



**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES**  
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE

**SUMMARY OF AUDITORS' REPORT ON THE  
SCOPE OF MCMASTER UNIVERSITY'S  
RESPONSE TO THE QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AUDIT**

**OCTOBER 2020**

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# AUDITORS' REPORT ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

## SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance undertook an Audit of Quality Assurance at McMaster University in 2018. As with all such audits, the purpose was to assess the extent to which McMaster University is in compliance with its own Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP) and to affirm that institutional practices are consistent with the Quality Assurance Framework that governs all Ontario Universities.

The 2018 Audit Report of McMaster University contained nine recommendations and 16 suggestions. Under the Quality Assurance Framework, universities must satisfy audit recommendations, as they identify institutional practices that are not compliant with the university's IQAP. Suggestions are made by the audit team in the spirit of encouraging reflection on how practice might be improved, and thus compliance is not mandatory.

The Quality Assurance Framework requires that each institution submit a one-year follow-up response to the Quality Council. McMaster University submitted its One-year Response and letter from the Provost on September 21, 2020. Auditors have concluded that McMaster University's One-year Response satisfactorily addresses the Audit Report's nine recommendations.

The University's One-year Response, submitted in September 2020, serves as the basis for this report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Ensure that all steps of the relevant quality assurance process required by the IQAP are fully documented.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Develop a sign-off procedure to ensure the preparation and completeness of self-studies for Cyclical Program Reviews, of new program proposals, and the report from the Review Committee for Cyclical Program Reviews and new program proposals.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Revise the IQAP to include a clear process for the review of joint programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to indicate that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for Cyclical Program Reviews are to be distributed to the academic unit responsible for the program and that this stage of the process is to be documented.

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

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Include a formal statement listing the specific programs to be included as part of the CPR with the introductory materials sent to the relevant academic unit or units.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Clarify the role of the internal reviewer.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Ensure that all progress reports are produced, as required by the IQAP's process for monitoring new programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** Revise the IQAP to require the external review of a new program to take place prior to Senate approval.

## **CONCLUSION**

McMaster University's One-year Response describes how they have addressed the recommendations in the Audit Report and the auditors found these revised steps satisfy the recommendations. The auditors commend McMaster University on their engagement in the Quality Assurance process. The University has clearly provided careful consideration of Audit Team's recommendations and suggestions.

September 21, 2020

Dr. Ian Orchard  
Senior Director Academic  
Council of Ontario Universities  
180 Dundas Street West, Suite 1800 Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8

Dear Dr. Orchard,

**Subject: McMaster One-Year Follow-Up Report**


On behalf of McMaster University, I am pleased to submit the one-year follow up report in response to the Quality Assurance Audit report.

The enclosed report describes the steps the University has taken to address the audit recommendations and suggestions.

I would like to thank the auditors for their recommendations and suggestions. The steps the University has taken in response to the audit will further enhance the quality assurance processes and support the development and continuous improvement of the academic programs at McMaster.

Should you require additional information please contact me at [avpfac@mcmaster.ca](mailto:avpfac@mcmaster.ca).

Sincerely,



Dr. Kimberley Dej  
Acting Vice Provost, Faculty

## McMaster University Quality Assurance Audit: One-Year Follow Up Report

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Ensure that all steps of the relevant quality assurance process required by the IQAP are fully documented

### Response

McMaster is committed to supporting this recommendation and as such regularly reviews its Quality Assurance process to ensure that all steps of the process are being upheld and fully documented. In 2016, McMaster began using the SharePoint system to ensure that all formal documentation related to the Quality Assurance process are securely saved and stored. Representatives of the IQAP Office and School of Graduate Studies meet regularly to create and/or update guidebooks and templates related to the QA process at McMaster to ensure accuracy of self-study, new program and review report documents. These regular meetings also ensure that the process for reviewing undergraduate and graduate programs are completed in parallel. As we have revised and updated our process as a result of the auditors' recommendations and suggestions, ensuring accurate records and documentation of the quality assurance process was a key priority.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Develop a sign-off procedure to ensure the preparation and completeness of self-studies for Cyclical Program Reviews, of new program proposals, and the report from the Review Committee for Cyclical Program Reviews and new program proposals

### Response

Signature lines for both the Chair and the Dean, or Dean's delegate, have been added to the cover page of the self-study templates for both cyclical review self-study and new program proposals. A signature line for the Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, has been added to the cover of the reviewer's report templates for cyclical program reviews and new program proposals. Checklists have also been added to the front page of the self-study and reviewers' report templates to clearly identify what the individual is endorsing. Both the appropriate Program Chair and Dean, or their designates must sign off on the completeness of the documents. For interdisciplinary programs, all relevant Program Chairs and Deans, or their designates, must sign off on the completeness of the documents.

Pending approval at McMaster and Quality Council, McMaster's IQAP policy will include the following statements regarding sign-off procedures for both cyclical reviews and new program proposals as well as reviewers' reports. The revised policy will be submitted for approval at McMaster in the fall 2020.

