

IMPACT AND EFFECTS OF LEARNING OUTCOME-ORIENTED  
PROGRAM REVIEW POLICY CHANGES IN ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

**PAOLA BORIN**

M.Ed., Stanford University

B.A., B.Ed., York University

Educational Studies

Educational Leadership and Public Policy

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of the requirements for the degree of

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Faculty of Education, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

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## **Abstract**

This multiple-case, mixed methods study characterized the effects, and outcomes perceived by key participants involved in the program review process at four universities, five years after the introduction of a common learning-outcomes oriented quality assurance review process across the province of Ontario in 2011. Purposeful and criterion sampling was applied to identify key informants from four universities, with specialized knowledge and experience from five levels of involvement in recently conducted cyclical program reviews employing the new framework. This included, faculty members, department chairs, teaching and learning centre support staff, quality assurance support staff, and senior administrators. Data were collected using in-depth interviews comprised of structured and unstructured questions. Analysis applied variable and case oriented strategies, thematic and content analysis, and matrix displays. This research found three orientations to the review influenced perceptions and outcomes, including a standard accountability, control and compliance, and an enhancement orientation. Nearly half the changes participants identified as triggered by the review process are likely to have a long-term impact. Perceived negative changes included increased oversight, bureaucracy, and workload. Objectives and accountability of the cyclical review were confounded with ongoing budgetary reviews, institutional goal setting, and measures of the fiscal sustainability. Perceived positive changes included longer-term effects such as increased alignment of curriculum to student outcomes, increased departmental discussion about curriculum, and more consistent provision of program relevant data across the university. Participants described a shift from a focus on teaching students, to a focus on bringing about learning.

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## **Abbreviations**

COU	Council of Ontario Universities
IQAP	Institutional Quality Assurance Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
OCAV	Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
UPRAC	University Program Review and Audit Committee

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

When Marco Polo travelled to China he had to reconcile the foreign monetary and administrative systems with those of his own country to determine the value of goods and the value of the knowledge he would gain. Agreeing to participate in an approach adopted by other countries does not always have predictable effects and outcomes. An orientation towards comparing and assessing outcomes is a natural product of internationalization in many fields, including post-secondary education. This study will focus on the effects brought about by the move to an outcomes oriented assessment of post-secondary education in Ontario.

This study examines the effects of quality assurance policies put into place in Canada and more specifically the province of Ontario (OUQCA, 2017). The policy of interest to this investigation concerns the introduction of a quality assurance oversight process with a new focus on program-level learning outcomes. This study will ask, what is the impact of introducing an outcomes-oriented method into the Ontario university program review process? I will introduce a conceptual model to explore the various effects of the new process and explore the perspectives of the participants involved. Any insights and lessons to be learned which may help improve teaching and learning in higher education and the process of program review will also be directly relevant for my work in university curriculum development.

This chapter includes a brief orientation to elements of the dissertation itself, outlining the background of the problem, discussing the significance of the study, the nature of the problem under investigation, the methods of investigation, and rationale.

This will be followed by definition of some of the key terms and abbreviations, employed and will address some key assumptions and limitations.

### **Background to the Problem**

Factors forming the background and context for the introduction of outcome oriented quality assurance processes in Ontario include politics, demographic growth, the rise of degree mills, the increased mobility of students, and increased tuition costs. Issues of accountability and quality assurance gained prominence in the 1980s during the time of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and Ronald Reagan in the United States, who called for reduced spending by the public sector and a streamlining of public bureaucracy (Clabaugh, 2004; Miller, 2012; Newton, 2000). By the 1990s, a major increase in higher education enrollment, and the creation of new universities in response, led to concerns about the quality of university degrees in the rapidly expanded system (Clark, 2009; Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). The defensive reaction to degree mills and fly-by-night institutions offering degrees for little or no work resulted in major initiatives in the UK, Australia and the US to assure the quality of university degrees (CHEA, 2017). In addition, rising tuition costs added to the pressures and concerns of families about student debt, raising questions about the value provided for the cost of education (Archibald & Feldman, 2008; Boggs, 2009).

Increasing numbers of students began to study internationally, and the mobility of faculty members also increased globally, raising the issue of the comparative credentials and the relative quality of degrees offered or earned. In 1998 in Europe these pressures led to a movement to rationalize the widely diverse degree programs across the European

Union. This became known as the Bologna Process and reignited quality initiatives (EHEA, 2012; Harvey, 2006).

Responding to these international pressures and the tremendous growth of higher education (Hango & De Broucker, 2007), Ontario formed the Quality Council in 2010 to monitor and assure quality standards in Ontario universities. The Quality Council required each university in Ontario to develop an Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) to monitor program quality, and to address requirements (Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, 2014). The process was similar to the earlier University Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC) process which required departments to develop a self-study document consisting of a considerable range of information (e.g., program history, enrolment trends, persistence, completion rates, human and facility resources).

Key features of the new process of interest to the current study included (a) an emphasis on analysis of the curriculum of the program under review (with a particular focus on the outcomes of student learning), and (b) providing evidence that the curriculum explicitly addressed six provincially mandated expectations known as the Degree-Level Expectations (Broadhurst, 1993).

This study will apply an adaptation of the conceptual framework outlined by Brennan and Shah (2000) in their widely cited European study on the topic of Managing Quality in Higher Education. The framework summarizes relationships and influences in the quality assurance process in higher education. This framework will be applied to explore these variables in the Ontario context.

## **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this multiple-case, mixed methods study is to characterize the effects and the changes perceived by key participants involved in the program review process at four universities, five years after the introduction of a new learning-outcomes oriented quality assurance process across the province of Ontario. This research examines the impact of the introduction of the degree-level expectations into an Ontario university quality assurance framework for the cyclical departmental program review process. It will explore the effects experienced by those involved at various levels of the process; reviewing the intended outcomes, unintended outcomes, trends, and peripheral effects observed. This will be accomplished by means of case studies following a common framework. The second research purpose is to seek knowledge and insights with regard to implementation of this policy in order to inform policy makers, educational leaders and administrators.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions will guide this research:

1. How are university Senior Administrators perceived to define a quality university?
2. What approaches and criteria are used to measure a quality university education by those who make decisions (this includes a cross section of participants directly involved in the quality assurance process including administrators involved in devising the strategies at the administrative level, those who operationalize the strategies at the university and department level, and those at the department level who carry out the work.)?

3. How has the learning outcomes orientation of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process affected university decision-making related to assessment and promotion of the quality of teaching and learning?
4. How has the Ontario Quality Assurance Framework affected university decision-making policies, rewards, structures, and culture to promote the quality of teaching and learning in the Ontario university curriculum?
5. What program-related changes have resulted from the introduction of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process?

### **Significance of the Study**

Despite considerable literature dealing with implementation of quality assurance in other parts of the world (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Shah, Nair & Wilson, 2011; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011; van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993), very little deals with the Canadian context (Goff, 2013). This study addresses the experiences and perceptions of participants directly involved in interpreting and applying program quality assurance policy across multiple levels of involvement (e.g., administrators, department/school chairs, faculty, support staff) in Ontario universities for the first time.

Much of the existing research deals exclusively with the views of management and upper level administrators not directly involved in the work of preparing a self-study for the program review (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Newton, 2000). Only recently have impact studies emerged from countries with a longer history of implementing such policies such as the U.K., Europe, and Australia (Clarke, 2009; El-Khawas, 2014; Harvey & Williams, 2010a; Leiber, 2014; Stensaker, 2008). The current research engages a cross section of participants directly involved in the quality assurance process including

administrators involved in devising administrative level strategies, those who operationalize the strategies at the university and department level, and those at the department level who carry out the work.

The outcomes-oriented approach has been applied widely in Europe, Australia and in parts of the US for almost two decades. These implementations have met with varying degrees of acceptance and perception of value (Stensaker, 2011). The literature primarily suggests the policy does exactly what it sets out to do and has many positive outcomes (Brennan & Shah, 2000). However, there is not only vocal dissent (Blackmur, 2010; Newton, 2000), but also highly outspoken criticism in university publications and academic blogs regarding the increased bureaucracy and onerous nature of the work required in the process. (Clabaugh, 2004; Noonan, 2016).

### **Learning from Experience**

Since Ontario introduced program level review with a learning outcome focus 10 to 15 years later than other parts of the world, the potential to take a different approach existed that could result in a more favourable implementation and results. In Canada, education is not a federal but a provincial responsibility. Consequently, each provincial jurisdiction determines how they will proceed. In approaching this task, the province of Ontario has applied its own strategies, interpreted at the university and departmental levels. This research will examine the effects of implementing the new outcome oriented process of the Quality Assurance Framework as perceived by those involved.

**Communities and professionals.** The communities who may find this study meaningful include, first, international higher education policymakers at the national, provincial, or institutional level since the application of quality assurance policy under



scrutiny is being applied ten to twenty years following the major wave of similar policy application in the UK (Clarke, 2009), U.S. (Miller, 2012), Europe (EHEA, 2012), and Australia (Baird, 2011). As a result, the opportunity exists for policy implementation to attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced in other jurisdictions (Blackmur, 2010; Newton, 2000). A careful review of the literature suggests a study of the effects of the learning outcomes focus of the IQAP implementation as perceived by those directly involved in the review process at several levels of the university has not been undertaken before.

Second, higher education is a provincial responsibility in Canada, and by extension the quality of delivery is a provincial responsibility. All provinces in Canada have adopted the same Degree-Level Expectations applied in Ontario in 2005, and this standard, with its focus on outcomes (both student learning outcomes and program outcomes) is being embedded in provincial Quality Assurance frameworks (CICIC, 2017). All provincial Quality Assurance (QA) bodies may discover value in the study findings identifying the effects of Ontario processes, practices, and provincial application.

Third, professionals administering quality assurance policies, processes, and practices at various institutions in Ontario, in Canada or abroad may wish to compare local effects with those observed in the study. This study lays a foundation for subsequent longitudinal impact research. This would include administrators, staff supporting the program review and those supporting the curriculum development process.

## **Nature of the Study**

This research study employed a qualitative, multiple case study approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2011). Interviews including structured and unstructured questions were conducted by telephone. The multiple case study involved gathering data from between five to eight participants from each of four universities in southern Ontario and comparing results across cases. Given the complexity of institutional contexts, a number of decisions were made to reduce the number of variables between settings to increase similarities and help to rule out competing explanations (Kelly, 2017). For example, all four universities invited to participate are categorized as comprehensive, as defined by Statistics Canada “Comprehensive institutions have a significant amount of research activity and a wide range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including professional degrees” (Orton, 2009, p.16). At all four universities, the same academic department was invited to participate. Participants were recruited from five levels of involvement in the program review process at each institution with a minimum of one person from each level. The levels included: (a) faculty members; (b) department or school chair/director or former department chair/director; (c) teaching and learning centre support staff; (d) quality assurance support staff; and (e) senior administration.

Research ethics approval was sought and received from Brock university and each of the participating institutions. Mixed research methods were employed including a few structured questions to obtain baseline comparable information (e.g., perceived definitions of quality) and semi-structured questions to obtain richer responses to open ended questions (e.g., what effects, if any, would you say the program review has had on

program planning?) and to probe beyond the immediate responses. Data was collected by telephone interview, and analysis was conducted using content and thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse, 2012; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2011) applying a range of qualitative analysis methods.

### **Rationale**

Research into the effects of quality assurance processes on higher education has been criticized for not including those directly involved in conducting the program review and focusing on perceptions reported by upper level administration, which generally concludes that quality assurance outcomes are precisely those intended (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Leiber, 2015). The current study was designed to address this gap in the literature and to achieve a more balanced perspective in three ways: (a) including major participants in the self-study process from across the university at different levels of involvement, (b) employing a multiple case study approach and, (c) including four similar universities.

### **Definition of Terms**

While there may be some differences of opinion in the field of higher education regarding the definitions of *quality*, the work of Lee Harvey in the field of higher education quality assurance is seen as a benchmark in western Europe. The paper titled *Defining Quality* (1993) has being cited over 1800 times according to Google Scholar. Harvey is well published in the field of quality assurance in higher education. Amongst various roles, he served as the director of the Centre for Research into Quality at the University of Central England, and Director of Research at the Higher Education Academy. For this reason, definitions by Harvey have been adopted for this study.

**Accountability.** The term accountability means being responsible for services provided and the expenditure of public money. Accountability has been the primary driver for establishing quality evaluation mechanisms in higher education. Accountability also addresses the issue of responsibility to students for the provision of a well-ordered delivery of educational programs (Harvey, 2008).

**Accreditation.** Accreditation is a process of approval and recognition by an external body that a program meets threshold standards.

**Control.** Control is about ensuring higher education is conducted with integrity and delivers on expectations related to legitimacy and status. In higher education, this includes controlling costs and controlling growth, and preventing of unscrupulous or inadequate educational delivery. Control addresses issues such as setting standards, thresholds and expectations. The control function of assurance engages in specifying processes and procedures for comparison against expectations (Harvey, 2008).

**Compliance.** The term compliance requires universities establish, implement and uphold policies, practices and procedures to ensure adequate administration of higher education. This includes financial accountability as well as policy-related accountability as governments place increasing demands on universities to meet public expectations and strategic provincial mandates. In addition, regulatory bodies such as the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance mandate compliance and monitor implementation of the Institutional Quality Assurance policy. This compels universities to develop and carry out collection, analysis of data and to develop a self-study report (Harvey, 2008).

**Higher education.** Higher Education in this study refers to public universities operating in Ontario. When discussing other jurisdictions, Higher Education may refer more broadly to degree granting institutions internationally.

**Improvement.** The term improvement means to enhance, or make better. Improvement is a claim made by most quality assurance systems, though it is often secondarily or nominally addressed in the early years of the system. Enhancement may be given more attention subsequently. In Ontario, the audit conducted by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance do not review improvement or enhancement of teaching and learning programs themselves but rather of the degree to which an institution monitors its own practices.

**Quality.** The term quality has been described as a multifaceted, relative, and slippery concept conceived in multiple ways and is context dependent (Brockerhoff, Huisman & Laufer, 2015; Vlasceanu, Gurnberg, & Parlea, 2007. Harvey and Green (1993) cite five common conceptions include (a) fitness for purpose, (b) excellence, (c) perfection, or consistency, (d) transformation, and (e) value for money. Quality is a relative concept in two ways. First, it means different things to different people. Different stakeholders such as students, parents, employers or the government will often hold differing views. “This is not a different perspective on the same thing but different perspectives on different things with the same label” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 10). Secondly, it is relative in that one can have more or less quality (Gibbs, 2010).

**Quality assurance.** Quality assurance is a process of continuous and ongoing assessment of the quality of higher education programs, institutions, or systems. This involves a variety of enhancement, assurance, and maintenance functions. Quality

assurance is a mechanism used to regulate with a focus on accountability and enhancement. It employs consistent processes and established criteria to provide information, and may render a judgment. Quality assurance processes rely on a culture of quality. Quality is ensured by means of the management, enhancement, control, and assessment of quality following agreed-upon measures (Vlaseanu, et al., 2007). This definition is in keeping with the description from the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance website which states the agency is “responsible for oversight of the Quality Assurance Framework processes for Ontario Universities” (OUCQA, 2017b, pp. 1).

### **Assumptions**

The effects of the program review process under investigation in this study are likely to be perceived differently by institution, by role, and by individuals at the same institution. The study assumes the researcher and those being interviewed will influence each other. I currently work in the field under investigation and have familiarity with the structures, processes and procedures of an institution not involved in the study.

**Topic specific assumptions.** The topic of assuring the quality of programs in universities brings with it certain current assumptions held by the general public. Sample assumptions:

- that students, parents, the public, and the government require an accounting for the public funds provided for university education (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011);
- that increased oversight is required to prevent the waste of public funds. Various political pressures labeled neo-liberalism, the new right, or new public management

- as described and elaborated in the literature review have increased attention on and demand for this oversight (Clabaugh, 2004; Miller, 2012; Newton, 2000);
- that increased quality monitoring will increase the quality of education for students (Brown & Lauder, 1989; ISO, 2011; Taylor, 1911);
  - that increased quality monitoring will result in fiscal efficiencies;
  - since most western countries have stepped up oversight internationally (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993) that Canada must performe follow suit.

**Conceptual limitations.** Finally, the conceptual framework of Brennan and Shah (2000) employed in this study assumes the impact of quality assurance differs between universities and suggests the differences are connected to the methods and context of their use as will be explored further in the next chapter.

**Methodological assumptions.** Qualitative research is an inductive, emergent process influenced by a researcher's experience conducting research, collecting data, and analyzing results (Creswell, 2013). This study takes a scientific approach to research but does not ascribe to strict cause and effect; it sees research inquiry as involving logical steps and anticipates multiple perspectives from participants. This research investigates multiple perspectives representing the multiple realities of participants. Truth is not seen as an objective reality but is seen as dependent on worldview (Patton, 2015).

### **Limitations**

This research will not focus on improvement of academic standards and measured outcomes of student learning, but rather on who makes the decisions regarding program learning outcomes, how they make the decisions, and how the resulting effects are experienced by those involved in the program review process at various levels.

Student perceptions have not been included in the current study because student involvement in development of the self-study document often involves little more than survey feedback responses. In addition, since very few students are directly involved in the process of program review there would be the additional difficulty of identifying and encouraging student participation, and ensuring participation from all four participating universities.

Each participating university is not treated as a case in itself; a common academic department from each university is represented. While the senior administration and support staff are normally common across the university, there is tremendous variation in experiences between departments themselves. To reliably characterize the experiences of a university as a case study would require multiple departments and a much larger sample of participants beyond the scope of this study. Even if that were possible, perceptions of Science departments may differ considerably from those from the Humanities from a disciplinary perspective, as explored by Becher and Trowler (2001).

No conclusions and generalizations of a statistical nature will be drawn due to the nature of the data. Instead, the study relies on carefully selected key individuals involved in the program review process across multiple levels of involvement in program review for direct experience and information-rich reports.

This research deals with implementation of a policy formally mandated by the Ontario Quality Council. The first program reviews were initiated following the new process in 2011. As a result, the current research examines the first five years of policy implementation. Any conclusions drawn will be preliminary based on early experiences before universities have settled into regular implementation.



## **Summary**

The remainder of the dissertation will be organized as follows. In Chapter 2 will introduce the conceptual framework for the study and provide a review of the literature with an analysis, critique, and synthesis of the relevant literature. In Chapter 3 the research methodology used to address the research questions will be introduced. Chapter 4 will analyze the research data. Chapter five will include the research findings, a summary of results, and implications for practice. The final chapter also makes the connection to the research literature, and provides recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review surveys the quality assurance literature pertinent to the study questions and will:

- (a) Synthesize key historic and political influences and pressures;
- (b) Analyze the international factors contributing to the rise of quality assurance;
- (c) Describe the origins of accountability in higher education and leading to growth of quality assurance internationally, in Canada; and
- (d) Describe the Ontario higher education quality assurance system itself.

The review then:

- (e) Outlines the conceptual model employed for study, describes the various components and outlines the relationship between elements of the model;
- (f) Explores the existing research studying the impact of quality assurance, the need for further studies and investigates why this research is complex; and
- (g) Reviews four designs for researching the impact of quality assurance as well as some of the methods appropriate for the study of impact.

### **Surveying the Literature**

A review of literature for this study began by searching across multiple journal databases (e.g., including CRKN Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities, JSTOR Arts and Sciences VI, ProQuest Research Library, OECD Periodicals). Employing keywords with a targeted vocabulary, this included author searches, bibliographic mining, search of cited references within research articles, searches by methodology and a review of dissertations.

A successive refinement of keyword searches in databases (referenced above) helped to determine the breadth and scope of the field of study. The search started with keywords such as quality, quality assurance, and higher education identifying a vast literature dealing with issues related to quality.

### **Key Historic and Political Influences and Pressures**

Quality assurance is a topic of research and commentary in numerous fields, including manufacturing (e.g., International Standards Organization; ISO, 2017), business (e.g., Total Quality Management; Rehder & Ralston, 1984), and Health Care (Vuori, 1982). These initial searches demonstrated how the quality assurance processes so successful in manufacturing have been systematically applied in other fields. In the field of manufacturing, quality assurance refers to the process itself. A “quality” process streamlines procedures and methods to enhance the consistency of output (Deming & Edwards, 1982; ISO, 2017; Taylor, 1911) and many fields have adopted these ideas. This literature revealed a history of quality processes introduced in the United States as far back as 1911 by Taylor (1911), and Deming and Edwards (1982).

Narrowing the exploration to higher education decision-making, Trow (1973) revealed the powerful influence of demographics on political decision making with entry of the post-war baby boom and echo into the education system. During this time quality issues gained traction in the field of business with the tremendously popular application of methods such as Total Quality Management (Rehder & Ralston, 1984) and ideas of systematic quality assurance began to influence higher education (Ho & Weeam, 1996).

Bibliographic mining allowed identification of recurrently cited studies, journals, and authors, such as Harvey and Green (1993) and their frequently referenced definitions

of quality in higher education. This involves review and analysis of the bibliographies of key articles to identify useful leads to pursue. In the 1990s the Bologna Process was conceived and British and European authors dominated the higher education literature with articles comparing and reconciling programs across the European Union. Journals such as *Quality in Higher Education*, and the *European Journal of Education* were particularly useful.

In addition, a considerable number of research studies, reports, and commentaries addressing issues of quality assurance in higher education are published online directly by international organizations, including governmental bodies, bodies at arm's length from government, and quality assurance agencies directly involved in this work. International bodies producing such reports include the international Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2012), the European Higher Education Area. Research reports and documentation are also produced by the national quality assurance agencies of various countries including the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2017a) ; the American Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, 2017); and the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2013).

In Canada, Ontario government websites and Canadian bodies at arm's length from government also publicly provide reports and documentation regarding quality assurance in higher education. Organizations include Universities Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2007), and the Council of Ontario Universities (2012). The Ontario bodies including the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA, 2017a), and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO, 2008) also produce public research reports and documentation.

The quantity of literature dealing with issues of quality assurance in higher education rose considerably beginning in the 1980s and continued to grow. This literature review will begin by addressing some of the international factors triggering the rise of quality assurance.

### **International Factors Contributing to the Rise of Quality Assurance**

This section of the literature review will situate Ontario higher education quality assurance within the broader international context of reform emphasizing the influences and pressures leading to a rise in adoption of quality assurance processes in many western countries, and then it will shift the discussion from international to the current Ontario context. First, the general concept of accountability will be discussed, second, accountability in higher education, third, demographic pressures and massification, fourth, international quality assurance. It will then discuss how these factors have influenced quality assurance in Canadian higher education, Ontario quality assurance in particular, and finally introduce the Ontario Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).

### **Accountability Over Time**

Although changes in the last 40 years have transformed the strategies for ensuring quality in higher education, it is not a recent issue. Stensaker and Harvey (2011) suggest the concepts of accountability and quality assurance can be traced back to the origins of the words, “accounting” or “bookkeeping” and describe the trail. William, I of England asked property holders to provide “a count” of their possessions in 1085 in order to hold property owners accountable for the proportion of goods they were obliged to submit to the crown. With the rise of democratic societies, the public demanded the state render an account for the money spent. However, as state services grew in complexity it became

increasingly difficult for the public to make sense of the accounting involved. The public grew sceptical of a system that required elected representatives to rely on civil servants to be accountable and responsible for spending. A growing distrust of civil servants resulted in a search for new and more objective approaches to accountability (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011).

