

## 2017/18 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS AUDIT ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

*The Summary was prepared by the Degree Quality Assessment Board Secretariat using the Institutional Report, the Expert Panel Report, and the Response to the Expert Panel Report. Royal Roads University was one of five public post-secondary institution volunteers to test the new Quality Assurance Process Audit during the pilot phase (2016-2018).*

### Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Degree Quality Assessment Board establish that audits will be based on information provided by public post-secondary institutions to ensure that rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes have been implemented.

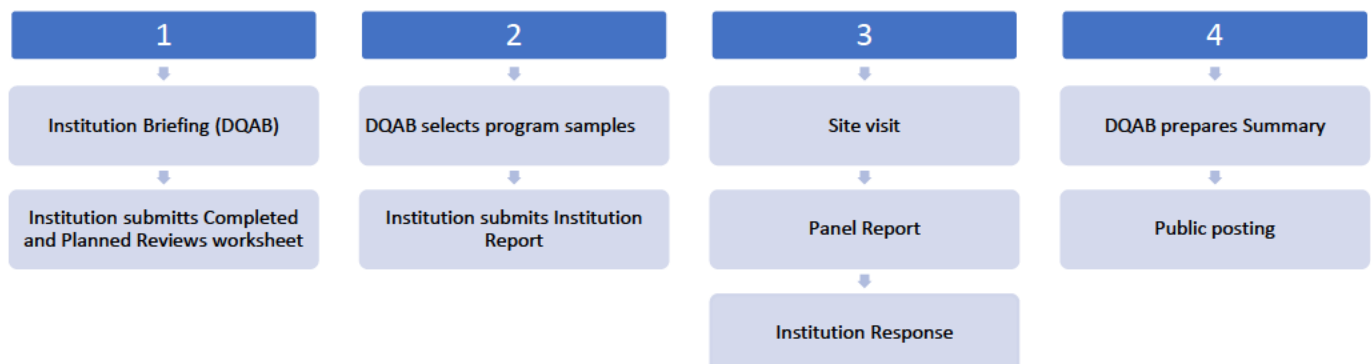
The main objectives of the quality assurance process audit (QAPA) are to ascertain that the institution:

- a) Continues to meet the program review policy requirements outlined in the DQAB's *Exempt Status Criteria and Guidelines* and the *Degree Program Review Criteria and Guidelines*, as applicable to the institution;
- b) Has and continues to meet appropriate program review processes and policies for all credential programs; and
- c) Applies its quality assurance process in relation to those requirements and responds to review findings appropriately.

The QAPA assessment is focused on answering questions in two categories:

1. Overall process
  - a. Does the process reflect the institution's mandate, mission, and values?
  - b. Is the scope of the process appropriate?
  - c. Are the guidelines differentiated and adaptable to respond to the needs and contexts of different units, e.g. faculties or departments or credential level?
  - d. Does the process promote quality improvement?
2. Review findings
  - a. Were the responses to the sample program review findings adequate?
  - b. Does the process inform future decision making?
  - c. Are the review findings appropriately disseminated?

**Figure 1: QAPA Process**



## Royal Roads University – Institutional Context

Royal Roads University (RRU) was established through the *Royal Roads University Act* with a unique mandate and governance structure to:

- Offer certificate, diploma and degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the applied and professional fields
- Provide continuing education in response to the needs of the local community
- Maintain teaching excellence and research activities that support the university's programs in response to the labour market needs of British Columbia

**Table 1: Student enrollment (2016-2017)**

	Undergraduate	Graduate	Degree Programs	Non-Degree Programs
<b>Full-time equivalent (FTE)</b>	1,061	1,894	2,660	295

RRU offer a suite of interdisciplinary undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs and lifelong learning opportunities in the range of program areas.

