

**Audit of
the quality assurance of
Adult and Community Education
in New Zealand universities**

Overview report

February 2008



New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit
Te Wāhanga Tātari

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P O Box 9747
Wellington
Marion Square
New Zealand 6141

*Level 7
West Block
Education House
178 Willis Street
Wellington
New Zealand*

Contents

Preface	v
Findings	1
Government priorities for university courses in Adult and Community Education	1
Context for the delivery of courses	2
Goals and objectives	2
Development of courses	3
Quality assurance and quality enhancement systems	4
Personnel	5
Marketing and delivery of courses	6
Learner evaluations and the review of courses	7
Grievance processes	8
Collaboration with other providers	8
Appendix: Quality assurance of Adult and Community Education programmes	9

Preface

Background

In 2001, the New Zealand Government released the report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party, *Koia! Koia! Towards a learning society: the role of adult and community education*.¹ In early 2004, the New Zealand Government set out principles to underpin a new funding system for Adult and Community Education, with new quality assurance arrangements aimed at raising the quality of education and assuring learners that quality systems are in place. The Government indicated that, by the end of 2007, it would require a guarantee of the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements employed in the approval and maintenance of quality in Adult and Community Education courses offered by providers.

In early 2007, the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit negotiated with the universities and the Committee on University Academic Programmes of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (CUAP), and agreed on a process to be used by the Unit to audit the quality assurance of Adult and Community Education. CUAP agreed that the audit must be made against the guiding principles and process determined by CUAP in 2004, updated in 2006 and promulgated as Appendix G to the Committee's *Functions and procedures*.² It was also agreed that the Unit prepare a set of guidelines for use by universities who may wish to carry out a self-review prior to the audit. The guidelines mapped the CUAP guiding principles and process against open-ended questions based on the requirements of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority *Quality assurance arrangements for providers of Adult and Community Education*, March 2005.

The audit process

The process for the audit of quality assurance of Adult and Community Education administered by the Unit involved the evaluation by a two-person panel of a portfolio of documents. Typically, these documents included a report on a self-review by the university and description of the processes the university followed in offering Adult and Community Education courses, university charter and profile, relevant strategic plans and annual reports, forms associated with course approval and learner evaluation, minutes of appropriate committees, policies and procedures, brochures and course materials, handbooks and guidebooks. The panel then carried out a site visit and examined files that demonstrated the way in which processes and procedures were being implemented. The panel also talked with relevant staff to verify what had been written, to ensure compliance with the university's own policies and to evaluate staff views on the effectiveness of the principles and processes in assisting the university to achieve its goals and objectives with respect to Adult and Community Education.

Following the site visit, a report addressed to the Vice-Chancellor was prepared by the panel based on the evidence gained from the evaluation of documentation and from the interviews held during the site visit. A draft of the report was referred to the University for comment on errors of fact before the final copy of the report was forwarded to the University and the Tertiary Education Commission.

The audits were carried out by a two-person panel comprising the Director of the Unit, assisted by a person experienced and expert in the area of university Adult and Community Education and in the

1 Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party, *Koia! Koia! Towards a learning society: the role of adult and community education*. Report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party. Wellington, Ministry of Education, 2001.

Available at: http://www.minedu.govt.nz/web/downloadable/dl6287_v1/ace-full-report-web-version.pdf

2 The *Functions and procedures* of the Committee on University Academic programmes may be accessed at: <http://www.nzvcc.ac.nz/default.aspx?l=3&p=1>.

delivery of such courses. Geoff Pearman of Geoff Pearman Consulting assisted in all audits except that of the University of Canterbury, and in the preparation of this overview report; Dr Jan Blayne of the Wellington Institute of Technology provided assistance for the University of Canterbury.

The audit timetable

The audits were conducted during the period September to December 2007.

