were impressed by the efforts made by many of the individuals involved to both respect the requirements of the QUQAPs and ensure that Queen's academic programs are thoroughly reviewed. However, the University does face some obstacles before it will achieve full compliance with the QUQAPs and the Quality Assurance Framework. These lie, broadly, in three areas.

First, the University must ensure that all of its academic programs are subject to review. As noted in our list of recommendation and suggestions, this will require some attention to jurisdiction, i.e., identifying which units are responsible for reviews of programs that are not seen readily to 'belong' to particular departments or schools, and ensuring that all the academic units of the University comply with the requirement to review its programs under the terms of the QUQAPs. It will also require some housekeeping to ensure that program listings are up to date.

Second, the audit team noted a considerable amount of delegation of responsibility for functions outlined in the QUQAPs. In some instances, this appears to have resulted in uncertainty about who has the authority to intervene in and/or resolve certain issues. The auditors suggest that the language of the QUQAPs be amended to ensure that the officers to whom responsibility is assigned for various actions are named accurately in the document and that steps be taken to ensure that the named actors are actually performing these responsibilities.

Third, the auditors observed that some decisions about 'new' programs are made outside the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework. In particular, the procedures to be followed in the case of expedited approvals need to be clarified in the QUQAPs and brought in line with the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework.

The auditors' specific recommendations and suggestions for Queen's University's quality assurance process are listed below:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Review Teams should be advised that, in their reports, they are expected to address all the evaluation criteria, for each program under consideration.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The QUQAPs should be revised to include the titles of all officers, including their delegates, who fulfill specified QA roles.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Senate Committee on Cyclical Program Review should ensure that each program under review is addressed in its reports to the Provost.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The University should undertake to identify all of its academic programs and ensure that they are included in the calendar of Cyclical Program Review.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The QUQAPs should be revised to include the full definition of "new program" from the Quality Assurance Framework.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The QUQAPs should be revised to clarify the criteria used to define whether proposals should be treated as 'new programs', 'major modifications' or 'minor modifications'.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The QUQAPs should specify the University official(s) authorized to determine whether a proposal constitutes a new program, a major modification, or a minor modification and thereby determine the process to be followed.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The University should take steps to ensure that all programs are reviewed within the eight years required by the Quality Assurance Framework.

SUGGESTION 1: The University should ensure that documents prepared in compliance with QUQAPs are clearly signed and dated by the relevant parties named in the QUQAPs.

SUGGESTION 2: The QUQAPs and related documents should be revised to clarify what is expected from the academic units in terms of the length and scope of responses to Review Team Reports.

SUGGESTION 3: Program representatives who are invited to appear at SCPRC meetings should be informed in advance about issues of concern and/or provided with some general questions to assist them in preparing for the meeting.

SUGGESTION 4: The QUQAPs should be revised to include more specific language about timelines by which Departmental responses as well as Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans must be prepared and submitted.

SUGGESTION 5: The QUQAPs should be revised to make explicit how reviewers are to be instructed in their roles and by whom.

SUGGESTION 6: The roles of internal reviewers should be clarified, including their responsibilities with respect to the preparation of the Review Team Report Form.

SUGGESTION 7: The University should specify the academic unit or units responsible for each program review.

SUGGESTION 8: The University should develop a process for formally discontinuing programs that are no longer operating.

SUGGESTION 9: The University should look for ways to simplify review templates.