

5 Cyclical Program Review Protocol

5.1 Purpose and Application

The Cyclical Program Review Protocol is used to ensure University of Toronto programs meet the highest standards of academic excellence. As stated in the *Policy on Approval and Review of Academic Programs*, regular reviews allow for ongoing appraisal and quality improvement of programs and the academic units in which they reside.

The Cyclical Program Review Protocol applies to all undergraduate and graduate degree programs offered by the University, and to degree programs that are offered by the University with other institutions including **all joint, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multisite and inter-institutional programs, and all modes of delivery.**

5.2 Institutional Authority

The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs is responsible for the oversight of the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process and ensuring that the UTQAP is applied in a manner that conforms to the University's quality assurance principles and Quality Council requirements. The Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs is responsible for ensuring that cyclical reviews of academic programs and/or units are undertaken. Where quality concerns are raised in the cyclical review, the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs monitors the timely implementation of improvements.

Within the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, the Director, Academic Programs and Policy is the authoritative contact between the institution and the Quality Council.

5.3 Degree Programs and Review Schedule

The University's full complement of undergraduate and graduate degree and diploma programs are reviewed on a planned cycle.⁵ Reviews are conducted on a regular basis, frequent enough to ensure that Chairs, Deans and the Provost are kept informed of developments in all academic units, but at sufficiently long intervals that the effects of given actions can be assessed and that the system is not over-burdened by the logistical demands of the process. The interval between program reviews must not exceed eight years.

⁵ See the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website for a schedule of reviews.

The review of an academic program can be completed through a review of the academic unit offering the program. Reviews of the various programs, undergraduate and graduate, offered by a given academic unit may be synchronized. Reviews may also be conducted concurrently with professional accreditation. Depending upon the range of a division's academic programs, it can elect to conduct quality reviews at the level of the degree or the program. Regardless of the schedule, the quality of each academic program and the learning environment of the students in each program must be addressed explicitly as set out in the evaluation criteria below.

University-commissioned reviews are not waived because an externally commissioned review, such as an accreditation, has recently been conducted. Reviews of academic programs for professional accreditation bodies form part of collegial self-regulatory systems intended to ensure that mutually agreed-upon threshold standards of quality are maintained in new and existing programs. Such reviews may serve different purposes than those commissioned by the University under the UTQAP. In some cases, however, the University process may be streamlined if the mandates of externally and internally commissioned reviews are closely aligned and any deficits can be easily remedied through providing supplementary documentation as necessary.

Interdivisional degree programs offered by more than one unit may be reviewed as entities distinct from the larger academic units which support them. Such programs must have an identified commissioning division for the purpose of administering the Cyclical Program Review Protocol.

Inter-institutional programs offered in partnership with other higher education institutions (colleges and universities) through affiliation, federation and other formal agreements are reviewed as entities distinct from the larger institutions within which they may be included. Where a program is held jointly with an Ontario institution that does not have an IQAP that has been ratified by the Quality Council, the UTQAP will serve as the guiding document and the University of Toronto will be the lead institution. Where a program is held jointly with an Ontario institution that does have an IQAP that has been ratified by the Quality Council, a lead institution will be selected.

General guiding principles for such reviews include:

- Selection of reviewers will involve participation by each partner institution;
- There will be a single self-study;
- The site visit will involve all partner institutions and sites;
- The self-study will clearly explain how input was received from faculty, staff and students at each partner institution;

- Feedback on the reviewers' report will be solicited from participating units at each institution;
- Preparation of a Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan will contain input from each partner;
- A single Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan will be prepared and presented to the appropriate governance processes at each partner institution;
- Partner institutions will agree on an appropriate monitoring process for the Implementation Plan.

5.4 Commissioning Officer

Reviews of academic programs and the units in which they reside are commissioned by the Dean. The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs commissions reviews of academic divisions and associated programs that are being reviewed at the time of a divisional review. A database containing a schedule of all program reviews is maintained by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs. See the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs' website for a schedule of reviews.