Six universities – the University of Auckland, the University of Waikato, Victoria University of Wellington, the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University and the University of Otago – draw Government funding for Adult and Community Education courses. These universities submitted documentation when convenient to them during the second half of 2007. The Unit panel evaluated the documentation, and made a site visit. Draft reports for these universities were sent to the universities for comment, and the final audit reports were delivered to the universities and the Tertiary Education Commission by the end of December 2007.

The remaining two universities – the Auckland University of Technology and Massey University – are not Government funded for Adult and Community Education courses. However, these two universities submitted documentation which was evaluated by the Unit panel towards the end of 2007, with recommendations regarding processes and the audit of their implementation should those universities claim Government funding in the future. Draft reports were sent to those two universities by the end of December for their comment; final reports were delivered to the universities and the Tertiary Education Commission by the end of January 2008.

This report

This report provides a summary overview of the findings of the audits as reported in the individual reports made to the universities. The panels undertaking these audits met with people who were passionate about Adult and Community Education, and the panels were impressed by both the diversity and quality of good practice in a number of areas. As is the practice of the Unit, where good practice was being followed, this was commended. Where necessary, recommendations were made with a view to enhancing quality. The suggestions for good practice in this report reflect good practice which, in most cases, is already happening in some universities. One aim of this report is to make these practices better known among all universities and to stimulate ongoing reflection. The report also identifies some ongoing issues which universities may wish to consider as they continue their work in providing learners in their communities with high quality, accessible and relevant courses consistent with the agreed national university priorities for courses in Adult and Community Education.

Acknowledgment

The Unit appreciated the frankness, openness, generous co-operation and willingness to participate fully in the process by all of those responsible for, and involved in, the development and delivery of Adult and Community Education courses. The Unit acknowledges the time spent in the preparation and the submission of documentation, as well as on the self assessments of their own performance in this area by the universities.

John M Jennings

Director

February 2008

Findings

On the basis of the audits undertaken, the Government can be assured that all universities funded by Government for Adult and Community Education courses have in place effective quality assurance arrangements. These include:

- **effective course approval processes,**
- **effective consultative mechanisms with communities of interest, and involvement in Adult and Community Education networks where appropriate,**
- **alignment of courses with the national university priorities in Adult and Community Education,**
- **high quality of support for tutors, both in the development and delivery of courses,**
- **attention to enhancements resulting from student feedback.**

Government priorities for university courses in Adult and Community Education

In implementing *Koia! Koia!*, the report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party, the Government promulgated five Adult and Community Education priorities, established Adult and Community Education Networks, developed quality assurance guidelines and invested in professional development. Providers were required to improve their engagement with communities so they can identify more clearly the needs of the community, consider new or different approaches to meeting those needs, and align their provision to the five priorities.³

It was also subsequently agreed that universities had a distinctive university contribution to make within a network of Adult and Community Education provision. A set of national university

3 See *All you need to know about ACE priorities* which can be accessed on the Tertiary Education Commission at <http://www.tec.govt.nz/upload/downloads/ace-priorities-guidelines-final.pdf>.

The Government priorities are:

- *Strengthening social cohesion*
Intention: to assist those who face barriers to active participation or engagement in their community and/or wider society.
- *Strengthening communities by meeting community learning needs*
Intention: to support the community by providing development activities that meet their identified needs.
- *Raising foundation skills*
Intention: to provide opportunities for adults to develop foundation skills through ACE delivery, as preparation for participation in the community and employment.
- *Encouraging lifelong learning*
Intention: to provide learning activities that will engage adults in learning and motivate them to continue learning so that they can fulfil their potential to effectively participate in society.
- *Targeting learners whose initial learning was unsuccessful*
Intention: to engage those who have not had positive learning experiences in ongoing learning.

priorities in Adult and Community Education was developed and promulgated in early 2007. Those priorities identify that publicly-funded Adult and Community Education provision at universities contributes to and encourages lifelong learning by:

- *providing specialised and research-informed higher-level learning that contributes directly to the creation of an advanced and rapidly evolving knowledge economy,*
- *contributing to the knowledge society through the preservation, dissemination and application of university research,*
- *promoting the development of critical and reflective thinking, and active and informed citizenship locally, nationally and globally,*
- *facilitating pathways into and through university education, and*
- *building capability in the wider adult and community education sector.*⁴

Proposals for university Adult and Community Education courses must relate to one or more of the national university priorities before Government funding can be claimed.