#### New Program Proposals

Section 5.3; Page 6-7

Both the Chair and the Dean, or Dean's delegate, ensure that the proposal has met all of the New Program Proposal criteria outlined below and sign off on the completeness

of the proposal. For an interdisciplinary program, all affiliated program Chairs and appropriate Deans, or the Deans' delegates, sign off on the completeness of the proposal.

New Program Proposals, Reviewers' Report

Section 5.5.; Page 10

The Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, will review the reviewers' report for completeness.

Cyclical Review Self-Study

Section 7.1; Page 13

Both the Chair and the Dean, or the Dean's delegates, ensure that the self-study has met all of the self-study criteria and sign off on the completeness of the self-study. For interdisciplinary programs, all affiliated program Chairs and appropriate Deans, or the Deans' delegates, sign off on the completeness of the self-study.

Cyclical Review, Reviewers' Report

Section 7.2; Page 17

The Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, will review the Review Team's report for completeness and will circulate it to the appropriate Chairs and Deans.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Revise the IQAP to include a clear process for the review of joint programs

**Response**

McMaster's IQAP policy has been revised to clarify the process for the review of programs delivered in partnership with other educational institutions. Pending approval at McMaster and Quality Council, the policy will now include the following:

Section 7; Page 13

For academic programs delivered in partnership with other educational institutions, the Chair must ensure that representatives from all educational institutions in the partnership are consulted during all key stages of the cyclical review process, including self-study, site visit, implementation and monitoring.

In practice, for joint programs the requirement to include all educational institutions in the partnership in the review process will be communicated to the chair of the program in the initial notification email of the program's upcoming review.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** Revise the IQAP and institutional practice to indicate that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for Cyclical Program Reviews are to be distributed

to the academic unit responsible for the program and that this stage of the process is to be documented

### **Response**

McMaster's policy has been revised to indicate that the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for Cyclical Programs are distributed to the academic unit responsible for the program. Pending approval at McMaster and Quality Council, the policy will now include the following. The revised policy will be submitted for approval at McMaster in the fall 2020.

#### Section 7.3, Page 17

The Final Assessment Report from the Quality Assurance Committee along with **any recommendations or comments is sent to the program** and presented to Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council, as appropriate, and then to Senate. These governing bodies will consider if additional recommendations or comments are necessary. If so, these recommendations or comments will be presented to the Provost and Vice-President (Academic). **These will be communicated via email to the Chair**, the Dean and the Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, to the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

In practice, McMaster was already informing academic units via email of the outcome of their Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan. As of August 2020, records of this stage of the process will be kept in McMaster's SharePoint system.

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

### **Response**

McMaster's IQAP policy, pending approval, now requires the Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, to review the Review Team's report for completeness (Section 7.2; Page 17). If the report is deemed insufficient, the Vice-Provost Faculty and/or the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies will go back to the Review Team to request additional information be included in the report. The process for ensuring completeness of the external reviewer reports is outlined in McMaster's response to Recommendation 2.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** Include a formal statement listing the specific programs to be included as part of the CPR with the introductory materials sent to the relevant academic unit or units

### **Response**

As of September 2019, McMaster includes all the specific programs to be reviewed in its initial email notification to academic units of upcoming cyclical program reviews.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Clarify the role of the internal reviewer



**Response**

McMaster's IQAP policy, pending approval, now specifies that the role of the reviewer is to review and comment on the report prepared by external reviewers. In practice, the role of both the external reviewers and internal reviewer is clarified at the beginning of the site visit by the Vice-Provost (Faculty) or, in the case of graduate programs, the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies (Section 7.2; Page 17). We are also creating a guiding document for reviewers that further outlines the role of the internal reviewer and will provide some guiding principles and best practices for participation in reviews and site visits. This guide will be shared with internal reviewers once they have confirmed their participation in an upcoming review.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Ensure that all progress reports are produced, as required by the IQAP's process for monitoring new programs

**Response**

As of January 2020, the MacPherson Institute and the School of Graduate Studies uses SharePoint to ensure tracking of new program processes, including the completion of progress reports.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** Revise the IQAP to require the external review of a new program to take place prior to Senate approval

**Response**

Pending approval at McMaster and Quality Council, the IQAP policy has revised the process of approvals such that external reviews for new programs occur prior to approval at Senate. The revised policy will be submitted for approval at McMaster in the fall 2020. New programs currently in process are permitted to proceed with Senate approval first followed by a site visit until the revised policy comes into effect.

**SUGGESTION 1:** Consider an information session for senior administrators on quality assurance

**Response**

As of July 2019, McMaster offers information meeting to all incoming senior administrators to orient them to the quality assurance process.

**SUGGESTION 2:** Revise the composition of the Quality Assurance committee so that the membership is significantly different from the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils

**Response**

McMaster has begun conversations around the composition of the Quality Assurance Committee to determine whether or not it is desirable to change the pools from where the membership is drawn. If it is deemed that changes to the composition will be made, they will be phased in beginning 2021 – 2022.

