



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF AUDITORS' REPORT ON THE
SCOPE OF NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S
RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE
AUDIT**

APRIL 2017

REPORT CONTENTS:

- 1. SUMMARY STATEMENT**
- 2. APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF THE AUDITORS' REPORT ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF NIPISSING UNIVERSITY**
- 3. APPENDIX 2: NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY COUNCIL AUDIT**

AUDITOR'S REPORT ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF NIPISSING UNIVERSITY

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (Quality Council) undertook an Audit of Quality Assurance at Nipissing University in 2014-15. The purpose was to assess the extent to which Nipissing University complies with its own Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP) and to affirm that institutional practices are consistent with the Quality Assurance Framework that governs quality assurance activities at publicly assisted Ontario Universities.

A team of three Quality Council auditors prepared a report based on audits of documents submitted by Nipissing University and a three-day site visit to the institution (March 25-27, 2015). Eight Recommendations were made, of which three were identified as Causes for Concern, and there were seven Suggestions. The Report on the Quality Assurance Audit of Nipissing University was approved by the Quality Council on February 17, 2016 and was sent to the University on February 25, 2016. In response to the Causes for Concern the Quality Council required that a subsequent desk audit be conducted following receipt of the outstanding Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans, as per the Quality Council's letter of February 25, 2016. This Desk Audit Report was sent to Nipissing University on July 29, 2016.

Under the Quality Assurance Framework, universities must satisfy audit recommendations, including those identified as Causes for Concern, as they identify institutional practices that are not compliant with the university's IQAP. Suggestions are proposed by the auditors in the spirit of encouraging reflection on how practice might be improved, however compliance is not mandatory.

THE AUDITORS' RESPONSE

Recommendation 1: Nipissing University must comply with its IQAP to follow the processes for appointment of internal and external reviewers for cyclical program reviews or change the IQAP.

Recommendation 2: (Cause for Concern) Nipissing University must prepare and post on its website the Institutional Executive Summary and Associated Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review.

Recommendation 3: (Cause for Concern) Nipissing University must prepare and send the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.

Recommendation 4: (Cause for Concern) Nipissing University must comply with its IQAP and implement the follow-up monitoring process identified in the IQAP for each program review.

Recommendation 5: Nipissing University must ensure that the external and internal reviewers appointed are at "arm's-length" from the program to be reviewed.

Recommendation 6: Nipissing University must ensure that the relevant officials (i.e.: Dean; Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research) review and provide feedback to the program on self-studies created for cyclical program reviews to ensure that the self-study contains the information required in the IQAP.

Recommendation 7: Nipissing University must review its list of programs offered against its cyclical program review schedule to ensure the review schedule is up-to-date and that every program is scheduled for review at least once every eight years.

Recommendation 8: Nipissing University must ensure that there is formal documentation of the approval of relevant governance bodies including Faculty Council, Senate Committees and Senate for quality assurance processes that require these approvals.

CONCLUSION

After careful review of Nipissing University's Follow-Up One-Year Response, the auditors concluded that it is in general compliance with the recommendations in the Audit Report. Better monitoring of university IQAP processes from beginning to end has been achieved and the Auditors applaud the work that Nipissing has done to create templates (see Appendices A to L and Appendices 1 and 2) that will systematize the IQAP process at Nipissing. However, there remain a number of issues that are not fully resolved. In particular, in their second audit following submission of the Final Assessment Reports requested in Recommendations 2 and 3, the Auditors found numerous deficiencies and the Quality Council has requested a second one-year follow-up in response to the second audit.