**Table 2: Program offerings (2016-2017)**

Credential Type	# of Programs
Undergraduate Degree	11
Master's	19
Doctoral	1
Certificates and Diplomas	30
Total	61

### Institution Self-Study

The Royal Roads University (RRU) QAPA review was initiated with an Institution Briefing on March 30, 2017 at the Victoria campus. The Institution Briefing provides an overview of the QAPA process and the documentation institutions are requested to submit.

At its meeting on May 24, 2017, the Quality Assurance Audit Committee reviewed the Completed and Planned Review worksheet submitted by RRU and selected three program reviews for sampling. The programs reviews selected were: Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management; the Master of Arts in Tourism Management; and the Master of Arts in Leadership. On October 12, 2017, RRU submitted its Institution Report.

### Self-Evaluation Approach

The self-study was led by the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost. Policies that address quality assurance were reviewed, including past policies relevant to the program reviews included in the audit. Procedures and processes related to program development and

program review were also reviewed. The self-study was a collaborative effort and included the executive team and faculty and staff. The following were included in consultations:

- President and Chair of PRC
- Vice-President Academic and Provost and Chair of Academic Council
- Vice-President Academic and Provost (Acting)
- Academic Planning and Review Manager, Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost
- Academic Planning and Review Manager (Acting), Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost
- Executive Assistant to the Vice-President Academic and Provost and Secretary to Academic Council
- Manager of Board Governance and Planning, Office of the President
- Vice-Provost, Research and Interdisciplinary Studies
- Chair of Curriculum Committee
- Senior Portfolio Director, Office of the Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer
- Student System Coordinator, Registrar's Office
- Business Manager, Business Planning and Performance

### Quality Assurance Policy and Practices

RRU undertakes planning on an annual basis. Informed by the five-year business plan, a number of institutional plans are developed including the Academic Plan which sets out the academic priorities and direction of the university. Led by the Vice-President Academic and Provost (VPAP) and driven through efforts of the Strategic Enrolment Management group, academic and support units establish priorities to support enrolments and new programming opportunities for the coming year. These include maintaining and monitoring academic quality across all programs, conducting external program reviews and diversifying offerings through the development and introduction of new programs.

Academic quality is informed and driven by the Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Academic Programs Policy. These policies were approved in 2016. To effect the Academic Quality Policy and Academic Programs Policy, the Board of Governors, the Program and Research Council (PRC), the Academic Council, the School Advisory Councils and the Academic Leadership Team all play a role in supporting the work of the university and contributing to quality assurance.

The PRC and the School Advisory Councils are key participants in RRU's overall quality assurance practices. The PRC was created under the RRU Act "advises the board on instructional program and research priorities, program objectives and desirable learning outcomes." Each school has an advisory council that is required:

- To engage in collaborative dialogue with the school's faculty and university administration about strategic trends, issues and developments related to professional fields targeted by the programming offered by, or being developed by the school.
- To provide insight and perspective on the educational needs of professionals and the professional competencies expected by their employers, thereby helping to ensure that the school's programs remain current and relevant to labour market needs.
- To provide input to the school's environmental scan on an annual basis.

- To assist in the development of strategic alliances with government, business, industry, and other relevant partners for the betterment of the university, its students, and its alumni.

The following also support quality assurance and practice:

- Learning and Teaching Model; and
- faculty research.

### *Program Development*

In accordance with the Academic Programs Policy, Academic Council establishes the procedures for approval of all new degree, diploma and certificate programs before recommendation to the Board. New program proposals must be developed in consultation with faculty and other relevant bodies. Curriculum Committee establishes procedures for the approval of all new credit courses and program admission and progression requirements are approved through procedures determined by Admissions Committee.

When a new programming opportunity is identified, the Vice-President Academic and Provost consults with the deans to identify a champion for the initiative. The champion completes an initial analysis of the opportunity and if considered feasible, a concept briefing note is prepared with a description of the opportunity, including preliminary analysis of market demand and environmental scan, overview of proposed program structure, alignment with the strategic direction of the university and Academic Plan. The concept is reviewed by the Executive Committee and if endorsed, the initiative is moved to the next stage.