In the case of programs that involve more than one unit, the review is commissioned by the Dean of the lead Faculty.

5.5 Overview of the Review Process

The UTQAP for the conduct of Cyclical Program Reviews has five principal components:

1. Self-study (see section 5.6.4);
2. External evaluation (peer review) with report and recommendations on program quality improvement (see section 5.7);
3. University evaluation of the self-study and the external assessment report resulting in recommendations for program quality improvement (see section 5.8);
4. Preparation and adoption of plans to implement the recommendations and to monitor their implementation (see section 5.8.3); and
5. Follow-up reporting on the principal findings of the review and the implementation of the recommendations (see section 5.8.4).

5.6 Self-Study Requirements: Internal Program Perspective

5.6.1 Unit of Review

The commissioning officer defines the scope of a review (e.g., undergraduate program[s], graduate program[s], etc.) and formally initiates the review process. For example, a unit may

elect to review both its undergraduate and graduate degree programs concurrently or separately.

5.6.2 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference identify the key issues to be addressed by the review and must address the core program evaluation criteria laid out in section 5.6.5. Commissioning officers may enlarge or enhance the criteria to meet the needs of the disciplines. Standard terms of reference for reviews may be found on the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website.

5.6.3 Announcement

A review is publicly announced by the commissioning officer through appropriate unit and/or program channels and University and/or divisional media as appropriate. Submissions are invited from teaching and administrative staff, students, alumni and members of the program and/or unit community.

