



**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES**  
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL  
FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY  
ASSURANCE AUDIT OF  
TRENT UNIVERSITY**

**AUGUST 2017**



# Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Trent University

August 2017

Trent 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 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 Trent University's IQAP (the original version ratified by the Quality Assurance Council in 2011 and a second version that went into effect in September 2015) 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 6 to 8, 2017. 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 auditors sensed right from the start of the site visit that Trent University 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:**

- Biomedical Science, BSc (Honours)
- Educational Studies, MEd
- Indigenous, BEd

## **Cyclical Program Reviews**

- Business Administration, BA/BSc (Joint Major)
- Canadian Studies, PhD
- International Development Studies, BA
- Mathematics, BSc

## **Major Modifications:**

- Gender and Women's Studies, BA
- Kinesiology, BHSc (Degree Pathway from Trent University to the University of Ontario Institute of Technology)

The audit report makes nine recommendations. Three of the recommendations concern the University's Schedule of Reviews. These are intended to ensure that Trent conforms to the eight-year cycle of reviews, as set out in the Quality Assurance Framework and provides adequate documentation in instances where unavoidable delay occurs that extends a review beyond the eight-year timeframe. Three of the recommendations concern the external review process. They relate to ensuring that external reviewers are ranked in accordance with the provisions of the Trent IQAP, are appropriately arm's length and submit reports that are complete under the requirements for external reviewers' reports, as set out in the IQAP. The auditors have made a recommendation intended to ensure that Trent adheres to the QAF by involving faculty, staff and students in the cyclical review process. Finally, Trent must amend the advertising related to one of its pathway programs that leads to a degree from another institution to clarify that it does not lead to a Trent degree.

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

- The processes for cyclical program review and development of new programs with partner institutions;
- Development of a tracking system for written documentation related to its quality assurance processes;
- Providing additional data and supports for units undergoing cyclical program reviews and developing new programs and for university committees and senior administrators involved in the process;
- Considering the processes used in university level quality assurance committees to mitigate against potential conflicts of interest and facilitate expeditious decision making.

In addition to recommendations and suggestions, the report identifies four aspects of Trent's quality assurance process that are examples of best practice. These are: the engagement of Faculty Deans in the process; the consultation and monitoring processes associated with the university's new Indigenous BEd program; and the care with which Trent prepares its Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans.

In conclusion, Trent University shows strong evidence of understanding and valuing the quality assurance process. The auditors are confident that Trent will pursue a thoughtful course as it works to further improve its quality assurance policies and processes.

## Recommendations

Trent University must:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Ensure that its Schedule of Reviews does not provide more than eight years between cyclical program reviews.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Ensure that any reasons for deviation from the Schedule of Review are fully documented.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Ensure that the Cyclical Review cycle is timed from the commencement of the review process.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Ensure that all approvals and commentaries required under its IQAP for the development of new programs, cyclical program reviews and major modifications are complete and part of the formal record. Reasons for deviation from the timelines established in the Trent IQAP should also be documented.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Develop protocols and procedures for dealing with external reviewer reports that are incomplete.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Either adhere to the process of ranking of external reviewers as described in the IQAP, or change the IQAP to reflect current practice.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Ensure that faculty, staff and students are engaged in preparing the CPR self-study and that this participation is documented in the self-study.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Amend the advertising of the BHSc Kinesiology pathway to clarify that it does not lead to a Trent degree.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** Verify and document the arm's length status of the proposed external reviewers.

## Suggestions

Trent University should:

**SUGGESTION 1:** Consider how cyclical program reviews for programs with partner institutions be dealt with at the outset.

**SUGGESTION 2:** Consider creating a joint Memorandum of Agreement with partner institutions for quality assurance policies and practices related to development of new joint programs and major modification of existing joint programs.

**SUGGESTION 3:** Consider expanding student involvement in its quality assurance processes.

**SUGGESTION 4:** Consider developing a tracking system for written documentation related to its quality assurance processes, including signoffs on each step of the process.

**SUGGESTION 5:** Consider creating a Conflict of Interest Policy for quality assurance committees.

**SUGGESTION 6:** Consider inviting the Program Chair or proponent for a new program proposal or self-study to be present at relevant committee meetings where the new program proposal or cyclical review is to be discussed.

**SUGGESTION 7:** Consider incorporating alumni data into cyclical program reviews.

**SUGGESTION 8:** Consider additional supports for programs undergoing CPRs and preparing for new programs.

**SUGGESTION 9:** Consider a workshop on the assessment of learning outcomes for the Cyclical Program Review Committee (CPRC) and the Deans.

**SUGGESTION 10:** Consider a policy for dealing with optional program elements involving experiential education.