At this point, the proposed program is entered into a tracking system maintained by the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost and is included in regular reporting to the Strategic Enrolment Management committee.

The program champion leads the development of the program proposal. The proposal is aligned with the requirements of DQAB for new programs. As mandated by Academic Council, Curriculum Committee reviews the program proposal to ensure it meets the quality standards of for-credit programs and courses offered by the university. Learning outcomes are a key component of the learning framework at Royal Roads and as a program proposal or course revision makes its way through Curriculum Committee, a careful review of the learning outcomes and assessment framework is carried out. The program proposal then advances to Academic Council for review. Council engages in a review of the program design and ensures it meets the criteria and standards of the university within the context of the Academic Plan. Once it is satisfied the criteria and standards are met by the proposal, council recommends it to PRC.

Once Academic Council recommends the program proposal advance to the next stage, the program area may hold a 'kick off' meeting. Once this meeting occurs, initial program development funds are released and departments may start the work required to support implementation, including release of a program schedule, website content and course development.

PRC which reviews it on the basis of relevance, academic rigour and fit with strategic direction, and makes a recommendation to the Board of Governors. Once a new certificate or diploma is approved by the Board, it moves to implementation, led by the champion and program office. New degree programs are submitted to the Degree Quality Assessment Board for ministerial approval. Royal Roads has exempt status up to the master's level.

Program revisions that are substantive in nature are subject to this approval process. Substantive changes may include new learning outcomes, a significant number of new courses, introduction of new specializations or degree completion options, etc. Minor program revisions follow a similar process but final approval stops at Academic Council.

### *Program Review*

The VPAP is responsible for oversight of external degree program reviews on a five-to-seven year basis. A schedule is maintained by the VPAP office and posted on an internal website. Certificates and diplomas embedded in a degree program are included in the degree's review. Further, as stipulated in the policy, other certificate and diploma programs are subject to external review at the discretion of the VPAP. The list of reviews planned for each year are included in the Academic Plan.

The first stage of planning involves the completion of the external review plan. The template is maintained by the VPAP and establishes key milestones in the planning and review process, and roles and responsibilities. The program area completes the document, including the names of proposed external reviewers. Reviewers are not employees of the university and are recognized experts in the program field of study. Reviewers may work in post-secondary, business, industry, government or other organizations that are representative of the field and/or potential employers. The review plan is endorsed by the school director and dean before final review and approval by the VPAP.

The VPAP maintains a template for the program self-study, which is completed by the program. The self-study covers the period since the last external review or program launch, whichever is more recent. Once reviewed and approved by the school director, dean and VPAP, the document is distributed to the review panel in advance of the site visit, with two or three questions from the program to frame the review and identify particular issues or opportunities on which the program wishes to receive feedback. The review panel convenes over a two-day period on campus.

Following receipt of the panel's report, the school may access program development funds to cover the costs of a planning meeting with faculty and associate faculty to consider the recommendations of the report and inform the school's response. The VPAP debriefs with the school and program to review the report and response and agree to an action plan for improvements and revisions. Additional program development funds are available for a planning meeting(s) with faculty and associate faculty. Program revisions are subject to the approval processes outlined above and program development funds are allocated for new course development and course revisions. In 2016, the VPAP office implemented an approach to summarize the agreed actions for tracking through the following year.

Complementing the external review process, all credit programs complete an annual review, in accordance with the Academic Programs Policy. These provide an overview of key

performance indicators associated with program performance to aid continuous improvement processes.

### **QAPA Review**

The QAPA panel conducting the assessment were Dr. Ulrich Scheck, panel chair, and panel members Dr. Ross Paul and Dr. John Black. The site visit was held on November 16 and 17, 2017. Dr. Black did not attend due to illness. In addition to the panel, a member of the DQAB Secretariat, Ms. Dorothy Rogers, also attended the site visit.

The QAPA panel submitted its initial report on November 30, 2017. Following RRU's review for factual errors, the panel finalized its report on January 3, 2018. RRU provided a response on March 14, 2018.

