



## New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit *Te Wāhanga Tātari*

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### A statement on Cycle 4 academic audits of New Zealand universities

Memorandum to: **The Universities**

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From: **The Board of the  
New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit**

Date: **17 July 2007**

# A statement on Cycle 4 academic audits of New Zealand universities

## Executive summary

### 1 Introduction

The Board supports the wish of the university sector for Cycle 4 academic audits to be a five-year cycle of whole-of-institution audits. This Statement sets out the proposed focus and process to be followed.

### 2 Feedback on methodology

The Unit has, over many years, sought and received feedback on academic audits, and the audit process will be streamlined in Cycle 4 where feasible, to accommodate that feedback. (See section 4 below.)

### 3 The impact of the Tertiary Education Reforms

The shift in quality assurance heralded by the Cabinet papers towards institutional ‘self-assessment and validation’ is akin to the approach taken by this Unit, but the Unit’s approach goes beyond mere validation to the support of enhancement activities. This will be maintained by the Unit in Cycle 4. The process of whole-of-institution Cycle 4 academic audits will continue to be in line with international practice of institutional self-assessment and portfolio, evaluation of the portfolio and site interviews by an independent panel, and a report with commendations, recommendations and affirmations. The Unit will continue to abide by the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education guidelines of good practice by recognizing institutional responsibility and institutional autonomy, and by contributing to both quality improvement and accountability.

### 4 The Unit’s approach to academic audit for Cycle 4

The following sub-sections indicate the approach to be taken, and the way the process will be streamlined.

#### 4.1 The scope of Cycle 4

- Cycle 4 academic audits will be whole-of-institution (see *Table 1*).
- Up to two specific aspects of each University’s activities – as may be negotiated by the University – may be subject to more detailed evaluation.
- Boundaries will be placed on the exercise by devising a set of questions to provide focus and to avoid unrealistic and excessive additional workload.
- Attention will focus on the way internal processes monitor and enhance the achievement of outputs and outcomes. This is intended to build on the trend in Cycle 3, and is based on the premise that the purpose of good processes is to support the achievement of good outputs and outcomes.

#### 4.2 Academic auditors

- The Unit will conduct a recruitment and training programme.
- The Unit will be diligent in ensuring the Unit’s expectations of auditors are fulfilled in every audit.

### **4.3 Audit panels**

- The four-person audit panels will include a senior person from a New Zealand university (Chair), a New Zealand academic, a non-academic, and an international academic.
- The Unit will work hard to ensure a balance of experience on each panel which is forward-looking and exhibits a positive attitude, and to ensure a consistency of high-level performance across all panels.
- Chairs will chair more than one audit during the Cycle.
- The Director of the Unit will be in attendance, and will not be an auditor.

### **4.4 Self-assessment**

- Universities will manage their self-assessment, and the portfolio will be carefully prescribed. The self-assessment will be carried out in the way best suited to the University's needs and will build to the greatest extent possible on the on-going review activities of the universities.

### **4.5 Portfolio**

- A single portfolio will be submitted by the University, and will contain the judgements of the various sectors of the whole University community.
- The portfolio will contain statements of progress on the recommendations in the Cycle 3 audit report and on the University's own enhancement initiatives identified in the Cycle 3 portfolio.
- Each of the remaining sections of the portfolio will discuss the specific areas set out in *Table 1* (institutional processes, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, teaching and learning, academic programmes, students, staff, administrative support and infrastructure, community engagement, collaborations and partnerships) and conform to the framework set out in *Table 2* (commitment statements, an evaluation of the progress in honouring the commitment statements, and the identification of areas for enhancement and the activities to be undertaken).
- The portfolio text is to be limited to 15,000 words (excluding tables and graphs), and supporting materials limited to one A4 storage box.
- Supporting materials will include high-level documentation (strategic documents, plans, annual reports, data). Policies and procedures will not be included, but should be made available to the panel during the site visit.
- The Unit will negotiate with the University as to what is expected by way of supporting documentation so as to manage better the amount of material presented.

### **4.6 Further information**

- Further information will be requested only where there is good reason to do so.
- A clear indication will be given as to why further information is required.
- The further information requested will not be forwarded to the panel prior to the site visit, but will be made available at the site visit.