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT BY THE QUALITY COUNCIL

Introduction

Nipissing University's response to the Quality Assurance Audit was prepared by the Planning and Priorities Committee (PPC) of Senate and approved by the Senate at its January 12, 2017 meeting. The changes to its Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP) document stemming from the Audit response were also adopted by the Senate at the same meeting. Although only required to respond to the Recommendations, the University decided to inform the Quality Council of the actions undertaken or envisaged as responses to the various Suggestions made by the Audit Team. Nipissing University would like to thank the Audit Team for its work and helpful analysis which will lead to an improved quality assurance process for the University. There are many other useful suggestions and comments in both Audit Reports which will be analyzed in more detail later with the aim to make adjustments, if and as required, to the quality assurance process.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *Nipissing University must comply with its IQAP to follow the processes for appointment of internal and external reviewers for cyclical program reviews or change the IQAP.*

PPC notes that the choice of reviewers has in practice been completed by the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research in consultation with the unit and respective Dean, rather than PPC as stated in the IQAP document. This practice has proven to be an efficient and meaningful way to appoint reviewers. The IQAP document has been modified accordingly (see Part 1, Section B, Selection of Review Team).

The Audit Report raised a number of issues related to the appointment of reviewers, which are addressed in Recommendation 5.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *Nipissing University must prepare and post on its website the Institutional Executive Summary and Associated Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review.*

As required by Quality Council in its initial February 2016 Audit Report, Nipissing University completed the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans for the programs before the May 31 deadline identified in the Audit Report.

Nipissing has chosen to post the entire Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan rather than an Executive Summary on its website. In the opinion of PPC, this satisfies the transparency and accountability requirements of the process.

The IQAP document has been modified accordingly (see Part 1, Section C, PPC Response of the revised IQAP document).

RECOMMENDATION 3: *Nipissing University must prepare and send the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.*

Nipissing University sent the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, as required.

RECOMMENDATION 4: *Nipissing University must comply with its IQAP and implement the follow-up monitoring process identified in the IQAP for each program review.*

As noted in the July 2016 Desk Audit Report on the “causes for concern”, it is too early to respond to this requirement, given that the Final Assessment Plans and Implementation Plans were approved by Senate in the spring of 2016. However, PPC will require the relevant Deans to ensure that the follow-up monitoring process proceeds as required. In addition, the IQAP document has been modified to require that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan identify clearly that the Dean is the official responsible for ensuring the follow-up monitoring process. That limitation had been identified in the Audit Report.

RECOMMENDATION 5: *Nipissing University must ensure that the external and internal reviewers appointed are at “arm’s-length” from the program to be reviewed.*

PPC recognizes that the appointment of “arm’s length” reviewers is crucial to the quality assurance process, and that the appointment of reviewers who are not “arm’s length” may jeopardize the credibility of the process. PPC has proposed four key changes to the IQAP document to ensure “arm’s length”:

- (1) the IQAP document will make it clear that previous reviewers are not eligible to serve as reviewers;
- (2) when requesting a list of reviewers from the academic unit, the Dean(s) will inform the unit that the list must not be ranked;
- (3) the Dean will be required to take reasonable steps to ensure that the reviewers proposed are at “arm’s length”;
- (4) the number of internal reviewers will be reduced to one, from a discipline not closely related to the program under review, and,
- (5) the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research makes the final decision regarding the composition of the Review Team (see Recommendation 1)

The latter action also responds to the Audit Report’s comment that many, if not most, universities have only one internal reviewer. Given that Nipissing is a relatively small university, any reviewer from a “related” discipline would probably not qualify as “arm’s length”.

RECOMMENDATION 6: *Nipissing University must ensure that the relevant officials (i.e.: Dean; Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research) review and provide feedback to the program on self-studies created for cyclical program reviews to ensure that the self-study contains the information required in the IQAP.*

PPC confirms that the Dean and the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research review and provide feedback to the program on its self-study, as suggested in the Audit Report. What is missing, however, is documentation in the file to attest to this process. In practice the Dean, and the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research, have met with the member of the unit responsible for preparing the self-study to provide feedback. This feedback is usually verbal, not written. Henceforth, the Dean and the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research will be required to document in writing (letter) that they have reviewed the submitted self-study. The Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research will also be required to confirm that the self-study has been approved.

RECOMMENDATION 7: *Nipissing University must review its list of programs offered against its cyclical program review schedule to ensure the review schedule is up-to-date and that every program is scheduled for review at least once every eight years.*

Nipissing will review its list of programs offered and make modifications as required to the review schedule to ensure that every program is reviewed at least once every eight years.