### **Accountability in Higher Education**

Historically, higher education institutions gained the trust of the population over time based on strong norms and a common identity. The oldest universities such as the University of Bologna, the University of Paris, and Oxford University developed reputations, that became a proxy for trust and for quality (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). Over time, and especially over the last few decades, the demand for increased accountability was strengthened, sustained, and amplified. Three factors affecting the increased demand for higher education include, shaken trust, the role of massification, and the application of efficiency strategies. Each will be discussed.

First, in recent decades, trust in universities and other publicly funded institutions began to crumble in the mid 1980s when Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher heralded the political New Right. They demanded smaller government and increased accountability for services provided by public funds. Reagan in the U.S., and Thatcher in the U.K advocated cuts to public spending and the need to *drive up quality* (Brennan, 2012). They promoted a distrust of civil service and publicly funded institutions resulting in a search for new and more objective approaches to accountability (Clark, 2009; Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). The level of distrust and the new willingness to exert control over public spending was intensified when Ronald Reagan fired 12,000 public sector air

traffic controllers in 1981 rather than concede to their spending demands (New York State Archives, 2012). Those holding the purse strings called for measures of performance in various sectors and to varying degrees. For example, Thatcher cut annual funding to universities by 5% and allocated specified funds based on perceived outputs (Clark, 2009; Gillard, 2011). In some of the American states during the same period, institutional funding became dependent on *performance measures* (Banta, 2010), a strategy also taken up in Australia (Banta, 2010; Clarke, 2009).

### **Demographic Pressures and Massification**

A second factor influencing higher education includes what Martin Trow called the *massification* of education characterized by development from an *elite* higher education system serving less than 15% of the school age cohort to a *mass* system serving 40% or more. When the education system serves over 52% it is considered a *universal* system (Trow, 1973). In North America, the end of WWII marked the demise of the primarily *elite* public system of postsecondary education in the west. The school participation rate continued to rise as the baby boom filled schools beyond capacity and educated over 40% of the cohort to become a *mass* system by 1960 (Foot & Stoffman, 1998). As manufacturing jobs in the 1980s began to move to lower wage countries, western governments around the world began to promote a knowledge-based economy (Kis, 2005). With flagging economies and government encouragement, higher education moved toward a *mass* system in the U.K., U.S., Canada, and Australia in the 1980s and 1990s. These countries are now approaching if not exceeding the over 50% postsecondary participation rate marking a universal system of higher education. To put

this in the local context, the Ontario provincial government has set a target to reach a 70% post-secondary attainment rate by the age-related cohort by 2020 (MASED, 2017).

As massification caused demand for higher education spaces to rise, and employers began increasingly to require university degrees, some students sought short cuts. Fly-by-night operations appeared on the scene, ready and willing to offer university degrees for little or no work. This raised serious concerns about the quality of higher education degrees in a rapidly expanded system. With the new millennium, many countries around the world scrambled to take action (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). For example, in Chile between 1980 and 1990, 37 private higher education institutions were closed. These institutions catered to affluent students with inadequate grades, but the programs “did not meet basic standards” (Lemaitre, 2011, p.153). With unprecedented numbers attending higher education, public costs have inevitably risen along with concerns about sustaining quality in a growing system. These factors produced major pressures on higher education.

Exacerbating the increasingly scrutinized situation of universities came publications such as, *Higher Education? How Colleges are Wasting our Money and Failing our Kids* (Hacker & Dreifus, 2011) or, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum & Roska, 2011). The latter reviewed educational gains by students over the four years of college as measured by the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a standardized test of critical thinking, analytical thinking, and higher order thinking skills. Their conclusion: after four years of college, students had not learned very much. The Chronicle of Higher education called it “a damning indictment of the American higher-education system” (Glenn, 2011, pp. 1).



Thus, the political influences addressed earlier were fuelled by the rising demographics and resulted in a crisis of confidence in the quality of higher education. This naturally led to a search for strategies to address the problem of assuring quality.

### **Quality Assurance Practices**

A third factor influencing higher education involves the search for quality assurance processes. These processes in manufacturing succeeded in bringing about considerable efficiencies and improvements in the quality of production, and the consistency of output from the 1940s to the 1980s. They were seen as providing a promising suite of tools and strategies for higher education such as *scientific management* which included time-motion studies to analyze efficiency of assembly in factories (Taylor, 1911), or analysis for processes to increase the consistency and quality of production (ISO, 2011; Nair, 2010). Leaders saw higher education institutions to some extent as places that involved the production of goods. These quality assurance strategies were seen as providing useful, rigorous, and systematic frameworks to apply in higher education (Brown & Lauder, 1996; ISO, 2011; Taylor, 1911;).

Thus, three factors can be seen as affecting the climate from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, a shaken trust in public service, pressures in higher education from massification of growing system, and warning signs about the quality of provision. These led naturally to plans for applying the efficiency strategies successful in other sectors. These factors set the stage for the introduction of quality assurance strategies in higher education.

**International quality assurance.** Discussion of international developments that influenced the design of Canadian and Ontario quality assurance will include first, the

creation of international, national, and regional bodies to coordinate and strengthen quality assurance processes and procedures in various countries. This will be followed by examples of two initiatives designed to begin comparing standards at the level of the academic program: the Tuning Process, and the Bologna Process.

Pressures and concerns about quality described earlier put universities on the defensive regarding the rising costs of education, the value offered, and the quality provided. This led many countries to respond by establishing quality assurance bodies at local, national, and international levels. Countries and regions including Australia, Africa, China, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, and the United States have established quality assurance bodies to monitor higher education quality (Baird, 2011; Nair, 2010; Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). An indication of this growth can be seen in the creation and expansion of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). This association of worldwide quality assurance organizations is “active in the theory and practice of quality assurance (QA) in higher education” (INQAAHE, 2017). Founded in 1991 as concerns for quality assurance was taking root with eight member countries, by 2017 the members of INQAAHE numbered over 280.

At the level of the academic program, a number of initiatives comparing standards across jurisdictions were launched. For example, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is studying the commonality of learning outcomes in the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Project (Group of National Experts on the AHELO Feasibility Study, 2011). This project currently involves 17 countries from around the world in the comparison of learning

outcomes from selected disciplines including Economics, and Engineering. Countries include Russia, Mexico, US, Australia, Canada, and Japan.

Another initiative comparing standards is the Tuning project, which includes many countries outside Europe including Canada, US, Russia, and China. It aims to re-design, develop, implement, evaluate, and enhance quality by finding curricular points of reference, points of convergence, and common understanding across countries by discipline (Tuning, 2012).

In addition, numerous public initiatives have been formed to review, compare, and monitor the quality of higher education between countries. The most ambitious of these initiatives is known as the *Bologna process* (Harvey, 2006), which aims to create a more “comparable, compatible and coherent” system of higher education in Europe with the creation of a European Higher Education Area. This would allow European students to enjoy smooth recognition between countries (EHEA, 2017a, pp. 2).

The Bologna Process began with the Bologna declaration in 1999, which aimed to increase the mobility of academic staff and students and to facilitate employment. The 48 European countries that now comprise the European Higher Education Area collectively created the process (EHEA, 2017b). To join the European Higher Education Area a member state must be part of the European Cultural Convention and declare a willingness to implement and pursue Bologna Process objectives in their higher education systems.

Development included public authorities, teachers, universities, students, stakeholder associations, quality assurance agencies, international institutions and organizations. The objective of the Bologna process was to: (a) introduce a three-cycle

system consisting of the bachelor, master, and doctoral degree; (b) recognize periods of study and qualifications; and (c) strengthen quality assurance processes (European Commission, 2017).

In the communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education involved in enacting the Bologna process each committed to establishing by 2005 a national quality assurance system (Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2003). The communiqué states the following:

The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at the *institutional, national and European level* [emphasis added]. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. (p. 3)

They also stress that consistent with the principle of *institutional autonomy* [emphasis added], the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. Therefore, they agree that *by 2005* [emphasis added] national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop *an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies* [emphasis added], and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005. Due account will be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks. (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2003, p. 3)

This agreement was to be enacted by 2005. A few points to note about this statement: first, it unequivocally states quality assurance processes will be put in place at the institutional, national and European level. Secondly, it recognizes and emphasizes the autonomy of the institution itself as holder of primary responsibility for quality. Thirdly, it lays out common quality assurance elements to be applied across the European Higher Education Area including a coordinating body, internal assessment, external review, participation of students, and publication of results. It is worthwhile to bear these elements in mind as developments in Canada are discussed below.

The discussion will return to the Bologna Process which helped to shift the focus in universities from input measures such as entering grade point average to an emphasis on outcomes such as measures of student learning. This section will begin with: (a) a brief discussion of the concept of learning outcomes; then address (b) the increased adoption of learning outcomes in western countries; and finally (c) describe the increase in the implementation of learning outcomes in the western world.

Adamson, Becerra, Cullen, González-Vega, Sobrino, and Ryan (2010) say the term learning outcomes can be thought of at least three different ways. First, learning outcomes refer to the simple results of learning, short or long term. Second, in the context of higher education, learning outcomes often refer to the statements prepared by instructors to communicate the knowledge, skills, and products students are expected to be able to demonstrate or produce by the end of a program of instruction. Third, the statements are intended to identify the assessable results, products, or outcomes of learning used to measure what a student actually knows, is able to do, or what they can produce as products to demonstrate their learning.

The actual outcomes of learning are numerous and not all can or should be measured. For example, individual students experience an enormous variability of experiences as they go through university depending upon their choice of courses, the instructors assigned to teach their classes, the friends they make, the assignments completed, and their experiences inside and outside of class. Not all are intended, nor are all positive. They will differ substantially from student to student. Despite this diversity, degree programs are designed to help students learn relatively bounded knowledge, skills and other forms of learning in a specific field. Assessments in the form of projects, assignments, and tests are used to determine if students have achieved the program's intended learning outcomes. If the quality of a program were uncertain, an accountability check, for example a peer review, could determine if the disciplinary outcomes of learning had been met.

Learning outcomes have received considerable attention, particularly in the western world. Most notably in the UK, the US, Europe, and Australia. In 1992, the

federal government of the United States passed the Higher Education Act requiring all regional bodies and disciplinary bodies accrediting universities to identify and assess learning related to learning outcomes. By 2009, a survey of chief academic officers in the US identified institutional accreditation as the major external driver of learning outcome assessment (Banta, Ewell & Cogswell, 2016). A tremendous expansion of instruments and approaches to document learning outcomes were developed and expanded in the United States between 2000 and 2015. In 2013, Borden and Kernel identified 26 assessment tools for measuring quality. The tools measured perceptions, experiences, learning goals, and learning outcomes. They also revealed a growing trend the number of such tools had reached 250.

Also in the early 1990s, a European Union project dealing with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) concluded that programs of study would be easier to compare if described in terms of outcomes rather than inputs. Since then, learning outcomes increasingly gained importance at the policy level and have been mandated in a range of key documents to the Bologna process. They have,

consequently, been supported by the development of national qualifications frameworks (Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2003), the adoption of the ESG [*the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*], the overarching outcomes-focused Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QFEHEA) (Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2003) and the European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning. Today and in the near future student-centered

learning and learning outcomes will be at the core of implementing Bologna (Adamson et al., 2010, p. 4).

As a measure of this importance, the topic of learning outcomes has appeared in every ministerial communiqué after 2001 (Adam, 2008). A UK Bologna expert asserts, “learning outcomes are acknowledged as one of the basic building blocks of European higher education reform” (p. 4). Adam describes an emphasis on student learning outcomes as contributing to different levels and dimensions of higher education including: (a) at the institutional level, implications for teaching learning and assessment; (b) at the national level, implications for descriptions of national qualifications frameworks; and (c) internationally, they help with broader descriptors that can contribute to “transparency, mobility and fair recognition” (p. 10). Thus, learning outcomes became a mechanism to facilitate comparisons of student performance at multiple levels in higher education in Europe. In a document produced as a Bologna Process seminar, Adam (2008) stated, “The humble learning outcome has moved from being a peripheral tool to a central device to achieve radical educational reform of European higher education” (p. 4).

In 2008, the same year as Adam’s comment, a review of the Australian quality audit system found the system overly focused on inputs and processes. It was described as inefficient, fragmented, and not placing sufficient emphasis on standards and outcomes. The report recommended creating a new government quality assurance agency, which was subsequently formed and called the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. The new agency was to develop a more transparent process and to assure the quality of learning outcomes (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). To



underscore the weight of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, the new body was even granted power to withdraw an institution's privilege to use the title of 'university' (Massacre, 2009).

**Summary.** This section has examined some of the international developments influencing the design of Canadian and Ontario quality assurance including the creation of international, national, and regional bodies to coordinate quality assurance processes. It also provided two examples of initiatives comparing and reconciling student performance standards internationally that require the creation of quality assurance processes and which place an emphasis on student learning outcomes. This was followed by a brief description of the growing emphasis of learning outcomes in quality assurance processes in higher education in western countries. How these international changes affected systems in Canada and Ontario will be considered next.

### **Canadian Quality Assurance**

This section will briefly address quality assurance governance in Canada overall and more specifically, in Ontario. It begins with a) a broad overview of responsibilities, addresses b) issues of accountability, followed by c) the concept of peer review in higher education and finally, d) the concept of cyclical review, key for the current research study. Higher education in Canada is a provincial responsibility and provincial legislation grants universities the authority to grant degrees. Like those in Europe, each Canadian university is considered autonomous and establishes its own procedures and quality assurance standards (Universities Canada, 2017). In 2007, provincial and territorial ministers of education adopted the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework. The stated reasons for endorsing the framework were:

- To provide assurance to the public, students, employers, and postsecondary institutions at home and abroad that new programs and new institutions of higher learning meet appropriate standards and that performance against the standards will be assessed by appropriate means;
- To provide a context for identifying how degree credentials compare in level and standard to those in other jurisdictions, with a view to facilitating the search for continuous improvement, the education and training of an internationally competitive workforce, and international recognition of the quality of Canadian credentials;
- To improve student access to further study at the postsecondary level by establishing a degree-level standards context in which policies on the transfer of credits and credential recognition may be developed and, in fairness to students who choose non-traditional providers, to focus discussion of credit transfer and credential recognition on the academic standards that the programs involved have met (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2007).

The first point speaks to the concerns of stakeholders over the quality of education arising from the rapid expansion of higher education, as well as the rise of independent providers. Point two, deals with the need to compare local credentials to other jurisdictions to address mobility related to globalization. Point three, again addresses issues of comparability, but for the purpose of transfer from one educational system to another particularly with “non-traditional” providers given the availability of online degrees inside and outside of Canada. This Canadian position has been listed first, however the province of Ontario started this process two years earlier. The current research study focuses specifically on the Ontario setting, which will be considered next.

## **Quality Assurance in Ontario**

The history of quality assurance in Ontario is briefly summarized here from two sources; first, Universities Canada (2017), an organization of Canadian university presidents, and second, the Ontario Universities Council for Quality Assurance, also known as the *Quality Council*, the body responsible for the oversight of quality assurance process in Ontario universities operating at arm's length from both university and government (OUCQA, 2017a). University quality assurance falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), formerly known as the MTCU, or Ministry for Training Colleges and Universities (Universities Canada, 2017).

From 1982 until 2010, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) periodically reviewed graduate programs, and in 1996, the Council of Ontario Universities moved to adopt similar processes for the audit of undergraduate programs. Under the direction of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), the executive director of OCGS administered audits conducted by the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC).

In January of 2005, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies approved the Graduate University Degree Level Expectations and by December of the same year the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), approved the university Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLES). Note the year: 2005 was the deadline to put quality assurance processes in place as part of the formation of the European Higher Education Area. It is clear international pressures including initiatives such as the Bologna process influenced administrators in Ontario to enhance the quality

assurance processes put in place. The rationale for developing the degree-level expectations can be seen in the first line of the Degree-level expectations document produced by OCAV which states, “the globalization of higher education has led to the need to be able to compare and contrast the variety of qualifications granted by academic institutions for credit transfer, graduate study preparation and professional qualification” (COU, 2007, pp. 1).

In 2007, a COU commissioned report by former president of Carleton University Dr. Richard Van Loon recommended establishing the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council). The Quality Council was subsequently established in 2010 with the stated purpose of ensuring the development of a rigorous framework for quality assurance in Ontario.

The Quality Council mandated each university to establish an Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP). This recognizes that each university is itself responsible for quality assurance, program improvement and academic standards.

**The Ontario quality assurance framework.** The Quality Assurance Transition/Implementation Task Force formed in 2008 included academic Vice Presidents, graduate deans, and representatives from COU and UPRAC (Quality Assurance Task Force, 2010). This task force worked with the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) to develop a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) applicable to all publicly assisted universities graduate and undergraduate programs. Each university was to develop and apply its own Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), which would address the university mission, meet the Degree-Level Expectations, and address the requirements of the IQAP developed by the institution

itself. In addition, the universities granted the Quality Council decision-making authority regarding any new graduate or undergraduate program proposed.

The provincial process for assuring quality is detailed in Ontario's Quality Assurance Framework (OUCQA, 2017b). The framework outlines the approvals process required for authorization of all new programs and specifies procedures for the cyclical review of existing programs on an cycle of no more than eight years and includes an external review. In addition, the Quality Council also audits each university's quality assurance processes on an eight-year cycle.

The cyclical program review requires each degree program to: (a) demonstrate how it addresses the Ontario Degree-Level Expectations; (b) to articulate student learning outcomes; and (c) to describe how learning outcomes are assessed (Universities Canada, 2017). The requirement to include learning outcomes in the quality assurance process was new. The earlier OCGS and UPRAC quality assurance processes asked for statements of goals or objectives. This new emphasis was consistent with the growing emphasis on learning outcomes developing internationally, and would facilitate comparison across jurisdictions. The requirement to include learning outcomes encourages programs to be accountable not just for delivery of learning, but also for the outcomes of student learning.

### **Origins of Accountability and the Peer Review Process in Higher Education**

It is useful at this point to return to the historical concept of accountability in the higher education context. The ancient European universities formed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century like those of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, developed reputations over time which became a proxy for trust and for quality (Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). The issue of *accountability*

and *peer review* also dates back to the medieval universities with repercussions that have persisted to the present day. Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) describe two models of quality assurance they broadly identify as the *French model* and the *English model*. The French model originated from a dramatic struggle over control of universities with church authorities in medieval Paris. The universities were considered “ecclesiastical colonies” (p. 355). The chancellor of the cathedral asserted the right to determine the content of studies over that of the masters’ guild. In 1231, the fight ended when Pope Gregory IX issued a papal bull, granting the guild masters’ authority over content. The French model thus ceded an external authority with the power to decide who could teach and what they could teach. This is considered the classic *accountability approach* to quality assurance (Cobban, 1975).

In England by contrast, the medieval colleges of Oxford and Cambridge were self-governing sovereign communities of fellows (Cobban, 1988). Completely independent, they were not subject to outside jurisdiction. They had authority to add and remove masters at their own discretion; and the academic community judged the quality of colleagues. The English system could be taken as the model for a *peer review approach* to quality assurance.

The French and English models of quality assurance still form two critical aspects of current systems of cyclical quality assurance in the western world, accountability and peer review which continue to this day in in the form of cyclical program review process (van Wught & Westerheijden, 1994).

**The Ontario cyclical program review process.** The accountability and peer review elements so important to medieval universities are still key features; their enduring presence underscores their importance in the university system.

A general scheme of cyclical program review is now common in systems of public higher education with a high level of institutional autonomy. This is known as the four-stage model of external review. Van Wught and Westerheijden (1993) identified the following common elements in cyclical program review processes:

- a) a managing or coordinating agent for the quality assurance system, operating at arm's length from government;
- b) submission of a self-assessment or self-study report;
- c) a peer review including site visits by external experts; and
- d) a public report.

The current Ontario cyclical program review process includes all elements of the four-stage model. Between the 1990s and the present day, a parallel shift in emphasis has taken place in the western world. In 1995, Barr and Tagg described this as the shift *From Teaching to Learning* in their highly influential work of the same name (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The change marked a shift from a focus on inputs to outcomes. A shift from the *teaching* universities, courses, and instructors provide to students; to the *learning outcomes* students could expect by the end of a course or educational degree.

This learning outcomes focus has major implications for the design, delivery, and evaluation of educational programs and has steadily increased in importance. This shift in focus is aligned with the new managerial and accountability agenda because it addresses issues of accountability to stakeholders by delivering on promises made by

universities. It also aligns most closely with the views of quality as *value for money* and *fitness for purpose* (Harvey & Green, 1993) although it has the potential to help programs become *transformative* and better stronger thus *excellent*, and possibly more consistent.

With respect to cyclical program review, the shift from teaching focus to a learning outcomes focus changed the emphasis in the program review. Rather than explaining what a program was designed to deliver in terms of content, the new process would require an articulation of the program's intended student *learning outcomes* and whether the program could demonstrate how it enabled students to achieve the outcomes. The emphasis on *learning outcomes* found in the documentation for the Bologna Process, is similarly found in the new Ontario Quality Assurance Framework. The website of the Quality Council draws the connection between quality assurance and outcomes in this way:

The task of the Quality Council is, above all, to ensure the continuing achievement of a defined level of quality in the design and delivery of an institution's programs, *with particular emphasis on the desired learning outcomes and Ontario's degree level expectations* [emphasis added], as well as on the monitoring of an institution's compliance with its Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) in its cyclical program reviews (OUCQA, 2017a, pp. 2).

This explanation does not define quality itself, but defines "quality assurance" in relation to three elements. Note the emphasis on standards to be met in the passage above; programs must first assure the continuous quality of design and delivery. Second, they must achieve the articulated learning outcomes and the Ontario degree-level



expectations. And third, they must comply with the local review process specified in the university's own IQAP.

## **Summary**

This review of quality assurance governance outlines the situation in Canada overall and Ontario more specifically including responsibilities, issues of accountability, the importance of peer review, as well as the concept of cyclical review with the new emphasis on learning outcomes, new to the Ontario and key to the current research study. This study will investigate the perceived effects of this outcomes-oriented process.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Elements of the conceptual model adopted in this study, will be outlined and described in this section. It is an adaptation of the model developed, by Brennan and Shah (2000). The model guided the collection, analysis and interpretation of data collected for this research.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) explain, “a conceptual framework explains either graphically, or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts or variables – and the presumed relationship among them” (p. 18). Liehr and Smith (1999) describe the conceptual framework as providing a bounding function that specifies what participants and/or topics will be studied and what will not be studied. The framework indicates relationships and possible influences. It guides the researcher in the selection of questions for the study, the selection of methods and the forms of analysis.

Since researchers usually have some idea of the central elements of the study they will undertake, most studies begin with some notion of a conceptual framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The Brennan and Shah (2000) model describes an understanding of

the relationship between elements involved in the study, an understanding which may evolve over the course of the work.

Vaughan (2008) describes a conceptual model as serving several functions. First, it serves as a point of reference for exploration of the literature, selection of methods, and results. Second, it serves as a tool to filter the selection of research questions and appropriate data collection. Third, it allows the researcher to make sense of data collected from the study. Fourth, it allows the researcher to move past descriptions to explanations. And finally, it establishes boundaries of the work.