#### **4.7 Site visit**

- The site visit will be of four days, but only two of these will involve interviews. (See *Table 3*.)
- The first and last days will be panel-only days, for the reading of further materials, discussion, and the bringing together of the conclusions of the panel.
- Interviews in Cycle 4 will be carefully targeted.
- To the extent possible and practicable, the main topics and/or issues to be discussed at interviews will be made clear prior to the site visit.
- Wherever possible, the context and rationale underlining questions will be explained by the panel; but panels must be free to ask questions about other matters.
- To the extent possible, all participants in interviews will have the chance to be heard.

#### **4.8 Report**

- The report will contain the findings of the panel based on what the panel has read and heard.
- The report will include commendations, recommendations and affirmations.
- The draft report will be sent to the University for comment on errors of fact, tone and expression.
- The University will be invited to make management responses to the recommendations.

### **5 Timeframe for Cycle 4 academic audits**

The order and time of Cycle 4 academic audits is as in *Table 4* and *Table 5*:

2008 Massey University (second half)

2009 University of Auckland (first half)                      Victoria University of Wellington (second half)

2010 University of Canterbury (first half)                      University of Waikato (second half)

2011 Auckland University of Technology (first half)                      University of Otago (2011 second half)

2012 Lincoln University (first half)

### **6 Conclusion**

Through the activities associated with Cycle 4 academic audits, the Board looks forward to the Unit continuing a strong and productive professional working relationship with all New Zealand universities. The Unit will work with the universities to implement a process that will continue to support self-assessment and self-improvement.

## A statement on Cycle 4 academic audits of New Zealand universities

### 1 Introduction

In April 2007, the Board of the Unit received advice from the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee with respect to Cycle 4 audits. In response, the Board advised the June meeting of the Committee that it supported the Committee's wish that there be a five-year cycle of whole-of-institution academic audits which would begin in 2008, and that the Unit would continue to engage with the universities on institutional audit methodology with particular reference to any implications of the Tertiary Education Reforms.

Having received the Committee's advice, the Unit is now in a position to begin planning for the next cycle of academic audits which will begin in the second half of 2008 and end in the first half of 2012.

As a first stage, this Statement has been developed and sets out the proposed focus of Cycle 4 and outlines the process to be followed. In preparing this Statement, the Unit has considered feedback received over several years, and drafts of this Statement have been considered by a small reference group of people drawn from the university sector who are very experienced in the administration of academic audit at institutional level, and by the Board of the Unit which has members drawn from key stakeholder groups and some members with expertise in quality assurance.

The Unit will now

- prepare and distribute a manual specific to Cycle 4 academic audits,
- recruit prospective auditors, and conduct an auditor training session.

The Board supports the Director's wish to visit at any time any University that would like to discuss the proposed focus and process for Cycle 4 academic audit. It is the intention of the Director to visit each University in turn about 12 months before the due date for the submission of a self-assessment portfolio to ensure a clear understanding of the requirements of the Cycle 4 academic audit; and, prior to the submission of the portfolio, to consult with the University to ensure that realistic limits are placed on the size of the portfolio and the number and size of supporting documents.

### 2 Feedback on the methodology

The Unit has, over many years, sought, and received, feedback on the Unit's performance, and has attempted to apply the suggestions offered. The following are the main sources of feedback in recent years.

- In planning for Cycle 3 in 2002, the Unit prepared a statement on *Institutional academic audits of New Zealand universities 2002-2006* which set out the process to be used in Cycle 3, applying lessons learned from Cycles 1 and 2. The December 2000 edition of the Unit's *Academic audit manual* also incorporated those lessons.
- In 2004 (after the completion of only one Cycle 3 audit) the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee opened discussions with the Unit about the future of academic audit with a document in which the Committee reported a 'growing scepticism of the value of quality audit processes', and raised issues and criticism based on the universities' experiences of Cycle 1 and 2 audits. The Board

commented back to the Committee in early 2005, indicating how the Unit was already responding to the issues raised.