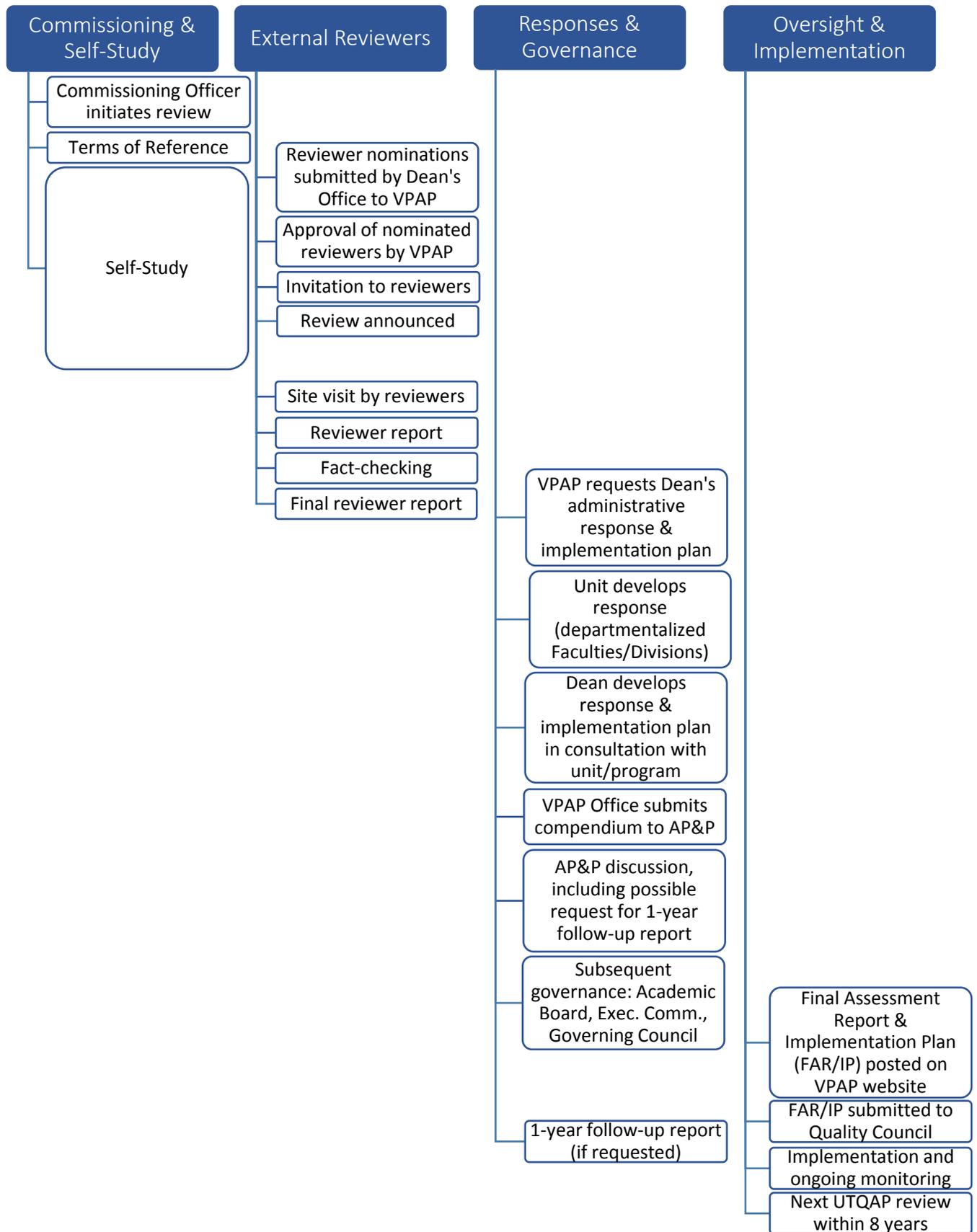
5.6.4 Self-Study Contents

The degree program(s) and/or degree granting unit under review shall prepare a self-study. The self-study is a broad-based, reflective and forward-looking report that includes critical self-analysis. It is an assessment of the strengths and challenges facing the program(s) and/or unit, the range of its activities and the nature of its future plans. The self-study should address the terms of reference and program evaluation criteria as these will be provided to the external reviewers and will form the basis of their assessment.

The process of preparing a self-study should involve faculty, students and staff.⁶ The input of others deemed to be relevant and useful, such as graduates of the program and representatives of industry, the professions, practical training programs and employers may also be included. The involvement of these various constituencies should be described in detail in the self-study. An outline of the core elements of the self-study is provided on the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs' website.

⁶ The Quality Council's Guide to Quality Assurance Processes includes best practices for supporting this involvement in the section on Engaging Stakeholders in the Creation of Self-Studies and New Program Development.

Figure 4: UTQAP Protocol for Cyclical Program Reviews



In accordance with the Quality Assurance Framework, the self-study should address and document the following:

- The consistency of the program's learning outcomes with the institution's mission and divisional Degree-Level Expectations, and how its graduates achieve those outcomes;
- Program-related data and measures of performance, including applicable provincial, national and professional standards (where available);
- The integrity of the data
- Review criteria and quality indicators identified in section 5.6.5 below;
- Concerns and recommendations raised in previous reviews;
- Areas identified through the conduct of the self-study as requiring improvement;
- Areas that hold promise for enhancement;
- Academic services that directly contribute to the academic quality of each program under review;
- Participation of program faculty, staff and students in the self-study and how their views have been obtained and taken into account.

The self-study is reviewed and approved by the commissioning officer to ensure that it meets the core elements of a self-study and program evaluation criteria.

5.6.5 Core Program Evaluation

Reviews of undergraduate and graduate degree programs and graduate diplomas require, at minimum, the evaluation criteria set out below. Commissioning officers may enlarge or enhance the criteria to meet the needs of the disciplines.

Objectives

- Program is consistent with the institution's mission and unit's academic plans.
- Program requirements and learning outcomes are clear, appropriate and align with the relevant undergraduate and/or graduate Degree-Level Expectations.

Admission Requirements

- Admission requirements are appropriately aligned with the learning outcomes established for completion of the program.

Curriculum

- The curriculum reflects the current state of the discipline or area of study and is appropriate for the level of the program.
- Evidence of any significant innovation or creativity in the content and/or delivery of the program relative to other such programs.

- Mode(s) of delivery to meet the program's identified learning outcomes are appropriate and effective.