RECOMMENDATION 8: *Nipissing University must ensure that there is formal documentation of the approval of relevant governance bodies including Faculty Council, Senate Committees and Senate for quality assurance processes that require these approvals.*

Nipissing's response to this recommendation is similar in nature to the response to Recommendation 6. The relevant bodies do already make the decisions as required, but the attestation of such approval is not necessarily placed in the file. Written confirmation (letter) will be in evidence in the future.

SUGGESTION 1: *Nipissing University should consider requiring that the responsible authority sign and date the self-study as confirmation that it has been approved.*

The University will implement this practice.

SUGGESTION 2: *Nipissing University should consider developing a template for self-studies for cyclical program reviews.*

Nipissing considers this suggestion to be very useful. Nipissing has developed a template to

address this suggestion.

In doing so, Nipissing has benefitted from the work completed at other universities. In particular, Nipissing thanks Brock University (the Office of the Provost) for allowing us to build on and modify their exemplary templates.

SUGGESTION 3: *Nipissing University should clarify the role of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research in the preparation of Final Assessment Reports to the Planning and Priorities Committee, and ensure that written documentation of Senate approval is included in the files.*

After having received feedback from the academic unit and the Dean regarding the Reviewers' report, as well as some preliminary discussion at PPC, the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research prepares a draft of the Final Assessment Reports for PPC's consideration.

To confirm Senate's approval of the Final Assessment Reports, Nipissing will include either an extract of the relevant section of the appropriate Senate minutes or a signed attestation by either the Senate Chair or Secretariat in the file.

SUGGESTION 4: *Nipissing University should clarify the role of the Planning and Priorities Committee in reviewing the self-study for cyclical program reviews.*

PPC serves as an appeal body if the academic unit does not agree with the decision of the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research. In other instances, the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research may bring matters for discussion to PPC, although no approval by PPC is sought.

SUGGESTION 5: *Nipissing University should consider clarifying in the IQAP who the final authority is to sign off on the documentation to be sent to the Reviewers for a cyclical program review.*

As noted in the response to Suggestion 4, the final authority for approving the self-study, and thus the documentation sent to the reviewers rests with the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research, unless the academic unit disagrees with the decision of the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research. In that case, the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research will send to the reviewers the documentation approved by PPC, if that is different from his/her initial decision.

SUGGESTION 6: *Nipissing University should ask external reviewers to send their Reviewers' Report to the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research.*

Although this is the policy, Nipissing recognizes that it has neither been consistently

followed, nor specified clearly in its IQAP document. The IQAP document has been modified appropriately (Part 1, Section B, Reviewers' Report). The Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research will remind the Review Committee of this requirement.

SUGGESTION 7: *Nipissing University should consider naming an arbiter to assist in identifying when a program change is a major or minor modification or a new program.*

PPC has considered this suggestion, but considers that the appointment of an arbiter is not warranted at this time. As PPC is responsible for managing the Quality Assurance process on behalf of Senate, it is appropriate that any challenge to the Provost and Vice-President Academic and Research's initial determination in these matters be referred to PPC for a final determination. To do otherwise might result in a situation where an outside third party could rule contrary to the interpretation of PPC, and ultimately Senate, the bodies responsible for managing the process and ensuring quality assurance.



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**Auditors' Report on the Second Institutional
One-Year Follow-Up Response to the
Causes for Concern Identified in the Quality
Assurance Audit of Nipissing University**

September 2017

REPORT CONTENTS:

- 1. SUMMARY:** AUDITORS' REPORT ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE DESK AUDIT OF NIPISSING UNIVERSITY
- 2. APPENDIX 1:** NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY COUNCIL DESK AUDIT

Audit Team's Response to Nipissing University's One-Year Report on Its Quality Assurance Desk Audit

Summary

The quality assurance practices at Nipissing University were audited in 2014-15. In February 2016 the Quality Council approved the Audit Committee's Report on the Quality Assurance Audit, which included eight Recommendations, three of which were identified by the Quality Council as Causes for Concern, and seven Suggestions. The Causes for Concern were:

- The failure to prepare and post on the University website the Institutional Executive Summary and Associated Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review.
- The failure to prepare and send the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for each cyclical program review to Senate and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.
- The failure to comply with the IQAP requirement to implement the follow-up monitoring process identified in the IQAP for each program review.

