

# Towards a Taxonomy of Quality Assurance Systems

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**AQA** | Academic  
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For New Zealand Universities

*Te Pokapū Kōunga Mātauranga  
mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*



**NZQA**

NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY  
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# Outline

- Rationale
- Background/literature review/existing frameworks
- Approach
- Initial taxonomy
- Implications, limitations and further work



# Rationale

- Two external quality assurance systems in New Zealand
- Limited interaction and debate
- Limited theoretical literature
- Opportunities to learn from one another



# Existing Frameworks

- Principles
  - INQAAHE
  - ESG
- Comparative studies
  - Campbell et al.,
  - ENQA reports
  - Internal reports
- Lack of consistent framework or terminology
  - Taxonomy: a classification into ordered categories (dictionary.com)
- Relatively little emphasis on why differences exist or when particular features are more or less appropriate/effective
- Little ‘design/configuration’ guidance

# Approach: New Zealand Case Study

- Two systems
  - Universities: Academic Audit (5 cycles)
  - Other providers: External Evaluation and Review (2<sup>nd</sup> cycle)

	Universities	Other institutions
Number of institutions	8	~ 570
% Population enrolled in tertiary study in 2015	9.8%	
Total enrolments 2015	172,055	247,680
Full-time equivalent enrolments (EFTS) 2015	131,770	144,560
Bachelor's degree and above EFTS	126,250	23,155
8-year Qualification completion rate (2008-2015)	71%	58%*



# Universities

- Academic Audit conducted by Academic Quality Agency (AQA)
  - AQA established by universities as independent, arms-length QAB
  - AQA undergoes external review
- Cycle 5 Academic Audit
  - 40 Guideline Statements across 7 academic activity themes
  - Panel makes Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations
  - All reports publicly available at [www.aqa.ac.nz](http://www.aqa.ac.nz)

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, featuring a white silhouette of a tea tree branch with several clusters of leaves, set against a teal background.

# Other tertiary providers

- Much more diverse sector
  - Public, private, industry, Māori (Wānanga), large, small
- External Evaluation and Review (EER) conducted by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)
  - EER addresses 6 outcomes-oriented ‘Key Evaluation Questions’
  - EER also looks at focus areas – programmes and themes
  - Panels make summative judgements of educational performance and self-assessment capability
  - Reports also make recommendations
  - Reports publicly available on NZQA website
- NZQA has wider remit and regulatory role
  - Ex ante and ex post quality assurance



# Research Questions

- Both systems would meet INQAAHE GGP and/or ESG
  - AQA External Reviews consider GGP
- The systems are different
- How can we usefully compare these two systems and understand the reasons for their differences?





# Method

- Compare and contrast NZ QA systems
- Informed by and embedded in ‘literature’
- Initial taxonomy
  - Distinguish between system characteristics and contextual drivers and/or boundary conditions
- Comparisons with international systems
  - UK-QAA, Scotland, Ireland, Australia-TEQSA, Ontario, Finland



# Initial Taxonomy

Component	Sub-dimensions					
Overarching approach	Role of self-review	Evaluative or assessment oriented	Assessment framework or evaluative questions	Outcomes orientation	Enhancement orientation	Public reporting
Substantive coverage	Common framework or focus elements					
Method	Length of cycle	Pattern of engagement	Variation/ flexibility of treatment		Nature of reviewers	





# Drivers and Boundary Conditions

- Size and diversity of the sectors
- Actor roles and inter-relationships
  
- Smaller, less diverse systems, non-regulatory → greater enhancement orientation, use of peer reviewers
- Larger, more diverse systems → differential approaches, use of professional evaluators



# International Comparisons

- 3 components (approach, coverage, method)
  - Campbell et al. (2015) suggest who, what and how as characteristics of quality assurance systems
- Overarching approach
  - Broadly reflective of international commentary
  - Less explicit emphasis on standards in NZ systems
  - NZQA's strongly evaluative approach is uncommon
- Substantive coverage
  - Both approaches seen internationally
- Method
  - Reflect international practice
- Drivers and boundary conditions
  - 2 NZ systems reflect international differences



# Findings and Implications

- A taxonomy provides a common language and set of descriptors
- Differentiate between system characteristics and drivers and boundary conditions
- New Zealand quality assurance systems reflect international practice
- Opportunities for learning
  - AQA consider greater outcomes orientation
  - NZQA consider follow-ups
  - Both systems consider student auditors/reviewers



# Limitations and Further Work

- Limitations
  - NZ ‘tertiary’ sector not typical
  - Small set of comparator jurisdictions
  - Dynamism and change in systems
- Further work
  - Test taxonomy against a wider range of systems
  - Draw on body of practice to reconceptualise quality assurance in higher education



# THANK-YOU!

# QUESTIONS?

## Contacts

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