Assessment of Learning

- Methods for assessing student achievement of the defined learning outcomes and degree learning expectations are appropriate and effective.
- Appropriateness and effectiveness of the means of assessment, especially in the students' final year of the program, in clearly demonstrating achievement of the program learning objectives and the relevant Degree-Level Expectations.

Resources

- Appropriateness and effectiveness of the academic unit's use of **existing** human, physical and financial resources in delivering its program(s). In making this assessment, reviewers must recognize the institution's autonomy in determining priorities for funding, space and faculty allocation.

Quality Indicators

- Outcome measures of student performance and achievement are of particular interest.
- There are also important input and process measures which are known to have a strong association with quality outcomes. It is expected that many of the following listed examples will be widely used.
 - ▶ **Faculty:** qualifications, research and scholarly record; class sizes; percentage of classes taught by permanent or non-permanent (contractual) faculty; numbers, assignments and qualifications of part-time or temporary faculty;
 - ▶ **Students:** applications and registrations; attrition rates; time to completion; final-year academic achievement; graduation rates; academic awards; student in-course reports on teaching;
 - ▶ **Graduates:** rates of graduation; employment six months and two years after graduation; postgraduate study; "skills match"; and alumni reports on program quality when available and when permitted by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). Auditors will be instructed that these items may not be available and applicable to all programs.
- Assessment of the programs relative to the best of their kind offered in Canada, North America and internationally, including areas of strength and opportunities.

Quality Enhancement

- Initiatives taken to enhance the quality of the program and the associated learning and teaching environment.

Additional Graduate Program Criteria

- Evidence that students' time to completion is both monitored and managed in relation to the program's defined length and program requirements.
- Quality and availability of graduate supervision.
- Definition and application of indicators that provide evidence of faculty, student and program quality, for example:
 - ▶ **Faculty:** funding, honours and awards, and commitment to student mentoring;
 - ▶ **Students:** grade level for admission, scholarly output, success rates in provincial and national scholarships, competitions, awards and commitment to professional and transferable skills;
 - ▶ **Program:** evidence of a program structure and faculty research that will ensure the intellectual quality of the student experience; sufficient graduate-level courses that students will be able to meet the requirement that two-thirds of their course requirements be met through courses at this level.⁷

5.7 External Evaluation: Reviewer Selection and Review Process

The commissioning officer is responsible for the selection of the external review committee in consultation with the unit and/or program(s) to be reviewed. All reviewers are approved by the Office of the Provost. When the commissioning officer is a Dean, the Dean's Office forwards reviewer nominations for approval by the Office of the Provost, prior to the Dean's Office issuing invitations. When the commissioning officer is the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, the Dean's Office forwards reviewer nominations for approval by the Office of the Provost, which may also add to the list of nominations prior to issuing invitations.

5.7.1 Selection of Reviewers

Normally the evaluation will be conducted by a Review Committee composed of at least:

1. Two external reviewers or one internal and one external reviewer for an undergraduate program qualified by discipline and experience to review the program(s);
2. Three external reviewers or two external and one internal reviewer for a graduate program qualified by discipline and experience to review the program(s);

⁷ While the QAF requires a minimum of 2/3 courses be at the graduate level, the University of Toronto requires all courses be at the graduate level.

3. Three external reviewers or two external and one internal reviewer for the concurrent review of an undergraduate and graduate program.

In cases where more than one program is being considered by the Review Committee, reviewers should be selected to ensure the appropriate review of all the programs being considered. In selecting reviewers, an appropriate balance needs to be struck between familiarity with the unit and/or program(s) under review and distance to allow for objective assessment. All members of the Review Committee must be at arm's length from the program under review; that is, they should not have a particular interest in the outcome of the review due to personal or professional relationships with members of the unit. For more details, see the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website.

The external and institutional reviewers should be active and respected in their field. They will normally be associate or full professors with program management experience and representatives of peer institutions offering high-quality programs in the field under review.

The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website provides further guidance on the selection of reviewers and nomination forms that set out the information that must be provided to support an informed approval process.