- In 2005, the Unit initiated a discussion on the future of academic audit at the annual meeting of University quality personnel – Quality Enhancement Meeting 10 – in which both the strengths and benefits of the process as well as the issues of concern were raised, noted by the Unit, and posted on the Unit’s website.
- During Cycle 3, the Unit sought feedback from each university at the conclusion of the audit process in response to questions about the performance of the Unit, the performance of the audit panel, and the audit methodology and process and these have been reported to, and discussed by, the Board.
- In February 2007, a workshop of university personnel was held in Christchurch. Notes from the workshop, as supplied by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, identified positive aspects of the process and matters requiring further consideration.

The Unit has kept a watching brief on feedback as it has been received and has attempted to amend operational details to take up suggestions that have been made throughout Cycle 3. However, the extent of change has been limited by the desire to maintain consistency in process across the whole of Cycle 3 audits. The Unit has now reconsidered all of this feedback to find the best way to build on the strengths of the process as identified by the universities and panels through their feedback, to improve the process by eliminating the negative factors to the greatest extent possible, and to streamline the process where feasible.

### **3 The impact of the Tertiary Education Reforms**

The Board has maintained that the Unit must ensure that its future activities are relevant to the new environment that is likely to arise from the Tertiary Education Reforms. From discussions and written documentation, the Board of the Unit has formed the view that the intention of the Reforms is to introduce a quality assurance and monitoring regime where the Tertiary Education Commission will monitor institutional performance, and where the Commission will be seeking information on the processes that support core activities of universities – research, teaching, learning and community engagement – from a quality assurance system that involves institutional ‘self-assessment and validation’.

The Cabinet papers and Tertiary Education Commission papers related to the Reforms give notice of a shift in quality assurance for the whole tertiary sector towards institutional ‘self-assessment and validation’. The Board believes that the approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement activities undertaken for over a decade by the Unit on behalf of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee is well aligned with this, but goes beyond mere validation to the encouragement of the universities’ enhancement activities. The Cycle 3 external audit administered by this Unit was an evaluation and review of each University’s self-assessment and programme of improvement initiatives, with the aim of supporting and enhancing the University’s own programme of improvement

The challenge for the Unit at this time is to improve the present methodology to take into account a growing maturity in the universities themselves arising from their involvement in the three Cycles of audit already administered, and to work at ways of ensuring the audit process continues to add value for universities. The process of whole-of-institution Cycle 4 academic audits will continue to be in line with international practice – namely, institutional

self-assessment leading to the production of a portfolio with supporting documentation; the evaluation of the portfolio and documentation together with site interviews by a panel independent of the institution being audited; the production of a report by the panel, based on their observations, which contains commendations of good practice, recommendations for improvement, and affirmations of institutional initiatives. In its practice, the Unit will continue to abide by the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education guidelines of good practice by recognizing that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, by respecting the autonomy, identity and integrity of the institution, and by aiming to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability.

#### **4 The Unit's approach to academic audit for Cycle 4**

The Board affirms the approach of the Unit to the evaluation process for Cycle 4 as set out below, building on the strengths and experience gained in Cycles 1-3, and accommodating the suggestions for change received by the Unit through feedback sought over recent years.

##### **4.1 The scope of Cycle 4**

The universities have indicated their wish for Cycle 4 academic audits to be whole-of-institution. In 2005, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee changed the terms of reference of the Unit to 'consider and review the universities' mechanisms for monitoring and enhancing the ongoing academic quality of academic programmes, their delivery and their learning outcomes'. This removes the evaluation of mechanisms relating to the assessment of the quality of research *per se* because of the implementation of assessment activities related to the Performance-Based Research Fund. The terms of reference, however, do not exclude consideration of the extent to which the research culture, research environment and research activities impact on teaching and learning.

A whole-of-institution academic audit will cover all aspects that impact on the design, delivery and evaluation of academic programmes and the learning environment. (See *Table 1* for an indicative framework.) The audit will be streamlined where feasible with a 'lighter touch' than Cycle 1 academic audits by being focused on the ability of institutional processes to support the achievement of outputs and outcomes. The Board also supports the suggestion that, in addition to the whole-of-institution audit, Cycle 4 audits may also include more detailed evaluations of up to two specific aspects of each University's activities that the University may wish to have audited. Any such areas of more detailed evaluation will be negotiated between the Unit and each University.

