



## TNE Quality Framework of AUQA

AUQA audits have a special emphasis on the 'transnational education (TNE)' arrangements. The primary reason for this emphasis is that these operations are inherently more difficult to control, being at a great distance from the base of the university's operations, embedded in a different culture, and under the charge of another organisation. Therefore, it is harder to get them right.

Because there is little experience world-wide in the exercise of an external quality assurance role over operations outside the country where the quality agency is based, AUQA set up a two-part structure. The first part, using a risk-based approach, is a group of factors that guide the audit panels in this area of high importance and visibility.

### ***Part 1: Sampling — Factors in deciding whether and which overseas operations to visit***

AUQA's detailed investigation is based on sampling. AUQA audit panels talk to samples of staff and students, inspect sample documents for a range of processes and activities, investigate a sample of research centres, and so on. This sampling includes operations on multiple campuses, operations with partner organisations, and operations overseas.

To assist panels in selecting overseas samples, AUQA has set down five factors for panels to consider in order to decide which overseas activities warrant a visit, and two more factors relating to practical aspects of carrying out such visits.

- i. Materiality: The panels consider whether the numbers of staff and students involved in an offshore venue are significant enough to warrant particular attention.
- ii. Strategic Significance: If the overseas activities are significant to the organisational strategies such as the subject of a major growth strategy then the audit panel may deem them sufficiently significant to warrant particular attention, even if the activity is currently quite small.
- iii. Risk Management: The likelihood and consequences of things going wrong with the overseas activities and the integrity of the institution's risk management system will be considered.

Risk to Students: An institution may lack experience in the provision of necessary systems for overseas students, and hence pose a greater risk to students.

- iv. Host Country Accreditation: Most overseas locations in which Australian institutions operate have external quality mechanisms of their own and the panels will consider to what extent their outcomes can be used to provide some of the information required for AUQA audit.

On the basis of these factors, the audit panel decides whether any TNE operations merit close attention, and if so, which ones. The panel then decides what sort of attention is feasible, by reflecting on:

- i. Practicality: An auditee may have a large number of relatively small-scale operations widely dispersed around the world, and it may be impractical to visit many but of dubious value to visit only one. The panel will consider the time available, and the spread and scale of the activities and choose the sample.
- ii. Necessity: Once the audit panel has decided on the level of attention needed, further information can always be obtained in various ways including additional documentation request, web search, and personal interaction through teleconferencing, video-conferencing, and even email. Thus, a physical visit overseas is only one option among a number of strategies available to an audit panel to carry out its investigations.

Each audit panel considers these seven factors and weighs their total effect, adequacy and value in deciding how to gather all the information it needs, and specifically which of an auditee's overseas activities to visit (or in rare cases, whether to undertake visits overseas at all).

## ***Part 2: Audit Investigation***

Much of the information gathered by audit panels and the evidence assessed by them is the same for operations through partners and/or overseas as for operations in Australia on the university's campus. Other information is more peculiar to these outreach operations. The second part of AUQA's TNE structure for its investigations of partner and particularly overseas operations is a 17-point framework. It is also noticeable that many universities have over-estimated the similarity of campus and partner operations, and have inadequate processes in place to reliably handle the different situation. They too have benefited from AUQA's TNE investigation framework as it has made institutions examine the arrangements related to these aspects more carefully.

In general, the following areas are considered by AUQA in investigating operations through partners and/or operations overseas.