The conceptual framework selected for this research is adapted from a study conducted in Europe and sponsored by the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) led by John Brennan from the UK with support from the European Commission. The objectives of the study were to clarify the purposes, methods, and intended outcomes of different national systems of quality assessment, and to investigate their impact on institutional management and decision-making. The study involved 17 different higher education systems, seven national quality agencies in systems, 14 countries, and 29 higher education institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

The conceptual model of Brennan & Shah (2000; see Figure 1) identifies impact on quality assessment resulting at different levels of the higher education system which can be referred to as the macro (national), meso (provincial), and micro (institutional, departmental) levels (Leiber, Stensaker & Harvey 2015). These include (a) the national and institutional contexts, and (b) the methods used. Four levels of impact are identified within institutions including the level of the (a) system; (b) institution; (c) basic unit,

(department level); and (d) individual. The model sees three mechanisms as producing impact (a) rewards; (b) policies/structures; and (c) cultures. Underlying the model are issues of power and values.

Elements similar to those investigated by Brennan and Shah (2000) are relevant for the current study of the effects of outcome-oriented quality assurance in Ontario. The Brennan and Shah model has been adapted for the Ontario context as seen in Figure 2 and described below.

### **Revised Conceptual Framework**

This section begins with a description of the differences between the two frameworks then elaborates on the elements of the framework for the current study. The conceptual model for this study (Figure 2) identifies impact as resulting from (a) the context at the provincial, institutional, and department level, and (b) the methods used at the institutional and department level. Three levels of impact are identified within institutions including the level of the: (a) institution; (b) department; and (c) individual. The model also sees three mechanisms as producing impact including: (a) rewards; (b) policies/structures; and (c) cultures. Underlying this model are issues of power and values.



The department level is defined as the academic department, the home of the degree program of study.

The Brennan and Shah (2000) study compared different national systems of quality assessment across 14 countries. The context of the revised model focuses on a more contained system, universities within the single province of Ontario in Canada. The Ontario adoption of a province-wide quality assurance process provides a unique opportunity to study the impact of the new process across universities within a common provincial system.

The context of the model includes the *institutional* level, which is unchanged between the two models and is seen as varying between universities. The revised model adds the context of the *department* level which designs and delivers degree programs (e.g., department of English) also seen as varying between academic departments.

Brenan and Shah saw methods as differing at the national and internal level. They use the word *internal* to describe the basic unit of preparation of the self-study for the program review. The *national* level refers to the external peer review, which in the context of Europe is national. The revised model narrows the focus from the national level to provincial level. Given the difference in Canadian higher education, each Ontario university works in the context of the common provincial requirements, and develops its own Institutional Quality Assurance Process; this model sees the institutional, and department level as affecting impact.

The revised model also narrows the scope of impact to that occurring at three levels, the institutional, department, and individual level. Mechanisms through which impact occurs are seen as rewards, policies/structures, and cultures. The next sections describe each part of the conceptual framework in turn.

**Context for quality assurance.** The description of the conceptual framework begins with *context*, seen top left in Figure 1. At the provincial level, the same regulating bodies govern all the universities in Ontario. Universities fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) and to varying degrees experience the provincial issues and political pressures affecting decision-making.

All publicly funded universities have agreed to be subject to the quality assurance process outlined by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance that provides oversight for the quality assurance process at arm's length from the provincial government. Each university has defined their own Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), and each academic program must address the degree-level expectations, specify the intended program Origins of Accountability and the Peer Review Process in Higher Education, and address all elements required by their IQAP.

At the institutional level, the context for universities operating in Ontario is influenced by a number of common factors. First, tremendous demographic growth took place between 1986 and 1992 produced by the echo of the baby boom generation, which peaked in 2011 (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada , 2011). Second, all Ontario universities were affected by the elimination of grade thirteen, the pre-university year of secondary school in Ontario creating a double cohort in 2003 (Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009). Two new universities were created during this period, Nipissing University (Nipissing, 1992), and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in 2002 (University of Ontario Insitute of Technology, 2017).

Contextual differences between universities include rural vs. urban settings and institutional size, with rural universities generally smaller than those in major cities such as Ottawa, Toronto, and London. The student body is generally more ethnically diverse in the more populous and diverse southern Ontario cities. Institutions also vary to some extent in their focus. For example, Ryerson University identifies as career-oriented, University of Ontario Institute of Technology specializes in technology sector education, and the University of Toronto is seen as the traditional university.

At the department level, the context looks different. The department of English at one university will usually have more in common with an English department at other universities, than with departments such as French Language Studies, Economics, or Biology at the same university. Similarities derive from the discipline itself including the subject of study, the methods of inquiry and what is valued by the discipline (Becher & Trowler, 2001).

**Methods of Conducting Quality Assurance.** The conceptual model sees methods of quality assurance at the institutional level and the department level affecting impact. The standard four-step model quality assurance model described earlier (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993) as a requirement in the IQAP that must be developed by each university in Ontario with minor variations appears, which must include the following five principal components:

- a) self-study;
- b) external evaluation (peer review) with report and recommendations on program quality improvement;

- c) institutional evaluation of the self-study and the external assessment report resulting in recommendations for program quality improvement;
- d) preparation and adoption of plans to implement the recommendations and to monitor their implementation; and
- e) follow-up reporting on the principal findings of the review and the implementation of the recommendations.

Degree Level Expectations, combined with the expert judgment of external disciplinary scholars, provide the benchmarks for assessing a program's standards and quality (OUCQA, 2017b).

As part of the new process, each Ontario university agreed to develop their own IQAP consistent with their university mission statement, the university Degree Level Expectations, and the protocols of the Quality Assurance Framework.

Some methodological differences between universities conducting quality assurance involve dimensions of who, how, what, and how often (Brennan & Shah, 2000). The *who* involves who starts the process, who is involved in carrying out quality assurance work, who checks the work and who provides the final approval. How the IQAP is carried out differs according to the institution's IQAP. The new quality assurance process required all Ontario universities to revise their local policies and structures in order to enact and govern the quality assurance process within their existing context. As a result, existing policies and reporting requirements, and the resulting institutional IQAPs taking these into account will differ between universities. When all the activities above are included, the actual process and steps governing how this is carried out may differ somewhat from university to university. How also includes the



various methods employed to collect feedback from students, instructors, employers and alumni. A narrative or synthesis of this is included in the self-study document as specified in the IQAP document. Some institutional IQAP documents may be quite prescriptive regarding the topics to be addressed, the tables included, the analyses to include, and the format in which the final report must appear, while others may provide more flexibility. The timelines suggested for the process vary, and institutions may require different follow up procedures to the program review process.

**Impact and effects.** The conceptual model distinguishes between *levels* of impact, and *mechanisms* of impact. Levels investigated include the institutional, departmental and the individual. Mechanisms to bring about changes are identified as rewards, policies/structures (e.g., committee structures, or institutional support structures), and cultures (e.g., academic values, climate, priorities and relationships). These will be explored further in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of research data via case studies later in this document.

### **Defining Impact**

The concept of impact is hard to pin down. The Oxford dictionary defines impact as, “a marked effect or influence” (2017). The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2017) defines it as the:

broad or longer-term effects of a project or organisation’s work. This can include effects on people who are direct users of a project or organisation’s work, effects on those who are not direct users, or effects on a wider field such as government policy.(pp. 1)

The definition describes impact as more than a simple result or outcome but a more substantial or longer term effect. Harvey puts it this way:

impact in the context of quality in higher education refers to the consequences that the establishment of quality processes (both internal and external) has on the culture, policy, organisational framework, documentation, infrastructure, learning and teaching practices, assessment/grading of students, learning outcomes, student experience, student support, resources, learning and research environment, research outcomes and community involvement of an institution or department.

(Harvey, 2017, pp. 9)

In short, Harvey sees impact as representing the consequences or results on one of many aspects of higher education. These consequences could be positive or negative, short or longer term in contrast to the earlier definition, which suggested an impact is not a simple result, but indicates something more substantial or enduring.

**Impact implies causality.** Impact implies a causal relationship - a cause produces an effect. An effect presumably would not have occurred in the same way without the cause. However, in this complex world, a single effect is rarely produced exclusively by a single cause.

The concept of causal networks, also known as causal social mechanisms, can allow us to tackle complex social situations that cannot be explained through application of universal laws as can be done with scientific questions (Leiber et al., 2015). These causal social networks can identify the mechanisms or social pathways that produce change in the social world (Hedström, 2005). As a result, a mechanism-based analysis is a common approach used to explain the social world. It enables discussion of the micro

level of human activity and the results at the macro level of society. We make judgements as we plan, prepare and develop policy and plans with the expectation of outcomes in an intended direction. As Phillips and Burbules (2000), state regarding the importance of the notion of causality, “without causal mechanisms and attendant regularities there could be no educational planning, no educational reform and indeed no social life” (p. 92).

The difficulty with analysis of impact in quality assurance is the complexity of factors involved. Quality assurance processes have complex effects produced not just by one cause, but by multi-factorial interactions between causes and their effects mediated by context. Often, multiple causes act together to produce certain effects (Gerring, 2006; Leiber & Todorovski, 2016). In addition, while positive effects may occur, the possibility of negative, unintended, and undesirable effects is also possible (Leiber et al., 2015).

Quality assurance processes have complex effects across different systems affecting the micro, meso, and macro level of higher educational institutions, for example, the mindset of individuals within academic departments, the clarity of learning outcome statements, the effectiveness of department chairs, and the clarity of institutional policies and committee structures (Leiber et al., 2015). For this reason, the adopted conceptual model posits causal relationships, which will be explored at the micro, meso, and macro level of the individual, the department and the institution.

**Values.** The values underlying the conceptual model adopted for this study can be at odds with those of the various academic cultures within higher education. The French model of quality assurance discussed earlier emphasized external oversight for

accountability purposes and can be seen as conflicting with the English model that emphasized autonomy. Another tension exists between these models with respect to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. van Wught & Westerheijden (1994) argue higher education has always been involved in ideals of pursuing knowledge and truth for its intrinsic value as well as pursuing knowledge of value and support to society. This tension can be seen in the four values identified by Brennan and Shah (2000) as underlying the conceptual model for this study seen in Table 1 and described below.

*Academic* values focus on the academic subject knowledge and curricula and include strong professional control based on epistemic values and standards. Conceptions of quality are based on disciplinary affiliations that vary across departments. Academic values are very significant in higher education. *Managerial* values are based on a concern about policies, procedures and structures. This is associated with a focus on assessment. Quality is produced through good management and is seen as applicable across academic and non-academic aspects of an institution equally. *Pedagogic* values focus on the teaching skill and classroom skill of instructors. The focus is less on content than on teaching and bringing about learning. This is associated with educational development and training. Quality is also seen as invariant across the institution. *Employment focused* values emphasize standards, learning outcomes, and the output characteristics of graduates; it is associated with a consumer focus. Quality emphasizes both subject matter and delivery.

New quality assurance processes are more likely to meet resistance when they conflict with underlying values at various levels at the institutional or departmental level. Issues of power also affect each of these values.

Table 1

*Values of Quality (Brennan & Shah, 2000)*

Category	Focus
Academic	Primarily a subject focus Quality values vary across institutions
Managerial	Primarily a process focus Quality values invariant across institution
Pedagogic	Primarily a delivery focus Quality values invariant across institution
Employment Focus	Primarily an output focus Quality values may vary across the institution

**Power.** Issues of power are controversial. This stems not least from the history of the academy represented in the French and English models of accountability affecting how power is distributed and managed in higher education. Quality assurance can influence how resources within the university are allocated, and status can be associated with the allocation. This can strengthen institutional administration and can be used to promote unpopular decisions. The bodies managing quality must strike a balance in their allegiance to government bodies, institutional administration, and the academic disciplines. The smooth functioning of quality assurance requires the cooperation of the academic community particularly for the peer review process and for recognition of the resulting decisions and recommendations. It lends what Brennan calls the *moral authority* of peers, which adds legitimacy to the process in the eyes of faculty members. The peer review process acknowledges the autonomy of departments and the authority of peers in the bureaucratic process of quality assurance. It is seen as a restraint on management and helps to gain the acceptance of the department (Brennan, El-Khawas & Shah 1994; Finch, 1997).

### **Summary**

This section has addressed the various components of the conceptual model, providing discussion of the elements and key related concepts. It has discussed the interaction between elements, including the proposed causal relationships and causal mechanisms. A review of literature addressing the impact of quality assurance processes will be considered next.

## Review of Previous Impact Research

This section first provides a brief overview of findings from previous studies of the impact of quality assurance. It then addresses why there is a scarcity of research and discusses the need to address this topic. Finally, the section addresses challenges in the study of QA impact.

At least four major categories of findings can be identified in studies of the impact quality assurance including those by Stensaker (2014). Quality assurance affects *power* relationships centralizing power more towards central administration (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Newton, 2000). It promotes student interests in higher education and increases the focus on student learning outcomes (Beerkens, 2014). Secondly, quality assurance has resulted in the *professionalization* of quality assurance processes in higher education along with the development of specialized staff (Stensaker, 2014). Another effect involves the *public relations* around quality assurance with increased communication across institutions, and increased attention on education. Stensaker's own research touches on most of these categories as well as on an increased *permeability*, that is, increased transparency in programs and an increase in informed decision-making (El-Khawas, 2014; Stensaker, 1998, 2003, 2014).

In addition, empirical studies have addressed issues of governance, organizational structures, leadership and to some extent the culture of quality (Beerkens, 2014; Stensaker, 2014;). Leiber and colleagues (2015) reports that twenty years of impact studies of external higher education institutions reveal institutional workload has increased and is in need of more streamlined procedures. He also reports complaints from governments about the costs of conducting QA (2015). Harvey (2010), involved in

quality assurance research since the 1990s, says the evidence of direct effects of QA is ambiguous, although countries with a history of QA claim fewer direct effects than those without. Agencies involved in directing quality assurance claim they have established internal (institutional) quality assurance processes, that cyclical reviews reveal changes, and that institutions demonstrate considerable compliance with QA recommendations. Harvey says some studies show a limited but not a significant impact on learning. Harvey relates the positive learning-related impact to the increased requirement for learning outcomes, the increased rigour of course approval, the requirement to provide more detailed documentation, more team-based planning, the dissemination of good practice, and the increased collection of student feedback. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on the curriculum, teaching, and assessment in order to produce an impact on learning.

Specific areas have been identified as requiring exploration. Far less work has been done addressing student views, teaching and learning, measuring student learning outcomes, and academic results (Beerkens, 2014; Harvey & Williams, 2010b; Stensaker, 2014).

A number of factors account for the scarcity of studies examining the impact of quality assurance in higher education. They include, first, the assumption that quality assurance does exactly what it aims to do. If this were the case, studies of impact would be unnecessary (Brennan & Shah, 2000). Without review, this cannot be concluded. Second, measuring impact is extremely difficult to do. The final impact may not be evident until a period of time has passed and changes have had an opportunity to take root (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Also, as time passes, additional factors may act



from different directions to further drive change, adding momentum or killing initiatives (Kajaste, Prades & Scheuthle, 2015). Third, various quality assurance strategies yield different results and promote different developmental changes (Kajaste et al., 2015), and finally, there are methodological challenges. Reporting on outcomes from the International IMHE study, Brennan and Shah (2000) noted the relative absence of literature addressing the impact of quality assessment. Ten years later articles from the journal, *Quality in Higher Education*, summarizing research specifically in this area drew the same conclusion, noting the existence of very few studies dealing with issues of impact. The summary identified only 29 articles in fifteen years (Harvey & Williams, 2010a). The current research contributes to the field by dealing with effects and impact of quality assurance as investigated in Ontario Universities.

### **Need for Impact Studies**

Why should the impact of quality assurance be studied? First, quality assurance has been put into place and justified for purposes of accountability and enhancement to the government and other stakeholders. While it may perform this function, it is an unsubstantiated assumption. Therefore, an impact analysis could determine if it participants believe it achieves the intended accountability and enhancement. Secondly, Stensaker (2014) says if we know the effects of quality assurance work, this will facilitate the design of quality assurance processes moving forward producing an improved understanding of how change takes place, how changes are perceived and who engages in change processes.

Third, experts in the field lament the scarcity of research on impact (Harvey & Williams, 2010b; Newton, 2012). As mentioned, one reason for this is the fundamental

assumption that quality assurance does exactly what it sets out to do (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Serrano-Velarde, 2008). The study of the impact of quality assurance in higher education is considered under theorized, and under researched (Leiber, 2014, 2015; Mark & Henry, 2004). Leiber (2014) also notes the range of methodological approaches applied in the field has been quite limited and would benefit from an application of broader methods.

The research referenced above describes the current state of understanding in countries with such processes in place for twenty years. The effects of changes take time and often cannot be examined until sufficient time has passed for differences to be discerned. By contrast, the effects of the Ontario-wide quality assurance processes introduced in 2010 are only beginning to be studied. This provides an opportunity to taking stock of the effects of the early implementation. In addition, there has been an overrepresentation of the perspectives from senior administrators (Leiber, Stensaker & Harvey, 2015). This literature will also benefit from a broader representation of stakeholders. Brought together, these reasons suggest this research study is both timely and will help to advance understanding in the field.

**Summary.** This brief review of earlier impact studies helps explain why there is a paucity of research on this topic and underscores the need for further research. The next part of the discussion will review strategies appropriate for such research.

## **Methodological Research Designs for Measuring the Impact of Quality assurance**

### **Research Designs**

Leiber and colleagues (2015) identify four general research designs which could be used to measure the impact of quality assurance in higher education each is described below.

#### **Experimental Design**

This approach requires multiple similar contexts in which the same intervention can be repeated under roughly equivalent conditions. Validation of the approach requires that the intervention achieve the same results in multiple contexts. Given the variability and continuously changing nature of university departments and the complex organizational processes and structures, this approach is not realistic.

#### **Control Group Design**

This approach identifies roughly equivalent groups that would or would not experience a quality assurance intervention based on random assignment. The outcomes are compared later. This would be difficult, complicated by the factors identified above. Furthermore, this would be unethical since it would be difficult to justify non-implementation of the program review, and would not be possible as it is a process required by each Ontario university.

#### **Before-After Comparison Design also Known as Pre-Post**

This involves comparing the situation prior to the quality assurance process, and following the process to identify factors that have presumably changed as a result. This design has the difficulty of determining which changes have resulted from the quality assurance intervention and which caused by other factors. The *before* study, determines a

baseline against which to measure change. If this is not done, then the before state must be reconstructed and may be subject to error or imprecision. This also requires knowledge of the context and related causal relationships.

### **Ex-Post**

Finally, the ex-post analysis design involves trying to determine the effects after a quality assurance intervention has taken place. This design commonly employs stakeholder, participant, and expert reports as well as documented data. Given the challenges with other designs, ex-post is the approach most commonly applied in impact studies of quality assurance in higher education.

### **Methodology**

Methodological elements are required to apply any of the four impact research designs described above. This next section will describe six possible methods before proceeding to the method employed in this study. *Document analysis* is commonly used to conduct an analysis of actions and identify changes to the institution (Gibson & Brown, 2009). For the current research, documentation in the form of online schedules, final assessment reports, and departmental websites contributed to the current research. A second method involves use of *standardized surveys* with a variety of specific groups such as Quality Assurance staff, students, faculty members, or senior administrators. This enables analysis of perceptions, actions, and institutional change (Wolf, Joye & Smith, 2016). While the current research did not involve standardized surveys, it did include some questions that might be found on standardized surveys in the form of questions with fixed responses, ranking, and forced choice in order to collect comparable information across participants.

A third method is the use of *hypotheses of causal mechanisms* (Leiber et al., 2015; Olsen, 2015; Stensaker & Leiber, 2015). These can be incorporated into any impact analysis and can form part of quality assurance itself. This strategy involves identification of conditional correlations between *causative* events and *effect* events (Leiber et al., 2015). This approach can make it possible to analyse how effects are achieved. For example, the conceptual framework adapted for this study involves a hypothesis of causal mechanisms.

A fourth method to consider is the use of *in-depth interviews* with key participants in the process. This strategy makes it possible to examine causal mechanisms by asking participants directly for their assessment of effects and what they believe to be causes of those effects.

A fifth possible method to apply is the *counterfactual self-estimation of participants* (Mueller, Gaus, & Rech, 2014). This approach asks participants to analyze the effect on themselves if they had not experienced the QA intervention. This is only applicable for self-report of preferences, decisions and actions relative to institutional and program change.

A final method, and the chief method employed in the current research study is the use of *comparative case studies*, also known as multiple case studies. Leiber et al. (2015) suggest this method can be considered a pragmatic semi-substitute for a control group design. Some researchers take issue with this position rejecting the notion of generalizability. Denzin (1983) for example, explains the interpretivist should never intend to choose samples of human experience at random. Denzin says each thick description represents a slice of the world with its own unique structure, logic, and sense.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) similarly suggest context heavily mediates human behaviour in virtually all situations. On the other hand, the comparative case study can allow the researcher some reassurance that events, processes, and effects outlined in one setting are not unique. It also allows processes and outcomes to be seen across cases and makes it possible to see how the local context influences the outcomes. When a control group is not possible, the interpretive comparison of highly similar but different cases can somewhat approximate a comparison (Leiber et al., 2015).

The current research uses an ex-post comparative case study approach. A reliable impact study would involve a combination of methods in order to triangulate results. Of the six research methods described above, the current research study includes document analysis, hypothesis of causal mechanisms, standardized questions, and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

### **Summary**

This section has reviewed some of the major factors contributing to the rise in importance of quality assurance in higher education beginning with a synthesis of the key historic influences. This included the shift from university reputations being developed over time with the ancient universities, which became a proxy for trust and quality, to the demand for accountability, which grew, to new heights in the 1980s. Additional influences during this time included the massification of the higher education system brought about by the demographic echo of the post-war baby boom, as well as increased pressures on students to prepare themselves with the higher education credentials requisite for the new knowledge-based world economy.

This rapidly expanded higher education system generated concerns about rapidly rising public costs and the quality of educational programs, particularly when stories of sub-standard education emerged of diploma mills offering higher education certification for little or no work. These pressures helped to sweep the political New Right of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher into office with calls to “drive up” quality. These stories promoted distrust of the increased public spending and redoubled demands for accountability including performance-based assessment in some jurisdictions including the UK and the US.

Applying new quality assurance processes such as Total Quality Management (TQM), and the ISO in the 1980s brought tremendous efficiencies and increased quality and reliability to the manufacturing industry. These strategies were applied to numerous other fields with the hope of similar gains to boost confidence, including the higher education sector. By the late 1990s this push for increased quality monitoring sparked the creation of numerous regional, national, and international quality assurance agencies to accredit universities in the US, to monitor quality assurance reviews in Europe, and to conduct department-level reviews of the quality of degree programs across the western world.

Shortly after the start of the new millennium, discussions across jurisdictions explored a new European Union and a new European Higher Education Area. This would require reconciling degree programs between universities with histories of over a thousand years with those minted in the tremendous growth of universities of the 1990s. Activities to reconcile programs identified learning outcomes as a particularly promising approach to comparing programs. While this process was brought about to achieve

managerial objectives, this also shifted some of the focus from the *teaching* provided to students, to what the students had *learned* by the end of a program of study by focusing on the outcomes of learning.

