

2019/20 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS AUDIT THOMPSON RIVERS 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. Thompson Rivers University was one of four public post-secondary institutions to undertake the Quality Assurance Process Audit in 2019/20.

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.

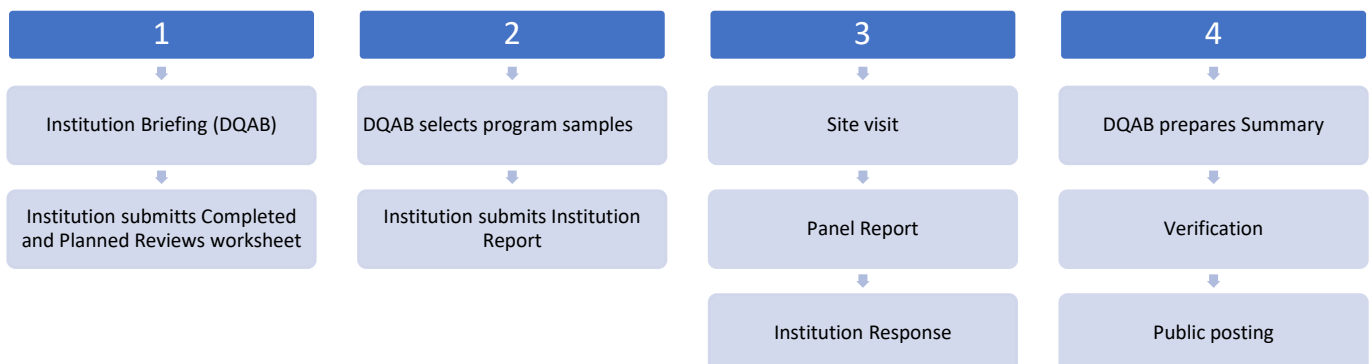
The main objectives of the quality assurance process audit (QAPA) are to ascertain that the institution:

- 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



Thompson Rivers University – Institutional Context

Thompson Rivers University's (TRU) mandate is outlined in the *Thompson Rivers University Act* and emphasizes comprehensive education from academic access to graduate programs, teaching excellence, open access to meet the needs of British Columbians (BC), and research/scholarly activity to support its educational focus. TRU has a tricameral governance structure as outlined in the TRU Act to meet its unique mandate. TRU has a Board of Governors (Board), Senate, and Planning Council for Open Learning (PCOL). These three governing bodies have oversight and approval roles related to quality assurance.

TRU's mission statement was adopted in 2007 and was reaffirmed by Senate and the Board in 2014 following a comprehensive consultation process for the development of the Strategic Priorities. The TRU mission is:

Thompson Rivers University is a comprehensive, learner-centred environmentally responsible institution that serves its regional, national, and international learners and their communities through high quality and flexible education, training, research and scholarship.

TRU's mission statement is derived from TRU's mandate as are its academic plan, strategic priorities, and graduate attributes. These statements and priorities provide the basis for decision making related to educational and programmatic activities including program development, budget allocation, faculty hiring, student services, and required facilities.

Table 1: Student enrollment

	Undergraduate	Graduate	Degree Programs	Non-Degree Programs
Full-time equivalent (FTE)	13,155	626	6,483	7,297

TRU offers programs at its campuses in Kamloops and Williams Lake.

Table 2: Program offerings

Credential Type	# of Programs
Undergraduate Certificate	106
Undergraduate Diploma	44
Associate Degree	4
Baccalaureate Degree	98
Post-baccalaureate Certificate	11
Past-baccalaureate Diploma	24
Graduate Certificate	2
Graduate Diploma	1
Master's Degree	6

Institution Self-Study

The TRU QAPA review was initiated with an Institution Briefing on May 2, 2019 at the Kamloops campus. The Institution Briefing provides an overview of the QAPA process and the documentation institutions are requested to submit.

At its meeting on July 31, 2019, the Quality Assurance Audit Committee reviewed the Completed and Planned Review worksheet submitted by TRU and selected three program reviews for sampling. The program reviews selected were: Bachelor of Education; Horticulture Diploma and Certificate; and Bachelor of Arts, Major in Psychology.

Self-Evaluation Approach

TRU's QAPA was led by the:

- Provost and Vice-President, Academic
- Associate Vice President, Academic
- Program Review Officer
- Director, Centre for Excellence for Learning and Teaching
- Director, Integrated Planning & Effectiveness
- Administrative Assistant, Office of Quality Assurance

Data and evidence collection was coordinated through the Office of Quality Assurance as both the program review process and academic approval process is primarily located within this office. Since being appointed in 2016, the Associate Vice-President Academic (AVPA) has been working with Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (APPC), Educational Program Committee (EPC), and the Program Review Officer to streamline and improve processes that are compliant with approved TRU policy. TRU has recently been granted accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, and many of the standards for accreditation relate to an assessment of TRU policies and procedures for approving and reviewing academic programs. As the assessment of academic approval and program review procedures occurred in 2016 and continues to occur, the documents and templates have undergone critical assessment and revision to meet the needs and requirements of TRU.

