SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL FINDINGS OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

OCTOBER 2013
The University of Ottawa’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) was ratified by the Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Council (Quality Council) and adopted by the University of Ottawa in June 2011. The University of Ottawa is one of the first two Ontario universities to undergo a quality assurance audit under the new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which allows for the audit of all publicly assisted universities in Ontario over an eight-year cycle. The purpose of the audit is to determine whether the University has complied with the terms of its IQAP.

A team of three auditors was assigned to conduct the University of Ottawa audit. They selected for audit nine programs that had been reviewed, modified or approved under the University’s IQAP. The auditors reviewed all the relevant documentation provided by the University of Ottawa. Their desk audit was followed up by a three-day site visit in March 2013, during which time the auditors met with faculty, staff and students involved in each program and with senior academic leaders of the University. The Executive Director and staff of the Quality Council provided support throughout the process.

The programs selected for audit were: two undergraduate cyclical program reviews (Honours BA with Specialization in Ethics and Society, and BComm); two graduate cyclical program reviews (Biochemistry and Education); one new graduate program approval (MA in Bilingualism Studies); major modifications to two undergraduate programs (Honours BA with Major in Human Relations and Spirituality, and Common Law JD); major modifications to one graduate program (PhD in Nursing); and the expedited approval of one new graduate program (Collaborative MA and MSc in Environmental Sustainability). In many cases, the review processes were still in progress at the time of the site visit.

The auditors were very grateful for the helpfulness, courtesy, and professionalism extended to them by the members of the University of Ottawa community who prepared for and assisted in the audit. The auditors were also very impressed by their commitment to the quality assurance process and to the importance of following – and of being seen to be following – the procedures in the University’s IQAP. The recommendations and suggestions in the audit report are intended to further support this commitment. 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.
Overall, the auditors found a generally high level of compliance with the procedures as specified in the University of Ottawa’s IQAP. They made four recommendations. Recommendations 2 and 4 involve cases in which practices at the University of Ottawa conform to its IQAP, but where the IQAP is not consistent with the Quality Assurance Framework. Recommendation 1 concerns a case in which the quality assurance practice does not align with the University’s IQAP, and Recommendation 3 was prompted by the auditors’ observation that not every graduate and undergraduate program is scheduled for cyclical review at least once every eight years.

When developing its IQAP, the University of Ottawa elected to develop different quality assurance procedures for its undergraduate and graduate programs. In the latter case, the procedures rely heavily on the old Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) review system. The early experience of those responsible for implementing the University’s IQAP has been that it is unwieldy and that the highly detailed templates and many layers of review and approval not only require unsustainably large time commitments on the part of faculty members and administrators, but also appear to contribute to significant delays in the completion of program reviews and the approval of even modest proposals for course and/or program changes.

The auditors were asked by those responsible for quality assurance processes at the University of Ottawa to make suggestions concerning how to streamline its IQAP. They thus made several suggestions to assist the University when it reviews its IQAP and the roles of the various committees charged with quality assurance responsibilities (especially for graduate programs). The majority of the other suggestions made by the auditors have to do with the following: assisting faculty members in developing and articulating learning outcomes for courses and programs, and using learning outcomes and degree level expectations as tools for measuring student success; ensuring that relevant data are provided in a timely fashion to academic units; ensuring that the relevant committee(s) provide explicit approval at a prescribed stage of the process; clarifying the approval steps for programs delivered by Saint Paul University; and considering the advantages of having a centralized Office of Quality Assurance at the University.

The auditors are of the view that, while the University’s compliance with its IQAP is generally very good, the time commitments on the part of faculty and administrators required by the procedures specified in the IQAP are exceedingly onerous and unlikely to be sustainable. The auditors believe that with a simplified, streamlined and more internally symmetrical IQAP, a review of its committee structure, and perhaps the introduction of a single office responsible for overseeing the University’s quality assurance processes, the University of Ottawa would be better placed to sustain an efficient and credible quality assurance process for all of its programs.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: The University of Ottawa should align its IQAP (section 3.2.1.2.3) and its practice regarding the development of the Proposal Brief for new For-Credit Graduate Diplomas and new Collaborative Programs.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The University of Ottawa should ensure that its general bachelor’s programs are included in the schedule of programs to be reviewed, and that these programs are reviewed using a version of the protocol outlined in 6.1 of its IQAP.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The University of Ottawa should review its schedules of undergraduate and graduate cyclical program reviews to ensure that all undergraduate and graduate programs at the University are reviewed at least every eight years.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The University of Ottawa should amend its IQAP to provide the relevant Dean(s) or delegates with the opportunity to respond to the external reviewers’ report on a proposed new graduate program.

SUGGESTION 1: The University of Ottawa should investigate how long it is taking to complete the cyclical reviews of its undergraduate and graduate programs, identify reasons for delays, and implement measures to reduce delays.

SUGGESTION 2: The University of Ottawa should consider requiring that the self-evaluation reports for cyclical program reviews be formally approved by the relevant academic unit(s) before the reports are forwarded to the appropriate university committee for review.