During this tumultuous time, Canada did not escape the demographic or political pressures did not experience the extent of the crisis of confidence created by the diploma mills as experienced in the US. However, the Bologna accord and the increasing mobility of students and staff led to quality assurance processes originally developed before or into the 1990s such as OCGS and UPRAC being reconsidered particularly in the province of Ontario after discussions regarding the Bologna Accord were underway. This change is seen with the introduction of the Ontario Degree-level expectations, which like the European and American systems, introduced a focus on learning outcomes. As Marco Polo discovered, agreeing to participate in an approach adopted by other countries does not always have predictable effects and outcomes..

In this section, the conceptual model of Brennan and Shah (2000) was outlined, adapted for this study to the more bounded system of Ontario, and described. This included a description of how the context and methods of quality assurance may influence the impact of quality assurance. This was followed by a brief summary of the findings from studies addressing the impact of quality assurance in higher education, as well as a rationale for additional exploration. Finally, a variety of possible research designs were described as well as methods to conduct the research.

The next chapter will build on this discussion exploring in more detail the issues considered in selecting the research design and methods employed in the current research study.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This research investigated the impact of introducing a learning outcomes oriented process into an Ontario university quality assurance framework for the cyclical review of academic programs. More specifically, it aims to characterize effects and the changes in attitudes perceived by key participants involved in the program review process in Ontario following the introduction of a new learning-outcomes oriented quality assurance framework at four Ontario universities, and second, to seek knowledge and insights with regard to implementation of this policy in order to inform policy makers, educational leaders and administrators about the effects of this policy.

This section will begin with a recap of the rationale and research questions for the current study. Afterwards, this section will be structured as follows: (a) a description of the overall research design; (b) an overview of the research site selection; (c) identification of the information required to answer the research questions; (d) a discussion of the target population from which the sample was drawn and the sampling strategy; (e) an outline of the research methods applied; (f) a detailed explanation of the steps involved in carrying out the data collection; (g) the steps involved in the analysis and synthesis of data; (h) ethical considerations; and (i) issues of validity and reliability, followed by a summary of the chapter.

### **Rationale**

Although a considerable body of research identifies and discusses factors leading to increased attention on issues of accountability and quality assurance, very little empirical research identifies the impact and effects from the perspective of stakeholders

participating at various levels of the quality assurance process (Hulpiau & Waeytens, 2003).

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This section provides a description of the primary methods used in the current research design followed by a detailed description of the case study protocol. More specifically, it will include descriptions of qualitative research, mixed methods research, case study, and multiple case studies. Then it will address the purposeful, and criterion sampling applied to a population of universities and the identification of participants with specialized knowledge and experience in recently conducted cyclical program review for quality assurance purposes. This will be followed by a description of data collection methods including in-depth interviews consisting of structured and semi structured questions. Data were analyzed by applying variable and case oriented strategies, thematic and content analysis, and analysis using various matrix displays, and frequency distributions. This section will now elaborate on these approaches, methods and strategies.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a general term describing the attitudes and strategies used to determine how humans experience, understand, and interpret the social world (Mason, 1996). It is not a singular form of investigation and is utilized by researchers from diverse disciplines including, humanities, social sciences, and the sciences. Sandelowski (2004) asserts qualitative research is not distinguished from quantitative only though the use of text rather than numbers, since text can be employed and reduced to numbers, and numbers are usually interpreted into text. He describes qualitative research as

characterized by richly detailed descriptions and interpretations of phenomenon such as events, interventions, and practices. Qualitative research often aims to identify the perspectives of people concerning a phenomenon of interest. It is an empirical approach and usually comprises an awareness of context, the purposeful sampling of participants, in-depth interviews, and may involve document analysis. Qualitative research aims to go beyond the surface appearances generated by the data collected. Where quantitative researchers aim to control conditions in order to reduce bias and threat to validity, the qualitative researcher aims for disciplined subjectivity, through observation and the study of events and phenomenon in their natural state without controlling conditions (Sandelowski, 2004). The approach adopted for this study is also known as *applied qualitative* research. This is an approach frequently used to inform policymaking and research related to commerce (Walker, 2004) where the aim is to evaluate practice or policy using the techniques best suited to the task. Applied qualitative research is aligned with pragmatism, which involves matching methods to specific research questions (Walker, 2004). Qualitative research and pragmatism are aligned with the current research study, which deals with the impact of policy implementation.

**Mixed methods.** A study that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer a research question can be described as applying *mixed methods* (Jupp, 2006). The core component of the current research is qualitative (QUAL) and the supplementary component is quantitative (quant). Morse (2012) describes the *core component* of a mixed methods approach as having enough substance to publish on its own, with any *supplementary components* adding analytical strategies and additional data characteristic of one or more other approaches. The supplementary method contributes to the research

and while it is considered too thin to stand on its own, it supports and deepens the understanding of the project. Furthermore, increased certainty in the outcome of a study results if an independent line of evidence leads to the same conclusion. A mixed method design requires the researcher to be alert to two difficulties, first in sampling, and second in how data is combined during or following analysis (Morse, 2012). Whereas quantitative methods generally aim for random sampling methods, qualitative methods may hand pick participants. Secondly, how data is combined during or following analysis must be considered when integrating information collected using different methods (Morse, 2012). Morse suggests careful attention to the integration of qualitative and quantitative information.

Yin (2009), says case studies are not limited to one type of data or evidence and can employ both qualitative and quantitative data relevant to the study. These data can be gathered from sources including interviews, documentary sources, surveys or observations. Hence the application of mixed methods with a case study approach is consistent with the literature. The current case study research included quantitative and qualitative data collected through interviews employing survey methods for collection of the interview notes. First some details about collection and integrating qualitative and quantitative data will be considered, followed by more detail about use of case studies, survey, and interview methods.

**Case study definition and design.** Yin (2009) defines a case study as, “An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context - especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case study research begins with the intention of exploring one or

a small number of cases in depth and set in their own contexts (Bromley, 1986). The aim is to develop a deep and insightful understanding of the case to develop new learning about the meaning and complexity of the world. Case study design can take the form of a single case within a context (e.g., a leader in the context of a start-up company), a multiple case design (e.g., four hospitals, each within a local context), or cases can also be viewed as embedded in a larger context (e.g., grade level classes within an elementary school).

**Unit of analysis for the current research.** A *unit of analysis* is the term used to describe the object of study. Units of analysis in case study research can consist of a single person (e.g., a single patient, a student, a musician, or a leader) it can be an event (e.g., the fall of the Berlin Wall), it can be a phenomenon such as a decision (e.g., to approve a major real estate development in an environmentally sensitive area), it can be a program (e.g., effectiveness of a health initiative), or an organizational or policy change, (e.g., eliminating capital punishment; Patton, 2015). The current research investigating perceptions of effects of a policy change in the program review process in Ontario universities is another example of a possible unit of analysis. The primary unit of analysis for this study is *the role* of participants carrying out in their responsibilities in the quality assurance process within the context of their own university. The roles include, senior administrator, department chair, faculty member, quality assurance support staff, and teaching and learning centre staff.

**Multiple case study design.** The current research is a multiple case study. Within the provincial context of Ontario, four comprehensive universities participated in the study as can be seen in Figure 3. The design and units of analysis will be outlined here

and specifics about recruitment are described later in this chapter. Within the context of each university five roles, or levels of participation in the program review process were selected for the current study and interviewed: 1) senior administrators; 2) teaching and learning centre staff; 3) quality assurance support staff; 4) the department chair (or school director); and 5) faculty members. Viewed across the Figure 3 horizontally, each role is represented in each of the four university settings. Within the specific context of each university, the academic department is an embedded unit. This is consistent with the description of embedded multiple cases studies as described by Yin (2013). The primary unit of analysis is *the role* of the individual carrying out their work in the quality assurance process within the context of their own university. All participants work in the common context of the province of Ontario. Participants from the same university share a common context. In addition, the academic department constitutes an embedded unit within the university. The academic discipline selected for this study was common across all four universities (e.g., Chemistry, English, Fine Art). More detail will be outlined in the section on sampling.

### **Multiple Case Study Method**

Working with a group of cases is known by various names including *multiple case study* (Stake, 2006), *cross case study* (Miles & Huberman, 1994), *natural experiment* (William & Vogt, 2011), *comparative case study* (Campbell, 2010). For purposes of this research study, this research design is called a *multiple case study*. This form of case study still aims for the detailed descriptions found in individual case studies, but the emphasis is on an investigation of similarities, differences, and recurrent patterns across cases. The comparative focus of a multiple case study can take a qualitative or

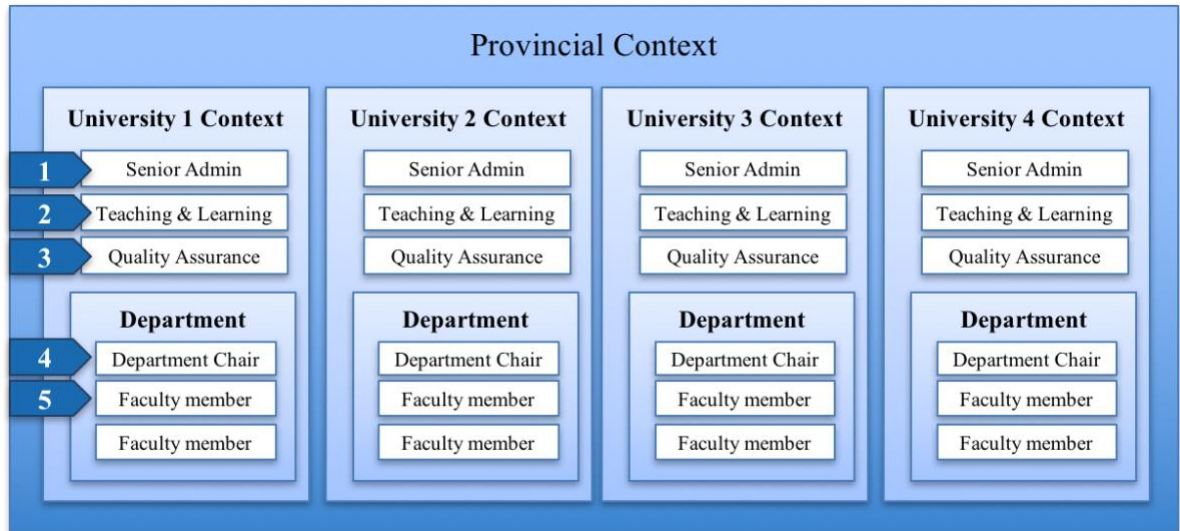


Figure 3. Multiple case study embedded design.

quantitative form. Most multiple case studies lean toward review of typical cases demonstrating some similarity rather than extreme cases or outliers to facilitate comparison (Campbell, 2010).

As Yin (2012) explains, multiple case studies broaden the case study coverage, and variations enable comparisons of whether a reform may occur in a similar way in different settings. Yin (1999) has described multiple cases as similar to multiple experiments. Cases are selected based on what he calls *replication logic*. A finding identified in one case can be tested in a second or subsequent cases to directly replicate findings identified earlier. A significant finding discovered in one experiment, leads to the goal of replicating the finding in two or more subsequent experiments. At the outset of a multiple case study, cases are selected predicting they will produce similar results (a literal replication), or differing results for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication). Increasing the number of cases increases the opportunities for replications. Replication logic is very different than the sampling logic used in in surveys, which aims for a selection from a random sampling of a population in order to represent the larger population (Yin, 2009).

**The value of the multiple case study design.** The multiple case study, is described by Ragin (1987), as valuable for a variety of reasons. First, it can enhance generalizability. When describing and pursuing the details of individual cases we still wish to see beyond the specific to determine if findings may be applicable in other settings. Analysis and comparison of multiple case studies makes it possible to ask reasonable questions about whether the findings may be meaningful beyond a specific case. Second, Glaser and Strauss (1970), argue comparison of multiple groups can help



determine the conditions under which certain structural conditions are reduced or enhanced. They argued negative cases could be used to strengthen theory about similarities and differences across cases, and multiple cases could also help specify the conditions under which findings may occur.

**Variable oriented and case oriented analysis.** Ragin (1987), describes two general approaches to inquiry comparisons employed in case studies, *case oriented analysis* and *variable oriented analysis*. One or both approaches can be applied to case studies. With *variable-oriented analysis*, also known as a cross-sectional analysis, variables are listed in the table across the top and the table is read vertically across cases. Analysis compares cases by how certain variables interact or correlate, and aims to clarify any patterns that may emerge. This approach is tied to the conceptual theory on which the cases are based. In the case of the current research, this form of analysis would apply and check the model by Brennan and Shah (2000) described in Chapter One for fit. By contrast, case oriented strategies review cases and try to determine if cases cluster into groups or form configurations. The design of the current research naturally clusters participants by *roles* (the unit of analysis) in both the university and in the program review process grouping, for example, the teaching and learning centre staff or grouping department chairs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ragin (1987) states it is not only possible, but desirable to mix case oriented and variable oriented strategies as will be described in the data analysis section.

**Interviews.** Patton (2015) describes in-depth interviews as long, ranging from hours to days and designed to capture the viewpoint of another person. Program evaluation interviews he explains, aim to capture a deep understanding of the perspective

of participants including their expectations, reflections, experiences, opinions, and beliefs about program outcomes. An interview is an interaction between the person asking questions and the participant. An interviewer aims to establish rapport, authenticity, and a connection with the participant. Questions are clarified, and follow up questions, planned or impromptu are asked as part of a natural conversation. Questions addressing knowledge, affect, and behaviour are distinguished. The interviewer is empathetic, encouraging, and non-judgemental.

This research made use of an interview guide (Appendix H), which is a useful tool for consistent data collection. In advance it lays out the process, questions, and any follow up prompts to be considered during the interview, and forms part of the overall design of the study. The guide is a structured framework to help ensure the same questions will be asked for each of the participants to facilitate later comparison. It helps ensure a consistent sequence, and keeps the interviewer focused on the questions at hand as planned to use time efficiently. Within the semi structured interview format, it enables spontaneity in responses within the limited time of the interview. The interview guide facilitates a variable oriented analysis and reports participant responses to each question sequentially. This approach facilitates comparative analysis as was done for the current study (Patton, 2015; Ragin, 1987). In addition, a multiple case study approach makes case oriented analysis possible by pooling responses, analyzing, and reporting patterns across cases.

### **Information Required for the Research**

This section reviews the information required to conduct the current research study and how the data will be collected employing structured and semi-structured

qualitative data, as well as some simple averages. An overview of the research design can be seen in Figure 4.

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative interview information requires data to be collected in a particular way. The quantitative approach to interviews is considered *structured*. The researcher identifies and selects all questions, and participants respond to forced choice questions from which they select a response. All participants are asked the same questions in the same order. The direction of inquiry is known and the approach to inquiry is deductive. The data takes the form of a matrix with responses on one axis and variables on the other axis. The sample is generally a random selection of the population. A large random sample size is desirable for statistical purposes with analysis conducted following the full collection of data. For mixed methods research, the point of intersection with qualitative methodology occurs in the narrative, for what Morse (2012) describes as a *results narrative point of intersection*. Some of the questions in the current research employ structured interview questions. How structured and unstructured questions are combined can be seen in Figure 4.

Two other interview formats are common, the unstructured and semi-structured interview as will be described here. Qualitative interviews can employ *unstructured interviews* in which the researcher asks a few open-ended questions to generally start the discussion then adopts a listening stance without leading or prompting (McCracken, 1988; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The *semi structured interview* is the third interview method, and is the primary approach adopted for the current research. This involves asking participants questions to which they can freely respond (Fiske & Kendall, 1990; Richards & Morse, 2007). Since

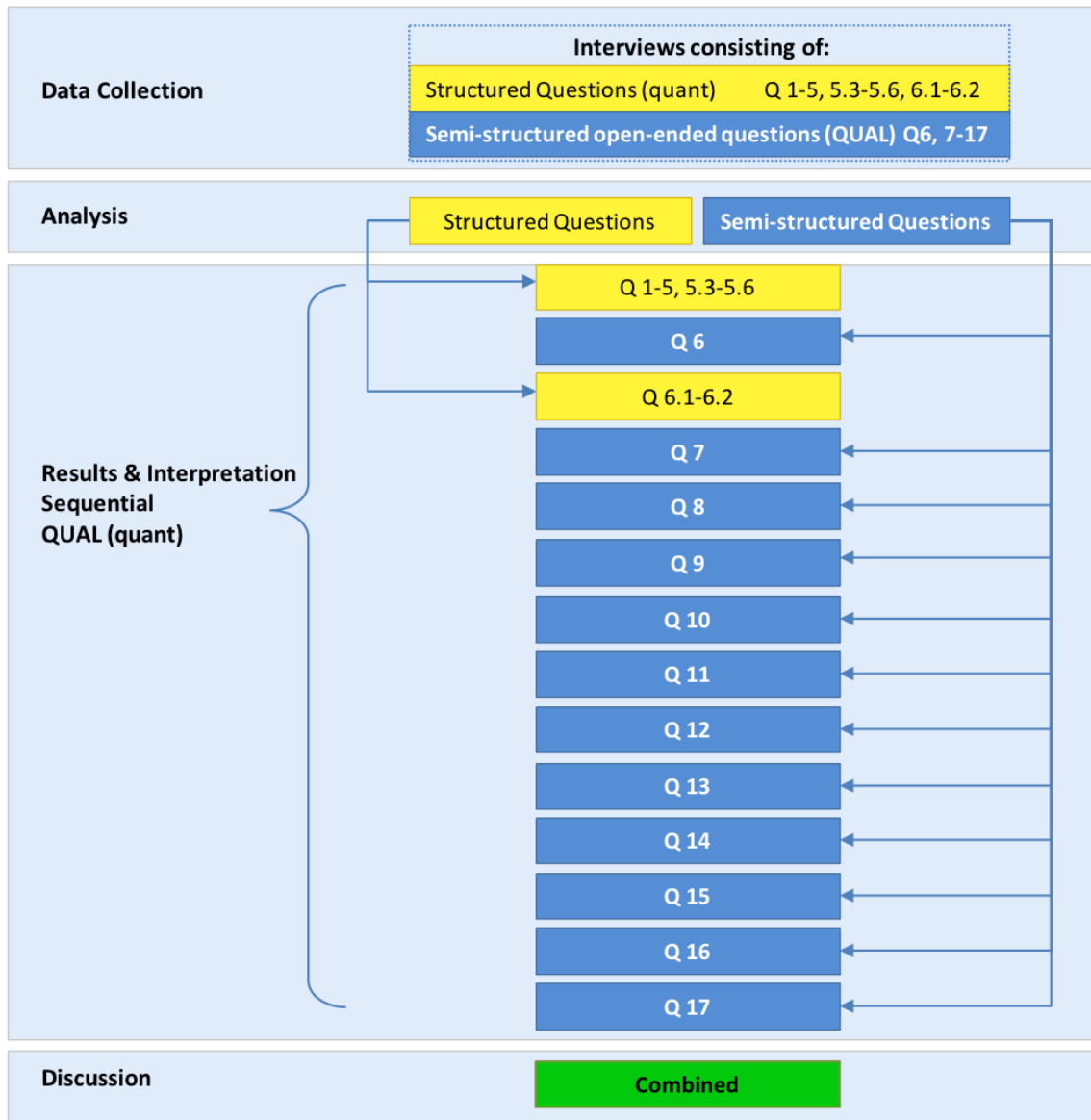


Figure 4. Mixed methods research.

the researcher cannot anticipate all the answers, planned or impromptu follow up questions may probe for further information. Semi structured interviews are used when the researcher is familiar with the topic, has a sense of the limits of the topic and is aware of what is and is not relevant to questions asked. Questions are asked of all participants in the same order. Questions can be asked in various formats such as face to face, by telephone, or over the internet. The systematic collection of data in response to semi structured interview questions makes it possible to organize variables in a table across the top with each row containing responses from one participant. In this way, the table can then be read vertically across cases. This also makes it possible to count the responses to structured or semi-structured questions (Morse, 2012).

### **Counting with Mixed Methods**

Three concerns must be addressed if counting is used in a qualitative research project according to Morse (2012). First, all participants must be asked the same questions, with only one response for each participant. If there is uncertainty about whether participants have all been asked the same questions in the same order, then counting is considered inappropriate, for example in an unstructured interview. Normally, in qualitative research quantities are discussed in general terms (e.g., a few, many, most). Second, the use of purposeful sampling and small  $n$  studies selecting participants with specific characteristics, or shared experiences of some kind would be considered a biased selection. This approach excludes random selection and would not be representative of the general population. However, when purposeful sampling is employed to explicitly draw out meaning specifically from those with shared experiences or characteristics with

the objective of developing insights from this group, the bias becomes strength. Counting should only be included if it helps to make sense of the data collected (Morse, 2012).

### **Pre-Testing Questions**

Since questions cannot be changed after the interviews have started, a test is advisable for semi structured interviews to ensure the questions will yield the responses expected (Morse, 2012). In preparation for the study, two faculty members from universities not associated with the participating institutions reviewed the semi structured interview questions developed for the current research and the questions were tested.

This section outlined the research design and methods used in the current research study addressing methodology, research approach, information required for the study, and pretesting. The next section will discuss the target population and participant selection, before proceeding to discuss data collection.

### **Target Population and Sampling**

To identify universities and disciplinary departments for the current study first, a research ethics proposal and interview guide (Appendix H) were prepared, submitted sequentially, and approved by four different university research ethics boards. Sampling aimed to identify similar sites for the research to reduce the number of confounding variables. A search was conducted using cyclical program review schedules publicly available on university websites to identify departments or schools that had completed their review following the introduction of the new Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) in 2010. Departments with recently completed reviews were sorted to identify clusters of common departments across universities. Second, the clusters of universities were grouped as categorized as identified by Statistics Canada (e.g., medical-

doctoral, comprehensive) then clusters of common disciplinary departments were identified (Orton, 2009).

### **Sampling**

The study employed two forms of sampling, first, purposeful or criterion sampling (Patton, 2015), which involves selection of cases that meet specific criteria.

Criteria of interest in the current research required:

- (a) participants from four comprehensive universities in southern Ontario;
- (b) all departments of interest would have completed a cyclical program review under the new rules introduced by the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) in Ontario in 2010;
- (c) participants would be recruited from five levels of involvement in the program review process at each university including, a department chair (or similar role), two or more faculty members from a department in common or related to that of the chair, a member of teaching and learning centre staff supporting the program review process, a member of quality assurance support staff;
- (d) participants from the level of faculty member would be recruited from a single common discipline across the participating universities; and
- (e) one or more senior administrators from different levels (e.g., associate dean, dean, vice provost academic).

Secondly, snowball, also known as chain sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to identify participants. A key contact from the teaching and learning centre was identified at each institution invited to participate. The contact was asked to confirm that the department under consideration fit the study criteria listed above as gathered from the university website. They were also asked about the feasibility of involving the identified

department to determine departmental receptivity and to rule out unrelated extreme or anomalous departmental conditions that might affect the research study. In addition, snowball sampling took place at the conclusion of each interview, when participants were asked if they would like to recommend anyone else to participate in the study. This led to additional invitations and participation.

### **Site Selection**

The research aimed to identify similar sites for comparison to increase the validity or trustworthiness of the comparison. The following factors were kept common across the four sites:

- the category of university (comprehensive);
- the academic department;
- the completion of the program review process after the 2010 introduction of the Ontario Institutional Quality Assurance Process; and
- participation from five categories of involvement in the program review process (faculty, department chair, teaching and learning centre staff, quality assurance support staff, and senior administration).

