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

MAY 2020

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

Algoma University is one of three universities to be audited in the eighth year of this first cycle of quality assurance audits under the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The primary objective of this 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 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 Algoma University IQAP (the original version ratified by the Quality Assurance Council in April 2011, a second version re-ratified in December 2013 and a third version that went into effect in April 2018) and focused on a sample of eight programs that have undergone the various processes included in the QAF. Since new programs at Algoma University are approved by Postsecondary Education Quality Assurance Board (PEQAB) rather than the Quality Council, the selection of programs for audit did not include any new program proposals. A desk audit of documents submitted for the Cyclical Program Reviews and Major Modifications to existing programs that were selected for audit preceded the audit meetings. These meetings were then conducted by videoconference (due to bad weather conditions), and took place on November 28-29, 2020. During the audit meetings, the auditors met via videoconference, with faculty, staff, and students associated with the programs selected for audit, as well as with senior academic administrators.

The auditors found a quality assurance process that has been evolving in order to overcome problems that have been experienced in recent years, mostly related to maintaining the timelines of the quality assurance process. They were impressed by the current support of the Quality Assurance Office, by the significant engagement from senior administration and its commitment in creating an institutional culture of quality. However, since most Cyclical Program Reviews that were scrutinized as part of the audit showed extended delays at the Department level and/or at the senior administration level and since there is not yet a clear indication of sustained improvement, the audit report includes a Cause for Concern. The report requests that the Cyclical Program Reviews comply with the timelines that have been established in the University IQAP.

The audit focused on the following programs:

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Cyclical Program Reviews

- Geography, BA
- Social Work, BSW
- Economics, BA
- Psychology, BA/BSc
- Law and Justice, BA

Major Modifications

- Computer Science, BCoSc
- Law and Justice, BA
- Music, BA

The audit report makes five recommendations. One recommendation aims at selecting the external reviewers earlier in the process to help reduce the duration of a Cyclical Program Review. Another recommendation asks the university to take steps to retain complete and accurate documentation of the quality assurance process for each program undergoing review, particularly with regard to sign-off procedures. The development of learning outcomes for each program along with the use of appropriate assessment methods is the object of another recommendation. Finally two recommendations are related the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan – one to make sure that the Quality Council receives them and a second to revise the IQAP in order to clarify who is responsible for the production of these documents.

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

- Involvement of all members of the Self-Study Committee, including students, at each stage of the Cyclical Program Review;
- Revision of the relevant sections in the IQAP to set a realistic and binding timeline with regard to the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan;
- Implementation of procedure for curriculum mapping;
- Information to incoming Chairs and Deans through the Implementation Plan the subsequent monitoring reports and appropriate orientation;
- Review of the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of the various committees associated with Quality Assurance;
- Support of the new quality assurance initiatives coming out of the Quality Assurance Office;
- Implementation of a system to collect data from alumni;
- Revision of some templates to make sure that all the information is provided;

- Vision of quality assurance processes as an opportunity for continuous improvement.

In addition to recommendations and suggestions, the report identifies the involvement of the students in the preparation of the self-study report as an example of best practice. To aid in program review, Algoma University's students are often charged with conducting a survey among their peers and feel that they are part of a process which values their input.

In conclusion, the audit of quality assurance at Algoma University has revealed significant efforts to meet the expectations of the Quality Assurance Framework, especially in recent years. However, complying with the established timelines so that the Cyclical Program Reviews are completed in a reasonable time is crucial. If this issue can be properly addressed, the auditors believe that the institution now has the capacity to further develop a culture of understanding and commitment to program quality.

Cause for Concern

Ensure that the Cyclical Program Review processes are completed in compliance with the timeline that is described in the IQAP or established during the orientation meeting.

Recommendations

Algoma University must:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Retain complete and accurate documentation for each stage of all quality assurance processes.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Provide adequate support to ensure that clear and relevant program-level learning outcomes are developed for each program and that the proposed methods of assessment are appropriate to assess student achievement of the intended program learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Ensure the entire process for selecting the external reviewers (nominating, selecting, and appointing) is initiated earlier in the CPR process.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Ensure that all Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans are submitted to the Quality Council, as per Section 4.2.6 a) of the Quality Assurance Framework.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Revise the relevant sections in the IQAP to clarify the responsibilities with regard to the creation of the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan.

Suggestions

Algoma University should:

SUGGESTION 1: Consider involving all members of the Self-Study Committee, including students, at each key stage of the Cyclical Program Review.

SUGGESTION 2: Consider revising the relevant sections in the IQAP to set a realistic and binding timeline with regard to the creation of the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan.

SUGGESTION 3: Consider ensuring that the Implementation Plan and subsequent monitoring reports be provided to incoming Chairs and Deans, with appropriate orientation added regarding this aspect of their role, to ensure continuity of action.

SUGGESTION 4: Consider the implementation of a system to collect data from alumni.

SUGGESTION 5: Consider how the new quality assurance initiatives coming out of the Quality Assurance Office can be supported appropriately.

SUGGESTION 6: Consider reviewing the roles, responsibilities, and planned interactions of the various committees (QualCom, AppCom, Curriculum Committee) associated with Quality Assurance, to determine whether they are functioning effectively.

SUGGESTION 7: Consider how the quality assurance processes can be envisioned as an opportunity for continuous improvement of the program.

SUGGESTION 8: Consider revising the templates to make sure that all of the information that is needed is provided.

SUGGESTION 9: Consider implementing a procedure for curriculum mapping.