ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

JUNE 2017

Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Lakehead University

June 2017

Lakehead University is one of three universities to be audited in the fifth year of this first cycle of quality assurance audits under the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The primary objective of the audit is to determine whether or not the institution has complied with the parameters of its Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) for cyclical program reviews and the development of new programs, as ratified by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council). Three arm's-length members of the Quality Council Audit Panel conducted the audit, with assistance throughout the process from Quality Council staff.

The audit itself included a review of Lakehead University's IQAP (January 2011 and January 2016) and focused on a number of programs that have undergone various processes outlined in the QAF. A desk audit of documents for each program preceded a three-day site visit, which took place November 1-3, 2016. During the site visit, auditors met with faculty, staff, and students associated with the programs selected for audit, as well as with senior academic administrators. The site visit was extremely well planned and the audit team would like to thank those charged with organizing the meetings for their hospitality and for providing assistance throughout the three-day visit. The auditors sensed right from the start of the site visit that Lakehead University has taken the matter of quality assurance very seriously, with some of the processes associated with the QAF having been given close attention even prior to the establishment of that framework. Auditors left the site visit convinced that excellence in teaching and learning and ongoing refinement of quality assurance procedures are top priorities for Lakehead University.

The audit focused on the following programs:

Cyclical Program Reviews:

- Indigenous Learning, BA, HBA
- Interdisciplinary Studies, HBASc and BASc
- Nursing, BScN (Collaborative)
- Economics, MA

New Programs:

- Social Justice Studies, MA
- Electrical & Computer Engineering, PhD

Expedited Review:

- Education, MEd (Education for Change)

Major Modifications:

- Aboriginal Education, HBEd
- Master of Public Health – Epidemiology Specialization

The audit report makes eight recommendations, including one to correct a misalignment between the University's IQAP and the Quality Assurance Framework. Three recommendations concern the completeness of self-studies for cyclical program reviews and proposals for new programs, the degree to which faculty, students and staff are involved in the development of self-studies for CPRs, and the completeness of the Implementation Plan attached to the Final Assessment Report. Three recommendations pertain to the external reviewers and their report, one with respect to communication, another concerning the development of evaluation guidelines and a template for review of new program proposals, and a third involving responses to the Reviewers' Report. The final recommendation is more general in its insistence that all procedures outlined in the IQAP are followed.

In addition to the recommendations, the audit report includes eleven suggestions, which are offered to assist Lakehead University in strengthening its demonstrated commitment to the quality assurance agenda and especially to the student learning experience. The suggestions refer to:

- Additions to or clarifications of the IQAP (with respect to procedures, clarification of roles and responsibilities, the external reviewer nomination form, articulation of assessment methods, the relationship between learning outcomes and modes of assessment in self-studies, and dealing with external reports that fail to address the required evaluation criteria);
- Refinement of processes (documentation of the initiation of the CPR process, post QA-approval steps, utilization of faculty champions to build the culture of quality assurance, early involvement of support services and the Office of the Vice-President (Research and Innovation) in the development of new program proposals, and more extensive communication and follow-up with students involved in the CPR process);
- Development of a centralized tracking system, especially for CPR processes; and
- Modification of the Schedule of Reviews.

In summary, it is abundantly clear that Lakehead University takes quality assurance seriously, notably through the significant support provided by the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) and that of the Deputy Provost. The SAC-QA Committee embraces the wide range of procedures outlined in the IQAP with a sense of pride. And the faculty members we spoke to who have been involved in various facets of quality assurance were both enthusiastic and articulate about the positive effects the processes make on their programs. Lakehead University is to be commended for its deep and genuine commitment to quality assurance. Moreover, it has demonstrated a keen understanding of how careful observance of quality assurance processes can positively affect the teaching and learning dimensions of post-secondary education.

Recommendations

Lakehead University must:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Revise Sections 5.4 and 3.5 of its IQAP to clarify the fact that two separate responses to Reviewers' Reports are required, as per Sections 4.2.5.f and 4.2.4.g of the QAF (for CPRs) and Section 2.2.8 of the QAF (for New Program Proposals).

RECOMMENDATION 2: Ensure that faculty, staff, and students are provided appropriate opportunities to participate in the review process, to provide input to the self-study, and these procedures must be documented in the self-study itself, as per Section 5.2 and Appendix 3, Part 1, Section 14 of the IQAP.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Ensure that all communication concerning the external reviewers—including communications regarding their selection, a listing of what materials were sent to them in advance of their site visit, and a summary of how the reviewers were briefed at their site visit—is documented and dated.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Post on the Provost's QA webpage the Report Guide that includes the guidelines for external reviewers, as per Section 3.4 of the IQAP.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Ensure that all internal responses to external reviewers' reports are complete, that they are undertaken within the timeframe specified in the IQAP, and that communication and approvals related to procedural delays are documented and dated.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Ensure that Self-Studies for CPRs, New Program Proposal Briefs, and Expedited Approval proposals address all evaluation criteria specified in its IQAP.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Ensure that the requirements of Section 4.2.5.c of the QAF regarding the contents of the Implementation Plan are fully met.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Ensure that all procedures for CPRs and New Program Proposals mandated by the IQAP are appropriately documented.

Suggestions

Lakehead University should:

SUGGESTION 1: Ensure that both the cross-referencing of learning outcomes with the appropriateness of modes of delivery, and the articulation of assessment methods are adequately addressed in New Program Proposals.

SUGGESTION 2: Amend Section 3.1 of its IQAP with respect to the internal processes following approval by the Quality Council to make it clear that program changes of any kind are not permitted between Quality Council approval and the commencement of a program.

SUGGESTION 3: Ensure that all Proposals (for new programs and major modifications) and Self-Studies (for CPRs) are dated, with their author(s) indicated, and should consider amending its IQAP to indicate which office or committee has the final authority to approve Self-Studies and New Program Proposals before they are sent to external reviewers.

SUGGESTION 4: Consider amending its IQAP to include a requirement to document how, when, and by whom the processes associated with New Program Approvals and CPRs are initiated.

SUGGESTION 5: Consider adding a procedural step in the Statement of Intent, requesting involvement of the various support services and the Vice-President (Research and Innovation) at that initial stage of a new program's development.

SUGGESTION 6: Improve communication with students involved in quality assurance processes regarding the context for and final outcomes of those processes.

SUGGESTION 7: Consider revising the External Reviewer Nomination Form to provide space for disclosure of potential conflicts-of-interest, and revise the sign-off sheet to indicate that signing the form confirms the arm's-length status of the external reviewers.

SUGGESTION 8: Consider capitalizing on the expertise and commitment of faculty members who have served as internal reviewers by seeking their assistance in mentoring faculty within units preparing for a cyclical program review or preparing a new program proposal.

SUGGESTION 9: Consider including language in its IQAP to deal with Reviewers' Reports that fail to address the required evaluation criteria specified in its IQAP.

SUGGESTION 10: Consider implementing a central tracking and document management system for the various stages of the CPR process along the lines of (or even via a modification of) *Curriculum Navigator,* currently used for tracking the steps in the New Program Approvals process.

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SUGGESTION 11: Amend its Schedule of Reviews to include the date when each program was last reviewed, to make more explicit the Schedule's compliance with the required eight-year window for CPRs.