### **Selection of Participating Universities**

As a courtesy to academic departments and to encourage departmental involvement in the project, the department chair of the academic discipline was contacted first. After describing the study, the chair was asked to approve participation of the department in the research. This was intended to increase the likelihood of participation of the department chair and possibly provide a slightly more favourable view about participation of colleagues in the department. The department chair was ideally



positioned to suggest participants who had been directly involved in the program review process. This would make it possible to collect information-rich data from those with direct experience and an in-depth understanding of research questions. It was assumed that departments would be more likely to participate if the program review process had proceeded fairly smoothly as it would reflect well on the department. It was also anticipated the chair was likely to suggest participants who would speak favourably about the experience. This awareness of potential positive bias was important to keep in mind since the selection of participants and reported experiences might be positively skewed. Once the chair approved departmental participation in the study, he or she helped to identify potential departmental participants for the study. All four sites invited agreed to participate.

### **Participants**

Five to nine participants from each university were involved in the research for a total of 26 participants. The sampling frame was drawn from individuals involved in the Ontario program review process introduced in 2010. Participants were drawn from one of several key roles in the cyclical program review process (e.g., senior administrator, department chair, quality assurance support staff, and faculty member). At least one person from each level was invited, except for the faculty level where three to five participants were invited. Although the department chair from one university declined to participate, another participant had performed this role in a similar discipline, and responses were deemed similar enough to those of other chairs to include this individual as chair for comparison purposes.

The opportunity arose to enrich and inform the study findings with two additional participants not associated with the four main participating universities. Both participants were in the category of senior administrators. Both were very experienced in the field. One was from the UK and another from Ontario. This increased the total to 28 participants. The two external senior administrators were excluded when counts involved institutionally related questions. Representation from the five levels can be seen in Table 2.

### **Data Collection**

This section sequentially outlines how data were collected, addressing first, a description of site selection, second identification of all data collection methods used, third, explanation of methods and pre-testing, before moving to the next section which addresses how data were analyzed and synthesized.

This section begins with an outline explaining how institutions were selected and then describes the research protocol used to conduct the study. Information about the program review process is publicly available on all Ontario university websites. To leave open the possibility of face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews, the decision was made to begin with locations in southern Ontario.

The first step in data collection involved a search for lists of completed program reviews for all comprehensive universities in southern Ontario following the introduction of the IQAP process. Since the policy was adopted in 2010, the first completed reviews under the new process were identified the following year. A list of completed program reviews is posted on each university website. The location of this information is not consistent or easily located across universities, but did eventually yield a list of

Table 2

*Participants by Institution and Level*

	University				Other	<b>Total</b>
	1	2	3	4		
Faculty members	2	2	1	2		7
Department Chair	1	1	1	0		3
Teaching & Learning support	1	1	1	1		4
Quality Assurance support	1	1	1	1		4
Senior Administrator	1	3	1	2	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>

departments for possible comparison of completion dates. A period of transition between the phasing out of the old process and introduction of the new requirements meant the completion dates did not guarantee the new process had been applied and required confirmation.

Second, the list of completed programs was sorted by academic discipline resulting in three clusters of candidate departments for the study. General information about the university for comparison such as size and location were taken into consideration to increase similarity. Third, the academic program cluster with the greatest number of completed reviews was selected for participation in the research study. Additional info about the institutions was collected from the university website including – policy documents, SMA documents, and contact information. These were briefly reviewed for an overview of the slate of candidate universities.

Fourth, a key contact was identified in the teaching and learning centre or the quality assurance office to confirm the identified academic discipline had completed a program review under the new IQAP process. Since the researcher is directly involved in this work, the contacts were known and very helpful in identifying a list of potential participants including:

- (a) a teaching and learning centre support person;
- (b) a quality assurance support person; and
- (c) one or two senior administrators.

With chair approval (described earlier), a telephone call or email was sent to members of the department (Appendix D). Participation was entirely voluntary, and

participants were advised they could withdraw at any time. Participants were not compensated for involvement in the study.

### **Interview Process**

A letter of information and informed consent (see Appendix G) as well as the list of interview questions (see Appendix H) were sent in advance to all those agreeing to participate. The letter introduced the researcher, the reason for being invited, a description of what would be involved, and an outline of potential benefits and risks. The letter explained results would be kept confidential and no information identifying individuals or institutions would be published. Participation was described as voluntary, without obligation, and explained that participation could be withdrawn following the interview resulting in the destruction of their data. Contact information was provided for the university research ethics board at their own university as well as the Research Ethics Board approval number if they wished to ask questions. The letter concluded with a request for consent to participate. This could be provided in writing, or provided verbally on the day of the interview. Some consent forms were scanned by participants and returned by email, one was returned by regular mail, and other participants provided verbal consent on the day of the interview.

Confirmation of the date, time, and location were confirmed by email (Appendix F). A reminder of the interview time and location (Appendix I) was sent a few days prior to the interview date. Most interviews took place by telephone. Two interviews took place face to face, in the participant's office, or in a location participants found agreeable. Interviews were conducted by following the interview guide (Appendix H).

A copy of the interview questions was provided prior to the interview, and during the interview, participants were asked to confirm they had a copy available for reference. All participants confirmed they had a copy. If consent was not received in advance, participants were asked if they wished to provide verbal consent. With participants' permission, the interview was audio recorded. One person declined to be recorded. Particular care was taken with note taking during the non-recorded interview, and the participant was asked to clarify specific points to facilitate accurate note taking. Interviews were recorded using the Call Recorder software application, which records directly to the computer, recording both input (questions asked) and output (responses).

Google Forms was used to systematically collect the interview data by using a survey format for data entry to facilitate later comparison and analysis. This structured format made it possible to ask structured forced choice questions as well as open-ended questions with follow-up prompts. The Google Forms questionnaire was not sent to participants but used by the researcher. As participants answered each question, the *researcher* entered the response. This made it possible to ask for clarification about specific questions, to repeat back what was captured, to amend or correct answers during the interview, and to collect answers to both fixed response and open-ended questions.

At the end of the 60 to 90-minute interviews, participants were thanked, asked if they would like a summary of the findings, and asked if there was anyone else who might have a valuable perspective to consider inviting to participate in the study. Several participants made suggestions, which subsequently led to additional invitations to participate.

Immediately following the end of the interview, the Google questionnaire responses in the questionnaire were reviewed. Language was clarified, typing errors fixed and turned into clear text ready for coding. Then the online questionnaire was submitted.

### **Interview Questions**

This section briefly describes the types of questions employed in the interview including, structured and semi-structured questions. This involved asking background questions, experience/behaviour questions, and opinion/values questions.

**Initial structured questions.** The initial questions confirmed the participant's level of involvement and experience with program review (e.g., At what level of the university do you work? What is your title?). Immediately following these were structured survey-style questions asking participants to make a forced choice (e.g., Which of the following better applies. At this university, the program review: (a) primarily aims to address *external* standards; or (b) primarily aims to address *internal* standards).

During the interview, the researcher captured observations in the moment within the notes being captured. These comments were flagged with the researcher's initials. When particularly interesting comments were made, the recording time signature was also captured in the notes. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher reviewed the notes, made corrections and added initial comments in response to the interview. When this was completed, the questionnaire was submitted. In this way, the information was collected in spreadsheet format and could be opened using the spreadsheet Google sheets then saved in Excel. In addition, a summary of all comments could be opened and reviewed by individual participant (by row), or by reviewing all responses to a single question (by column).

Interview questions were formulated to explore the fit of the conceptual model to the introduction of the new program review process in Ontario (Figure 2). For example, the model suggests *rewards* are one of three possible mechanisms to bring about impact. Participants were asked about any rewards associated with the program review process (question five asks the question in an open-ended form, subsequently, the participant is prompted in 5.3 with examples of potential financial rewards of various forms).

**Semi-structured questions.** The structured questions were followed by a set of open-ended questions to which participants could respond freely (Fiske & Kendall, 1990; Richards & Morse, 2007). Some of the questions included prepared follow up prompts or were followed by impromptu questions to confirm understanding, to ask for more information, or to clarify a perspective. The aim was to engage the participant actively in the discussion, and to build rapport to encourage frank responses. This would be considered a *conversational interview strategy* (Patton, 2015) and a *pragmatic interview approach*. Van Maanen says, “pragmatism [involves] ... intense reliance on personalized seeing, hearing, experiencing in specific social settings” (2011, p. 156). These two approaches were employed and structured with the use of an interview guide as described earlier (Patton, 2015).

Interviews were conducted with the participants from one university at a time to help the researcher build a sense of the similarities and differences of the context and experiences at each university.

This section has outlined how institutions were selected for involvement in the study followed by a stepwise description of the approach taken to collect data for this study. Next, the matter of analyzing the data collected is discussed.



## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

This section describes how the collected data were organized, managed and analyzed in preparation for the findings outlined in chapter 4 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The description begins with an outline of how the data were organized and managed.

**Data preparation.** Once the qualitative and quantitative data have been collected they must be prepared for analysis. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) describe the importance of reviewing and correcting notes captured during collection and turning them into notes typed directly or transcribed from dictation. “A write up is an intelligible product for anyone, not just for the fieldworker. It can be read and edited for accuracy, commented on, coded and analyzed” (p. 71).

Direct audio recordings must also be processed. The researcher “listens, makes notes, selects excerpts and if applicable makes judgements or ratings” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 71) though the audio can also be turned into text they warn this process is “fraught with slippage” (p. 71) and is reliant on a knowledgeable and skilful transcriptionist. Conversion of audio to a nice typed copy however is problematic, due to the substantial time and significant expense of hiring someone to transcribe the audio. Depending on the level of detail, four to ten hours may be required for each hour of recording. Furthermore, turning notes and transcripts into clear copy is not as straightforward as it may appear.

**Transcription.** Rapley (2008) describes transcription as an initial form of analysis in which a transcriptionist makes many judgements. Influencing these decisions is the form of transcription adopted, the time taken, the purpose of the transcript, and the cost. Kvale (2007) says transcription is an interpretive process. It is a multifaceted change

in medium from spoken language to the written word involving numerous assessments and multiple levels of abstraction. In terms of validity, Kvale portrays transcription as a translation from the language of speech with one set of rules to written language, which follows a different set of rules. A telephone interview is transformed from a nuanced verbal exchange with the pauses, emphases, cadence, fits and starts acceptable in speech, into the form of complete grammatically correct sentences and a clear verbal response.

Kvale (2011) says, “transcripts are impoverished, decontextualized renderings of interview conversations” (p. 95). However, “the interviewer's active listening and remembering may work as a selective filter, not only as a bias, but potentially also to retain the very meanings essential for the topic and for the purpose of the interview” (p. 96).

The variety of forms of transcription includes the following:

- Verbatim - typing everything heard in the recording, all sounds uttered including ums, colloquialisms, and partial sentences;
- Jeffersonian - applying additional information to a verbatim transcript such as rising and falling inflections of speech with a special notation system;
- Condensed or summary - leaving out all speech unrelated to the research question. The challenge is knowing what should be excluded, and this requires a knowledgeable transcriptionist, ideally the researcher;
- Essence – this form of transcription paraphrases the recorded text, capturing the essence of the content; and
- Partial transcription – listening to audio recordings and transcribing selected excerpts (Smith & Davies, 2010).

With partial transcription, it may not be necessary to transcribe all or any information to conduct analysis; it can be conducted directly from recordings or audio (Gibbs, 2007; Greener, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith & Davies, 2010;,) a practice common in policy research (Gibbs, 2007). Condensed or essence, as described above allows the researcher to focus on the larger issues and themes without focusing on the specific wording of individuals.

Greener suggests it can be useful to transcribe and analyze in greater detail earlier in the analytical process and to employ partial or no transcription later as themes repeat, as coding takes place directly from audio. Alternatively, one can transcribe some excerpts word for word and provide summaries for the remainder (Greener, 2011). Arksy and Knight (1999) advocate checks on shortened transcriptions to ensure the complexity of an interview is not lost. A good corrective to ensure interpretations is to return to the recordings to confirm understanding (Gibbs, 2007) or to carefully transcribe key excerpts noting where they occur in the audio.

Partial transcription is often employed as a combined strategy. In the first phase, the researcher transcribes interviews word for word. This initial process and the initial transcripts can be analyzed and themes identified. Subsequently, coding may take place directly from audio and selected portions transcribed. The current research employed a full summary (word for word), essence, and partial transcription process as will be detailed shortly.

Published research employing interviews with partial transcription includes Grünbaum and Stenger (2013), and Hussain, McGarvey and Fruzzetti (2015). Doctoral research employing partial transcription includes Alvarado (2011), Berrios (2014),

Dimitrov (2004), and Green (2012). Doctoral research including interviews and no transcription includes Stensaker (2004).

The discussion thus far has reviewed some of the concerns with the processing of data in particular transcription and has described various approaches. Now it will consider in more detail how data were processed for the current study. First the qualitative data followed by the quantitative data.

**Processing of data.** The research study proceeded stepwise through the interview guide (Appendix H) and employed a semi structured interview format. First, detailed notes were taken during the 60-90 minute interviews in a highly-structured format employing Google Forms created for the purpose. Additional questions were asked, both planned and impromptu. When a particularly insightful comment was made during the interview, an attempt was made to capture the exact words of the speaker; sometimes this involved asking for clarification of wording. In addition, the recording time signature was sometimes captured in the note field for the question in anticipation of returning to the audio for later use. During the interview, observations noted by the researcher were always flagged to distinguish comments from participant responses.

Second, immediately following the interview, all responses were reviewed by the researcher, text was tidied into more readable prose, and observations made during the interview were elaborated. When it was deemed complete, the Google interview form was submitted. The detailed notes taken during the interview constitute a summary transcription and first level of analysis according to Kvale (2007). Third, when the form was submitted, Google Forms automatically places responses into a spreadsheet format, structuring the information to facilitate later comparison.

Fourth, six of the 28 audio recordings were fully transcribed. The initial full transcriptions revealed the judgement required to generate a clear full written transcript. Capturing the responses to the interview questions word for word helped the researcher to establish the pattern of responses and the rhythm of the interviews with participants at each level of involvement of the program review process.

Fifth, some of the initial themes were identified that would recur during the analysis. Due to a limitation of time and resources, the researcher used the detailed question responses for first level coding and to identify passages of interest as described by Miles et al. (2014). Excerpts were captured and coded initially from the detailed question responses, and then subsequently each quote was confirmed and transcribed directly from the audio recordings for accuracy.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Morse (2012) raised three cautions about counting in qualitative research mentioned earlier. First, questions must be asked in the same order with only one response provided by each participant as applied in the current research. Second, in small numbers, a purposeful sampling method constitutes a biased sample. This is considered a *strength* if the sample is explicitly selected to elicit meaning from those with common experiences. The objective of the current study is to identify the experiences of specially selected participants. And finally, what is counted should make sense. This can be determined in the discussion of findings in the next chapter.

Quantitative information from interviews was processed to ensure data was captured correctly and to ensure responses included the relevant participants. Due to the nature of the data no attempt was made to conduct statistical analyses. The numbers were

used to determine averages of respondents taking various positions and to produce displays to help produce meaning. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe counting as a familiar and useful way “to see what’s there”, and suggests a variety of applications. For example, counting can be used to spot patterns or themes, to determine the frequency something occurs, or to determine if something occurs more or less frequently. Numbers can be used to rapidly see what is in a batch of data, to test a hypothesis or hunch, or to keep the researcher analytically honest (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the current study, quantitative data helped to determine trends of responses, particularly to compare and contrast the various levels of respondents. An example would be a comparison of faculty and department chairs responses.

**Coding.** The coding process involves selecting and identifying selections of text that capture a theoretical or descriptive idea. Multiple passages are selected and flagged with a label for the idea. This is an approach to organizing, indexing, or categorizing text to facilitate the development of an organizing structure or framework. This is known as by various names such as coding (Gibbs, 2007) or searching for themes (King, 1998). All text flagged with the same code can be retrieved to examine examples of the same idea or phenomenon and permits a structured review of data. These codes facilitate case-by-case comparisons, and relationships between codes (Gibbs, 2007). Coding is most easily conducted with a written transcript, but can also be conducted directly from audio, video or from rough field notes (Gibbs, 2007; Miles et al, 2014).

Gibbs identifies three different types of codes, descriptive codes (identifying what has been described), categorical (categories of codes that can be identified across cases), and analytical codes (describing how the participant conceptualizes). Other authors

suggest many more (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Codes from one passage are then compared to those from other passages to make connections.

*Concept driven coding.* This form of coding is deductive; it begins with a list of codes prior to analysis and applies the list, which may include modifying and adding codes as the research proceeds (King, 1998). *Open coding* is inductive, it involves starting without a list and deriving codes from the data itself. These codes are better grounded empirically. Charmaz (2003) suggests researchers try to set aside preconceptions and aim to draw from the data without imposing theory or interpretation. However, researchers are part of a social world, have read literature on the topic and cannot help but to have formed ideas. Like many research methods discussed, these approaches are not mutually exclusive and both concept and open coding can be applied in the course of the research (Gibbs, 2007).

Miles et al. describe first and second level coding as an approach to trigger and prompt deeper reflection; they are a form of data reduction to derive meaning. First level coding comprises the initial selection and labeling of excerpts. It involves collecting excerpts of data that go together in order to reduce a large amount of data into manageable parts. Coding is a repeated and progressive process of comparing and condensing meaning. Second level coding involves collecting things that appear to go together, comparing and contrasting, grouping, clustering, categorizing, and applying various approaches to ordering the codes such as seeking extremes or noting continua. This is a process some researchers have called *constant comparison* (Flick, 2011). Codes help to identify recurring patterns; clustered into categories these become *pattern codes*.

Pattern codes are used to construct higher-level meanings in the form of propositions, assertions, hypotheses, or to formulate theory (Miles et al., 2014).

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

In the current study, first and second cycle coding was conducted with the detailed question responses. Interview questions were processed first, question-by-question. This involved applying a variety of analytical approaches as described above employing a variable oriented strategy.

For each open-ended question, a new table was created with a list of respondents identified by institution (1- 4) and level of involvement in program (faculty member, department chair, quality assurance staff, teaching and learning centre staff, senior administrator). The response of each participant to a question was read and first cycle coding completed by hand. The first cycle codes were then reviewed to determine how they might best be analyzed for second cycle coding. When responses to a question appeared to differ by level, they were clustered to better compare patterns of response across institutions for similarities and differences, and further analyzed. Observations, and patterns were noted and summarized.

During the analysis, observations connecting ideas were captured as memos. These were ideas, exploration of themes, and the beginning of connections, patterns and categories within and across questions. In addition, some matrix displays were developed to more fully integrate ideas across cases.

A findings document was developed gathering the analysis of each question in the interview including structured and open-ended questions in one place. Further analysis was conducted with the data as a whole to address the research questions. Visual displays



were developed from the structured information collected, seeking themes and integrating ideas across cases.

This concludes discussion of the processing, coding, and analysis of data. Another issue of concern in working with the data are the measures to ensure the information was collected, processed and analyzed ethically.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This section outlines some of the actions taken to ensure the current research was conducted with an awareness of ethical concerns including the process undertaken, the forms of information collected, and measures to maintain confidentiality and to store information securely. As described earlier, the current study was submitted for approval sequentially to 4 university research ethics boards prior to commencing data collection. After research was conducted at four of the sites, sufficient data had been gathered and data collection was concluded. Appropriate follow up information was submitted to all research ethics boards to communicate the conclusion of data collection.

Information collected from participants including participant names, institutional affiliation, and titles were replaced with a code used during analysis of data. Personal identifiers were not retained following completion of the study. Only codes have been retained. Those with access to the data include the doctoral student, the advisor, and the supervision committee.

Participants were assigned a non-identifying code to be used during data collection and analysis. In the release of findings, institutions are not identified by name. Where possible, information is presented in aggregate form. This research aimed to identify similar institutions, similar departments and similar positions (administrator,

faculty member, support staff). Generic forms (e.g., at one institution, another institution..., or references to an administrator from one university, a faculty member from another institution ...) are used to distinguish the institutions and participants. Any information that might reveal the institution, for example in quotes, has been substituted in a generic form. E.g., “Here at <our institution>...”

Participants were informed their information would be confidential in the Letter of Informed Consent, which also addresses limits to confidentiality (Appendix G).

### **Confidentiality**

Transcripts of collected data will be kept for 7 years following the completion date of the study. All electronic data will be stored on password-protected computers. Any paper records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Any paper records not stored (not anticipated other than summaries of findings) will be shredded. Upon completion of the collection and analysis of data, all audio recordings will be destroyed. All personal identifiers will be destroyed.

### **Validity and Reliability**

This section examines efforts undertaken in the current study to enhance the validity and reliability of the study in the research design, data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis.

Issues of validity and reliability can be a challenge when describing and conducting qualitative research with case studies. In *quantitative* research, a study is valid if it represents the phenomenon under consideration accurately (Smith, 2004). Validity describes how well an experiment is done, particularly in avoiding confounding variables, that is, more than one independent variable acting simultaneously. Reducing

the number of potentially confounding variables increases internal validity. Stronger internal validity allows the researcher to restrict the number of explanations for an observation and select an explanation with greater confidence (Yin, 2013).

However, in *qualitative* research the question of realism is problematic. Some researchers see little point in bothering with discussions of accurate representations of a reality that exists independently (Smith & Deemer, 2000). Hammersley (1990) says validity is not a question of how accurately a study represents reality, but rather a judgment about the how faithful the account is to the phenomenon under consideration. Smith defines a valid study in qualitative research, as one,

whose results have met the tests of plausibility and credibility. The former is a matter of whether or not an account of a situation is likely true given the existing state of knowledge of that situation. The latter directs attention to whether or not a researcher's judgment is accurate given the nature of the phenomena, the circumstances of the research, the characteristics of the researcher, and so on (Smith, 2004, p. 957).

In ordinary language, the word *valid* is defined by the Oxford dictionary online as “having a sound basis in logic or fact”, by Merriam-Webster as, “well-grounded or justifiable: being at once relevant and meaningful” . Similarly, a *valid argument* is sound, well grounded, and convincing. In quantitative studies, validity requires asking whether a study measures what it intends to measure. In qualitative research, validity it has to do with the extent to which it represents the variables of interest (Kvale, 2011; Pervin, 1984).

Miles et al. (2014) claim internal validity can be increased in a variety of ways including a few described here. Validity can be increased through meaningful descriptions of context, and through plausible and convincing interpretations that make sense. It is also strengthened when data is linked to theory either emergent or identified in advance, when negative examples are sought, when triangulation is employed to increase evidence supporting a claim, or when attempts are made to replicate a finding in other parts of the database of information collected. To this Yin (2013) adds pattern matching, and explanation building during data analysis to further aid to increasing internal validity. And finally, Lacey and Luff (2007) recommend considering the extent to which all relevant views are represented, ensuring a sufficient and systematic use of the data collected such as quotations from a variety of participants to increase confidence in interpretations as might be done in a multiple case study research design.