Context for the delivery of courses

Of the six universities that receive Government funding for Adult and Community Education courses, three were involved in structural change at the time of the audits. Two of the three universities were re-establishing their centres for continuing education as the entities responsible for the institutional oversight of the development, approval, delivery and administration of Adult and Community Education courses; the other was repositioning the centre within a new College bringing together continuing education, community and professional development activities along with foundation and bridging programmes, student learning support and other outreach activities.

Of the other three universities, one had maintained a consolidated and centralised approach to its outreach activities for many years. The other two universities operated more devolved approaches to community outreach programmes with central personnel responsible for the authorisation of school/faculty/division proposals for Adult and Community Education courses seeking Government funding.

Five of the universities had management or oversight boards (with various titles) to which the centres for continuing education (four universities) or the person with sole responsibility for Adult and Community Education (one university) were responsible on programming matters. These boards exercised a governance role, setting policy, providing support and advice for those with operational responsibilities in Adult and Community Education, and in some cases exercising course approval delegations on behalf of their Academic Boards.

Goals and objectives

All universities through their charters and profiles acknowledged the importance of universities undertaking community outreach, with some giving Adult and Community Education a strategic profile with specific goals and objectives. During the audit, an examination of the documentation

⁴ These priorities accompany the Committee on University Academic Programmes' principles and process for Adult and Community Education detailed in Appendix G of the Committee's *Functions and procedures*.

suggested differing understandings by universities as to the place of Adult and Community Education within a university. The promulgation in 2007 by the Tertiary Education Commission of a set of national priorities for university Adult and Community Education now provides opportunities for universities to make legitimate and more explicit claims to the role Adult and Community Education can play as a vehicle for the dissemination of university research and new knowledge, and as a vehicle for community engagement.

Good practice suggests that each university should, in the context of its strategic planning, review its rationale for offering Adult and Community Education courses, and develop and promulgate a high-level university statement which demonstrates a clear understanding of the distinctive contribution universities can make to Adult and Community Education. Such a statement should lead to a stronger commitment by the university to Adult and Community Education. Alongside such a statement, ***good practice suggests each university should develop robust processes for determining those courses eligible for Government funding and ensure that the criteria are known to the wider university thereby ensuring transparency in the process.***

Good practice would also suggest that universities should make more explicit in their publications and on their homepage their commitment to Adult and Community Education, by placing it alongside undergraduate teaching, postgraduate teaching and research.

Where universities had enunciated objectives and strategies, the audits revealed that the reporting on the progress in achieving objectives and on the effectiveness of strategies and activities varied. One university's centre for continuing education had a very strong process of annual reporting which gave clear indication that it was engaged in the implementation of its strategic plan and actively assessing the success of the centre in achieving it. Another centre reported quarterly against the University's operational plan on the status of the centre's key activities, and also undertook quarterly reviews of the development plans identified within its business plan.

Good practice suggests that key performance indicators relevant to the achievement of educational and strategic objectives should be developed, and that there be a robust and regular reporting system which includes the reporting of qualitative and quantitative 'data' against key performance indicators and appropriate measures of progress towards the achievement of objectives, key deliverables and targets as might be agreed by the University.

Development of courses

In identifying the needs of the community it serves and seeking ideas for courses, all six continuing education programmes carried out consultations with the community in a variety of ways – meetings with learners during courses, provision on websites for suggestions of desired courses, interaction with professional societies, research groups and government agencies, scanning of external media, and discussions with informally and more formally organised regional Adult and Community Education networks. Academic staff offer suggestions, often in response to current events and research interests. University publications that report on research and teaching activities are also monitored by continuing education programme managers.