The full self-study report was reviewed by each of the chairs of the respective senate committees, with APPC reviewing the final report prior to submission.

Quality Assurance Policy and Practices

Over the past several years TRU has engaged in a comprehensive initiative, led by the Centre for Excellence for Learning and Teaching (CELT), to clearly identify program learning outcomes for campus-based programs. The teaching fellows in CELT have worked with program areas to articulate the program learning outcomes and complete a program curriculum map which identifies the linkage between course and program learning outcomes.

The OL Division publishes learning outcomes for each course on the website. Additionally, once registered, students taking courses through OL are provided with the learning outcomes in written form either through the learning management system for web-based courses or in the materials package for print-based courses.

Program Development

The TRU curriculum approval process, including new program approval is housed in several Senate committees and led by the faculty within a Faculty or School as per the Senate bylaws. The standing committees of Senate that participate in the review and/or approval of new programs include:

- Academic Planning and Priorities Committee (APPC)
- Educational Programs Committee (EPC)
- Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)
- Budget Committee of Senate (BCOS)

All TRU programs must follow the policies that provide the framework for establishing and awarding credentials at TRU:

- *ED 8-0: Educational Standards in Credit Courses and Programs*
- *ED 8-2: Undergraduate Course and Program Approvals*
- *ED 8-5: New Graduate Program Assessment Criteria*
- *ED 16-0: Types of Undergraduate and Graduate Credentials*

Faculty members initiate and develop new programs in conjunction with department members and their Dean. Department curriculum committees, faculty councils, standing committees of Senate, Senate, PCOL, and the Board, review and approve proposals for academic content, rigour, and alignment with strategic goals.

The first step in the development of a new program is the submission of a program sustainability worksheet (PSW) to APPC for approval. The purpose of the PSW is to assist APPC to identify if the new program is in alignment with the mandate, mission, academic plan, and strategic priorities of TRU. The PSW also includes all elements of the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) Stage 1 requirements.

The completion of the PSW is the responsibility of faculty proposing the new program; however, several other TRU departments are consulted and support new program development. The requirement for a labour market analysis and enrolment projections is supported through the Integrated Planning and Effectiveness (IPE) department. The Library Liaison Officer completes a *Library Curriculum Consultation Form* to assess the adequacy of library holdings and identify gaps and requirements. The Budget Officer from the finance department assists in developing a budget (revenue, expenses, tuition fees) that demonstrates financial sustainability. The Quality Assurance Office assists Deans and faculty as they complete the PSW.

The PSW is sent to APPC for review and approval. Part of this review process is to have the financial sustainability of the proposed program assessed by BCOS, this occurs prior to APPC making a decision about the PSW. After the PSW is approved by APPC, the program area submits the program curriculum details for review and approval. TRU utilizes an electronic database called CurricUNET, for all program and course information and approvals.

All new programs require evidence of consultation with transfer institutions, industry stakeholders, and professional accrediting bodies (where appropriate) in the form of letters of support. A new program proposal is reviewed and approved by the following individuals or

departments before it is presented to either EPC (undergraduate programs) or GSC (graduate programs) for review.

As part of the approval process new programs are posted to the TRU community for peer review comment (undergraduate programs for 5 days; graduate programs for 15 days). EPC and GSC review and recommend new programs to APPC. APPC then reviews and makes recommendation to Senate, and Senate recommends to the Board for final approval. New programs that will be delivered through the Open Learning Division at TRU must be reviewed and approved by PCOL prior to final Board approval.

Program Review

The TRU program review process and cycle is guided by policy *ED 8-4 Program Review*. As per the policy, all reviews are undertaken for the purpose of quality assurance and program improvement. Program review is seen as a formative evaluation with the potential to provide constructive change within the program. The focus is on improvement, sustainability, and accountability. Program review is coordinated through the Quality Assurance Office, which is located within the Associate Vice-President Academic's portfolio in the Provost's Office.

All Senate approved undergraduate and graduate degree, diploma, and certificate programs are included within policy ED 8-4. The self-study questionnaire is standard for all TRU programs, though it is modified for programs with external accreditation processes. In the case of a program with external accreditation, the external criteria and processes are compared to the TRU process and questionnaire. Duplicate questions are removed from the TRU questionnaire and the external accreditation site visit and peer report is utilized for the TRU program review report. The changes are made to avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources. For all program reviews the faculty, student, and alumni surveys can be modified to meet the needs of the program under review.

TRU has established a schedule for program reviews for the next five years. This schedule can be modified as needed. At times some programs request a program review earlier than planned, this is typically done due to a change in student demographic or labour market needs.

Most program reviews will take up to a year to complete and include several steps as part of the process. All program reviews include:

- 1) program self-study including a SWOT analysis;
- 2) surveys for students, alumni, faculty, and employers as appropriate;
- 3) external site visit;
- 4) action plan;
- 5) final report; and
- 6) progress report.

Program review is completed by the program Chair and faculty, with support from the Dean, Program Review Officer, and CELT. The Deans have input into and are aware of the five-year planned program review schedule.