To demonstrate that the Causes for Concern were being addressed, Nipissing University was requested to submit to the Executive Director of the Quality Council by the end of May 2016 all Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans for each cyclical program review that had been conducted to date under its IQAP.

In June 2016 a team of three auditors from the Audit Committee performed a desk audit of the 13 Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans submitted by the University. The Quality Council approved the Report on the desk audit in July 2016. The Report identified some instances of non-compliance with Nipissing University's IQAP and some places where the IQAP needed to be clarified. It also raised some concerns about the practices around monitoring and follow-up of recommendations included in Final Assessment Reports.

Nipissing University submitted its One-Year Response to the Audit Report in January 2017, along with a revised IQAP. The Audit Committee submitted a Report on this One-Year Response to the Quality Council, as well as a Summary of the Report. The Report noted that many of the Recommendations had been addressed, but it also identified several specific issues that still required attention. The Quality Council approved the Report and Summary in April 2017. The Quality Council also accepted the recommendation by the Audit Committee that Nipissing University be asked to submit a second Response that specifically addressed the matters raised in the July 2016 Report on the desk audit of the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans. The second Response was received on July 28, 2017.

The second Response makes it clear that Nipissing University is aware that the revised IQAP it submitted along with its One-Year Response needs further changes before it can be submitted to the Quality Council for ratification. The second Response says these changes will be made in the fall of 2017. The second Response also makes it clear that some changes to the practices of the university committee charged with reviewing documents associated with cyclical program reviews will need to be modified in order that several of the concerns of the Audit Committee

around Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans be addressed. The Quality Council has not received any Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans for cyclical program reviews conducted in 2015-16 or in 2016-17. Neither have these been posted on the Nipissing University website.

Recommendation of the Audit Committee

Given that Nipissing University still has to revise its IQAP before submitting it to the Quality Council for ratification, and given that no further Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans are available for review, the auditors are not in a position to comment on whether the Causes for Concern have been adequately addressed.

Given the complexities of the Causes for Concern, the Audit Committee recommends to the Quality Council that Nipissing University undergo a full audit in 2019-2020, which also will pay particular attention to those issues that led to Causes for Concern being identified. It is intended that this audit be conducted in a manner that would best support the University in its quality assurance work.

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE DESK AUDIT BY THE QUALITY COUNCIL

This is the second response from Nipissing University stemming from the Quality Assurance Audit. The first response addressed all eight Recommendations and seven Suggestions contained in the first Audit Report, including the three Causes for Concern related to the thirteen outstanding Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans. The desk audit of these thirteen outstanding Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans has provided Nipissing University with a number of excellent suggestions for the improvement of the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans. The University notes that there were no specific Recommendations or Suggestions in the Desk Audit. The University's initial response to the Quality Assurance Audit was prepared by the Planning and Priorities Committee (PPC) of Senate and approved by the Senate at its January 12, 2017 meeting. Changes to its Institutional Quality Assurance Policy (IQAP) document stemming from the Audit response were also adopted by the Senate at the same meeting. Although only required to respond to the Recommendations, the University decided to inform the Quality Council of the actions undertaken or envisaged as responses to the various Suggestions made by the Audit Team. Once again, Nipissing University would like to thank the Audit Team for its work and helpful analysis which will lead to an improved quality assurance process for the University. In this second response, Nipissing University will address the comments and concerns contained in the desk audit. The comments and concerns raised in the Desk Audit, as well as detailed comments received from Quality Council about the revised IQAP document, will be used to again revise the IQAP document in the Fall of 2017.

