



# The University of Sydney

## Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Policy

### Foreword

This policy specifies the University's approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement as well as its principles, features, structures and standards. The University wishes to assure quality teaching, learning, research, research training and service delivery through a regular review and improvement process. The University of Sydney is a dynamic community of students, scholars and staff committed to performing at the highest standards. The University's aim is to provide a stimulating and innovative environment for teaching, learning, research and research training. Its approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement is to learn from best practice, locally and internationally, and benchmark against leading research universities.

### Purpose

The aim of the University's quality assurance policy is to enhance the effectiveness of its core activities of learning, teaching, research performance, research training and effective management. The policy addresses all areas of University activity focusing on their contribution to and alignment with the University's Strategic Goals.

### Principles

1. Quality teaching, learning, research and administrative services and continuous improvement as a core value. Quality teaching, learning, research are essential to the University's mission, goals and activities. The University's quality assurance processes are intrinsic to the work of all staff, who are undertaking or supporting teaching and the promotion of learning and research.
2. Benchmarking and evidence-based approach. The University evaluates its achievements against appropriate national and international benchmarks. Its quality assurance methods are evidence-based, where outcomes and feedback from stakeholders (including students, staff, employers and the community) will provide the basis for analyses and conclusions on which improvements are planned.
3. Collegiality. The University's procedures reflect the principles of rigorous peer review, as we aim to identify areas for improvement, to foster collaboration and exchange of best practice, and to encourage an ethos of critical self-evaluation.

### Features

1. A commitment to widespread involvement of staff, students and stakeholders in the QA process
  - critical self-evaluation and rigorous peer review of academic and administrative areas;
  - methodical collection of evidence about service satisfaction and student experience, including external comparisons;
  - external assessment of professional courses through accreditation and international review;
  - multiple avenues for student and staff input to QA and improvement: College, Faculty, School, Services, Academic Board and committees, student associations; and
  - systematic use of client experiences to improve staff development and training.

2. A focus on efficient management, planning and resource processes to achieve excellence and ensure continuous improvement
  - University-wide strategic goals linked to plans, priorities and the review system;
  - strong Academic Board and committee structure to develop, implement and oversee academic policies;
  - a regular cycle of reviews of all faculties and administrative services units;
  - alignment between academic and administrative review processes;
  - a process for monitoring implementation of the recommendations of reviews through College PVCs and the Academic Board;
  - performance-based funding of teaching and research;
  - allocation of funding to address areas for improvement;
  - annually-updated faculty teaching and learning plans, linked to funding; and
  - a performance management and development system for all staff, including managers.
  
3. A commitment to judging outcomes and processes against the highest external standards
  - formal links with many of the world's leading universities: national and international benchmarking of academic standards and outcomes and
  - national and international benchmarking of quality assurance processes with comparable research-led universities.

#### **Coverage**

The quality assurance strategy is integral to the work of all staff, who are active in teaching, research and administration, and have the responsibility for implementing QA by ensuring quality principles are adhered to. In practice, this commitment is implemented within devolved areas by local QA processes and professional accreditation.

#### **Structure**

The Quality Advisory & Coordination Group (QACG) was formed to have carriage of the University's quality assurance and improvement strategy. This framework is the basis for a quality review process, aimed at safeguarding not only the highest quality teaching, learning and research in academic standards but also to attain the utmost value of programs, services and initiatives in meeting goals specified in the University's strategic plan. QACG consists of senior managers from all areas of the University, including: -

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair)	Professor Ken Eltis
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)	Professor Tim Hirst
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)	Professor John Hearn
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (College of Sciences & Technology)	Professor Beryl Hesketh
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (College of Humanities & Social Sciences)	Professor June Sinclair
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (College of Health Sciences)	Professor Don Nutbeam
Chief Financial Officer	Mr. Bob Kotic
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Employee Relations) & Acting CIO	Professor Michael Fry
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)	Professor Paul Ramsden
Assistant Pro-Vice-Chancellor	Professor Ann Brewer
Chair of Academic Board	Professor Judyth Sachs
Dean Faculty of Pharmacy	Professor Charlie Benrimoj
Head of School Economics & Political Science	Professor Stephen Nicholas
Director Planning Support Office	Mr. Geoff Woods
Director Internal Audit and Review	Mr. Craig Prosser
Dean Faculty of Medicine	Professor Andrew Coats

QACG Members bring both a university-side and local perspective to QACG.