SUGGESTION 3: The University of Ottawa, with a view to simplifying and standardizing their procedures, should review the reasons for the discrepancy in the number of lists of possible external reviewers to be sent to the Senate Committee on the Evaluation of Undergraduate Programs and the Council on Undergraduate Studies respectively. It should also review the role of the Dean of the Faculty in proposing external reviewers for undergraduate program cyclical reviews and for new undergraduate programs.

SUGGESTION 4: The University of Ottawa should consider ways of streamlining the templates used in the cyclical reviews of its undergraduate and graduate programs to make them less onerous for faculty to complete and/or pre-populating the templates with the relevant data.

SUGGESTION 5: The University of Ottawa should consider permitting the use of alternative sources of data and evidence in the case of programs with low student numbers.
**SUGGESTION 6:** The University of Ottawa should consider ways in which to further assist its faculty members to develop and articulate learning outcomes for courses and programs.

**SUGGESTION 7:** The University of Ottawa should consider ways in which to further assist its faculty members to use learning outcomes and degree level expectations as tools for measuring student success.

**SUGGESTION 8:** When revisiting its IQAP and the various associated templates, the University of Ottawa may wish to consider ways of better coordinating some of the work (and scheduling) involved in cyclical program reviews mandated by its IQAP and accreditation reviews that must also be undertaken periodically.

**SUGGESTION 9:** The University of Ottawa might consider amending 6.2.1.3 a) of its IQAP to require that the Graduate Program Evaluation Committee approve final versions of the self-evaluation reports before they are forwarded to the external reviewers.

**SUGGESTION 10:** In reviewing the roles of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and its committees in the quality assurance processes and the devolution of some responsibilities to Faculties, the University of Ottawa should make sure that the delegation of responsibilities to Faculties avoids replication of processes and procedures.

**SUGGESTION 11:** The University of Ottawa should take steps to ensure the collection of reliable program-level data concerning student employment after graduation.

**SUGGESTION 12:** The University of Ottawa should rethink whether, in the cases of graduate program cyclical reviews and new graduate programs, the role of mentor should be combined with that of internal reviewer.

**SUGGESTION 13:** The University of Ottawa should reconsider the role of the internal reviewer. Perhaps there should be a single report, co-authored by the external and internal reviewers, or if the requirement of the internal reviewer’s report is retained, the report could be much briefer and more focused.

**SUGGESTION 14:** The University of Ottawa may wish to review the procedures in place to collect and deliver relevant data to the academic units for use in program reviews.

**SUGGESTION 15:** The steps for approval of proposals for minor modifications, major modifications, and new programs at Saint Paul University as well as the steps for its cyclical reviews of programs should be made explicit in the University of Ottawa’s IQAP.
SUGGESTION 16: Saint Paul University should develop a website on which it can post the results of the cyclical reviews of its undergraduate and graduate programs and the approval of new undergraduate and graduate programs.

SUGGESTION 17: The University of Ottawa should review its criteria for determining a major modification.

SUGGESTION 18: The University of Ottawa should review the approval processes for both minor and major modifications to make certain that each step provides added value in the University’s attempts to ensure and enhance the quality of its programs and the student learning experience. In particular, the University of Ottawa should consider whether minor modifications could be approved at the Faculty level.

SUGGESTION 19: The University of Ottawa should consider requiring that completed Letters of Intent for new Collaborative Programs and for For-Credit Graduate Diplomas be formally approved by the relevant academic units.

SUGGESTION 20: The University of Ottawa should consider requiring that proposal briefs for new Collaborative Programs and for For-Credit Graduate Diplomas be approved by the Graduate Program Committee or the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

SUGGESTION 21: The University of Ottawa should make clear at 2.1.1.3 of its IQAP that the Council on Undergraduate Studies is required to approve proposals for new undergraduate programs before these proposals are forwarded to the external reviewers.

SUGGESTION 22: The University of Ottawa should modify and streamline the templates for self-evaluation reports, proposals for new programs, and curricular modifications to reduce redundancies and to reflect the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework. It should also consider whether having some of the data pre-populated, perhaps by the Office of the Dean of the relevant Faculty, might assist in the timely completion of the templates. There should be links to each of the templates in a revised IQAP.

SUGGESTION 23: The University of Ottawa should consider the advantages of, where possible, conducting cyclical reviews of undergraduate and graduate programs simultaneously.

SUGGESTION 24: The University of Ottawa should rethink the roles of the Graduate Program Evaluation Committee, the Graduate Program Committee, and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in the quality assurance processes for graduate programs.
SUGGESTION 25: In reviewing its IQAP, the University of Ottawa should aim for as much symmetry in language and processes as possible across the various protocols, both undergraduate and graduate.

SUGGESTION 26: The University of Ottawa should consider the merits of having a central Office of Quality Assurance that has overall responsibility for quality assurance at the University, and that maintains a quality assurance website and a database documenting each review, each proposal for a new program, and each proposed modification to curricula.