### **External Validity**

Concerns whether a study's findings can be generalized beyond a particular case, setting, or study. With quantitative research, the findings from a research survey are intended to generalize to the larger world using *statistical generalization*. Case studies employ *analytic generalization* (Yin, 2011), which involves extracting abstract ideas from a set of case studies that could apply to situations other than the original case and which might be applicable to other specific situations. Yin suggests, "the strongest empirical foundation for these generalizations derives from the close-up, in-depth study of a specific case in its real-world context." (Yin, 2013, p. 327).

## **Reliability**

Quantitative researchers consider a study reliable if other researchers can replicate the findings. Some qualitative researchers take issue with adopting what they would consider positivistic language from quantitative research, and prefer language such as trustworthiness, credibility, auditability, or dependability (Miles et al., 2014; Kvale, 2011). Reliability in interviews has to do with whether participants would provide different responses to different interviewers (Kvale, 2011). With respect to case studies, Yin says reliability has to do with whether another researcher, following the same procedures would identify the same findings and draw the same conclusions. The goal is to minimize study bias and errors (Yin, 2013). Reliability also applies to transcripts and whether different transcribers would produce similar transcripts.

Three aspects of the research may involve possible threats to validity. First, the researcher conducting this study is engaged in work facilitating the program review process, which could be considered a threat to internal validity. This researcher has a history of work in the field of educational development and related fields for 20 years and still seeks to promote effective teaching and learning processes and practices. However, it is important to recognize diverse perspectives and realities experienced. Familiarity with the processes could lead to pre-conceived notions of how the work is conducted including selective focus and emphasis on issues that might arise. In order to mitigate this potential bias, the researcher identified questions based on each component of the the conceptual framework of Brennan and Shah (2000), as well as findings related to outcomes of program review process identified in the literature (e.g., El-Khawas 2014; Lieber, 2015; Stensaker, 2008). In addition, the researcher applied a structured approach to interview

data collection asking each participant to answer the same questions in the same order, and prompting informally only after each participant responded to the initial question. Notes taken during interviews also included observations flagged by the researcher for later reflection.

Another way of looking at this familiarity with the topic under study is to view it as a strength in that participants speaking with an interviewer experienced in the matters under discussion can be prompted to go beyond brief superficial responses to provide more authentic responses, to clarify a position taken, or elaborate an opinion advanced. For example, during the interview process some participants made perfunctory comments, which could be identified as critical when familiar with the program review process. Someone unfamiliar with this work might not recognize the comments as significant. These participants were prompted to expand on their views to clarify and elaborate on the comment. Similarly, some of the participants in the study are professional colleagues. This might also raise concerns about the Hawthorne effect, which leads participants to provide answers they feel might reflect more positive changes resulting from the policy changes being studied (Sullivan, 2009). These participants too were encouraged to be forthright, which led to in-depth, and very frank responses, which can be seen as enhancing the data collected.

As described earlier, transcription is “fraught with slippage” (Miles et al. 2014, p. 71) and constitutes a first level of analysis (Kvale, 2011). The researcher or someone very familiar with the material is the best candidate for this task. The researcher completed six full transcriptions initially, then first cycle coding was conducted directly from the

detailed question responses. Subsequently, all quotes included in the study were confirmed directly from the audio recordings.

To strengthen internal validity, the researcher, aimed to identify patterns and to build explanations. Negative examples were sought and data was triangulated with multiple units of analysis, across five levels of involvement in the cyclical review process and across four sites. Efforts to increase external validity involved repeated searches for findings occurring across multiple case studies to further substantiate a generalization that might apply to similar or different cases. The purpose of the analytic generalization was to explain how or why an initiative generated or failed to generate an outcome, or why the events under examination occurred (Yin, 2011).

To increase reliability the study was designed first, to reduce the number of confounding variables by purposefully selecting four universities of comparable size, category (comprehensive university), a common academic department, and participants from five levels of involvement in cyclical review at each university. Second, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. Although interviews were conducted for the case studies, the data was collected using the structured approach used in quantitative data collection to facilitate a structured analysis and comparison. Third, comparing interview responses to questions across participants is a variable-oriented strategy that applies the replication logic described earlier as a process similar to the running of multiple experiments (Yin, 2009). The goal of this approach is to replicate findings, and to search for patterns of results including negative examples.

## Triangulation

Patton (2015) identifies four types of triangulation, 1) data source triangulation, (multiple sources of information) 2) analyst triangulation (multiple researchers), 3) theory/perspective triangulation (applying multiple theories), and 4) research method triangulation. Patton also suggests methods of triangulation can be combined. This study included two forms of triangulation. First *data source triangulation*, which involves comparing the responses of participants from different perspectives. In the current study, this involved comparing perspectives from participants working at five levels of involvement in the cyclical review process. Another possible comparison involved the perspectives of universities participating in the new Institutional Quality Assurance Process shortly after adoption of the new policy before procedures were normalized, or later, once structures were in place to support the process.

Second, the current study used *methods triangulation*, which involves applying more than one method. The current study is a multiple case study. However, interview responses were collected using a structured process intentionally including closed and open-ended questions in the case study interview design to gather qualitative and quantitative information. Miles et al. (2014) believe this strengthens the study.

At a notch higher in the confidence scale, you can test an emerging hypothesis in another part of the case or data set. Such a test is more rigorous; it's harder to bootleg researcher bias into it. Even stiffer tests can be made by looking at multiple cases: finding a pattern in a cross-case display and then tracking carefully through all of the cases to see whether the pattern is repeated. (p. 307)



This section has described how issues of validity and reliability were built first, into the research design of the current study by employing a multiple case study research design with purposeful criterion specific sampling of information-rich cases from a variety of perspectives. Second, the collection of closed and open-ended questions was gathered employing a highly structured format to facilitate comparison and enable application of replication logic, and cross case comparison. And third, data analysis across cases using cross case display was used to strengthen validity and trustworthiness of data collection, analysis, and synthesis.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a reminder of the rationale and research questions to be investigated in this study. It then presented the overall research design, beginning with the process of selecting the research sites and the information necessary to address the research study questions. This was followed by a description of the process employed to identify the target population for the study and the choice of sampling strategy. A broad description of the research methods then provided the framework for the more methods selected including a detailed explanation of the steps involved in carrying out the data collection.

The account then moved on to the process and methods applied to analyze and synthesize the collected data. This study involved careful consideration of ethical considerations in the design, collection, management, storage, and reporting of data collected and results of the research. And finally, the researcher has attempted to remain alert to issues that might threaten the validity and reliability of the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. Some of the approaches employed to

strengthen internal and external validity have also been introduced including the structured approach to collecting data, choice of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in a manner to facilitate discussion of intersection the point of reference, the choice of a multiple case study format, the selection of similar institutions, and inclusion of a variety of perspectives on the topic of interest. Chapter 4 will present the results of these efforts.



perspective, the specialized sample represents a cross-section of individuals representing five levels of highly specialized roles and defined responsibilities in carrying out the program review. When four department chairs from a common academic discipline independently come to the same conclusion, it is more noteworthy than four randomly selected faculty members. A table showing the proportion of the sample for this study and the total population can be seen in Table 3.

### **Research Question I**

**Research Question I:** *How are university Senior Administrators perceived to define a quality university?*

**Finding 1.** *Those involved in the program review process identify multiple definitions of quality that apply to higher education. Overall, the ranking of relevant definitions by senior administrators and all other roles are similar.*

Interview question one asked participants: *In general, would Senior Administrators at your university define a QUALITY UNIVERSITY in terms of: (a) fitness for purpose, (b) excellence, (c) perfection, or consistency, (d) transformation, and (e) value for money. (If more than one fits, how would you rank them?).*

Each groups' *perceptions* of senior administrators' choices were averaged and graphed, alongside the average of Senior Administrators rankings as indicated by yellow outlined bars in the Figure seen in Appendix J. These represent simple averages of participants from each group to facilitate visualization of responses patterns. Given the nature of the data, no attempt was made to determine statistical significance. Several observations can be made. First, the pattern of choices and predictions were similar amongst all groups. *Transformation, excellence, and fitness for purpose* are the three

Table 3

*Population Size to Sample Size*

	Total population	Sample size
Chair	6	4
Faculty member	~ 24	7
Senior Administrator	~ 18	9
T&L centre staff	~ 12	4
QA staff	~ 6	4

Note. The total population of Department Chairs and Faculty members is based on the number directly involved in the program review process in the selected discipline at the six Comprehensive universities in Ontario. The number of Senior Administrators, is based on an estimate of those directly involved in the program review process. Teaching and learning support staff (T&L), and Quality Assurance (QA) support staff is an estimate of numbers available to support.

Average perceptions of faculty members were least accurate in three categories (fitness for purpose, excellence, and transformation). Department chairs underestimated Senior Administrators ranking of perfection, and quality assurance staff substantially underestimated their ranking of value for money. Teaching and learning centre staff perceptions were closest in all but one category. A determination of statistical significance is not possible given the nature of the sample, as would be possible with a larger pool of participants.

### **A Quality University Versus a Quality University Education**

Interview question two, asked all participants: *How would your institution define a quality university, EDUCATION?* For purposes of comparison, the average senior administrator response was compared to the average response for each group of chairs, faculty and staff as seen in Appendix K.

When selecting definitions of a quality university *education*, participants were asked to identify and to rank only the definitions that applied at their university which forced a prioritizing of definitions. Responses were averaged for each participant group and graphed. A comparison of the rankings of each group reveals a similar overall pattern. Each group selected either *transformation* or *excellence* first, and the other second. All groups selected *fitness for purpose* third, and either *perfection* or *value for money* last.

This means all groups identify multiple definitions as applicable to the quality of a university *education*, and there is general consensus about which definitions of quality are perceived as salient.

## Research Question II

**Research Question II:** *What approaches and criteria are used to measure a quality university education with a specific focus on program quality by those who make decisions?*

**Finding 2.** *Several approaches to quality are applied by decision makers involved in preparing, supporting and evaluating the program review, and various definitions are applied.*

To address this research question, participants were asked interview question three, then they were asked whether the focus of the review was program enhancement or program accountability.

**Approach.** Interview question three asked participants: *In carrying out the program review which approach do you think your university takes? (more than one can be selected).* Part of Finding two, was consideration of the *approach* employed to carry out the review. Categories were adapted from the values Brennan and Shah (2000) identified as underlying quality assessment. Categories were presented to participants as defined in Table 4.

When participants were asked to identify which *approach* their university took in carrying out the program review, the majority of participants chose *managerial* (83%), and half selected *pedagogical*, and *collegial* (Appendix L) The collegial and departmental focus may result because most of work takes place within the department. The program review also requires some discussion of employer and alumni feedback which may explain why roughly one fifth (21%) of participants identified an employment focus.

Table 4

*Approaches to Quality Assurance*

Category	Description
Employment approach	a focus on graduate standards and outcomes for employers
Pedagogical approach	a focus on teaching skills, and classroom practice
Collegial approach	a focus on subject knowledge and curricula
Managerial approach	a focus on institutional requirements, policies and procedures



A faculty member described it as a “managerial approach, but it is all about making money and running it effectively with least amount of dollars. We should restructure everything to do the most for them with less” (F2 - 2). Another faculty member said, “I feel I thought it wasn't managerial before” (F4 - 2). A department chair commented,

We went through [the review] at the beginning of the Quality assurance process in 2012 - very early on. All programs could go through their choice of the new or the old process. We chose new but we took an old approach...mostly focused on pedagogy and subject knowledge in the curriculum. It was mostly about what we were doing program wise. (C2 - 1)

A quality assurance staff member stated “it is part of my role to ensure everything is done, but it is also collegial and pedagogical. I am in the teaching and learning centre” (QA2 - 1).

To further explore if participants viewed the review as focused more on accountability or enhancement, participants were presented with a series of paired statements. The first of each addressed three of the four quality assurance purposes identified by Harvey (2008), namely, *accountability*, *control*, or *compliance*. These can be seen in Figure 5 and Figure 6 on the left side. The second of each of the paired statements represents the fourth purpose of quality assurance, *improvement* or *enhancement*. These options are on the right side. The average responses for each pair is indicated as a percentage. Participants were asked, which of the pairs better applied to the program review process at their university. Figure 5 shows responses for Senior

Administrators, and Figure 6 shows responses from all other participants (a further breakdown is provided in Appendix M).

The criteria required to establish accountability differ from the criteria for enhancement (see Table 5). Most participants see the program review as predominantly enhancement oriented. However, while two thirds of senior administrators (67%) see the process as aiming to address external standards, they also unanimously describe the process as informing future directions and offering flexibility. Of the remaining participants, two thirds (67%) perceived the process as top down and the group is divided almost equally on whether the program review affirms past practice or focuses on development.

Senior administrator responses were averaged, and an average from the four remaining groups were averaged to represent all other participants. Two thirds of the responses on most items are enhancement oriented (green items on the right). This includes 7 of 8 categories for senior administrators and 6 of 8 for the all other participants.

Two major item differences between the two groups can be seen. First, two thirds (67%) of the Senior Administrators identified the process as *primarily aiming to address EXTERNAL standards* in contrast to all other participants where two thirds identified the process as *primarily aiming to address OWN standards* (68%). Since Senior Administrators are responsible for the process within the university, this suggests they view the standards as defined outside the university.

The institutional quality assurance process (IQAP) which specifies the major requirements of the program review is managed provincially by the Quality Council at

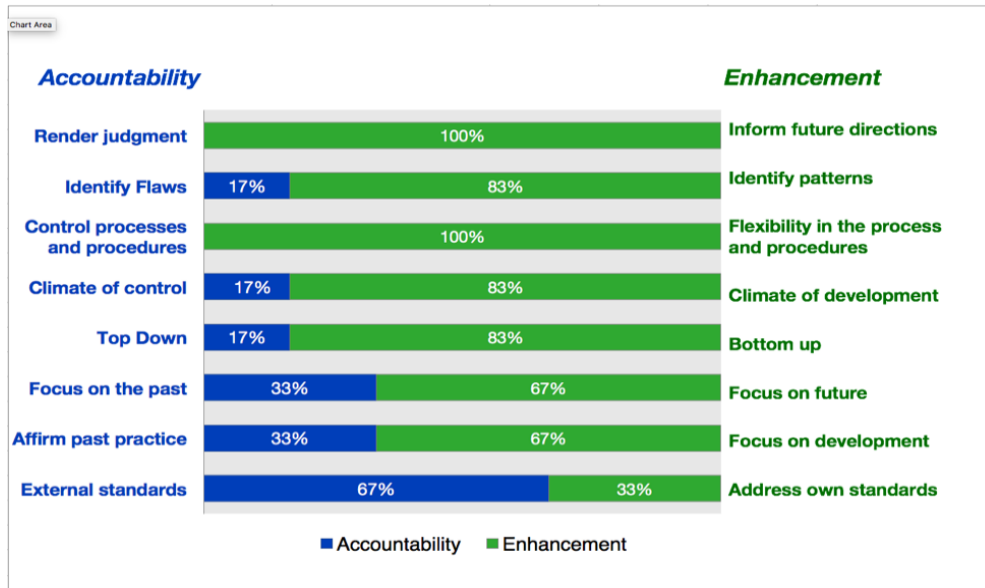


Figure 5. Accountability or enhancement: Senior Administrators choices of paired statements. Responses when asked which of the paired statements better applied to the program review process at their university. n = 7.

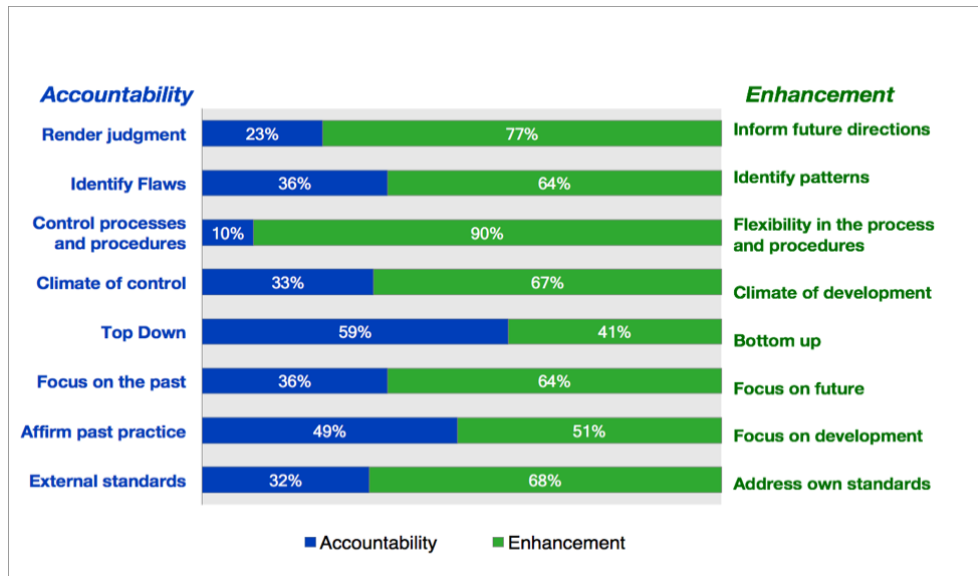


Figure 6. Accountability or Enhancement: Faculty, Chairs, and staff choices of paired statements. Responses when asked which of the statements better applied to the program review process at their university. n = 19 (excludes senior administrators).

Table 5

*Accountability Versus Enhancement in Program Review*

Accountability	Enhancement
data is used to render a judgement	data is used to inform future directions
seeks to identify flaws	seek to identify patterns
structures strictly control process and procedures	structures allow some flexibility in process and procedures
climate of control	climate of development
top down	bottom up
focus on past	focus on future
functions to affirm current practices	functions with a focus on development
primarily aims to address external standards	primarily aims to address own standards

arm's length from the university. Senior Administrators were likely see program standards as addressing these external standards. By contrast, two thirds (68%) of all other participants identified the program review as *primarily aiming to address their OWN standards*. This means the other participants view the IQAP as addressing an internal standard set by the university itself, or set by the department.

Second, the majority (83%) of senior administrators identified the process as *bottom up*, while more than half of the other participants identified the process as *top down* (59%). A closer look at the data (Figure 5) reveals most faculty members (86%) identified the process as top down. This suggests senior administrators view the process as department driven, while the majority of remaining groups view the process as driven by administration.

Third, the first pair of statements asks, *is data used to render a judgment, OR is data used to inform future directions*. An audit involves conducting a review that renders a judgment such as excellent, good, or poor. In this study, senior administrators unanimously view the process as informing future directions. By contrast, over one fifth (23%) of the remaining participants perceive the process as rendering of judgment. A closer examination of the data by role (see Appendix M) reveals three quarters of quality assurance staff (3 of 4) and three quarters of teaching and learning centre staff (3 of 4) see the process as informing future directions. Department chairs (2 of 4) and faculty members (4 of 7).

Fourth, *all* senior administrators identified the program review as providing *flexibility in process and procedures*, rather than *controlling processes and procedures*. 90% of remaining participants agreed. Thus, there is fairly broad agreement that the

process is flexible. Regarding the climate, four fifths of senior administrators identified the process as involving *a climate of development* while two thirds, of remaining participants identified the process as a *climate of development*. So, there is fairly broad agreement the process is intended to be development oriented.

Finally, responses suggest participants see the program review as predominantly enhancement oriented. However, two thirds of senior administrators (67%) see the process as aiming to *address external standards*, yet unanimously describe the process as *offering flexibility* and over four fifths (83%) see the process as *bottom up*. By contrast over half (59%) of the remaining participants, perceived the process as *top down* and the group is divided almost equally on whether the program review *affirms past practice* or *focuses on development*.

### **Research Question III**

**Research Question 3:** *How has the learning outcomes orientation of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process affected university decision-making related to assessment and promotion of the quality of teaching and learning?*

This question was addressed in two ways. First, participants were asked interview question twelve: *Did the development/refinement of program learning outcomes have any effects?* This will be pursued first. Second, key themes related to learning outcomes will be addressed since they were raised numerous times in response to a variety of interview questions. Relevant responses were qualitatively analyzed across questions and participant groups for emergent themes.

**Finding 3.** *The majority of respondents in each group believed the development or refinement of program learning outcomes had produced effects (Appendix N). However,*

*while most were cautiously optimistic, at least one person in each group dissented or was uncertain.*

A department chair commented,

After the review process occurred, there were more changes that occurred and a continual thinking of what came out of the review....at the time that was done, it was clear that the time had come for us to take a good serious look at what we were doing. The program had been pretty much the same for 15 years at that point...As we were trying to figure out what we were doing with the program we sat down with people from teaching and learning and started with program level outcomes... which really did make us think, if these are the kind of things we expect people to know when they leave here, then we need to make sure these are the kinds of courses we need to include. There was a kind of backwards program development; and we had subsequent meetings with the teaching and learning group to map out how the courses would manage that. (C2 - 1)

This means the development of learning outcomes was the trigger for departmental engagement in re-thinking a redesigned curriculum.

A dissenting chair said,

It is just something we already do; just an accounting, or verbalization, a reworking of what we already do, making the implicit, explicit... These are all things we already do but we don't view them as specific learning outcomes. The different things that go on in the various courses address many of the learning outcomes listed, but you go about doing it without really talking about it. We don't say we are doing this to do this, to help you with this; we just allow it to



happen. Rather than taking them through this activity and addressing this learning outcome and that learning outcome. It is more applied, a more natural process.

(C-3)

Subsequent reports did not require follow up on learning outcomes or result in more reflection, “there were lots of boxes to check off...I remember saying, are you kidding me? If we are doing our jobs correctly we are addressing a lot of those [learning outcomes] already” (C-3). This suggests *some participants saw the process as stating the obvious*, and a managerial exercise.

Faculty members took very different positions. Expressing a negative perspective one faculty member made the following comment,

Learning outcomes are apple pie and motherhood statements... They don't mean a whole lot of anything when you get right down to it at the course level... you can have all the learning outcomes you want ... That's not the real world... Learning outcomes are like vision statements - we are the best university in research... talk is cheap. Learning outcomes are a nice idea, they look good, but put more than 25 to 30 students in a course and it becomes impractical. (F1 - 2)

This suggests *a disconnect between what is stated and what is delivered*. Another faculty member saw things differently.

To be frank, even just thinking about LOs has an effect. People do things and people make courses and design programs. Prior to the last 5 or 6 years there were learning objectives - there are things you wanted to deliver – here's what I want to deliver so here is the course I want to offer, but learning outcomes are different. It isn't what I want to deliver, it is what GOT delivered. So, when you look at how

did I deliver it and now I have to think hard about what did I teach and how did I assess whether they got it. Learning objectives kind of gets you off the hook, right? I just had an objective. But learning outcomes, they are hard-core. if your learning outcome was to have students get to be better oral communicators then how did you teach it and how did you test it? There is a burden of proof required. Once there is a burden of proof, I'm redesigning courses because I know I have to teach it and test it. (F4 - 2)

This means the department aimed to make direct connections between intended outcomes and assessments of those outcomes.

### **Key Themes**

Themes regarding the effects of learning outcomes emerged in response to many interview questions. Recurrent themes were identified and triangulated across participating groups and representative quotes provided. Themes identified included:

- Administrators and staff increasingly discuss and reinforce learning outcomes with others in the university;
- The development of learning outcomes has been a catalyst for curriculum change;
- The focus on fiscal viability in a financially contracting system has increased and is widespread;
- Use of outcomes and metrics is escalating;
- Comparisons with other jurisdictions has increased;
- Rising costs have increased pressure on value for money spent on post-secondary education;

- The program review process has increased curricular responsiveness to employers and the community;
- Scaffolding of learning and a shift toward development of student learning outcomes has increased; and
- The academic culture is shifting from teaching to learning.