Whole-of-institution is a large canvas, and it is clear that boundaries must be placed on the exercise if it is not to attract the criticism of unrealistic and excessive additional workload which has been leveled at Cycles 2 and 3. Cycles 2 and 3 were limited, respectively, to all aspects related to research, and to all aspects related to teaching and learning. Anticipating issues and criticism around additional workload in Cycle 3, the Unit developed a set of open-ended questions as the 'Cycle 3 focus'. It was clear from feedback that this was appreciated by universities, some referring to it as a template for their self-review and portfolio. Some universities did not use the focus as a framework or template; some universities went well beyond the areas covered by the questions. In such cases, that was the choice of those universities. For Cycle 4, a set of questions will be devised to provide

the framework so as to give focus and avoid unrealistic and excessive additional workload. (A set of indicative questions is shown in *Table 2*, section 4.5.)

*Table 1*

**Indicative framework for whole-of-institution academic audit**

• <i>Institutional processes</i>	planning, reporting, reviews, feedback, quality assurance, quality enhancement
• <i>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</i>	implications for curriculum, programme delivery, student learning support
• <i>Teaching and learning</i>	plans, strategies, research environment, physical environment, evaluation, review, enhancement
• <i>Academic programmes</i>	development and design, implementation, delivery, assessment, course monitoring, review, enhancement
• <i>Students</i>	recruitment, support and achievement
• <i>Staff</i>	profile, recruitment, appointment, induction, professional support, professional development and appraisal
• <i>Administrative support and infrastructure</i>	human resources, facilities management
• <i>Community engagement</i>	stakeholder relationships
• <i>Collaborations and partnerships</i>	impact on teaching and learning environment, curriculum development and delivery

In Cycle 4 academic audits, the panels will focus their attention more on the way internal processes support, monitor and enhance the achievement of outputs and outcomes. For the Unit, outputs are performance data, such as completions and retentions; outcomes arise from the application of skills and techniques learned and the knowledge gained to the workplace and to the benefit of society.

The emphasis of the Unit in previous cycles of academic audit has been on the processes that support the achievement of outputs and outcomes in keeping with the objectives of the University. The Tertiary Education Reforms call for a focus on outputs (such as completions and retentions), but outputs alone do not tell us about the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Cycle 3 panels looked at the ‘processes-output/outcome’ connections with the last section of Cycle 3 audits focusing on links between processes and appropriate outputs and outcomes – such as the alignment of learning outcomes to University goals and objectives, the application of appropriate and effective assessment practices in testing the achievement of learning outcomes, and the effective benchmarking of academic standards.

Cycle 4 academic audit will build on the trend in Cycle 3. It will have a greater focus on these connections, given that the purpose of good processes is to support the achievement of good outputs and outcomes. Academic audits attempt to make assessments of institutions’ capacities to assure the quality of what they do, specifically in relation to the quality of the education and the experience of students. The audits will look at whole institutions in terms

of their culture, structure and processes, and specific areas of more detailed evaluation negotiated with universities will provide for a sampling process in areas of benefit to them.

## **4.2 Academic auditors**

The Unit has been holding back on the recruitment and training of academic auditors until the university sector provided advice as to its preference for Cycle 4. The Unit will now canvass universities and professional and quality assurance associations for expressions of interest in being an auditor for the Unit. In particular, the Unit will seek ‘academic’ auditors who are active members of university staff. The Unit will run a two-day training programme, employing expertise from within the university sector and from quality assurance agencies. As in the past, training will stress the Unit’s expectations with respect to the personal attributes, abilities and experience they bring to academic audit and their responsibilities in the performance of their duties, as set out in the Unit’s policy statements. The Unit will be diligent in ensuring that the Unit’s expectations are evident in practice in every academic audit.

