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

SEPTEMBER 2019

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

September 2019

McMaster University is one of three universities to be audited in the seventh year of this first cycle of quality assurance audits under the 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 the McMaster University of IQAP (the original version ratified by the Quality Assurance Council in July 2011 and a revised IQAP was ratified by the Quality Council in July 2013, with a further revisions and re-ratification in 2017). The audit 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 November 28 to 30, 2019. 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. It was clear to the auditors from the outset that the University has firmly embraced the quality assurance process and seeks to make improvements on an ongoing basis. Transitioning into the implementation of an institution's IQAP is itself a complex process and the University has navigated that task very well. Those responsible for making that transition work are to be commended. The auditors left the site visit confident that the University's commitment to quality assurance—as it relates to teaching, learning, and research—is both deep and genuine.

The auditors selected the following programs:

- **New Programs**
    - Biomedical Discovery and Commercialization (BHSc/MDC)
    - Neuroscience (BSc (Hons))

- **Cyclical Program Reviews**
    - History (BA (Hons)/MA/PhD)
    - Nursing (BScN/MSc/PhD/PHCNP)

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- o Theatre and Film Studies (BA (Hons))
- o UNENE Nuclear Engineering (M.Eng)

- **Expedited Approval Process**
  - o Professional Accountancy (GDip (Type 3))

- **Major Modifications**
  - o Business Administration (PhD)
  - o Sociology (MA)

The audit report makes nine recommendations. Two of the recommendations concern recordkeeping of the documentation. These are intended to ensure that McMaster has a record of the creation of the documentation and appropriate sign-off procedures at each stage. One recommendation is about revising the IQAP to include a clear process for joint programs, while another concerns the Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans. The audit also found instances where the program/department responsible for ensuring the implementation of the plan did not receive a copy of the FAR/IP, resulting in a related recommendation. A further recommendation concerns the role of the internal reviewer, and the auditors made a recommendation to ensure that McMaster amends its IQAP to require the external review of a new program to take place prior to Senate approval. Finally, there is a recommendation concerning the process for completeness of the external review reports that do not cover the evaluation criteria. These recommendations are intended to ensure that the approval process involves a review of the completeness of the evaluation.

The audit report also includes 16 suggestions, which are offered to assist McMaster University in strengthening its demonstrated commitment to the quality assurance agenda. The suggestions refer to:

- Development of processes so that the chair is not the reviewer of completeness of the self–study report, to address late Review Committee reports, to invite the library to be part of the CPR and new programs, for regular monitoring in CPR implementation plans, and for checking arm's length status of external examiners;
- Providing information sessions for administrators and external reviewers, more specific timelines in Implementation Plans, and a fuller description of how the self-study was developed in section 10 of the self-study template;
- Revise the composition of the Quality Assurance committee and the flowchart to match the 2017 IQAP;
- Create a "Best Practice for Site Visits" document for chairs.

In addition to recommendations and suggestions, the report identifies five aspects of McMaster's quality assurance process that are examples of best practice. These are: the centralization of the IQAP processes in the MacPherson Institute; informing the programs 18 months before the due date of the self-study; the formation of a program specific Steering Committee, comprised of faculty and students, to monitor the CPR process; the involvement of the students through the MacPherson Student Partners Program; and the self-study templates, especially the template for nominating external reviewers.

In conclusion, McMaster University is making significant changes to its quality assurance processes. They have expressed a desire to improve the processes, procedures and activities as the IQAP evolves, particularly through the creation of online repositories of past and current governance documents and an online verification system. The auditors are confident that McMaster University will benefit from reviewing and revising the IQAP based on the recommendations and suggestions within this report.

Recommendations

McMaster University must:

Recommendation 1: Ensure that all steps of the relevant quality assurance process required by the IQAP are fully documented.

Recommendation 2: Develop a sign-off procedure to ensure the preparation and completeness of self-studies for Cyclical Program Reviews, of new program proposals, and the report from the Review Committee for Cyclical Program Reviews and new program proposals.

Recommendation 3: Revise the IQAP to include a clear process for the review of joint programs.

Recommendation 4: Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to indicate that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for Cyclical Program Reviews are to be distributed to the academic unit responsible for the program and that this stage of the process is to be documented.

Recommendation 5: Create a process for ensuring the completeness of external reviewer reports that do not cover the evaluation criteria in the IQAP.

Recommendation 6: Include a formal statement listing the specific programs to be included as part of the CPR with the introductory materials sent to the relevant academic unit or units.

Recommendation 7: Clarify the role of the internal reviewer.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that all progress reports are produced, as required by the IQAP's process for monitoring new programs.

Recommendation 9: Revise the IQAP to require the external review of a new program to take place prior to Senate approval.

Suggestions

There are 16 suggestions, which are listed below.

McMaster University should:

Suggestion 1: Consider an information session for senior administrators on quality assurance.

Suggestion 2: Revise the composition of the Quality Assurance committee so that the membership is significantly different from the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils.

Suggestion 3: Consider updating the flowchart to match the 2017 IQAP.

Suggestion 4: Consider a process for checking arm's-length status of external reviewers.

Suggestion 5: Consider creating a "Best Practice for Site Visits" document for department chairs.

Suggestion 6: Consider a standard set of data for academic units preparing a self-study.

Suggestion 7: Consider providing a fuller description of how the self-study was developed in section 10 of the self-study template.

Suggestion 8: Consider changing the process so that the Chair is not the reviewer of the completeness of the self-study.

Suggestion 9: Consider creating an expanded description of and providing training for internal reviewers.

Suggestion 10: Consider developing a protocol for addressing late Review Committee's reports.

Suggestion 11: Consider involving the library earlier in the process so that they can ensure the preparation of a library report.

Suggestion 12: Consider using current student partners as mentors for the next set of student partners.

Suggestion 13: Consider providing more specific timelines in the Implementation Plan appropriate to each individual recommendation.

Suggestion 14: Consider developing a process for regular monitoring of the recommendations set out in the CPR Implementation Plan.

Suggestion 15: Consider adding the date of the last review to the list of programs on the Cyclical Program Review Schedule to ensure that program reviews do not exceed the IQAP's eight-year review requirement.

Suggestion 16: Consider creating a list of the examples of major and minor modifications.