



ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS
OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF
BROCK UNIVERSITY**

OCTOBER 2013

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Brock University is one of two universities to be audited in the first eight-year cycle of quality assurance audits under the new Quality Assurance Framework for Ontario universities. The objective of the audit is to determine whether or not the institution has complied with the provisions of its Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) for cyclical program reviews and the development of new programs, as ratified by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council). Three arm's length auditors who are members of the Quality Council Audit Panel conducted this review. Quality Council staff assisted throughout the audit.

The audit involved a review of Brock University's IQAP and selection of a set of the University's programs that have gone through quality assurance under its IQAP. This detailed review involved a desk audit of all documents pertaining to each program and a three-day site visit (from March 26 to 28, 2013), during which time the auditors met with faculty, staff and students involved in each program and with the senior academic leaders of the University. The support and professionalism of all members of the Brock University community who participated in and assisted with the audit is gratefully acknowledged.

The audit focused on:

- Four cyclical program reviews – General Studies: BA and BSc; Kinesiology: BPhEd and BKin; Earth Sciences: MSc and BSc; and Education: Joint PhD
- Three new program approvals – Game Design: BA; Game Programming: BSc; and Master's of Sustainability: Science and Society: MS
- Two major modifications to existing programs – Native Teacher Education: BEd, and History: MA

In summary, the audit team concluded that Brock University's quality assurance process has been developing very well. The University's IQAP is a generally clear document that has provided sound guidance to those involved in quality assurance. The Academic Review Committee (ARC) is doing an impressive job in overseeing the process. There is important support for quality assurance through the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic, particularly through the efforts of the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Academic. The University's academic leaders and other participants in the process have been thoughtful about considering potential improvements to the IQAP and related processes. The recommendations and suggestions in the audit report are intended to further assist in improvement. A recommendation identifies an instance

in which an institution has failed to comply with its IQAP, and must be implemented; a suggestion provides advice on how to achieve best practices in quality assurance. The list of specific recommendations and suggestions follows on page 3.

There are four issues that emerged across multiple programs. These concern the site review process; articulation of degree level expectations, learning outcomes and curriculum mapping; dispersion of responsibility for data gathering and analysis; and the need to ensure that quality assurance at Brock University is seen as a platform for excellence in academic planning and continuous program improvement.

The report's eight recommendations concern areas where Brock University was found not to be in compliance with its own IQAP or with Ontario's Quality Assurance Framework. In the case of cyclical program reviews, the recommendations concern the following requirements: to address all evaluation sub-criteria regarding program quality; to develop specific learning outcomes for all programs and link these to curricula and learning modes; to strengthen the rigour of the selection process for external and internal reviewers; and to ensure broader involvement of faculty, staff and students in the preparation of self-studies. One recommendation for new program approval concerns joint programs, and the need to create a new section of the IQAP that deals with their development. The report's concluding recommendation is that Brock University ensures that all of its programs are subject to cyclical review through the University's IQAP. External accreditation, although important for some programs, does not supersede the University's own quality assurance process.

The report also makes 17 suggestions that may be helpful to Brock University in strengthening its quality assurance process. These suggestions concern the integration of graduate and undergraduate program reviews; further ideas regarding instilling a constructive approach to quality assurance in the university; strengthening the site review process; clarifying responsibilities, timelines and improving communication among different participants in the quality assurance process; strengthening central supports for quality assurance, especially in the areas of data analysis and development of learning outcomes; and dealing more specifically with program discontinuation.

The auditors conclude with a brief commentary on how the *seriatim* review of programs under the Brock University IQAP might constructively inform the broader institutional academic planning and resource allocation process.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: Brock University must verify that each sub-criterion in its IQAP is dealt with in the self-studies before proceeding to the next stage of the review.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Brock University's graduate programs must develop explicit learning outcomes and map them to their curricula.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Brock University's IQAP must be amended to describe in more detail the external and internal reviewer selection process (Quality Assurance Framework section 4.2.4 b).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Brock University must ensure that it is in compliance with section G of its IQAP regarding the involvement of faculty, staff and students in preparation of the self-study.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Brock University must identify the relationship between learning outcomes and learning modes in its self-studies and external reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Brock University must develop a specific section of its IQAP that sets out a process for reviewing programs such as General Studies programs that do not have a single departmental home or prescribed set of courses. Particular attention should be paid to developing and assessing learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Brock University's IQAP must be amended to elaborate the process for developing joint programs, especially those of an inter-institutional and dual credential nature.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The University must ensure that all programs are included on the schedule for cyclical program review including those that are subject to accreditation.

SUGGESTION 1: The opportunity of conducting an integrated review enables the institution to consider the linkages between the undergraduate and graduate programs from an educational and an efficiency perspective. Brock University might think about points at which it would like specific discussion of the integration and alignment between the undergraduate and graduate programs in the self-study.

SUGGESTION 2: Brock University should undertake a more concerted effort to support and develop understanding of the benefits of working with a learning outcomes focus in quality assurance.

SUGGESTION 3: The responsibility of verifying that the reviewers are at arm's length should be formally assigned to the individual who, as designated in Brock University's IQAP, appoints the external reviewers.

SUGGESTION 4: Section J of Brock University's IQAP should be amended to instruct the reviewers to explicitly reference all of the evaluation criteria set out in section E of the IQAP. It might be helpful to provide external reviewers with a report template that includes all evaluation criteria.

SUGGESTION 5: Brock University should consider amending its IQAP to provide more specific instruction about the link between existing resources as set out in the evaluation criteria for learning outcomes (section II E 5 a) and the instructions for the reviewers' report regarding recommended actions to improve the program (section II J 4 c).

SUGGESTION 6: Brock University should consider revising its IQAP to clarify roles and reporting expectations between its Academic Review Committee and two Senate Committees, Senate Undergraduate Program Committee and Senate Graduate Studies Committee.

SUGGESTION 7: Brock University should consider establishing a university-wide process by which Deans and other affected senior budget managers would review draft Final Assessment Reports prior to distribution to Senate.

SUGGESTION 8: Brock University should review the package of data required for its self-studies, providing a comparable, analytically complete data set to units undergoing cyclical program review. The University should also develop a timeline to ensure the provision of data at an appropriate point.

SUGGESTION 9: Brock University might consider undertaking a gap analysis to determine if there are items in its IQAP that are not included in the IQAPs of partner institutions. Where gaps exist, procedures should be put in place to ensure that the requirements for cyclical program reviews under the Brock University IQAP are met.

SUGGESTION 10: Brock University should monitor the timelines associated with reviews of joint programs led by partner institutions in order to encourage a timely process.

SUGGESTION 11: Section 3 B of Brock University's IQAP should be reviewed and clarified. One approach might be to develop a timeline that works backward, in the number of weeks associated with each stage of approval, and that begins with the arrival of the first cohort of students.

SUGGESTION 12: Brock University should consider encouraging proponents of a new program to post that program's Statement of Intent for broad review within the University.

SUGGESTION 13: Brock University should consider providing additional encouragement and support to proponents of new programs in their program learning outcomes/curriculum mapping process.

SUGGESTION 14: Brock University should review the protocols for obtaining data in support of new program development, with the aim of providing the best level of central support possible to new program proponents.

SUGGESTION 15: Brock University may want to consider making specific reference in its IQAP regarding the practice of program proponents attending the relevant Academic Review Committee meeting(s) to receive comments on new program proposals.

SUGGESTION 16: Brock University may want to review its IQAP to ensure that there are processes for efficient communication between university-level committees and program proponents.

SUGGESTION 17: Brock University should consider including a separate section in its IQAP on program discontinuation.