



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS
OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF
THE ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE OF
CANADA**

JUNE 2015

Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Royal Military College of Canada (RMCC)

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The Royal Military College of Canada (RMCC) was audited in the third year of the first eight-year cycle of quality assurance audits under the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Ontario universities. The objective of the audit is to determine whether an institution has complied with the provisions of its own Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP), as ratified by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council). In addition, the audit provides the opportunity to identify any inconsistencies between an institution's IQAP and the QAF, and, as appropriate, note best practices and share suggestions about other best practices.

The audit involved a review of four cyclical program reviews conducted under the provisions of RMCC's IQAP. (RMCC had not introduced any new programs since 2011, and the major modifications submitted to the QC were quite modest.) In the desk audit phase, the auditors reviewed both the June 2011 and the re-ratified November 2013 versions of RMCC's IQAP and all the documentation around the cyclical program reviews sent by RMCC. During their site visit (February 10-11, 2015), the auditors met with administrators, faculty, staff, and students involved in the quality assurance processes at RMCC. The auditors wish to express their sincere thanks to all those with whom they met for being generous with their time and for their thoughtful and frank discussions.

The cyclical program reviews selected for audit were:

- Military and Strategic Studies – B.A.
- Computer Engineering – B.Eng.
- Space Science – B.Sc.
- War Studies – M.A. and Ph.D.

RMCC had participated in the quality assurance processes governed by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) with respect to the approval of its new graduate programs and the cyclical review of its existing graduate programs. RMCC had not participated in the Undergraduate Program Review (UPR) process, operated under the authority of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) and audited by the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC). RMCC had conducted periodic reviews of its undergraduate programs, albeit not ones governed by strict protocols. RMCC was thus unable to build on past practice – or appeal to an existing committee mandated to oversee the review of its programs – when it developed its policies and procedures governing cyclical program reviews.

Furthermore, RMCC had not had to document systematically and clearly each stage in its processes for a subsequent audit.

The auditors acknowledge that this background has made it harder for RMCC than for some other universities to put in place – and to follow – protocols governing quality assurance processes. RMCC also shares some of the challenges experienced by other small universities with limited resources and with limited local expertise in quality assurance matters. In particular, RMCC does not have dedicated staff to assist faculty in articulating learning outcomes for their courses, developing program-specific Degree Level Expectations (DLEs), mapping courses against university and program DLEs, and describing and evaluating the appropriateness of assessment tools for attaining these outcomes. Nor does RMCC have dedicated staff to collect, analyze, and provide the data identified as quality indicators in the IQAP. RMCC's status as a federal institution adds additional bureaucratic demands, as well as requirements around the provision of documents in both official languages. RMCC's objective "to prepare officer cadets for effective service as commissioned officers in the Canadian Forces" means that its graduates have to meet standards in leadership, military and physical training, and bilingualism, as well as in their academic programs.

The auditors are confident that the relevant parties at RMCC are committed to the quality assurance policies and protocols as mandated in the QAF and as captured in their IQAP. The auditors are of the view, however, that RMCC has some way to go before it reaches full compliance with its IQAP. The auditors' biggest challenge lay in the incompleteness of the documentation received from RMCC. They did not take the missing documentation to be evidence that the different procedures in the IQAP were not being followed. However, when the auditors pressed for further documentation during their site visit or even for oral confirmation about what had occurred, they had to conclude that there are several steps in the cyclical program review process for which no set practice exists and/or where RMCC is not in compliance with its IQAP.

Despite less robust institutional support for those tasked with writing the self-studies than at some other universities, the auditors found that the faculty they met took their roles in the process seriously. They were almost unanimous in recognizing the value of writing the self-studies for assessing and improving the quality of their programs. The self-studies were, by and large, well done, although their authors confirmed the auditors' suspicions that more leadership and support, particularly around DLEs, learning outcomes, and data, would make for self-studies that were both more complete and more useful for purposes of quality assessment.

The audit report contains 11 Recommendations and 24 Suggestions. They are intended to support the university in achieving its quality assurance goals. The Recommendations identify instances where RMCC's practice is not in compliance with its IQAP (Recommendations 1, 3, and 4), where there are inconsistencies internal to the IQAP (Recommendations 2, 5, and 9),

or where there are inconsistencies between the IQAP and the QAF (Recommendations 6, 7, and 8). Recommendation 11 requires that RMCC review the sections of its IQAP and the relevant appendices governing new program proposals and major modifications to identify and correct analogous problems to those the auditors noted in the cyclical program review process. These Recommendations will require that RMCC amend its IQAP and/or its practices. The Suggestions are matters RMCC is encouraged to consider as it continues to review and improve its current quality assurance practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The various stages in the cyclical review process must be better documented. The Office of Quality Assurance must receive and archive copies of all the documents required at each stage of the process. The Office of Quality Assurance must make available to the auditors, at the time of the next audit, all documents required at each stage of the process for cyclical program reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 2: RMCC must clarify whether it is the responsibility of the Dean(s) or the Vice-Principal Academic to approve self-studies.

RECOMMENDATION 3: RMCC must either routinely survey the DND, professional associations, and employers for all its programs under review or modify its IQAP Appendix 7 Section 6. d. to remove this requirement.