## **4.3 Audit panels**

The size and composition of audit panels is always under review, and there is a tension in gaining a balance between size (some feedback suggested Cycle 3 panels were too large) and a representative composition (the possibility of student representatives, the need for specific Te Tiriti o Waitangi expertise). For Cycle 4, the Board supports a panel of four auditors which has the following composition:

- a senior person from a New Zealand university as Chair,
- a New Zealand academic,
- a non-academic,
- an international academic.

As in Cycle 3, each University will be sent the names of proposed members of the panel, with the request that the University indicates whether it is aware of any reason – such as conflict of interest or inappropriateness for the character of the University – why any potential auditor should not be involved in their audit.

The Unit will work hard to ensure a balance of experience, with auditors who have knowledge of the processes of universities or those of other institutions; a positive attitude towards the future of the university sector; experience resulting from holding administrative posts at least at Faculty/School/Division level; the capability of being forward-looking; an awareness of the contemporary context in which universities work and of the national and international environments in which students will live and work as graduates.

The Unit is determined to maintain a consistency of high level performance across all panels. The presence of the Director in attendance to all panels and as the writer of the first draft of the reports assists in maintaining consistency. It is also the intention of the Unit for Chairs to chair more than one academic audit during the Cycle. As well, prior to giving its approval of each final report, the Board will continue to read the final report to test the extent the report and the processes used in the audit are consistent with the terms of reference of the Unit.

The Director of the Unit is in attendance to the panel to ensure the audit process is within the terms of reference. The Director is not an auditor. A notetaker is also in attendance, and the notes taken are destroyed at the time the academic audit report is released.

There have been calls for students on panels, as there are in, for example, Scotland. During the Cycle 3, the Board attempted to have a student association person as observer on a couple of panels. Present policy requires the approval of all of the Chair, the University being audited and the Director of the Unit to have any observer on the panel, and agreement could not be obtained in either of these cases. Opinion on whether a student should be included is divided. Apart from increasing the size of the panel, there has been the issue of whether a student has the experience of university structures and processes and/or quality assurance processes. As well, panel members are not representatives of any particular group. There may be concerns on the part of universities if students were to be officers in a local or national students' association; and there has been concern expressed that the student, particularly one holding office, could come under pressure from particular interest groups. After careful consideration, the Board has decided not to change the policy on panel composition, or on the inclusion of observers. Panels will not be expanded in Cycle 4 to include student 'representation'. Instead, the Board expects the panels to ensure that there is evidence of adequate student input into the self-assessment process and that there are adequate opportunities to talk with students during the site visit.

Universities are required by legislation to consider their responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in their core activities. In line with this, panels in Cycles 1, 2 and 3 have included someone with specialist knowledge of Te Tiriti. The Board is of the view that there is now a strong recognition of institutions' responsibilities to Te Tiriti, and New Zealand academic members of panels will have an understanding of the issues. The Unit intends to make the responsibilities of New Zealand universities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi an important part of auditor training, and will ensure there is collective knowledge in the composition of the panels themselves. If universities wish to welcome panels with a pōwhiri, the Unit will provide the panel with a kaumātua to give advice on the welcome and to ensure proper protocols are observed.

#### **4.4 Self-assessment**

In Cycles 1, 2 and 3, the management of the self-assessment process was left to the universities. For Cycle 4, the universities will continue to manage their self-assessment process in the way best suited to their needs, but the structure of the portfolio will be carefully prescribed. The Unit has always hoped that, as far as possible, the self-assessment would build to the greatest extent possible on the on-going review activities of the universities, although it is appreciated that the demands of a whole-of-institution audit is greater than would be expected of normal review activities, and will most probably require special tasks outside of normal activities.

#### **4.5 Portfolio**

The Unit will continue to require a single portfolio from the University rather than invite interested persons and/or groups to make submissions to the Unit. The reason for this is that the Unit is of the view that submissions from interested groups might undermine the unity and autonomy of the University, and might reduce the incentive for the University itself to engage with its communities of interest and to identify and take responsibility for

improvements. The Unit has considered the desirability of seeking submissions from students and other stakeholders, as is the case in some other jurisdictions. Advice received suggests that to call for submissions would face the difficulty of determining who might be the best representatives of stakeholder groups. For students, for example, the student voice is probably best heard through the data obtained through institutional surveys and summary reports such as those related to course experience and student engagement.