5.7.2 Commissioning Officer Responsibilities

The commissioning officer is responsible for ensuring that all members of the Review Committee:

- Understand their role and obligations;
- Identify and commend the program's notably strong and creative attributes;
- Describe the program's respective strengths, areas for improvement and opportunities for enhancement;
- Recommend specific steps to be taken to improve the program, distinguishing between those the program can itself take and those that require external action;
- Recognize the institution's autonomy to determine priorities for funding, space and faculty allocation; and
- Respect the confidentiality required for all aspects of the review process.

Reviewers will be provided with clear terms of reference. The commissioning officer will also emphasize these elements when meeting with the reviewers during the course of their visit.

5.7.3 Documentation to be Provided to the Review Committee

The commissioning officer will identify what reports and information are to be provided to the Review Committee in advance of the site visit. Core documents that must be included are the:

- Terms of reference;
- Self-study;
- Previous review report including the administrative response(s); and,
- Any non-University commissioned reviews (for example, for professional accreditation or Ontario Council on Graduate Studies) completed since the last review of the unit and/or program.

External reviewers are provided with access to all course descriptions and the *curricula vitae* of faculty. This can be done through provision of course calendars, web links, etc.

In the case of professional programs, the views of employers and professional associations should be solicited by the unit/program and made available to the Review Committee.

5.7.4 Site Visit

The commissioning officer provides the site visit schedule to reviewers. Reviewers should visit together. During their visit, provision must be made for reviewers to meet with faculty, students, administrative staff and senior program administrators as well as members of relevant cognate units as determined by the commissioning officer. In the case of professional programs, the views of employers and professional associates should be made available to the reviewers.

5.7.5 Review Report

The Review Committee submits a report to the commissioning officer normally within two months of the site visit. The Review Committee's report should address the substance of both the self-study and the evaluation criteria set out in section 5.6.5 above. A template for the review report should be provided to reviewers to ensure that all elements of the program appraisal are addressed. Before accepting the report as final, the commissioning officer will bring to the attention of the reviewers any clear factual errors that can be corrected in the report. The commissioning officer then formally accepts the final report and submits it to the Office of the Vice-President and Provost.

5.8 Institutional Perspective and Response

5.8.1 Institutional Authority: Administrative Perspective

The Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, as the identified institutional authority, assesses the Review Committee report. The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs requests a formal administrative response to the Review Committee report from the relevant Dean who will consult with the program and/or unit (in departmentalized Faculties/Divisions) under review.

As part of this consultation, the Dean will request a brief administrative response to the Review Committee report from the program and/or unit (in departmentalized Faculties/Divisions) under review. The Dean's response will reflect this consultation and respond to the key elements of the program's/unit's response.

The Dean's response to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs will discuss the following:

1. The plans and recommendations proposed in the self-study;
2. The recommendations advanced by the Review Committee; and,
3. The program's response to the Review Committee's report(s).

The Dean's response includes an implementation plan, which will describe:

1. Any changes in organization, policy or governance that would be necessary to meet the recommendations;
2. The resources, financial and otherwise, that would be provided in supporting the implementation of selected recommendations, and who will provide them; and,
3. A proposed timeline for the implementation of any of those recommendations, and who will be responsible for acting on them.
4. A proposed timeline for monitoring the implementation of those recommendations, which will include a brief report from the Dean to the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs due midway between the year of the last and next site visits.

A timeline will be specified by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, outlining when the Review Committee report and administrative response will be brought forward to divisional and University governance.

5.8.2 Circulation of the Review Committee Report

The Review Committee report is a public document and should be circulated within the unit reviewed along with the administrative response and implementation plan from the Dean.

5.8.3 University Accountability and Reporting Requirements

Reviews are important mechanisms of quality assurance accountability. The accountability framework for the review of academic programs and units is contained within the *Policy for Approval and Review of Academic Programs and Units* (2010). The *Framework* outlines the following responsibilities and mechanisms:

- Program and unit reviews are considered by governance in order to allow governors to ensure that academic administrators are reviewing programs and units on a regular basis and are responding to these reviews in a manner that achieves the purpose of maintaining and improving program quality.