The panel concluded that the university and the site visit demonstrated adherence to high standards and thorough processes to ensure academic quality with respect to continuing and new educational endeavors.

The panel report provided commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

Commendations are areas where the institution has shown exemplary practice. Areas of exemplary practice:

- Utilizing for each program advisory councils, the primary mission of which is to ensure its continuing relevance to the demands of the particular marketplace; consulting annually with the chairs of each of the 7 advisory councils to discuss RRU's overall successes and challenges across programs.
- Giving a strong role to the Program and Research Council and enabling the commitment to its role by the president, VPAP and faculty.
- Involving associate faculty in quality assurance; associate faculty are experts in specific professional areas and are consulted regularly on program effectiveness and student learning outcomes. The reliance on associates who are contract faculty gives the institution good outside intelligence and its use of short-term contracts and its interdisciplinary approach provide considerable flexibility when changes are required.
- Giving a strong role in academic program support to all staff, with less of a distinction between faculty and staff than exists in most institutions; also allowing RRU student practitioners to provide ongoing feedback because so many are mature students with considerable experience in the marketplace.
- Establishing the practice of having two pathways in quality assurance bodies (e.g., Curriculum Committee, Research Ethics Board, Academic Leadership Team) provides for expedited processes for less important matters (faster processes, fewer people involved) and full processes for more important ones; there is evidence that this saves considerably on administrative demands without compromising academic integrity.
- Focusing on and defining student learning outcomes has strengthened quality assurance; having been an early adopter of learning outcomes has given RRU an edge in demonstrating the academic and professional relevance of its programs and courses.

Affirmations are areas where the institution has identified weaknesses and intends to correct it. Areas the institution identified for improvement:

- RRU has identified some areas that could improve the quality of the self-study component of the quality assurance process, such as increasing consultation with and engagement of its faculty and staff, potentially further tightening up the templates made available to the external reviewers and ensuring that information supplied to external reviewers is focused and relevant. Furthermore, the university is considering conducting academic reviews at the school and college level. Other areas RRU is looking at are more consistent adherence to learning outcomes and more deliberate tracking of implementing recommended action items resulting from a review. The assessors concur with these institutional assessments for improvement and encourage RRU to continue to address these areas.

Recommendations are areas needing improvement. Areas for the panel identified for improvement:

- RRU should adopt a formal mechanism to ensure that the already established annual review of each program include a formal link to a review of progress on actions emanating from the recommendations of the five-year review and the program areas stated responses to them.
- Given the unique mission and mandate of RRU and the different processes that go with it, it is recommended that extra efforts are made to orient external program reviewers to these differences before they visit the campus for their official review.
- Leaders of at least one academic program expressed concern with the way the external five-year review was conducted for their program. Given that the selection of the committee and the format and schedule for such reviews are within RRU's jurisdiction, it is recommended that more thought be given to finding the most efficient ways to achieve robust quality assessment based on institutional policies and practices as well as program differences.
- RRU should improve internal communications across programs, departments and schools to build a stronger institutional culture that celebrates success in all areas and that encourages more collaboration across these units as new program ideas are considered.
- RRU may want to examine the viability of one or two department/school reviews while focusing most of its efforts on program reviews. It might be worth trying one in an area with more students and programs to consider more generic issues of funding and workload that are less obviously relevant to individual program reviews.
- It is suggested that RRU consult the Ministry of Advanced Education earlier in its new program processes than has usually been the case.
- The institution raised the issue as to whether it was providing too much information to external reviewers. The panel understood the concern but felt it better to err on the side of having more information available, leaving it to the panels to determine on what they would focus. Again, a better orientation of external reviewers before the institutional visit might facilitate this.
- School advisory councils could be utilized more extensively to assist the university with the development and review of academic programs.

RRU acknowledged the recommendations in its response to the panel's report and provided an action plan addressing each of the recommendations.