**Administration, Faculty, and Staff Discuss and Reinforce the Importance of Learning Outcomes to Others in the University**

The requirement to include student learning outcomes in each program review was promoted by senior administrators and carried out by department chairs or a designate responsible for the program self-study document. To develop buy in, administrators and those leading the review discussed and promoted learning outcomes within their universities, faculties, and departments. Universities could add additional learning outcomes to the degree level expectations required by the quality assurance framework.

A senior administrator said,

In our school, it was done as a collective; workshops, focus groups, alumni, students, externals, and community members, we refined learning outcomes. We started with the DLEs, we modified and changed syllabi... Now we do it about every three yrs. (C1-1)

A quality assurance staff member stated, learning outcomes were developed through an “very long process of consultation” (SA 4).

## **The Development of Learning Outcomes has Been a Catalyst for Curriculum Change**

A senior administrator commented,

“When the QAF came out, a few of our programs had learning outcomes but certainly not all of them. Now they all do” (SA2 - 3). A member of teaching and learning centre staff said “people are going to start being proactive to have these discussions so it wouldn't be so onerous. We are moving toward continuous improvement, articulating course outcomes on a regular basis” (TL3-1).

The requirement for program learning outcomes to be articulated is new to Ontario universities and required department-level discussion about the scope of material to be included and sequence of delivery raising questions about the alignment of the newly drafted learning outcome statements with the existing curriculum. This often-triggered curricular modifications following the review.

## **The Focus on Fiscal Viability in a Financially Contracting System has Increased and is Widespread**

The introduction of a new Quality Assurance Framework in Ontario signaled an increased focus on accountability. The same pressures led to the review and adoption of new *budget* processes at many universities in Ontario around the same time. The revised budget processes influenced subsequent program reviews. And comments from participants suggested some program work was completed in anticipation of the impact of the new budget processes being introduced. As a result, the program review is perceived by many as more a broad analysis of the *sustainability* of the academic department than a review of the academic program.

As one senior administrator explained the changes were, not really just related to program review, but the new budget model. Moving budgets to Deans is driven by the strategic mandate agreements. The program review has not been as big a driver as thought. Some people might see this as a piece of the whole of greater bureaucracy and external oversight.... Some programs still go into the program review as an avenue to advocate for resources. The message we are sending is that it is about quality and does not necessarily have to do with resources. The expectation is that we will reproduce the department as people retire. We need them to think about what it can be with what they have. For many areas, it takes time for the new reality to sink in. Some have been proactive about changing curriculum and working with the faculty they have. Others are still looking to say I want the external reviewers to say we need more faculty because we are teaching. The program review has been helpful in helping them focus. The changes are aligned with the resources available (SA2 - 2).

A department chair commented, “anything that would cost money was discounted by the institution. We can tweak within the current budget. A major reinvestment would improve quality, but we deliver a high-quality program already” (C-3).

A faculty member described it this way, “we argue vehemently. We tell them, you have given us the short end of the stick. Let us maintain this part that is essential in our program. Even with the budget cuts we’ve argued we must maintain it” (F1 - 2).

A quality assurance staff member explained that programs successfully navigating the quality assurance process could still be rejected.

We can't have strengths in every area, we had to define areas of strength. We had a PhD in a program approved by the Quality Council and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development rejected it. They said, it was not one of our areas of strength. There were ripples across the university when that happened. That had never happened before. (QA3 - 1)

### **Use of Outcomes and Metrics is Escalating**

*Outcomes* is a word broadly used, applied in many university contexts, and has recently been generalized to a wider range of contexts. With the new requirement for learning outcomes in the program review process, the term *learning outcomes* was used with greater frequency by administrative staff within departments. When the more general term *outcome* is used, people do not always clarify to what they are referring. Use of the term *outcome* has expanded to include measures of various kinds including alignment with and advancement of the university mission, departmental mission, key performance indicators, and the institution-specific strategic mandate agreements with the province. A variety of Senior Administrators raised this issue. A quality administrator described it this way,

Is your program aligned with the strategic mandate agreement? Are you following your own and the university mission?... They are seeing an effect and seeing how they can align to larger strategic goals that go from department to university and SMA [strategic mandate agreement]. Others thought departments would balk at this. (QA3 - 1)

Another senior administrator stated, “for the Quality Council all this has been the external driver. We needed internally to get talking about learning outcomes with an increased focus on metrics” (SA2 - 2). Another senior administrator said, “the ministry is focusing more on outcomes and metrics and won't change budgeting. The new budget model has hit us all hard. It has produced such turbulence, and I don't think we are going back” (SA2 - 1). Another said,

If the core indicator of Quality is the learning outcomes then the question is what do you have to have to get there? This will change the discussion about the input. It is anticipated there will be an increased alignment between institutional outcomes and program level outcomes in areas such as community engagement. (SA1 - 1)

A department chair said, “of course the University level outcomes has changed expectations for metrics. We must prove things with data rather than just reporting things. Although I work with quantitative data, I know not everything can be measured” (F4 - 2).

### **Comparisons of Outcomes Between Jurisdictions and Between Outcomes of Various Forms has Increased**

As outlined in the literature review, the drive towards reconciling diverse degrees and qualifications across jurisdictions in Europe, and the increased focus on assessing outcomes of various kinds in the United States has propelled the development of quality assurance in Ontario. As departments and institutions develop common language to describe programs, it facilitates comparisons as it was intended to do. Participants from various levels describe awareness of increasing comparisons between jurisdictions. For example, a senior administrator said,

Graduates with an English BA in the US, or the UK, or Ontario – there should be something that makes it a BA. There should be some level of universality about that. Internationally, in the Maritimes, and in the west, they have something similar. (SA2 - 2)

A department chair made the following statement,

Now it is more about institutional fit and provincial fit in the context of other comparable programs in Ontario, and how to manage financial resources more than in past. In the past it was internal, now it is broader. We must consider how it [the program] fits into the larger picture. (C2 - 1)

A quality assurance staff member also commented on comparisons.

They produce the report following the more prescriptive manual - it is more structured now. They did not get consistent data in the past. Now the data looks the same across programs and can be compared. For quality assurance, there is more information that is consistent across departments and programs. Programs use the same template, so in future it is easy to see there will be good information to mine... the learning outcomes adoption has provided an important connection with the external review process. Benchmarking is something people are beginning to see. This allows for comparator assessment. (QA3 - 1)

### **Rising Costs Have Increased Pressure on Value for Money Spent on Post-Secondary Education**

The rapid increase of the higher education system has been very expensive. The creation of new, more rigorous quality assurance measures has increased the focus on accountability for money spent. This fiscal accountability has not been restricted to



program review, it has been reinforced by the introduction of new budget frameworks at many Ontario universities.

A senior administrator said,

I think the government and the public stops trusting us. They basically didn't buy the argument that we do not need to explain ourselves in terms of what we do.

And let's face it, we had the longest most incredible ride with thinking we were just experts, and what we did, we did very well. People stopped and said, wait a second, we are paying a lot of money - both out of the public purse and for individual tuition costs to attend postsecondary institutions and for universities.

Can you tell me what the value of this is? (SA4 - 1)

A faculty member made a related comment, “the University is fueling the move towards a money focus. The review isn't what is causing the economic focus, but the new budget model is on the way” (F2 - 2). Another faculty member also commented on the topic.

For other administrators, it is all about the bottom line and are they making money - unfortunately. They are happy if our students achieve, but I don't think that is what it is about. It is a business even though we were told very clearly last week in a meeting, it is not. Of course it is a business,... it is all about making money and running it effectively with the least dollars. We are asked to restructure everything to do the most for them with less. (F2 - 2)

## **The Program Review Process has Increased Curricular Responsiveness to Employers and the Community**

The increased oversight of the Quality Assurance Framework has resulted in more consistent inclusion of input and involvement from stakeholders including students, alumni, the community, and employers. The Quality Council promotes an increased involvement with stakeholders and would like to see an increase in direct stakeholder involvement in drafting the self-study (OUCQA, 2017).

Stakeholder involvement has produced benefits as described by a department chair, “Departments have become more aware of opportunities to engage alumni, and to engage employers or other stakeholders in contrast with UPRAC [the previous University Program Review and Audit Committee process]. It is more effective because of the focus on learning outcomes.” (C2 - 1). Another senior administrator commented, “when the templates are revised there will be more alignment between institution level outcomes and program development. Things like community engagement, we want programs to address them” (SA1 - 1).

## **Scaffolding of Learning and a Shift Toward Development of Student Learning Outcomes has Increased**

The introduction of program learning outcomes triggered discussions of where in the curriculum program knowledge and skills were introduced, reinforced, and reached proficiency. This focused review of the curriculum dealing with what students required in order to achieve program outcomes has led to use and development of tools to facilitate curricular analysis such as curriculum mapping which involves cross-referencing learning outcomes to the courses in which they are developed and which

reinforce the developmental structure of curriculum. A senior administrator referred to this process:

They are all going through curriculum mapping and thinking in that intentional way about how the programs are structured. I think that is a powerful tool. There were always some curriculum changes that happened but it is getting done better. And thinking about programs and degrees as a curriculum and not as happenstance of what students take, but by tying this to specific learning. They now have the tools to do so, and now the whole review is structured around your learning outcomes. Before, questions were asked about practices without forcing the tie back to learning outcomes. I'm not sure UPRAC mentioned learning outcomes. If it did, it wasn't the center, it was more ancillary. They may have mentioned learning outcomes in the department mission but they were not forced to come back and connect everything back to them again and again . (SA2 - 3)

Another senior administrator described a shift away from what is delivered to what students need to learn.

Programs end up with a coherent program. Before, it was a collection of courses. It may have been a traditional view of the discipline more related to the faculty you have, and what they want to teach; faculty interest versus what a graduate needs. (SA2 - 2)

A quality assurance staff member stated,

When you have a set of courses without a curricular spine, we haven't brought them together [properly]. They are like bookends, at the foundational level, they set students up for success. If there was a gap in what people thought was being

delivered, without explicit learning outcomes, the outcomes actually helped them identify that they weren't delivering. (QA4-1)

Another quality assurance person recognized the intention of the changes taking place but added a caution, “it all maps up from learning outcomes to degree level expectations. It is all connected. It is one big system. Could they fake it? Yes” (QA3 - 1).

### **Learning Outcomes are Credited with Bringing About Shifts in the Academic Culture from Teaching to Learning**

The process of articulating intended student learning outcomes has shifted curricular discussions from the perspective of what each course will “cover”, to what knowledge, skills, and attributes students will develop in each course. This is what Barr and Tagg (1995) described as a shift from teaching to learning, that is, a shift from thinking about delivering instruction to bringing about learning. A quality assurance staff member described this move,

There was a shift in culture - this is likely because our quality assurance person tells them to make this a shared process with wide engagement and contributions. Each year I have more examples from others to show who is responsible for what. There is quite an open attitude about sharing and exchanging copies of existing documents. (QA2 - 1)

A department chair also described the change:

The entire shift of university in the last six years is doing that; it is a big change we have always been responsible for teaching students and think it is very important but it has been faculty driven; this is my course and what I like to teach; that necessarily always needs to be there, there's always a place for that; but there is

also a place to say where do students want to go when they leave here? How can we build a curriculum that will allow them to go where they want to go. (C2-1)

A teaching and learning centre person commented, “We are invested in the language of learning outcomes and learning outcomes assessment. There is more engagement as a value process shifting the culture towards student feedback that didn’t exist previously” (QA2 - 1).

### **Alignment of Key Themes with Definitions of Quality**

Each theme can be associated with two to five different definitions of quality which can be also be reviewed in light of the definitions. For example, elaborating on one theme identified in Table 6, (a) *administrators and staff increasingly discuss learning outcomes*. This can be associated with four different definitions of quality. It can be associated with *excellence* - administrators and staff discuss learning outcomes in order to maintain or increase the excellence of programs. *Perfection* – administrators and staff discuss learning outcomes in order to increase the consistency of programs.

*Transformation* – administrators and staff discuss learning outcomes to inspire departments to help students achieve their potential. *Fitness for purpose* – administrators and staff discuss learning outcomes in order to ensure programs deliver on the stated purpose of the program.

### **Research Question IV**

**Research Question 4:** *How has the Ontario Quality Assurance Framework affected university decision-making policies, rewards, structures, and culture as mechanisms to promote the quality of teaching and learning in the Ontario university curriculum?*

**Finding 4.** *All universities provide supports to assist in carrying out the program review that include guidance through templates, manuals, and consulting.*

However, not all respondents identify these as support. Interview participants report little monetary support to compensate departments for the extra work required by support staff. As a faculty member said “No rewards, no incentives. This is mandatory – there is an enormous threat for not doing this...the university paid for a full day workshop and provided lunch” (F1 - 1). A quality assurance staff commented, “We have significantly under resourced the process” (QA1 - 1), and from a senior administrator, “The Deans feel this is the Vice Provost’s responsibility and units are fighting with their Deans who are supposed to balance the books” (SA1 - 1).

The conceptual framework for this study, identifies mechanisms that may produce an impact in quality assurance (Figure 2). Interview question five asked participants: *Are any resources, rewards, or incentives made available for the program review?* Then, participants were provided with a list of prompts. However, the prompts separated policies and structures, and added *people* as well. Based on the researcher’s experience in this field, it was hypothesized that policies could be considered distinct from structures (such as committees or support units) *people* in certain positions could be also considered a mechanism to bring about change. Each is addressed below.

### **Policy Changes**

The Ontario Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) known more commonly as the program review or cyclical review, was introduced in 2011. Although the process built in flexibility for adaptation to each institution, it required all universities to modify policies regarding creation of new programs, modification of programs, and

Table 6

*Alignment of Key Themes with Definitions of Quality*

Key themes related to learning outcomes	Excellence	Perfection	Transformation	Fitness for purpose	Value for money
Administrators and staff increasingly discuss learning outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓	
The development of learning outcomes has been an catalyst for curriculum change	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Outcomes and metrics are escalating	✓	✓	✓		✓
Comparisons with other jurisdictions has increased	✓	✓		✓	
Increased curricular responsiveness	✓		✓	✓	
The academic culture is shifting from teaching to learning	✓	✓	✓		
Scaffolding of learning and a shift toward development of student learning outcomes is increasing	✓	✓			
There is an increased focus on fiscal viability in a financially contracting system		✓			✓
Rising costs have increased pressure on delivering value for money		✓			✓

cyclical program review. Any of these changes require a program to describe the intended student learning outcomes, and to explain how the program curricula was appropriately designed to meet the degree level expectations included in the Quality Assurance Framework.

One significant change was the introduction of an external review process for all *new* undergraduate programs. As one senior administrator explained:

Before we had a quality assurance framework, new undergraduate programs had no external review. So that is a change, a profound one. We treat graduate and undergraduate programs the same now. That has had a profound change in the system at multiple levels.

In addition, since the introduction of the IQAP, half of all participants report their IQAP policies had been further amended one or more times. For example, a quality assurance staff member said,

Two policies were amended for the IQAP: cyclical review, and the new program policy...last year we updated the policy on cyclical review; to ensure sections of self-study were relevant. We developed a committee and looked at the criteria required and included our university context and culture. (QA2 - 1)

A senior administrator commented, “some universities have modified it [the IQAP policy] up to five times” (SA-5). Changes have been made not only to create policies to enact the quality assurance process, but also to address problems collateral to the process. Another senior administrator commented,

a dean took two years to respond to a review...I know there have been policy changes since that time...departments take the recommendations from cyclical



program seriously because there is a mandatory follow up required in in following years. They know they can't sit on the recommendations. (F3 - 1)

At least one policy was altered for reasons collateral to the Quality Council and related to institutional power dynamics. A quality assurance participant said,

A dean had their own vision different from the program and wanted to take the reviewers' report to force it. The department fought back. So, a change was made to the policy - only those recommendations raised by reviewers can be added. (QA2 - 1)

### **Rewards, Incentives, Resources, People**

Participants were provided with a list of possible *rewards, resources or incentives* that might apply. Categories included financial support, people, services, resources, and structures. People and services were seen as resources which might be available, but might not otherwise be identified as resources. The average response from each group was averaged to produce the figures seen in Appendix O to S.

**Rewards and Incentives.** Financial support is not commonly provided. Though roughly one quarter of participants reported small forms of financial support including course release, or funds for additional administrative assistance. Some participants also reported approval to allow departments to connect findings from the program review with requests for funding in the following budget year, and some availability of program development funds. No participant identified hiring a writer to assist.

**Resources.** The most reported resources or documentation available to assist the program review process, was the availability of *timelines and schedules* identified by four fifths of participants (82%) followed by templates reported by just over half of the

participants (55%). Just under half (45%) identified availability of a program review manual and a minority of universities (9%) identified software available for curriculum mapping (Appendix P Resources). No participant identified availability of project management or course outline software. This suggests timelines, schedules and templates, which are fairly inexpensive supports, have been identified by most institutions as useful and made available for the review process

**People.** People did not appear in the conceptual framework as a mechanism, but a variety of *people*, were identified as providing some form of support to the program review as seen in Appendix Q. Almost half of participants (45%) identified people in six roles as providing some form of support including the Vice Provost Teaching and Learning or equivalent, Teaching and learning centre staff, Director or head of QA, Quality Assurance Office support, administrators or staff for questions, and administrative staff reassigned to assist. Just over (27%) of participants reported a curriculum specialist was available to assist.

**Services.** Resources such as workshop facilitation, and support from administrators were identified by just over one quarter of participants (27%) (Appendix R). No participants identified the availability of project management support to facilitate preparation of course outlines. Few services and people are identified as available to assist with the review process, although structures identified in the next section also provide services.

**Structures.** When asked whether particular *structures* support the review process, nearly two thirds of participants (64%) identified a quality assurance office, over one third (36%) identify Institutional Analysis or planning group, (36%), Teaching and Learning Centre and nearly one fifth (18%) the Program Review committee (Appendix S). These structures also provide services such as one-on-one or one-to-many consultations.

This report indicates either these structures do not exist at every university, participants are unaware of these structures, or participants do not perceive them as supporting the review. An internet search confirmed only one of the three universities involved has what would be considered a *quality assurance office*. All universities have an institutional analysis or planning office that provides data, and all universities have a structure that manages the program review process. The varying report of these structures suggests several possibilities: a structure may exist by a name other than those used in this study, there is a lack of awareness of the structures supporting program review, or participants may be aware of structures but do not report support from the existing structures. In drafting the interview questions, this researcher deemed these roles and activities to be support for the program review. However, one department chair drew a distinction, commenting that some of these offices provide *direction* rather than support. That is, being *told* what to do rather than being *supported*. Another explanation may relate to what is considered support, or how one defines support. Others might feel that asking questions or requesting services of these kinds might attract undue attention or generate additional work.

## Research Question V

**Research Question 5:** *What program-related effects have resulted from the introduction of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process?*

**Finding 5.** *Numerous effects are identified to result from the program review process including administrative changes and effects related to teaching and learning. Nearly half of the changes identified (43%) are likely to have a long-term impact.*

*Impact* is an umbrella term commonly used to describe effects of various kinds. These can be short-term, midterm, or long-term effects. The range of impact is more easily analyzed if effects are clustered into groups by related interview questions (Appendix T). First, participants were asked a two-part general open-ended question about the possible effects of the program review. This was followed by a series of more detailed questions about possible effects moving from general to specific, (interview questions 9 to 16). The second cluster of interview questions addresses, the quality of the degree program, and program accountability. The third cluster of questions addresses department-related effects, and effects on the institution. The fourth cluster deals with changes to the institution itself. The fifth cluster involves questions related to power and potentially harmful effects from the review process.

### **Cluster One: Changes**

The first question related to impact, interview question nine, asked participants a two-part question: *What types of changes (if any) do you think HAVE resulted from the program review?* and *What types of changes (if any) do you think WILL result from the program review?* (interview question nine). Changes could take any form identified by

participants. This two part question was intended to elicit spontaneous responses regarding the impact of the review. Each will be addressed in turn.

In response to interview question nine, *what changes do you think have resulted from the program review?* abbreviated responses from all participants were listed, identified, sorted into emergent categories (see Appendix U). All participants identified changes, and multiple categories identified. Mentioned most often were administrative changes, curriculum changes, effects on faculty members, course changes, and the introduction or increased use of learning outcomes.

Grouping the categories *course changes*, *learning outcomes*, and *curriculum* together reveals nearly half (46%) of the items relate to course and curriculum. This includes changes such as *declaring a major at a later point*, *a major curriculum overhaul*, *changed weighting of courses*, and *learning outcomes are more directly considered*. Administrative changes make up 25% of all identified effects. These include observations such as, *we modified how we completed exams* and *procedural changes*. Of all changes, 15% were identified as having effects on faculty members, including changes such as *reflection*, *increased evidence-based focus*, *discussed pedagogical matters*, *collegial discussion regarding teaching and learning*. Changes directly related to students constituted 6% of the comments, for example, *awareness of accomplishments*, *process centered on students*, and *added a minor to address student needs*.

### **Long Term Impact**

Almost half of changes identified (43%) are likely to have a long-term impact (graphed in Appendix V). This was determined by sorting the identified changes by items likely to have a short, medium, or long-term impact. Some could clearly be seen to be

likely to produce a long-term impact for example, *a new faculty hire, the review provided the evidence for a major curriculum change, follow up is mandated as part of the process, we are able to see how our program compares to others, we changed the weighting of courses.*

It is uncertain whether the remaining 57% of identified changes (short and mid-term) will have a long-term impact on academic programs. Examples include changes such as: *“all programs are provided with a common data set, we identified a need for more writing in the program, we increased departmental reflection, we have the ability to see changes in the program over time”*. These changes would require further action to result in a long-term impact, which may be dependent upon interest, willingness, or resources.

Senior Administrators identified twice as many changes as any other level, which is not surprising since many changes dealt with administrative responsibilities, and many administrators work across multiple Faculties and academic programs. Senior administrators will have reviewed numerous self-study documents.

### **Changes Expected to Result from the Program Review**

As part of interview question nine, participants were asked: *What types of changes (if any) do you think WILL result from the program review?* Responses were first assessed as to whether the participant believed changes would, or would not occur. A simple overview of the response can be seen in Appendix W which shows more than half the participants were positive regarding the likelihood changes would occur in the future. Just over half of the Senior Administrators, faculty members, and quality assurance staff

believed changes would occur, department chairs were equally divided, and teaching and learning centre staff all believed changes would occur.

The tone and comments of participants were also assessed on a five-point scale from very negative to very positive (Table 7 and Appendix X). More than half of the participants were positive regarding the likelihood that changes will occur in the future related to the review. On closer examination, this included most of the senior administrators, as might be expected given their role of promoting the process at their institutions, most of the teaching and learning centre personnel who support the process and half of the quality assurance support. Taking neither a positive or negative position were four participants. Finally, five participants spoke very negatively or pessimistically about the prospect of future changes. Faculty members were divided almost evenly across categories. Overall, the balance was tilted towards expecting positive changes to occur.

### **Cluster Two: Quality and Accountability**

The second cluster of interview questions prompted participants for details about *possible* effects.