Thus, the Cycles 1-3 policy of a single portfolio approach will be retained for Cycle 4, and it is intended that the single portfolio will contain the judgements of the whole University's community. The audit panels will look closely for evidence that confirms that adequate consultation and involvement of students and other stakeholders has taken place during the self-assessment process.

Limits will be placed on the size of the portfolio in Cycle 4, partly in response to the call from many universities for a lighter-touch evaluation and review. Although Cycle 3 academic audits were focused on specific aspects of the core activities of universities, the self-assessments, the preparation of the portfolio, and the administration of the site visits still required the dedication of much additional and special time and resource.

In Cycle 1 and 2, the structure of the portfolio was left to the universities to determine. In Cycle 3, universities were asked to structure the discussion of each aspect of the framework in a specific way. As with the framework for the scope of the audit, some universities did not follow the structure; in such cases, that was the choice of those universities. To assist in placing boundaries on the self-assessment exercise for Cycle 4 academic audit, and to provide some focus on whole-of-institution audit, the Unit will provide a template of requirements for the portfolio which universities are required to follow. It is to be hoped that the boundaries and focus will reduce the universities' workloads that is extra to the on-going 'quality' activities.

The first section of each portfolio will include:

- a brief statement of progress by the University on the recommendations contained in the Cycle 3 academic audit reports, and from academic audit reports of previous cycles where this is considered by the University to be both relevant and useful,
- a brief statement of progress on the University's own enhancement initiatives identified by the University arising from the Cycle 3 self-assessment.

This report will be followed by discussions of the specific areas under review as set out in *Table 1* (see section 4.1). A framework of open-ended questions will be applied to each aspect so as to define the limits of the enquiry. (*Table 2* overleaf sets out the framework with indicative questions.) The portfolio will be no more than 15,000 words (excluding tables and graphs) and will be written as answers to this template. The emphasis will be on the testing of the effectiveness of what is being done, rather than description of what the University expects to be done.

The accompanying documentation is to be limited to one A4 size storage box, and will include high-level documentation that exists (such as strategic documents, plans, key internal review reports in key areas, institution-wide survey summaries, data). Operational documents (such as policies and procedures) should not be included, but it is possible that they will be required by the panel at some stage and therefore should be available to the panel during site visit. (See section 4.7 below.)

Table 2

**Indicative framework for each section of the portfolio**

<i>Section</i>	<i>Indicative questions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment statements</li> </ul>	<p><i>What are the goals, objectives and planned strategies in this area?</i></p> <p><i>How were these goals, objectives and processes determined?</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the progress in honouring the commitment statements</li> </ul>	<p><i>What positive progress has been made in achieving the goals and objectives in this area?</i></p> <p><i>What is the relevant output/outcome data that illustrates progress?</i></p> <p><i>What key quality mechanisms and processes have been used in achieving progress?</i></p> <p><i>How effective have been the processes and activities in this area in achieving goals and objectives?</i></p> <p><i>What are the key strengths in this area?</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of areas for enhancement and the activities to be undertaken</li> </ul>	<p><i>What are the areas in which enhancement is needed?</i></p> <p><i>What enhancement activities will be undertaken during the next planning period – say, three years? Who will be responsible and what are the expected outputs and outcomes of those enhancement activities</i></p> <p><i>How will the University monitor the effectiveness of changes arising from the enhancement activities?</i></p>

In previous cycles, panels have examined output data when considering the processes that support core activities. In Cycle 4, more attention will be paid to the relationship of processes to output data. For example, the Unit will seek university agreement for panel access to plans and data such as that reported by the University to the Tertiary Education Commission and Ministry of Education. While the interest of the Commission appears to focus on institutional performance, the interest of the panel will be clearly focused on questions about the quality of processes and activities that give rise to the output data reported against indicators agreed to with the Commission.

The Unit will negotiate with the University as to what is expected. The amount of paper presented to the panel needs to be better managed than in earlier cycles. As indicated at the outset of this Statement, the Director of the Unit will visit the University about 12 months before the due date to discuss requirements. At that time, and prior to submission of the portfolio, the Unit will discuss the portfolio and supporting documents with the University and, with the University, will make a determination on what is required before the University assembles multiple copies and sends them off.