While having in place mechanisms for consulting with their communities of interest, some of the universities still see room for improvement with enhancement initiatives in this area being necessary if a full collaboration and partnership with communities is to be achieved. ***A good practice in one university is the innovative use of focus groups and telephone surveys to***

engage current students in identifying potential courses and contributing to the improvement of the quality of service provided.

Ideas for courses are discussed at in-house meetings and ‘brain-storming’ sessions within the centres for continuing education (or equivalent), and courses are developed by programme managers in consultation with the academic staff, tutors and academic departments responsible for the teaching and delivery of the courses. In some cases, courses are also offered in partnership with outside agencies who become involved in the development of such courses. The documentation and interviews during the audits indicated the extent to which considerable effort is put into designing courses that meet both the demands of the topic and the needs of the community.

Good practice suggests the provision by each university of a comprehensive guide to the development and running of short courses, including descriptions of Adult and Community Education, Government funding criteria and the agreed national university priorities for Adult and Community Education, and a checklist for setting up Adult and Community Education courses.

One university has such a guide available on its website.

Quality assurance and quality enhancement systems

As a matter of principle, universities have rigorous processes for the approval of academic programmes and courses with new proposals for major disciplinary developments, degree and postgraduate programmes requiring approval of the university Academic Board and University Council, and approval by the nationally-representative Committee on University Academic Programmes of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee. Minor proposals, however, are approved within the universities. Adult and Community Education courses, by their nature, fall into that category. However, the Government does require Adult and Community Education courses to be approved by the Academic Board. In practice, the Academic Boards in larger universities generally delegate the authority for approval to authorising agents ensuring there are reporting mechanisms and feedback loops.

The audits examined both the written requirements for approval and the documentation of the process of approval of a random sample of courses. All universities showed a seriousness of intent and have adequate processes, with details of the processes reflecting the structure and procedures consistent with the universities’ broader approaches to course approval. The best examples contained full documentation and paper trails; some were less detailed in documented evidence, assuming that due professional care had been taken by those responsible before final sign-off. In most cases, reporting back to the Academic Board was well documented ensuring that the proper exercise of delegated authority could be evidenced.

Good practice suggests that the approval process requires written documentation that includes:

- ***clearly-stated learning objectives and a description of course content,***
- ***an assessment of the alignment of a course against the national priorities for university Adult and Community Education,***
- ***a reputational, financial and health and safety risk assessment, given that community courses can touch on controversial issues,***

- *approval of the tutor,*
- *sign off by the head of the academic department(s)/faculties responsible for the academic content, teaching, delivery of the course, and provision of resources,*
- *sign-off by the person with university responsibilities for Adult and Community Education,*
- *sign-off by the authorising officer properly delegated by the Academic Board.*

There is the expectation that sign-off indicates that each course has been developed, and will be quality assured, as required by the guiding principles and process as set down by the Committee on University Academic Programmes,

Many universities followed *good practice by re-validating courses that were repeated from year to year, requiring assurance that adequate notice had been taken of suggestions for improvement through various methods of feedback, and that resources were available to maintain and enhance the quality of the courses in the year of revalidation.*

One university had recently instituted a *good practice whereby a senior committee of the university audited a sample of Adult and Community Education courses, providing a report indicating where, in the view of the committee, less than satisfactory attention to the quality assurance processes associated with Adult and Community Education was evident.* This report was referred to the appropriate operational unit and provided assurance to the Academic Board.

Personnel

All universities recognise that the key to the success of Adult and Community Education is the quality of teaching. Adult and Community Education courses are taught by tutors who are University academic staff, or research students, or teachers external to the University and who are experts in their fields. It is expected that staff from outside of the university are of such quality as to make them eligible for appointment to the university. Very often, staff from outside the university have pre-existing links with the university. Most universities have position descriptions setting out recruitment criteria and in some cases explicit expectations.

Good practice suggests that universities develop explicit selection criteria and that all tutors be issued with a statement of specific requirements along with the university's expectations of all employees in respect to professional conduct and employee/contractor obligations.

