



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL
FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY
ASSURANCE AUDIT OF
ONTARIO TECH UNIVERSITY**

JUNE 2020

Summary of the Principal Findings of the Quality Assurance Audit of Ontario Tech University

Ontario Tech University is one of three universities to be audited in the eighth year of this first cycle of quality assurance audits under the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The primary objective of the audit is to determine whether 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 Ontario Tech University's IQAP (the original version ratified by the Quality Assurance Council on June 9, 2011) 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 February 24-26, 2020. 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. 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 audit focused on the following programs:

New Programs

- Forensic Psychology, MSc, PhD
- Liberal Studies, BA

Cyclical Program Reviews

- Communication and Digital Media Studies, BA
- Education, MA
- Mechanical Engineering, BEng
- Nursing, BSc

Expedited Review

- Accounting, GDip(Type 3)

Major Modifications

- Applied and Industrial Mathematics, BSc
- Operations, BComm

The audit report makes eleven recommendations. Two of the recommendations concern recordkeeping of all documentation including the records of self-studies and reviewers' reports and the accuracy of CPR schedules. These are intended to ensure that Ontario Tech has a record of the creation of the documentation and appropriate signoff procedures at each stage of the quality assurance process. One recommendation is about revising the IQAP to clarify that distinct internal responses are required from both the academic unit and the relevant Dean. Two recommendations concern the requirement that students and staff be explicitly and appropriately engaged in both the New Program and Cyclical Program review processes. Two recommendations concern the use of external reviewers: one addresses the need to guarantee that the Dean and Faculty curriculum committee together nominate qualified potential reviewers to the Provost, and the other to create a process to ensure the completeness of external reviewers' reports that do not cover all the IQAP's evaluation criteria. One recommendation emphasizes the requirement that the IQAP must provide a clear process for the development and review of joint programs. One recommendation necessitates the University's revising the internal processes for distributing and FARs and IPs. Finally, two recommendations are focused on the institutional monitoring process, one for new programs, and one addressing CPR action items not completed by the 18-month report.

The audit report also includes six suggestions which are offered to assist Ontario Tech University to strengthen its demonstrated commitment to the quality assurance agenda. The suggestions refer to:

- Considering clarifying on all sections of the University's website that the Center for Institutional Quality Enhancement (CIQE) and the Quality Assurance Process report to the Provost.
- Considering having someone other than the Dean as the Chair of Undergraduate Studies Committee and Graduates Studies Committee.
- Considering expanding the tracking software to allow program and faculty administrators to know where a proposal is in the process.
- Considering ways in which Cyclical Program Reviews and accreditation reviews might be more closely aligned and ensure that the evaluation criteria are appropriately addressed.
- Considering how the quality assurance processes can be envisioned as an opportunity for continuous improvement of the program.
- Considering adding the date of the last review on 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.

In addition to the recommendations and suggestions, the report identifies two aspects of Ontario Tech University's quality assurance process that are examples of best practice. These are: Digital Communication and Media Studies' ongoing internal assessment process that monitors continuously the progress of this new program before its first Cyclical Program Review; and the ways in which some programs treated FARs and IPs as living documents that could be modified over time to record successful completion of goals and to adjust objectives accordingly. In both

these activities, the University demonstrates a serious commitment to continuous improvement in quality assurance processes.

In conclusion, the audit of quality assurance at Ontario Tech University has revealed a significant and on-going engagement with the goals and practices of the Quality Council. Reviews have been undertaken with rigour and attention to detail. Commitment and support from the senior administration has provided strong and helpful leadership for the campus community. The result is that there is a culture of understanding of and concern for quality across the institution. While several recommendations and suggestions have been provided by the auditors, their overall assessment is that policies and procedures at Ontario Tech work well.

Recommendations

Ontario Tech University must:

Recommendations on New Program Proposals and Cyclical Program Reviews

RECOMMENDATION 1: Revise the IQAP to indicate that distinct internal responses to external reviews are required from both the academic unit and the relevant Dean in New Program Proposals and Cyclical Program Reviews (QAF 2.2.8, 4.2.4f and 4.2.4g).

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: Ensure that students and staff are explicitly engaged in specific ways in the process of New Program Proposals and Cyclical Program Reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The University must either amend its current practice to align with the IQAP and involve students in all aspects of the Assessment Team work (including the selection of reviewers and preparing a response to the reviewers' reports) OR amend the IQAP to indicate that students are involved only in the preparation of the self-study phase of the Cyclical Program Review.

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

Recommendations Specific to New Degree Program Approvals

RECOMMENDATION 6: Ensure that the Dean and Faculty curriculum committee propose to the Provost the names of potential external reviewers.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to indicate clearly a formal monitoring process for new programs.

Recommendations Specific to Cyclical Program Reviews

RECOMMENDATION 8: Ensure that Cyclical Program Reviews take place every eight years, as required by the IQAP.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to indicate that after their approval, Final Assessment Reports and the Implementation Plans must be distributed to the programs where the Cyclical Program Reviews originated.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Revise the IQAP to ensure that any action items that remain in progress from Cyclical Program Review FARs and IPs are formally monitored if not completed by the 18-month Report.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Revise the IQAP to include a clear process for the development and review of joint programs.

Suggestions

Ontario Tech University should:

Suggestions on Overall Quality Assurance Processes

SUGGESTION 1: Consider clarifying on all relevant sections of the University's website that CIQE and the QA Process report to the Provost.

SUGGESTION 2: Consider having someone other than a Dean as the Chair of Undergraduate Studies Committee and Graduate Studies Committee.

Suggestions Specific to New Degree Program Approvals

SUGGESTION 3: Consider expanding the tracking software to allow program and faculty administrators to know where a proposal is in the process.

Suggestions Specific to Cyclical Program Reviews

SUGGESTION 4: Consider ways in which Cyclical Program Reviews and accreditation reviews might be more closely aligned and ensure that the evaluation criteria are appropriately addressed.

SUGGESTION 5: Reinforce the idea of how the quality assurance processes can be envisioned as an opportunity for continuous improvement of programs across the institution.

SUGGESTION 6: 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.