- i. Philosophy and Rationale: What is the purpose of the university's transnational activity? What values underpin it? Who are the stakeholders/beneficiaries, what are their interests, and how are their interests being represented? What are the particular features of the selected location? How does all this influence the overall model?
- ii. Partners and Agents: What kind of partner is it (public university; private university; business provider; silent investor; controlled entity etc.)? What are the partner's motivations? Was a thorough due diligence undertaken first? Have potential risks been explored, identified and appropriately managed? Are agents experienced and trained? How are they monitored and reviewed?
- iii. Contract/Agreement: Was there appropriate consultation? (Contract consideration); Who signed the contract? (Contract authorization); Are the academic QA issues covered in a clear manner? Are the risk management provisions adequate? (Contract scope); Are there good communication processes? Is the contract subject to review? Is the program financially sound - i.e. are students at risk? Are the obligations of the parties clear including exit strategies? (Contract management)
- iv. Quality Control: Does the auditee have necessary and appropriate host country approvals (eg registration)? Do the partner and program have appropriate host country approvals (eg accreditation)? Does the program have appropriate professional accreditation?
- v. Governance: With whom are the students enrolled? With whom will they graduate? Are they quite clear about this? Do the university's policies apply (eg plagiarism, grievances etc.)? If so, are there appropriate training, communication, and operational and appeals processes in place? To what extent does the partner also impose policies, and do these affect the impact of university policies?
- vi. Staffing and Staff Development: Are there appropriate selection, induction, briefing, support & review processes for teachers? Does induction include training on cultural issues? Who employs, supports and monitors the staff? Is there student evaluation of staff? Do the university and the partner share the information? How does it feed into development opportunities?
- vii. Curriculum: Was the curriculum specifically approved within the auditee for transnational delivery? What did this entail (eg changes to teaching methods; assessment amendments; advanced standing)? Is the curriculum identical, equivalent, significantly tailored or unique? Is

it appropriately contextualised (eg case studies, cultural sensitivity)?  
Are professional accreditation issues made clear to students?

- viii. Marketing & Promotion: Is there an ESOS-type audit process in place? In what language is the program promoted? If not English, what quality control is in place? Who is doing the promotion and to what guidelines? Is it consistent with domestic promotion regarding curriculum and policies? How accurate is the promotion, e.g. regarding availability of electives? Is the text ambiguous or open to misinterpretation by the student?
- ix. Entry Standards: How do entrance and advanced standing standards compare with the home campus? How are the advanced standing provisions approved? How do they compare with the AQF and AVCC Policy Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages? Who handles the admissions process? How are the student records checked (eg regarding validity of the evidentiary requirements)?
- x. Language: In what language are the teaching and teaching materials? In what language is the assessment? If assessment is in English, what are the English Language requirements? Are these set at entry or at exit? How do they compare with the sector? If not English, how are the implications for marking and moderation handled? What appears on the testamur?
- xi. Teaching: Who does the teaching – the Australian university or the partner? Does the auditee claim a teaching-research nexus? If so, how is this effected transnationally? Does the teaching schedule provide adequate time for student reflection and assignments? Do students conduct teacher evaluations? Run by whom? What happens with the results?
- xii. Standards and Assessment: How are standards set and monitored? Is the assessment schedule identical, equivalent or different to the home program? Who does the marking? Is assessment moderated? Are results compared against the home program results? How is this information used? How is the robustness of academic security provisions (eg invigilation) assured? Do students get timely feedback on assessed work?
- xiii. Academic Support: How are the learning support needs of the students assessed and responded to? What access to library services and resources exist? How are these determined and evaluated? How do these support services compare with the support provided at the home campus? What form of evaluation is in place?
- xiv. Pastoral Support: Are the decisions made in respect of pastoral support services deliberately based on an assessment of student support requirements? How do these support services compare with the Australian campus? What form of evaluation is in place? Are cultural issues taken into account?

- xv. Research: How is the link between teaching and research achieved? For research degrees, how is supervision provided? Nature of research links to home campus? Provision of research support?
- xvi. Community links: How does the institution define its 'community'? Is there a relation with the local community in the host country? Are there institutional contributions to the local community? What are the provisions for community input and feedback (eg from employers, government)?
- xvii. Evaluation & Review: What are the local QA arrangements? Is there a regular process for reviewing the equivalency of the student learning environment? Who is involved? What information is considered and what happens to the results? How is the academic program reviewed? If it is incorporated into the review of the home program, does it receive sufficient attention? How and how often is the contract/agreement reviewed? Who is involved and what information is considered?

The areas listed above are only indicative. Depending on the nature of the operations and areas of risk, AUQA determines the areas that need further examination.