

## Reference Group on Academic Standards and Outcomes

Terms of Reference for an initial Reference Group to advise on AUQA's emphasis on 'academic standards and outcomes' in Cycle 2 audits.

### Background

In Cycle 2 audits 'evidence of setting, maintaining and reviewing institutional academic standards and outcomes (eg relating to student progress, student achievement, graduate attributes, research achievements) will be expected, together with evidence of the institution's comparative national and international performance, and that professional accreditation requirements are being met'. The AUQA Board decided in June 2006 that it will set up a Reference Group (RG) to advise on this matter.

### Terms of Reference (ToR)

Broadly, the ToR for the RG are to develop a set of guidelines for AUQA in addressing the issue of 'academic standards and outcomes and their measurement'. This will be done in a phased manner where phase I will focus on the immediate requirements to guide the 2008 audits. The ToR of other phases will evolve as the discussions continue, perhaps with a reconstituted RG for each phase, depending on the focus of the phase.

For phase I, AUQA has already generated some examples of possible types of evidence and outcome measures to investigate academic standards. It has also developed a list of possible themes and external reference points that might be relevant to those themes. These are to guide institutions in their preparation for Cycle 2. Auditees will interpret these examples and external reference points and will project in their portfolios how well they perform against their own and the external expectations. It is against these points of comparison that the Audit Panel will make audit judgements about the auditee's achievement of academic standards and outcomes. Cycle 2 also emphasises the importance of an academic risk assessment framework.

To begin with, the Reference Group can help to elucidate these processes and advise AUQA accordingly. In turn, AUQA will be better able to advise the auditees and prepare its auditors.

Specific terms of reference for phase I are:

- Develop a framework to define and identify academic risk that may be used to inform selection of themes
- Advise on how to interpret and use the academic risk assessment
- Develop and advise on the areas to be covered to investigate academic standards and outcomes.
- Advise on the types of evidence auditees may be able to provide for the areas identified
- Advise on what outcome measures are available for these areas
- Elaborate/advise on what we might find in the Portfolios on these areas and how the Panel may interpret and investigate the evidence it is given by the auditees.

This work will result in the first set of guidelines on academic standards and outcomes that will guide AUQA in carrying out the 2008 audits. The RG may also identify further work on academic standards that needs a longer time-scale.

This phase has to be completed by May 2007. AUQA is required to report to MCEETYA in the middle of 2007 on progress in developing standards- and risk-related plans and procedures.

### **Modus Operandi of Phase I**

Mostly on-line discussions will be held with two face-to-face meetings. The first meeting will aim to start the discussion and to develop a common understanding of what the RG is expected to achieve. The final meeting is to give a final shape to the outcome of phase I. If necessary, the Melbourne-based RG members may meet face to face in between these two meetings and others may join through teleconference.

Each member of RG will bring external inputs and different perceptions to the RG. AUQA will give background information on how the QA agencies in other systems have approached standards and outcomes.

### **Membership**

The RG will include senior academics and AUQA Auditors with educational measurement and professional accreditation experience, and AUQA staff. International experts may be invited to comment on the outcome of the RG's work.

### **Other Phases of the Project**

The work of the reference group may be taken to the next phases by different membership.

Phase II: June – December 2007: RG will fine-tune guidelines for audit panels and may investigate and suggest other meaningful measures and comparators. For example,

- GCA to do employer surveys in identified areas (eg the capitals and the regions) that will show up comparisons between universities
- Instead of surveying all students with CEQ & GDP, use samples
- Select a GDP sample and follow them every two years for ten years
- Use of the Graduate Skills Assessment Test
- Compare institutions in the self-selected groups (eg Go8, ATN, IRUA, NGUA)
- Get evidence of meaningful benchmarking with patently comparable international partners (eg the U21 group)
- Use of sample external marking
- Moderation panels in various disciplines to produce exemplars plus associated verbal descriptions for levels of performance
- Evidence from professional associations, nationally and internationally

Phase III: January to December 2008: Develop other approaches to institutional evaluation. Field experience of the 2008 audits will guide further discussions on standards and outcomes. Some of the RG members may be involved in the 2008 audits.

Phase IV: January to May 2009: Fine-tune the standards that will be used for mid-course correction and then implementation from 2011. (The STAAs will be audited in 2010 and SAIs will be audited against any revised guidelines from 2011)