RECOMMENDATION 4: RMCC needs to review the requirement in its IQAP that all documents required by the cyclical program review process be made available in both official languages, and modify its IQAP and/or its practices accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The inconsistency between IQAP 2.4.2 and both IQAP 2.2 and Table A5-1 of Appendix 5 needs to be resolved so that it is clear who has the authority to select the external members of the ERC.

RECOMMENDATION 6: RMCC needs to revise its IQAP to include details about the nomination and selection process of internal members of ERCs consistent with the requirements of QAF 4.2.4 b).

RECOMMENDATION 7: RMCC needs to revise its IQAP to ensure that it meets the requirements of QAF 4.2.4 c) for briefing members of ERCs.

RECOMMENDATION 8: RMCC needs to revise its IQAP to ensure that it meets the requirements of QAF 4.2.4 d) concerning the identification of materials that are to be sent to the members of the ERC and to specify who is responsible for sending them.

RECOMMENDATION 9: RMCC must either reinstate the Faculty Board Quality Assurance Committee or remove all reference to it in the IQAP (including in the Appendices and the Glossary).

RECOMMENDATION 10: RMCC must review its list of programs offered against its cyclical program review schedule to ensure that every program is scheduled for review at least once every eight years.

RECOMMENDATION 11: RMCC must review sections 3 and 4 of its IQAP and Appendices 5 and 9-10 to identify shortcomings analogous to those the auditors noted in section 2 of the IQAP and Appendices 5 and 6-8 and in the practices governed by them, and RMCC must amend the relevant sections of its IQAP and the related appendices and/or its practices.

SUGGESTIONS

SUGGESTION 1: The Vice-Principal Academic should ensure that program Heads are notified several months before the January 15 reminder that their program will be undergoing a review. This notice should be copied to the Librarian, the Office of the Registrar, and other offices that could provide support in the preparation of the self-study.

SUGGESTION 2: RMCC should consider requiring that the responsible authority sign and date the self-study as confirmation that it has been approved.

SUGGESTION 3: RMCC should conduct focus groups with current students, wherever possible, and should involve current students more directly in the drafting and review of the self-studies.

SUGGESTION 4: RMCC should find ways to assist faculty more systematically in developing learning outcomes for their courses, articulating DLEs for their programs, and demonstrating how these are being met.

SUGGESTION 5: RMCC should determine how it can best support the tasks related to data collection and analysis to meet IQAP requirements, calculate what human and financial resources are required to facilitate this, and determine what new resources from which sources would permit RMCC to meet best practice.

SUGGESTION 6: RMCC should consider specifying more precisely how arm's length status of members of ERCs is determined.

SUGGESTION 7: RMCC should ensure that, whenever possible, the schedule for site visits by ERCs have the ERC meeting first with the Vice-Principal Academic and then with the Dean, as per IQAP 2.4.3 b).

SUGGESTION 8: Consistent with privacy legislation, RMCC should find ways of ensuring that programs meet the requirement of its IQAP to provide samples of students' written work to ERCs.

SUGGESTION 9: RMCC should explore the feasibility of having the ERC reports submitted electronically.

SUGGESTION 10: RMCC should consider amending its IQAP to require that the Dean(s) review the ERC reports before forwarding them to program Heads.

SUGGESTION 11: RMCC should consider amending its IQAP to – in the event that an ERC report does not address the components of the review as required by IQAP 2.4.5 and Appendix 8 – permit a Dean to return the ERC report to be completed or to commission another one.

SUGGESTION 12: RMCC should review the requirement in its IQAP that those responsible for the self-study provide a response to the ERC report separate from the response the program Head is to provide. RMCC also should specify to whom such a response is to be provided.

SUGGESTION 13: RMCC should review its IQAP to determine whether the program Head is the appropriate authority to draft a response to the ERC report and the program's response to it that meets the requirements of QAF 4.2.4 g).

SUGGESTION 14: RMCC should review its IQAP to make it clear that program Heads are not responsible for drafting Implementation Plans.

SUGGESTION 15: RMCC should review the requirement that the Dean draft a brief report to the Vice-Principal Academic *and* draft the FAR.

SUGGESTION 16: RMCC should ensure that the Implementation Plans produced by the Deans are plans and not reports.

SUGGESTION 17: RMCC should include in the Glossary of its IQAP a definition of Implementation Plan that makes clear its intended purpose.

SUGGESTION 18: RMCC should review the template for the ERC report in Appendix 8 and decide whether it wishes to include a requirement that the ERC comment on programs in the context of provincial, national or professional standards, as appropriate.

SUGGESTION 19: RMCC might consider removing the templates (Appendices 6-10) from its IQAP and providing links within the IQAP to the templates.

SUGGESTION 20: RMCC might consider removing the cyclical program review schedule from its IQAP and replacing it with a link to the schedule.

SUGGESTION 21: RMCC might consider including the date of the most recent cyclical program review in its cyclical program review schedule.

SUGGESTION 22: RMCC should review and revise the explanations of several of the terms provided in the Glossary at Appendix 3.

SUGGESTION 23: RMCC should consider developing and having approved a policy governing program closures.

SUGGESTION 24: RMCC should ascertain the status of the 'Recent Proposals' (dated January 2009) for changes to the Terms of Reference of the Syllabus Committee and the Graduate Studies & Research Committee and should modify Appendices 11 and 12 accordingly.