

FNU eyes international recognition for teacher education programmes



Back From Left: Ravinesh Prasad (Primary & ECE), Rohit Deo (Quality), Jan Cameron (AQA Facilitator), Preetika Mani (SEO-CHE), Varanisee Tagimaucia (Secondary & Sports Education), Khuswand Naidu (EO-SOE), Matereti Sukanaivalu (ADL&T-CHE). Front from Left: Prof James Pounder (FNU PVC L&T), Prof Sheelagh Matear (Executive Director, AQA), Dr Eci Nabalarua (Dean – CHE)

The Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Humanities and Education (CHE) has engaged New Zealand based Academic Quality Agency (AQA) to conduct an external review of selected teacher education programmes and provide guidance on obtaining international recognition.

The exercise, which is expected to place over the next year, is in line with FNU's Strategic Plan of external programme audit and international accreditation.

FNU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nigel Healey, stated "this system of external peer review is widely used in many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the UK, and the methodology is fairly standardized. It is an excellent way of benchmarking programmes on international best practice and identifying areas and practices which can be improved."

Professor Healey said the review by AQA offered a route to international recognition by bodies like New Zealand's Qualifications Recognition Service, but that the University was also looking at other routes to more formal international accreditation.

"We are of course aware that New Zealand has a systemic teacher shortage and is actively recruiting experienced teachers from Fiji. There is a risk that international recognition of our teacher education programmes may increase this 'brain drain' but, on balance, this additional risk is relatively small – New Zealand is seeking experienced teachers with several years of service – and offset by the benefits to our graduates of studying in an internationally-benchmarked programme," commented VC Healey.

Dean CHE, Dr Eci Nabalarua said while FNU is self-accrediting, having programmes that are internationally recognized or accredited provides an important way of guaranteeing quality to stakeholders and making the qualifications internationally portable.

FNU recently signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with AQA which paved the way for the external programme audit process.

"The first component is the self-review of the programme, which will be undertaken by the College staff, while the second phase involves the writing of the self-review document. This document will be assessed

by a three-member panel as per a rigid selection criterion under AQA processes. The Self-Review document will also form the basis for the on-site visit," said Dr Nabalarua.

"The AQA team's site visit will be for three days where they will interview both internal and external stakeholders about the programmes. AQA will then prepare a report which commends areas where the programmes are excellent and makes recommendations in areas where there is scope for improvement to bring the programme up to international standards."

"In the meantime, between now and November, there is a very systematic process where we have to compile all the evidence and data required for the Self-Review report. This report will be evidence-based."

According to the senior academic, the self-review component will provide the College with an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher education programmes.

The College has set-up a Self-Review Committee comprising of eight members, including the Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, Professor James Pounder and is being led by Dr Nabalarua.

"The focus here is developing the logistics for putting together the Self-Review document. We will collect the evidence as required by the Terms of Reference of the review," Dean Nabalarua said.

"We attended a workshop facilitated by AQA where the team was trained on ways to undertake a self-review – what kind of information to collect, what not to be overwhelmed with in the process of collecting data and how to avoid collecting unnecessary data."

The final report from AQA is expected to be given to the College by May 2020. Dr Nabalarua said the report would outline three important areas – commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

"The quality agency will give a time period to the College to improve on the recommendations made in the final report, which will be reviewed again after the necessary items have been actioned."

"The advantage of this is that as soon as the programme is evaluated by AQA, because their process is recognised by other international agencies this will be instrumental in attaining international recognition," Dr Nabalarua added.