**SUGGESTION 3:** Consider updating the flowchart to match the 2017 IQAP

**Response**

Once the revised IQAP policy is approved both internally and by Quality Council, the flowchart will be updated to match the most current version of the policy.

**SUGGESTION 4:** Consider a process for checking arm's-length status of external reviewers

**Response**

As of May 2020, McMaster now requires external reviewers to sign a self-declaration indicating the reviewer's arm's length from all programs they are reviewing. The self-declaration statement is as follows:

*REVIEWER'S NAME is external to McMaster University and has no known planned, existing, or recent (6 years) personal and/or professional relationships with McMaster or current members of the Department /Program.*

**SUGGESTION 5:** Consider creating a "Best Practice for Site Visits" document for department chairs

**Response**

As of January 2020, a guide for Site Visits has been shared with chairs whose programs will have site visits in the upcoming year. The document includes checklists of to-dos and a table that outlines responsibilities involved before, during, and after the site visit. It also includes guidance around setting up meetings and advice on how meeting participants can prepare for the site visit. This support document works in conjunction with a Site Visit information session run jointly by the IQAP Office and the School of Graduate Studies for program chairs, or their delegates.

**SUGGESTION 6:** Consider a standard set of data for academic units preparing a self- study

**Response**

A standard set of data exists and is provided to programs via McMaster's BI Tool. The IQAP Office and McMaster's Office for Institutional Research and Analysis regularly assess the data needs of programs and work together to ensure programs are well supported. For example, focus groups were held in January 2020 with program representatives that recently completed a review to determine if and how their data needs could be better met.

**SUGGESTION 7:** Consider providing a fuller description of how the self-study was developed in section 10 of the self-study template

**Response**

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement of our Quality Assurance processes, McMaster regularly updates cyclical review guidebooks and templates. The 2020/21 edition of

the IQAP cyclical review guidebook will include more instruction of section 10 to ensure this section is completed more thoroughly.

**SUGGESTION 8:** Consider changing the process so that the Chair is not the reviewer of the completeness of the self-study

**Response**

As outlined in the response to Recommendation 2, a signature page including a checklist for completeness of the self-study is required to be completed by both the appropriate program chair and Dean's, or their designate.

**SUGGESTION 9:** Consider creating an expanded description of and providing training for internal reviewers

**Response**

Please refer to the response to Recommendation 7 wherein we have outlined how we have revised our policy and processes to clarify the role of the internal reviewer.

**SUGGESTION 10:** Consider developing a protocol for addressing late Review Committee's reports

**Response**

All Review Teams are given a timeframe in which the reports must be completed. In the event that a response is overdue, the IQAP Office or School of Graduate Studies will send a reminder after 5 days. If the report is not received within one week of the reminder, a new follow-up reminder will be issued from the office of the Vice-Provost (Faculty) or Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.

As is the current practice, honoraria will be withheld until such time as the report has been submitted and is deemed complete.

**SUGGESTION 11:** Consider involving the library earlier in the process so that they can ensure the preparation of a library report

**Response**

As of November 2019, a library representative is now invited to the annual kick off event for programs about to begin their cyclical review self-study preparations.

**SUGGESTION 12:** Consider using current student partners as mentors for the next set of student partners

**Response**

While it would certainly be valuable to have current student partners act as mentors for the following year's student partners, at this time, it is not financially feasible to implement this suggestion.

**SUGGESTION 13:** Consider providing more specific timelines in the Implementation Plan appropriate to each individual recommendation

**Response**

As of June 2020, Implementation Plan template now includes specific timeline prompts related to each recommendation from the reviewers. The IQAP Office also continues to offer consultations with programs during the implementation phase of the process to ensure programs are working to meet the timelines they have indicated.

**SUGGESTION 14:** Consider developing a process for regular monitoring of the recommendations set out in the CPR Implementation Plan

**Response**

As of October 2019, began revising templates and consulting with QAC. Additionally, pending approval at McMaster and by Quality Council McMaster's revised policy includes the following line. The revised policy will be submitted for approval at McMaster in the fall 2020.

Section 7.3; Page 18

The Quality Assurance Committee, in some circumstances, will request follow up reporting on specific components if not satisfactorily addressed in 18 month report. The Quality Assurance Committee will present progress reports to Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council, if deemed necessary by the Chairs of the Quality Assurance Committee.

**SUGGESTION 15:** Consider adding the date of the last review to the list of programs on the Cyclical Program Review Schedule to ensure that program reviews do not exceed the IQAP's eight-year review requirement

**Response**

As of January 2020, the Cyclical Program Review Schedule has been updated and posted on the [website](#).

**SUGGESTION 16:** Consider creating a list of the examples of major and minor modifications

**Response**

A draft of the document listing examples of major and minor modifications has been created. Once it has been finalized by the IQAP office and School of Graduate Studies, it will be posted on The IQAP Website.