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

SEPTEMBER 2018

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

September 2018

The University of Waterloo is one of three universities to be audited in the sixth 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 if the institution has complied with the parameters of its Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), as ratified by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council), for the development of new programs, cyclical program reviews and major program modifications. 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 the University of Waterloo's IQAP (the original version ratified by the Quality Assurance Council in March 2011 and a second version that went into effect in 2017) and focused on a sample of nine programs that have undergone the various processes included in the QAF. A desk audit of documents for each program preceded a three-day site visit, which took place from March 19 to 21, 2018. 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 staff and faculty charged with organizing the meetings for their hospitality and for providing assistance throughout the visit. The auditors sensed right from the start of the site visit that the University of Waterloo has taken the matter of quality assurance very seriously and strives for continuous improvement in its quality assurance policies and practices.

The audit focused on the following programs:

- **New Programs**
    - Health Promotion (BHP)
    - Master of Environmental Studies in Sustainability Management (MES)

- **Expedited Approval of New Program**
    - Data Analytics (GDip (Type 2))
- **Cyclical Program Reviews**
    - Civil Engineering (MEng/MASc/PhD)
    - History (MA/PhD) – Joint with the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University

- o Social Work (BSW) – Renison University College
- o Studio Art (BA, MFA), Art History and Visual Culture (BA), Film Studies and Visual Culture (BA)

- **Major Modifications**
  - o Biology, Biochemistry, Biomedical Sciences, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Earth Sciences, Mathematical Physics, Materials and Nanosciences (BSc)
  - o Environment, International Development Program (BES)

The audit report makes nine recommendations. Two of the recommendations concern recordkeeping of the documentation. These are intended to ensure that Waterloo has a record of the creation of the documentation and appropriate sign-off procedures at each stage. One recommendation is about the evaluation criteria of the self-studies. This ensures that all evaluation criteria are described in the documentation that it can be reviewed by the external reviewers, thus providing better feedback from the examiners. Three of the recommendations concern the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans and the subsequent two-year progress reports. The executive summary was missing from the FARs that were reviewed, which is required by the QAF. In addition, there were instances where the program/department/unit responsible for ensuring the implementation of the plan did not receive a copy of the FAR/IP. The two-year report should be produced to address the requirement to monitor new programs and it was missing in some of the cyclical program reviews. One of the recommendations concerns the University's Schedule of Reviews. These are intended to ensure that Waterloo conforms to their seven-year cycle of reviews and provides adequate documentation in instances where unavoidable delay occurs that extends a review beyond the eight-year timeframe. The auditors have made a recommendation intended to ensure that Waterloo revise its IQAP to include a separate response from the appropriate Dean or academic administrator, thus brining the IQAP into alignment with the QAF. Finally, Waterloo must identify whether a curricular change is a minor or major modification prior to the creation of the documentation. This will help determine which template should be used and where the responsibility lies for approval within the University.

The audit report also includes 15 suggestions, which are offered to assist the University of Waterloo in strengthening its demonstrated commitment to the quality assurance agenda. The suggestions refer to:

- Documenting the requirements of the initial stages of new programs, creating templates for each modification type, and adding dates of last reviews to the schedule
- Development of processes for the self-study including addressing incomplete reviewer's reports, staff involvement and, where accreditation and CPR occur together, ensuring that evaluation criteria are appropriately addressed;
- Providing additional details on the roles of the internal reviewer, and each partner in a joint review with other universities;
- Review and clarify the distinction between learning outcomes and learning objectives in new program and CPR;

In addition to recommendations and suggestions, the report identifies four aspects of Waterloo's quality assurance process that are examples of best practice. These are: the centralization of the IAP processes in the newly formed Quality Assurance Office; the role of the Centre for Teacher Excellence in supporting programs and departments, particularly with the creation and updating of learning outcomes; the thoroughness of the self-study templates; and the inclusive processes for the design of new programs.

In conclusion, the University of Waterloo is committed to improving the quality assurance environment. They have expressed a desire to improve the processes, procedures and activities as the IQAP evolves. The auditors are confident that Waterloo will pursue a thoughtful course as it works to further improve its quality assurance policies and processes.

Recommendations

The University of Waterloo must:

Recommendation 1: Ensure that all processes required by the IQAP are fully documented.

Recommendation 2: Develop a sign-off procedure to ensure the preparation and completeness of self-studies for Cyclical Program Reviews, of new program proposals, and the report from the Review Committee for Cyclical Program Reviews and new program proposals.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that all evaluation criteria are fully discussed in the self-study, especially those connected with Degree Level Expectations, course learning outcomes, and program level learning outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Revise its IQAP to include the requirement for a separate response from the relevant dean(s) or academic administrator(s) response to the recommendations in the Review Committee's report for New Program Approvals and Cyclical Program Reviews.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that the programs on the Cyclical Program Review Schedule have a period of review of no more than seven years, as per the University's IQAP, and that all programs are listed on the schedule.

Recommendation 6: Ensure that Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans contain all of the required elements, as identified in the IQAP. The Executive Summary does not appear to be included in the FAR.

Recommendation 7: Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to include a stage indicating that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for Cyclical Program Reviews are distributed to the academic unit responsible for the program and then document this stage.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that a two-year progress report is produced to address the requirement to monitor new programs.

Recommendation 9: Identify whether an undergraduate curricular change is a major or minor modification prior to the creation of the documentation.

Suggestions

There are 15 suggestions, which are listed below.

Suggestion 1: Revise the IQAP to include a more detailed description of the roles and responsibilities of the internal reviewer.

Suggestion 2: Add a process for identifying the authority or authorities that will review and approve the Review Committee's report to ensure that it addresses all the relevant evaluation criteria.

Suggestion 3: Consider developing a protocol for addressing incomplete Review Committee's reports.

Suggestion 4: Review and clarify the distinction between learning outcomes and learning objectives to ensure that learning outcomes are fully addressed in New Program Proposals and in Cyclical Program Reviews.

Suggestion 5: Clarify the documentation requirements for the initial stages of a new program proposal.

Suggestion 6: Consider adding a review and approval stage to the New Program Proposal process to ensure completeness in addressing the required evaluation criteria.

Suggestion 7: Add the date of the last review to the list of programs on the Cyclical Program Review Schedule to ensure that program reviews do not exceed the IQAP's seven-year review requirement.

Suggestion 8: Consider, where multiple program reviews take place, that each program gets the appropriate attention.

Suggestion 9: Consider ways to document more fully the role of each partner in programs offered jointly with other universities.

Suggestion 10: Expand the description of the development of the self-study section to include more detail on staff involvement.

Suggestion 11: Consider, in cases where cyclical program reviews and accreditation reviews are conducted together, that the evaluation criteria are appropriately addressed.

Suggestion 12: Consider adding a documented stage of review and approval for New Program Proposals and for Review Reports for Cyclical Program Reviews and New Program Proposals.

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Suggestion 13: Consider creating templates for each type of modification.

Suggestion 14: Consider reviewing posting practices for affiliated institutions.

Suggestion 15: Consider reviewing the definition of a GDip (Type 2) in the QAF and the creation of GDip (Type 2) at the University.