Six copies of the material will be prepared in hardcopy. The portfolio text will be made available in portable document format (pdf). Together with all other supporting documentation available in electronic form, the pdf will be included on a compact disc

(CD). The University will send two copies of the hardcopy documentation and CD to the Unit (one for the use of the Director, one for the Unit Library) and one copy to each panel member.

#### **4.6 Further information**

The panel will meet at the Unit's office to make a preliminary evaluation of the materials supplied in the portfolio. After this preliminary evaluation, the panel will be able to request further information. Further information will be requested only when there is good reason to do so. More attention will be paid by the panel to the necessity for further information, and the panel will give a clear indication as to why the further information is requested – such as whether to clarify, to allow more detailed evaluation, to fill in gaps – and will take care not to ask for material already in hand.

In past cycles, the Unit asked for most of the further information to be distributed to the panel prior to the site visit. In Cycle 4, further information will not be distributed to the panel, but will be provided at the time of the site visit. Time will be built into the site visit programme to enable the panel to read and discuss the further information prior to the commencement of interviews.

#### **4.7 Site visit**

It will be necessary for a panel to interview people in the University to test actual practice against written material. In a sense, the external evaluation is testing the quality of the University's self-assessment. Interviews are aimed at finding out how things actually happen, the extent to which systems are appropriate for their purpose, and how well systems work. Besides finding areas where there should be a greater correspondence between practice and expectations, questioning can also confirm good practice and the strength and breadth of support for what the institution is aiming to achieve.

In each Cycle 4 academic audit, interviews will be carefully targeted and the panel will make clear prior to the site visit the main topics and/or issues to be discussed at each section. The aim of this is to address the concerns expressed following Cycle 3 audits about the difficulty for interviewees to understand the relevance of questions asked. Wherever possible, the panel will seek to explain the context and rationale underlying the questions. While there is a desire to give greater clarification to the purpose of each section, the panel must also be free to ask questions about other things, particularly if there are issues that arise during the site visit, or if there are issues that the panel needs to test with a range of people from senior to lower levels.

In each interview session, wherever possible all participants will have a chance to be heard. This was the aim in Cycle 3, but it is acknowledged that this was not achieved in every case.

A question that was raised during Cycle 3 is whether it is necessary to interview such large numbers of people (between 130 and 200, with a mean of 165). The Unit also received feedback from the panels that there was not enough time to think about the issues. Long panel-only sessions in the evening came on top of full days of interviews.

With this in mind, the Unit will be more focused in Cycle 4 by better targeting of interviews, and by limiting the number of people interviewed while also talking to a representative range of views. The number of days of interviews will be reduced to two days, and the number of interview sessions will be reduced to eight each day (four in the

morning, four in the afternoon) with the possibility of working lunches. The amount of ‘panel only’ time will be increased. The two days prior and after interviews will be panel only days; the first day will be set aside for panel discussion and the reading of further information materials, and the fourth day will be set aside for panel discussion with the bringing together of panel conclusions and an oral report to senior management. There will be opportunities (if required or desired) for panels, or members of panels, to visit sites on campus relevant to the enquiry.

An indicative timetable for a site visit is set out in *Table 3*.

*Table 3*

<b>Indicative timetable for a site visit</b>			
<i>Day 1</i>	<i>Day 2</i>	<i>Day 3</i>	<i>Day 4</i>
<i>Panel arrives early morning</i>			
<b>Panel only</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Panel only</b>
Reading of materials	Four sessions: Senior management and governance	Four sessions: Samples of students and student support agencies	Preparation of report
Lunch	Working lunch	Working lunch	Lunch
Evaluation of materials	Four sessions: Sample of middle management	Four sessions: Samples of staff, academic and non- academic	Further preparation of the report  Oral report to senior management
<i>Panel leaves late afternoon</i>			

#### 4.8 Report

The Unit will prepare a draft report which contains the findings of the panel based on what the panel has read and heard. The draft report will be refined in consultation with the panel. As with Cycle 3, the report will work out from the University’s own initiatives and enhance them where deemed appropriate, while also providing views on all aspects of the processes underscoring the core activities of the University, as is appropriate to the scope of the academic audit. Examples of significant, innovative and effective good practice will be the subject of *commendations*. Suggestions for improvement, whether to the University’s own enhancement initiatives, or in areas in which the panel is of the view that something should be addressed, will be the subject of *recommendations*. Enhancement initiatives and improvement activities underway which the panel supports will be the subject of *affirmations*.