Two universities follow a *good practice of producing information handbooks on tutoring, having been compiled after consultation with tutors. Such handbooks contain information about teaching for the university continuing education unit, how to design courses, effective teaching tips, the resources available for teachers, and relevant university policies in areas such as health and safety and emergency procedures.* Tutors who were interviewed appreciated access to the useful and relevant information in support of their teaching.

The audit panels heard much from tutors about the support for their teaching given by centre staff and programme managers. Support for tutors is given in both the development of courses and in their delivery. The panels also heard of the access to university staff professional development units for the staff of centres for continuing education. In line with the university priorities for Adult and Community Education, two universities had enhancement initiatives in the area of

teaching support and professional development for centre staff and contracted tutors, signifying the importance they attach to maintaining and improving teaching quality.

In line with the distinctive contribution universities are expected to make to Adult and Community Education provision, ***good practice suggests the opening of university staff development courses on the teaching of adult learners to Adult and Community Education tutors from other providers within the Adult and Community Education network, giving expression to the national university priority number 5 regarding building capacity in the wider Adult and Community Education sector.***

One university is offering such opportunities at present, and another university has an enhancement initiative to this effect.

Marketing and delivery of courses

Adult and Community Education courses are marketed through a variety of publications and website entries. In most universities, the content of such material was informative and useful, and of assistance to students in making decisions about their choice of courses. Attention was being given by universities in areas where content was less informative or where there were difficulties in locating the course website.

Good practice suggests that Adult and Community Education web pages should be easily accessible from the university's home page for the general public who may have little understanding of university nomenclatures or structures.

Universities take care that the facilities used for Adult and Community Education courses are of adequate standard, with most courses offered in university teaching rooms. Sites other than university teaching spaces are inspected and appropriate teaching equipment supplied and all legal and health requirements are met. Efforts were being made to ensure ease of access to facilities out-of-normal-hours.

In the case of field trips, specific arrangements and precautions are generally taken, although the audits suggested that more attention could be paid to tutors' briefings and awareness in respect of the potential for extraordinary health and safety issues that can arise on such occasions.

Good practice suggests centres for continuing education should align their health and safety and fieldwork policies to those of the university. In every Adult and Community Education course, the universities should ensure that there is proper training of tutors in university health and safety policies and requirements, and that there are adequate briefings given to students at the beginning of the courses commensurate with the levels of risk associated with the distinctive form of delivery of courses.

The audits indicated that the quality of information provided to students at the beginning of courses in some cases varied within a university's programme, often depending on the individual programme manager, as well as across the universities. Learners are entitled to information about the course content, any assessment or formative feedback where applicable, and need to know about administrative policies and procedures related to such matters as early withdrawal and grievance.

Good practice suggests that at the beginning of each course, all students are provided with written information about the course that follows a standard template that includes:

- *information for students on the learning objectives, course content and topics for each session, learning requirements of the course, assessment (where applicable), and additional materials and resources,*
- *information, or reference to where information may be found, on such things as withdrawal from courses, refunds and grievance policies.*

As well, students should be given a health and safety briefing appropriate to the nature of the course and the situation in which the course is being delivered.

Access to Library facilities for both non-university-staff tutors and for students varied. Some arrangements were excellent with full access for tutors and students. In line with the distinctive contribution universities are expected to make to Adult and Community Education provision, *good practice suggests that arrangements should be negotiated with Library management to ensure tutors who are not members of the university's staff have access to research and teaching materials relevant to the courses they offer during the period of preparation for that course, and that students have full access to the Library resources during the course.*

Learner evaluations and the review of courses

All universities provided opportunities for learners to evaluate Adult and Community Education courses. Normally those courses taught by first-time tutors are evaluated by students during the first offering. If a significant problem or issue is identified in a previous evaluation, a course is evaluated during its next iteration. In all universities, discussions took place between programme staff and tutors where there were performance issues. In one university, this extended to documenting concerns and, if required, using performance management approaches to address issues of ongoing concern.