The program review officer will initially meet with the Dean and program Chair to provide an overview of the program review process. Together the Chair and Program Review Officer will set a schedule for completing the SWOT analysis and review of all relevant surveys. As the

program self-study is being prepared by the program faculty, the Dean and faculty will recommend external peer reviewers. Once the list of peer reviewers is approved, the program review officer will contact potential reviewers to ascertain their ability and interest in serving as a peer reviewer, and finally coordinate dates and meetings for the external site visit.

The external site visit is normally conducted over two days. The site visitors are provided with the program self-study, SWOT, and survey responses prior to the site visit. Once the site visit is complete, the external peer reviewers will submit a report to the Program Review Officer and Dean. The external review report will contain a summary of their findings and recommendations for improvement of the program. The department will write a program review report that incorporates information from the peer evaluation report, program self-study, feedback from surveys, and the SWOT analysis. Following this, the program area will develop an action plan based on the recommendations and data.

Once the full program review report and action plan are completed and approved by the Dean, the final report and action plan is submitted to the AVPA for review. When required, a meeting of the AVPA, Dean, Program Chair, and Program Review Officer will be held to clarify or discuss aspects of the report. The report is then submitted to APPC for approval and then to Senate for information.

Progress reports are submitted to APPC and Senate for information one year following the program review and at mid-cycle, about 3-4 years post review. Mid-cycle reporting is a fairly new process for TRU as we had noted that once the program review was complete, there was little to no institutional follow-up and that all follow-up was left to the program area and Dean. As APPC is responsible for the overall academic direction of TRU, APPC is the appropriate body to accept the mid-cycle follow up reports and present them to Senate.

QAPA Review

The QAPA panel conducting the assessment were Dr. David Witty, panel chair, and panel members Dr. Patricia Lasserre and Dr. Art Quinney. The site visit occurred on January 30-31, 2020. A member of the DQAB Secretariat, Ms. Dao Luu, also attended the site visit. The QAPA panel submitted its report on February, 2020. TRU provided a response on June 24, 2020.

The panel concluded “much work has been accomplished to ensure that TRU is well positioned to continue to develop and implement on-going clear, transparent and thorough processes that will ensure that TRU remains an institution with high expectations for quality program delivery.” The panel report provided commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

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

- Program learning outcomes are mandated and mapped on the Institutional learning outcomes and course learning outcomes.
- The creation of an Office of Quality Assurance, with dedicated staff who are linked to the Provost Office, promotes and supports systematic comprehensive program reviews.

- The reporting of Program Reviews through all levels of governance and transparency of outcomes is well done.
- Program Reviews are formative and focused on improvements.
- A significant amount of QAPA initiated work has been accomplished and continues to be accomplished to address DQAB requirements.
- There is a demonstrated increased focus on undergraduate experiential learning and undergraduate research that is supported by institutional policies.
- New program development appears to be comprehensive and well done.
- The Action Plans that have been recently completed appear to be well developed and supportive of an Integrated Planning framework.

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

- The Panel urges TRU to continue to monitor the implementation of the Program Action Plans with clear, specific steps that ensure on-going institutional accountability and transparency.
- The Panel supports a plan to conduct a thorough review of program approval and program review processes as well as the continued promotion of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) curricula development initiatives.
- The concept that the program review officer is available for consultation and coordination of the program review site visit is supported by the Panel; as is the concept that the programs do more of the final program review report collation and writing.
- The Panel supports the increased focus on program learning outcomes and curricular maps and the current addition of the assessment of program learning outcomes.
- The continued use of the Annual Academic Service Plans and associated mid-cycle updates to Action Plans is endorsed by the Panel.
- The Panel supports the creation of the program review schedule to ensure a consistent program review timeframe.

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

- TRU needs to update the next policy review cycle policies to reflect learning outcomes nomenclature.
- TRU should develop policies and procedures for Institutional-wide curriculum review. The policy and procedure(s) should include opportunity for student input.
- TRU is urged to review and follow-up the Action Plans to monitor compliance and implementation by establishing a procedure that supports transparency and Action Plan accountability.
- In subsequent reviews, programs that have completed an Action Plan should ensure that the Action Plan status and implementation is considered as part of the Self Study Report.
- Program review procedures should include an assessment of program learning outcomes.
- The Panel urges the Office of Quality Assurance or other Institutional body to promote the successful achievements of the new quality program review work to date, learn from it, share it and replicate it.
- TRU should develop a detailed procedures document to support the program review policy ED 8-4 Program Review. The current table that is titled The Program Review Process at TRU – Processes and Procedures does not provide sufficient detail of all procedures including support documents. Generally, full procedures document would include detailed

guidelines about how the self-study would be undertaken by the department supporting the program (including all of the templates), the criteria to be followed for nominating external reviewers, how to analyze the data from IPE and the surveys, expected timelines for each stage of the review process. TRU may wish to consult other institutions to see a model for their program review procedures.

TRU acknowledged the recommendations in its response to the panel's report and addressed each of the recommendations.