When ready, the Unit will send the draft report to the University for comment on errors of fact, tone and expression. In Cycle 4, the Unit will invite ‘management responses’ to recommendations. On receiving comment and responses from the University, the Unit, in consultation with the panel, will amend the report to accommodate necessary corrections and changes arising from the University’s comments and, if appropriate, from the management responses. The Unit will send the final draft report to the University to ensure the Unit has addressed the comments. If the Unit has amended recommendations, it will ask the University to ensure that the report still maintains the essence of management responses to recommendations.

The Unit will send the final report to the Board for its consideration and approval. When approved, the final report will be released to the University, and will be released as a public document two weeks later.

## **5 Timeframe for Cycle 4 academic audits**

In a letter sent in May 2007 to the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee by the Director of the Unit on behalf of the Board, it was reported that it was the view of the Unit that twelve months is required to plan effectively for the first external evaluation and review. Therefore the Unit is planning for the first evaluation to be conducted during the second half of 2008, followed by two evaluations during each of 2009, 2010 and 2011, with the final evaluation in the first half of 2012. The following is an indicative timetable for two universities – one in the first half of the year and one in the second half of a year (taking as example the possible dates for 2009).

*Table 4*

### **Indicative timetable for the external evaluation and review process**

	<i>Week</i>	<i>Dates in first half 2009</i>	<i>Dates in second half 2009</i>
		<i>(ensuring site visit is in term time)</i>	<i>(ensuring site visit is in term time)</i>
		<i>Week beginning . . .</i>	<i>Week beginning . . .</i>
Portfolio	0	23 February	1 June
Preliminary Meeting	4	23 March	29 June
Planning Meeting	6	6 April	13 July
Site Visit	10	<b>4 May</b>	<b>10 August</b>
Draft report to the University	16	15 June	7 September
University comment	18	29 June	21 September
Final draft to the University	20	13 July	5 October
Final draft to the Board	22	27 July	19 October
Report to the University	24	10 August	2 November
Report released	26	24 August	16 November

The letter of May 2007 also reminded Vice-Chancellors of the decision of the Board in 2002, communicated in a letter in December 2002, that the order of evaluations in Cycle 4

would be the same as the order established for Cycle 3. Thus the timetable for Cycle 4 is as follows.

*Table 5*

**Order and timetable for Cycle 4**

<i>Year</i>	<i>First half of year</i>	<i>Second half of year</i>
2008	—	Massey University
2009	University of Auckland	Victoria University of Wellington
2010	University of Canterbury	University of Waikato
2011	Auckland University of Technology	University of Otago
2012	Lincoln University	—

## **6 Conclusion**

The Board is most grateful for the quality of the input the Unit has received over recent years in response to requests for feedback and suggestions for improvement. The Board has listened to the university sector but now has the responsibility to determine the nature and approach to Cycle 4 academic audits. The Unit will now prepare and distribute a manual specific to Cycle 4 academic audits, recruit prospective auditors, and conduct an auditor training session.

The universities deserve an independent external academic audit process which is authoritative, fair and perceptive and which is relevant to their needs at this time in their history of quality assurance activities and to the requirements of a new ‘accountability’ environment. Through its activities associated with Cycle 4 academic audits, the Board looks forward to the Unit continuing a strong and productive professional working relationship with all New Zealand universities. The Unit will work with universities to implement a process that will continue to support self-assessment and self-improvement.

On behalf of the Board of the Unit

***Emeritus Professor Les Holborow***  
*Chair of the Board*

***John M Jennings***  
*Director of the Unit*

*17 July 2007*