- The Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs ensures that reviews are performed on a regular basis, that they are conducted appropriately and that the issues identified in the self-study and by reviewers are dealt with appropriately. Where quality concerns are raised in the cyclical review, the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs will monitor the timely implementation of improvements.
- Concerns may be raised in an external review report that requires a long and sustained period of response. In order to ensure that improvements are made, the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs may request a follow-up one-year report from the relevant Dean to bring forward to the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs.
- Occasionally a program may have a review or series of reviews indicating significant problems or deficiencies such that admissions to the program should be discontinued until significant improvements are made. In these situations, the divisional Dean or the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs may suspend program admissions until there is evidence that changes have been made to address quality concerns.

The Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs develops and submits a full and accurate Summary of the External Review Report, and the Dean's Administrative Response to the Report (including the implementation plan and excluding all confidential information) to governance through the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs (AP&P) of the Academic Board on a biannual basis in the form of a compendium of draft Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans (see 5.8.4). The Committee's reading groups also receive the reviewers' reports, the program and/or unit responses (in departmentalized Faculties/Divisions), and the self-studies.

AP&P, which reports to the Academic Board, has general responsibility for policy on, and for monitoring, the quality of education and the research activities of the University.⁸ The Committee's terms of reference, membership and meeting schedule are maintained online. Its total membership is approximately 31. As with all Governing Council bodies, its membership is broadly representative of the academic divisions including teaching staff, administrative staff, students and alumni.⁹

⁸ http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Governing_Council/bac/APP_1.htm

⁹ The Governing Council Elections Guidelines establish the manner and procedure to be used in the election of Teaching Staff, Administrative Staff, and Students to the Governing Council and Teaching Staff and Librarians to the Academic Board, including the establishment of constituencies within these categories.
<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/elections.htm>

The compendium brought forward to each meeting is also considered by the Agenda Planning Committee of the Academic Board to determine whether there are any overall academic issues warranting discussion by the Board. The record of the discussion at AP&P is forwarded to the Executive Committee of Governing Council.

At the conclusion of this governance process, the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs is responsible for finalizing the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan, which is intended as an institutional synthesis of the external evaluation and internal responses and assessments.

5.8.4 Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs compiles the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan providing the institutional synthesis of the external evaluation and internal responses and assessments. This report:

- Includes the full and accurate summary described in 5.8.3, which identifies the following:
 - ▶ significant strengths of the program;
 - ▶ opportunities for program improvement and enhancement;
- Includes the Dean's response and implementation plan described in 5.8.1, which
 - ▶ Sets out and prioritizes recommendations that are selected for implementation; and identifies
 - who will be responsible for providing any resources made necessary by those recommendations;
 - who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations;
 - timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations; and
- Includes relevant excerpts from the report of the AP&P meeting, including whether
 - ▶ the Dean's response and implementation plan adequately addressed all the issues identified;
 - ▶ there were questions, comments or substantive issues that the committee considered;
 - ▶ a follow-up one-year report is required from the Dean
- May include a confidential section (where personnel issues are required to be addressed);
- Includes an institutional Executive Summary, exclusive of any such confidential information and suitable for publication on the web.

The Vice-Provost, Academic Programs provides for the timely monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations, and the appropriate distribution, including web postings, of the scheduled monitoring reports.

5.8.5 Quality Council Reporting Requirements

The Quality Council is provided with a copy of the Final Assessment Report (excluding all confidential information) including the Implementation Plan for all completed cyclical program reviews by the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs on an annual basis.

5.8.6 Public Access to Review Report

The Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan will be provided to the Dean and academic unit/program under review and posted on the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs website (exclusive of any confidential information). It is left to the discretion of the program(s) and/or units themselves to decide whether or not they wish to post the full records of the review process including self-study and review report on their website. In posting any materials to do with the review all confidential materials will be removed before posting.

5.9 Quality Council Audit Process

Auditors independently select programs for audit, typically four undergraduate and four graduate cyclical program reviews. These audits are conducted on an eight-year cycle.