### **Terms of Reference of the Quality Advisory and Co-Ordination Group**

1. To review and further develop the University of Sydney's quality assurance and improvement strategy and processes and oversee their implementation.
2. To propagate the idea of quality as a core value that is integrated with the principal research, teaching, learning and administrative activities of the University.
3. To monitor and evaluate the impact of the University's approach to quality assurance and improvement on its operations.
4. To ensure that the University's internal quality assurance and improvement activities take into account those activities already undertaken for the purposes of the University's internal and external reporting requirements.<sup>1</sup>
5. To liaise with senior administrative service portfolios to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to quality administrative services across the University.
6. To monitor and follow-up on the improvements arising from the reviews of Faculties and Administrative Portfolios.
7. The Chair of the QACG, working with the Chair of the Academic Board, will write to College PVCs, in regard to the recent Reviews of their Faculties, requesting them to ensure appropriate follow-up of Recommendations, for example, identifying strategic priorities and time-frames for achievement, identifying outcomes that measure the success of action taken, addressing resource implications where appropriate
8. The Chair of the QACG, working with the Assistant Pro Vice-Chancellor, will write to the relevant DVCs and PVCs, in regard to the recent Reviews of their Administrative Portfolios, requesting them to ensure appropriate follow-up of Recommendations, for example, identifying strategic priorities and time-frames for achievement, identifying outcomes that measure the success of action taken, addressing resource implications where appropriate
9. To advise the Vice-Chancellor on appropriate academic and management structures to implement the quality assurance and improvement strategy within the university as well as for liaison with external agencies, including AUQA, and other research-intensive universities nationally and internationally, for the purposes of quality assurance and improvement.

The Group will report regularly to the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC), highlighting action that needs to be taken.

### **Responsibility**

The Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, the Assistant Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Academic Board are leading the quality review process with regard to the University's Goals. Both the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning and the Assistant Pro-Vice Chancellor provide for the monitoring, co-ordination and management of University's Quality Assurance and Improvement Processes.

### **Internal Review**

The Academic Board introduced a process of cyclical reviews (five years) of all the University's faculties. The central purpose of the reviews is to assist the University in safeguarding and enhancing the quality of its core activities ie, teaching, learning and research. The reviews are intended to: -

- support faculties in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of their quality assurance arrangements, through peer review of processes, outcomes and the evidence that demonstrates their effectiveness;
- assist faculties in identifying and evaluating strengths and weaknesses;
- support faculties in maintaining a systematic and continuous cycle of planning, monitoring and improvement;
- promote good practice throughout the University;

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<sup>1</sup> For example, University Annual Report, DEST reporting requirements, reports to State and Commonwealth bodies, and review by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA).

- assist Faculties in evaluating achievements in relation to the University's Goals;
- promote ownership of quality assurance activities throughout the University; and
- fulfil the University's requirements for both internal and external accountability.

The University introduced cyclical reviews of administrative services to focus on how they contribute to the achievement of the University's strategic goals, and in particular how they enhance the University's teaching, learning, research and research training outcomes as well as the student and staff experience. The aims of the Administrative Service Review process are to:

- identify and appraise the quality (of deliverables) of services, programs and activities relative to purpose,
- examine how well services, programs and activities meet objectives specified in the University's strategic plan as well as objectives specified in operational plans at the divisional/departmental levels,
- evaluate all processes currently undertaken which assure total quality of administrative services and associated improvements, and
- implement all improvements in a planned, timely and effective manner.

### **External Reviews**

The regular internal reviews are the basis for external reporting and auditing.

**Authority/Consultation:** QACG, VCAC

**Management Responsibility:** Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, PVC (Teaching & Learning);  
Assistant Pro Vice Chancellor

**Implementation Responsibility:** QACG

**Date Approved**