Good practice suggests the use of performance development and management techniques with tutors ensuring they receive feedback, coaching and training where needed.

In some universities, a 'random' selection of courses is evaluated each year, although the selection of courses is usually designed to ensure all courses are evaluated at least once every three years. Some universities also encourage tutors to undertake 'fast feedback' surveys early in a course. *An example of good practice was the use of fast feedback questionnaires part-way through longer courses.*

Audit panels noted that, from a sample of evaluations read, the feedback is generally positive and it saw evidence of issues of concern or suggestions for improvement being referred by programme managers to tutors and being included in enhancements to repeats of courses. The feedback forms also encouraged ideas for new topics for courses from learners. The panels also noted that some universities had enhancement initiatives to further improve the feedback, including online feedback processes.

Good practice suggests that where changes have been made arising from information received from learner feedback, students are made aware of the changes, thus reinforcing the value of giving feedback and signalling that changes can be made in response to learners' comments.

Another example of good practice was one university that periodically followed up students using telephone surveys, thus overcoming the issue of getting feedback from learners who had dropped out.

Grievance processes

Universities take student grievance seriously and those responsible for Adult and Community Education as a matter of principle make themselves available to students who have complaints. There would appear to be very few complaints in such courses, and the panels were assured that such complaints as might occur are dealt with quickly and effectively. University grievance procedures are applicable to Adult and Community Education learners, but few universities advise their Adult and Community Education students that grievance procedures exist or how to access them. *Good practice suggests that all students must be told how to access grievance processes, and that the inclusion of such in the written information provided to all students at the beginning of a course would be the most appropriate vehicle, as well as in information on the website.*

There was variability in the practice of how complaints were documented and the procedures followed. *Good practice in customer-focussed organisations suggests that it is advisable to have clearly documented procedures and to maintain a complaints register so that patterns can be monitored and, where necessary, systemic interventions taken.*

Collaboration with other providers

At the time of the audit, three of the universities funded for Adult and Community Education reported they had no sub-contracting arrangements in this area.

Two universities delivered a number of courses in partnerships with agencies external to the universities. However, they maintained complete control of the employment of tutors and the approval of courses. In those cases, there were no sub-contracting arrangements for the *teaching* of the courses.

One university had two sub-contracting arrangements which facilitated the provision of community education taught by the sub-contracted providers, with university oversight of teaching, course materials and provision of teaching facilities.

Good practice requires that in maintaining sub-contracting arrangements with other providers, universities must ensure that courses delivered by the providers align with national university priorities in Adult and Community Education, and that the processes followed by the providers are consistent with the university's processes for the approval, delivery and quality assurance of Adult and Community Education courses.

Appendix

Quality assurance of Adult and Community Education programmes

Taken from Appendix G to:
New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, Committee on University Academic Programmes,
Functions and Procedures, 2005-2006, updated January 2006

Below are outlined:

- 1 the guiding principles related to the approval and quality assurance of community education courses provided by universities, and
- 2 an approval process

that will ensure university Adult and Community Education courses are appropriately quality assured and meet the Tertiary Education Commission's requirements for Adult and Community Education.

Guiding Principles

Adult and Community Education courses provided by a university should

- reflect the university's commitments under its Charter, in particular access to education,
- satisfy the university's quality assurance requirements,
- reflect the standing of the university as a provider of advanced learning,
- be appropriate to the university's educational context.

Process

A university offering Adult and Community Education courses should:

- engage in community consultation about learning needs,
- have proposals approved by the university's Academic Board,
- ensure that courses meet the Academic Board's requirements for sub-contracting arrangements, where there are such arrangements,
- ensure that courses are taught by appropriately qualified staff in a suitably resourced learning environment,
- ensure that the university's processes for handling grievances and disciplinary matters extend to Adult and Community Education students,
- give students an opportunity to complete course evaluations at the end of a course, where appropriate.