A number of the comments/suggestions made in the Desk Audit do not require that Nipissing University modify its practice in relation to quality assurance, but nevertheless require that Nipissing make changes to its IQAP document to clarify the process and make it very clear. The following are the Desk Audit's comments (in italics) and Nipissing's responses to those comments:

The Desk Audit report suggested "*making it clear that the 'report' prepared by the VPAR for PPC that is cited in IQAP Part 1 Section C is indeed the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan, if that is what is intended*". Nipissing's response is as follows: that is what was intended and the IQAP document will be modified to make that clear by changing "report" to "Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan".

The Desk Audit report suggested "*making it clear that the 'formal written response' received by PPC that is cited in IQAP Part 1 Section E is indeed the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan, if that is what is intended*". Nipissing's response is as follows: that is what was intended and the IQAP document will be modified to

make that clear.

The Desk Audit report suggested "*making it clear that the boxed recommendations at the bottom of the Final Assessment Reports (and the 'Specific Recommendations' referenced in Appendix G) in fact constitute the Implementation Plan*". Nipissing's response is as follows: the IQAP document will be modified to include the phrase "Implementation Plan".

The Desk Audit report suggested "*including a line on the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans on which the date they were approved by Senate*". Nipissing's response is as follows: that line will be added.

The Desk Audit report suggested "*replacing 'Projected Date' in the table in the Implementation Plan by 'Reporting Date' so as to increase the likelihood of timely follow-up*". Nipissing's response is as follows: the phrase "Projected Date" will be changed to "Projected Date/Reporting Date".

The auditors had some concerns regarding the substance and content of the Final Assessment Reports developed by PPC which need to be addressed. These concerns can probably be addressed without any changes to the IQAP document and resolved satisfactorily by requiring the Provost to provide more direction to PPC. As Chair of PPC, the Provost prepares the draft Final Assessment Report and can also set the tone for the discussion regarding these Reports. The Provost should therefore instruct PPC to do the following when deliberating on the Final Assessment Reports:

- (1) PPC has to include commentary that reflects PPC's evaluation of the quality of the programs against key review criteria, rather than rely primarily on the Review Team reports. PPC needs to take ownership of the final assessment of program under review.
- (2) PPC has to consider carefully all of the Review Team's recommendations and provide a clear rationale as to why some were not included in the Implementation Plan. Although not all of the Review Team's recommendations need to be included in the Implementation Plan, the Final Assessment Report should have sufficient detail to justify the exclusion of certain recommendations. In some cases, instead of an outright dismissal, recommendations could be included in the Implementation Plan for "further review and analysis".
- (3) PPC has to pay particular attention to recommendations that had been made in previous programs reviews, and provide some analysis/explanation as to why the previous recommendation had not been implemented.

- (4) Notwithstanding the fact that PPC does not have authority to make budgetary decisions or assign resources, in cases where PPC agrees that the lack of resources might have consequences in terms of program quality, PPC has to bring that to the attention of Senate. Moreover, PPC can recommend that the appropriate administrative officials investigate reallocation of resources.

Another issue raised by the auditors is the posting of the Executive Summaries of the Final Assessment Reports. This was Recommendation 2 of the first Audit Report. In its Institutional One-Year Follow-Up Response, Nipissing had responded to that Report as follows:

"Nipissing has chosen to post the entire Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan rather than an Executive Summary on its website. In the opinion of PPC, this satisfies the transparency and accountability requirements of the process.

The IQAP document has been modified accordingly (see Part 1, Section C, PPC Response of the revised IQAP document)." In a letter from the Quality Council dated April 24, 2017, Nipissing was advised that its Response had been accepted. It is still our contention that posting the entire Final Assessment Reports satisfies the transparency and accountability requirements of the process. However, the revised IQAP document, which includes that modification, has not yet been ratified by the Quality Council. Should the Quality Council reject that proposal, Nipissing will develop and post Executive Summaries as well in the future.

Prepared by Harley d'Entremont
Provost and VPAR
July 28, 2017