**Quality of the degree.** Interview question 11.1 asked: *Do you think the current program review process is likely to affect the quality of the degree program?*

**Finding 6.** *Half of all participants (13 of 26) reported the program review would affect the quality of the degree program, and half stated the review would not or were unsure if it would affect the quality of the degree program (overview Appendix Y).*

This was determined by summarizing the response of each participant by role to the question to a simple yes, no, or unsure, then analyzing the more detailed responses to

Table 7

*Attitudes Regarding Whether Changes Will Result from the Program Review*

	Chair	Faculty	Senior Administrators	QA	T&L	Total
Very negative	1	2	1	1		5 Negative
Negative						
Neutral	1	2	1			4 Neutral
Positive	1	2		1	1	5 Positive
Very positive	1	1	5	2	3	12 Very positive
Total	4	7	7	4	4	26



the question overall. Most notably, *none* of the department chairs expressed confidence the quality of the degree would be affected. By contrast, the majority of the remaining groups indicated the review *would* improve the degree. Faculty members were divided across the categories. This suggests the institutional leadership and support staff have greater confidence the process will improve quality than the department leadership.

**Program accountability.** Interview question 11.2 asked: *Do you think the current program review process is likely to affect program accountability (being responsible to students and the public for the programs offered)?*

**Finding 7.** Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of comments regarding program accountability: (a) change processes are improving accountability; (b) a focus on actions (output) rather than results (impact); (c) unrelated administrative processes interfere with accountability; (d) the review process has exposed gaps in administrative processes; and finally (e) a shift from teaching to learning. Each will be considered in turn.

**Change processes are improving accountability.** Over two thirds (18 of 25 [72%]) of participants felt the review *had* or *would* lead to greater accountability (Figure in Appendix Z). A teaching and learning centre person said “I think those annual reports identifying which tasks are identified that they have to achieve each year between program reviews – adds a layer of accountability that wasn’t there before” (T&L2 - 1). A department chair commented, “current IQAP with a focus on learning outcomes increases accountability especially to students” (C4 - 1). A faculty member said,

That was probably the whole reason for it - knowing this is a public document, knowing programs will be reviewed regularly. Every review we have, we are told

to make changes within a year. For students and the public – it could. I don't know if students and the public know a whole lot about the information. It is not written in a way for a student or the general public. (F4 - 2)

**Actions not results (output not impact).** Comments from some participants suggest activity does not equal results, and reports do not equal accountability. The review can result in a great deal of activity with little to show for the effort. A department chair commented, “I don't think students or the public are aware of accountability- a document on the shelf will not make us accountable” (C-3). A senior administrator, “the public doesn't understand or care. This is more accountability for the government” (SA2 - 1). Another senior administrator said, “publishing the FAR [final assessment report] is a farce. Publishing these is not accessible. Most people are struggling to know what to put them on the website. There is no alignment across universities, people don't know enough to look for them anyway” (SA1 - 1). A person providing teaching and learning support, said of the FAR, “where is it posted? Maybe I don't know where to look; it is not that transparent, so others can hold you accountable” (T&L3 - 1). This suggests that although accountability activities take place to demonstrate accountability, they may not provide accountability to students, and the general public.

**Unrelated administrative processes interfere with accountability.** A new or impending university budget restructuring process affected three of the four participating universities around the time of the program review and the fourth expected a budget restructuring process to begin in the near future. This additional administrative review process confounded some of the processes and experiences of the program review. A chair said, it was

confounded with university-wide review on sustainability and accountability...it tarnished the quality assurance process particularly for us since we had just finished the review... the Dean sat on the program review for two and a half years – the Provost thought it was fine after 2 months. (C1-1)

A faculty member said, “Around the same time as they started talking about learning outcomes and undergraduate degree level expectations (UDLEs), they started talking about Key performance indicators” (F1 - 2).

**The review process has exposed gaps in administrative processes.** Emerging from these statements is the view that the current IQAP process reveals gaps not only in academic programs but in the administrative processes and practices supporting program review and how the reviews are used. A senior administrator said, “We are going to force it. We have to be accountable in a different way than we had to be ten years ago, but we use our program reviews in exactly the same way” (SA1 - 1). A faculty member described “the dean who didn’t respond for 2 yrs., [to the review] – they are more accountable now for the recommendations” (F3 - 1). Some universities have mandated follow up to the program reviews. A teaching and learning centre staff person said “I think those annual reports in which tasks are identified that they have to achieve each year between program reviews adds a layer of accountability that wasn’t there before” (T&L2 - 1). These types of experiences may account for the twenty-five percent of administrative changes participants identified as resulting from the review.

**Shift in accountability from teaching to learning.** Participants commented on an increased focus on accountability regarding student needs. A department chair said,

the entire shift of university in the last six years is doing that. It is a big change. We have always been responsible for teaching students and think it is very important, but it has been faculty driven in terms of this is my course and what I like to teach. That necessarily always needs to be there, there's always a place for that, but there is also a place to say where do students want to go when they leave here? How can we build a curriculum that will allow them to go where they want to go? I think there is a little more looking at that. What can the program as a whole give, allowing flexibility for students but allowing for faculty as well? (C2 - 1)

Another chair put it this way, "the current IQAP with a focus on learning outcomes increases accountability especially to students as long as we take those outcomes seriously and evaluate the degree to which we address them" (C4 - 1). A senior administrator said the "learning outcome framework does really help with responsibility to students. To the public, it comes from longer term societal outcomes and whether university education has prepared them for life work etc." (C4 - 1).

### **Cluster Three: Department Level**

The third and largest cluster of questions dealt with effects on the academic department including, course level changes, effects on program planning, effects on individuals in the department, effects on the departmental culture, and team versus small group involvement.

**Course level changes.** Interview question ten asked participants: *Do you think the review will result in changes at the course level?*

**Finding 8.** *Two thirds (18 of 25 [72%]) of participants across the four levels believed changes would occur at the course level (Appendix AA). However, three out of four department chairs did not believe changes would occur. Only one other person, a faculty member, took this position. Senior Administrators were the only category uncertain about what *might* change. This finding means faculty members with control over what happens within their own courses predict greater change than those without direct ability to make changes. A senior administrator said,*

Nobody asked me how does your course relate to the rest of the courses within our program. And this process has forced the issue. Now people don't think of individual courses as being independent of other courses within the program.

Whereas when I started teaching there was no cohesion. It was, you teach a course in whatever way you want and one thing that has changed is that people are starting to think about, well wait a second, how does your course fit within general expectations of what we want our students to learn? (SA4 - 1)

A faculty member said, “We have since had 72 pages of course changes, added courses, deleted courses, changed course titles, move courses around - tons of work” (C2 - 1).

Another faculty member commented,

I'm doubtful if there are any changes... We can say we want to introduce more writing to 4-600 students; but we can't easily do so with these numbers. My colleagues recognize this is a drawback, but to fix it we would have to assign a lot of TAs or find other solutions. Most courses involve multiple sections of over 300 in each one; we could reduce the class size and provide more opportunities for writing assignments with feedback, but that would require a dramatically

increased number of TAs. That might be desirable, but not if it means I have to mark hundreds of essays with no new resources. It is easy to design a great program with experiential education and with writing, but without increased resources incentives, it is not going to happen. (F1 - 2)

**Program planning.** Department chairs and faculty members are those most involved in program planning. Four fifths of participants (20 of 25) thought the review would affect program planning. Appendix BB was created by analyzing responses from each individual to determine whether they described effects on program planning. Program review is *intended* to engage departments deeply in a review of data from multiple sources in order to better plan ahead and address issues. A faculty member said, “it had a huge impact on program planning because we completely changed our entire program” (C2 - 1), a department chair said, “we modify our learning outcomes, keeping them current on a rotating basis, working on time to completion. We are more student focused after the review” (C1-1). By contrast, a faculty member said, “back to the ship analogy at sea; turning the ship around is difficult. We can’t do what we want to do, so let’s just let it keep going” (F1 - 2).

Senior Administrators are involved in managing and planning in the longer term. One said the review process was,

helpful in terms of forcing. It creates a mechanism so people have to talk about an integrated curriculum and that is an incredibly positive aspect of this. We are new at this process. We are in the first or second round of quality assurance program reviews the way we do it now. Let’s look at it five rounds from now; it will become the norm. (SA4 - 1)

Another said, “the recommendations are often about program planning” (SA-5). The program review process itself requires departments to analyze their programs and to plan for the future, but this is not always the case. One administrator commented,

it is a continuous process - but it is a slow process. We won’t see the full result for eight years down the road until we can see what was done in the previous review and the changes that have taken place there. (SA3 - 1)

**Changes affecting individuals.** Participants were asked: *What effect (if any) would you say the program review has had on or will have, on individuals in the department?* Emerging from the qualitative analysis of responses were themes of leadership opportunities created, avoidance of responsibility, and identity.

A member of quality assurance staff said, “we have seen folks [subsequently] undertake *leadership* at the associate dean level, some have gone on to run as department chair, and some have gone on to do work on the scholarship of teaching and learning” (QA1 - 1). Another commented, “we nominated people for positions based on their leadership in the program review process” (QA2 - 1). A senior administrator said, “some of those who lead good reviews, were put on subcommittees and have since served as auditors for the quality council” (SA2 - 3). As a quality assurance person mentioned,

In a couple of places, it has caused real animosity. In one case, a department chair has stepped down. There were other larger issues. In this case, that coming together ignited some folks to feel they could attack the leadership and feel that was okay. That one has been very challenging on a whole lot of levels. (QA1 - 1)

A faculty member commented that some people actively *avoid* leadership of this kind. “Some people won’t take a position if they know a review is coming up” (F4 - 2).

Another faculty member commented “the person who should have taken the review is the previous chair rather than the new chair. It should have been done at least jointly” ( F2 - 2).

The program review also seems to touch on issues of *identity*. A department chair commented that it can require “delicate handling of faculty members. If they had a required course [canceled] it can affect how they feel about their self-worth and how important they are” (C2 - 1).

**Department culture changes.** When asked about effects of the program review on department/school culture (shared values, beliefs, assumptions) participant comments were mixed. What emerged was the continuum of responses in Table 8. Responses were grouped into categories from positive to negative and similar groupings were assigned a suitable label representing the sentiment expressed. Comments ranged from a sense of *coercion* or imposition of the program review process on a department culture, thus predominantly department Chairs and faculty members, with only a few additional comments by quality assurance support personnel. This means opinions vary considerably even amongst faculty members and department chairs. Opinions are divided even *within* individuals. Some participant comments but appear at both ends of the scale for example, Chair 1 whose comments appear at both extremes. The number of comments leans toward criticisms.

At one end of the continuum is a sense of being coerced or *forced* to undertake this process, and of the process exposing divisions, for example, “the department is split – we don’t have all the same values and beliefs” (F2 - 2). In the middle, statements suggest resignation, “I’m working on the first floor, someone else is on a different floor.



Table 8

*Continuum of Sample Comments Regarding Effects of the Program Review on Department/School Culture*

<b>Attitude Expressed</b>	<b>Descriptor and representative quotes</b>
<b>Coercion</b> ↓	<b>Forced</b> “the review is seen as <i>imposed</i> on them; this <i>forces</i> a level of reflection and development and creates a forum for discussion” (C4 - 1).
	<b>Division</b> “the department is split – we don’t have all the same values and beliefs” (F2 - 2).
	<b>Lack of common purpose and factors driving this</b> “You get hired to do research in this area and to teach these courses without any idea how it all fits together. A retreat helps a bit” (F1 - 2).  “it reinforces existing culture” (T&L1 - 1).
	<b>Changing department culture</b> I think some people say to themselves, why are you allowed to take 6 months off, while I don’t get a break. A colleague took paternity leave, had one child, went on sabbatical, had a second paternity leave. But any time people talk to one another it is positive thing” (F3 - 1).
<b>Resignation</b>	“This is nice but I’m doing research and teaching two courses, what can I change? Bringing about change is a nice idea but won’t work – it is a lot of work and not a manageable thing to do because it is so big” (F1 - 2).  “It reinforces existing culture – they are not closely enough involved (T&L1 - 1)
<b>No effect</b>	<b>No effect</b> “nothing” (C-3) “minimal or no effects” (F1 - 1)
<b>Evolving process</b>	“there are conversations taking place across departments, and they are helping others. They are asking about the benefits of the process. They are asking the right questions. There are cross faculty conversations that might not have taken place” (SA3 - 1).  “it has facilitated the improved cohesion of departments. When a critical mass of people show up it has been good for collective departments, for interpersonal relations and for communication skills” (T&L3 - 1).
	<b>Shared values</b> ”shared values around learning and discovery” (C1-1).  ”it allowed us the space to debate, at this level to articulate why they [learning outcomes] matter for reputation and excellence and how they can be of use.” (QA1 - 1)
<b>↑</b> <b>Shared values beliefs &amp; assumptions</b>	<b>Common purpose</b> “Going through those processes helps unify and clarify what we are trying to achieve” (C4 - 1) “we see a group working as a team and sharing across courses” (C2 - 1)  “it does help people get on the same page, to dispel myths about what is happening in the program and helps bolster people’s thoughts on the program it can pull the department together, it pulls people together.” (F4 - 2)  “yes, in one department, a person said after the six-month process, we haven’t had these discussions about teaching and learning in over a decade; they were meaningful conversations” (T&L4 - 1)

Individuals are distinguished by role, university, and number. The letter indicates the role (C=chair, F=faculty member, SA=Senior Administrator, QA=quality assurance staff, T&L=teaching and learning centre staff). The first digit indicates university (1,2,3, or 4). A digit following a dash identifies individual members (e.g., 2<sup>nd</sup> faculty member from that university). F1 2 can be read as Faculty member from university 1, and – 2 indicates it is the second faculty member of that group university.

Table 9

*Factors influencing the involvement of faculty members in a program review*

Factor	Representative Quotes
Politics	<p>“If a department is divided in political views or have strongly held beliefs, the program review can open wounds. Where departments are divided, there must be some difficulties” (SA4 - 1).</p> <p>“They are [part of a] larger question revealed and exacerbated by program review – should be its function – should be also to program politics are complex delicate thing and it might exacerbate the conflict” (SA1 - 1).</p>
Department interactions	<p>“in our school, it was done as a collective; workshops, focus groups, alumni, students, externals, community members.” (C1-1)</p> <p>“A faculty member got release collected information from syllabi and discussion at department and curricular level. Someone took a first pass and looked at outcomes. They queried faculty and courses, asked them to match them up. The whole department was involved at various stages.” (C-3)</p> <p>“For undergraduate learning outcomes, there were two of us” (F1 - 1).</p> <p>“It can precipitate crises in departments that don't get along. Leadership must insist they come to grips with this” (SA-5).</p>
Department size	<p>“We are like a large ship at sea going smoothly – if it ain't broke don't fix it. We are a cash cow and because we are big it is difficult to make any changes” (F1 - 2).</p>
Leadership	<p>“... especially those who take a leadership role, the program review increases their knowledge of the process and their engagement. Over time this reverberates throughout the larger group which generally becomes more engaged in the review and oversight in a positive way” (C4 - 1).</p> <p>“We had a unifying chair. Someone who wasn't the best leader is no longer chair and someone who could lead the department in the direction we needed to go, to facilitate and run the department more efficiently has taken over” (F2 - 2).</p>
Expedient	<p>“A get it done mentality. A lack of genuine interest in the QA process.” (QA1 - 1)</p> <p>“When this came down, the format had changed. Most people figured it just had to be done and anticipated. We anticipated no good outcomes, or that was the impression. What would have been a positive outcome?” (F1 - 1).</p>
Task perception	<p>“any time you have naval gazing exercises it is not a bad thing to talk to each other” (F1 - 2).</p> <p>“A chair feels empowered to have someone to hear the departmental woes... it is positive and constructive even for the reluctant... leading people to say, maybe I need to think about this.” (F3 - 1).</p>
External supports	<p>“We did a great job when we hired our quality assurance person ...she is respectful of faculty and the roles they have. She is a natural teacher and facilitator” (SA2 - 2).</p> <p>“The teaching and learning folks are very helpful as are other roles everything is being put in different places. They are constantly helping, and level of review and forms exceedingly good – became a formal office.” (C2 - 1).</p>

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Factor	Representative Quotes
Trust	<p data-bbox="464 258 1393 363">“There is a conception that this is top-down and bureaucratic, with a general distrust of those higher up. It has the potential to be very polarizing. We can have the conversation but often there is a hostility that they are being policed or over policed. Some see it as a decline in academic freedom; a neoliberal shift” (T&amp;L3 - 1).</p> <p data-bbox="464 394 1393 499">“There was an awareness of collective aims. The language of learning outcomes was translated from the program to course level. The ability to do this collaboratively increases and improves collegiality and spurs significant conversation regarding what they’re doing in courses” (T&amp;L4 - 1).</p> <p data-bbox="464 531 1393 611">“It can precipitate crises in departments that don't get along... it is a big problem. Changing who is in charge can make a difference. The champions of this – it is important to get them involved. Peer to peer often works” (SA-5).</p>

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How it all ties together is difficult. We are a large moving body, we don't understand how we all fit together to be the cogs in the wheel" (F1 - 2).

**Finding 9** – *Team versus small group involvement. The optimal number of faculty members involved in a program review is dependent on factors including politics, department interaction, department size, leadership, expediency versus efficiency, task perception, use of external supports, and trust.*

The investigator assumed effectiveness of the program review process increased with the number of program faculty involved. Study responses did not support this assumption. Broad or narrow involvement of department faculty members could be successful or problematic. Factors affecting a constructive or problematic running of the program review supported by the collected data included: (a) politics; (b) department interactions; (c) department size; (d) leadership; (e) expediency versus efficiency; (f) task perception; (g) use of external supports; and (h) trust. Examples of participants' responses related to these factors can be seen in Table 9.

#### **Cluster Four - Changes to the institution.**

Interview question 13.4 asked about effects on *the institution itself*. Participants reported *no effects, negative effects, and positive effects* on the university itself. One faculty member said, "I'm not sure it has had any effect at all" (F4 - 2), two department chairs made similar comments. A quality assurance staff member said, "I'm really critical about how we have been doing this, and sense this was a missed opportunity" (QA1 - 1). Some participants identified *negative* effects citing for example, "an increase in administrative load. In getting it all done, and all the coordinating and timing" (C3). Two others identified the creation of more reports seen as useless. A department chair said,

“we need more shelves to put them on” (C3), and a faculty member mentioned, “they just put the report on the shelf and move on ” (F1 - 2) Another chair commented, “the glacier is not moving any faster” (C-3).

A variety of benefits were identified. Most numerous related to *quality*, e.g., “overall, I think we will have higher quality programs” (QA2 - 1), and *university planning* e.g., “aligning trends in Ontario universities with other jurisdictions has been important” (SA2 - 2). Fewer issues included *finances*, e.g., “the institution secured millions to help them think about how to assess academic programs” (T&L4 - 1) [this was highly unusual], *discourse*, e.g., “discourse on campus about program quality has changed” (C4 - 1), *awareness*, e.g., the review has “raised awareness of what we need to do” (F4 - 1), *students*, e.g., “if we are doing our job better students benefit. The process makes us aware we must examine our practice. It is good for all and positive for the institution” (F3 - 1).

#### **Cluster Five: Power and Negative Effects**

The last cluster involved questions related to power dynamics, negative or harmful effects, and a collection of additional issues.

**Changes related to power dynamics.** Interview question 14.1 asked participants: *Do you think the program review has affected the power dynamics within the department or school?* Themes emerging from a qualitative analysis of responses suggest the program review highlighted the role of leadership, influenced the locus of authority, and magnified existing patterns.

*Leadership* figured prominently in responses to this question as well as other questions during interviews. It plays a role in how review processes were perceived at the

university or department level and the apparent strategic purpose and goals of the exercise. Finally, while leadership can unify it can also cause difficulties. Leadership is not always taken by the department chair, but sometimes by a designate which can lead to further leadership opportunities. A quality assurance staff member said, at the university level it was,

A get it done mentality, a lack of genuine interest in the QA process. There is a lack of interest in learning outcomes. We have a history with cyclical review. A previous senior administrator was involved in old UPRAC process and treated this as though we could roll it over, why reinvent the wheel. This affected how programs saw this. It matters who is in charge to the success of the activities.

(QA1 - 1)

By contrast, but also emphasizing the effect of leadership, a faculty member described the role of,

A unifying chair. Someone who wasn't best leader is no longer chair; and someone who could lead in the department in the direction we needed to go and could facilitate and run the department more efficiently has taken over. The program review occurred in conjunction with the change in power – there is a different power dynamic now in department for sure. (F2 - 2)

This suggests leadership at different levels can contribute significantly to the acceptance and involvement of participants in the program review process.

*The locus of authority* in program review does not always rest with administration. A senior administrator commented “the locus of authority varies and at times provides opportunities” (SA-5). From a teaching and learning centre person:

It has elevated some institutional leaders really. Some people have taken it upon themselves to be enabled and to enable others. There are a lot of what I would call knowledge catalysts, or leaders that have really spearheaded really strong program review processes, and it has elevated them as leaders across campus.

And some of them have gone on to take on other leadership roles. (T&L4 - 1)

*Patterns.* In addition to leadership, and locus of authority, patterns can be exposed. Some participants have commented the review provides something of a bird's eye view – exposing patterns of various types. A quality assurance person said, “in any review you can see who communicates well with their team; who is working as a team as opposed to just the leader ruling everybody” (QA1 - 1). A senior administrator said

When I see something coming out in a review that tells me there are difficulties there, I take that to the Dean; and I either given them a suggestion for the implementation plan, or I try to get that addressed. We have had instances where the program review hasn't affected the power dynamics but they have revealed that there are problematic power dynamics. (SA1 - 1)

By contrast another senior administrator commented, “one person said, I had no idea we were doing this” (SA3 - 1).

The patterns can expose problems that might otherwise not be visible. As a quality assurance person commented about problems, “Where they are bubbling under the surface, it allows them to come to the fore - for good or for bad” (QA1 - 1). A senior administrator similarly commented, “it can precipitate crises in departments that don't get along” (SA-5).

**Negative or harmful effects.** Participants were asked in interview question fifteen: *Has the program review had any harmful effects on programs?* The review was identified as an burdensome task, and producing a sense of winners and losers. A department chair probably captured it best by saying, “it depends who you ask” (C2 - 1).

One third of participants commented on the review as a burdensome task requiring a considerable time and effort to prepare the self-study and conduct the program review. However, across all interviews this is likely an underestimate. Many participants raised this issue repeatedly in association with many questions. This is clearly an issue of concern. A teaching and learning centre staff member explained it this way,

It’s not like we don’t know how to do this. It is that it came at them so quickly it was like giving students a surprise midterm. It hit them like a train. I’m not sure that faculty have been provided with adequate resources to support them through this process. If you would be going to describe something as a harmful effect, this is just a huge, huge task to take on. (T&L4 - 1)

A chair also commented on the “time impact that it has on the small groups that are actually doing the program reviews” (C4 - 1). A faculty member who had been through four program reviews said it requires “an enormous amount of time and energy. I think the outcome is not worth the input, and in my experience, it never has been” (F1 - 1). After participating in four reviews this particular participant did not draw a distinction between the process as conducted previously and the process conducted under the new policy. Potential coordinators are not willing to take on the role if they know the program will be up for review during their term. A senior administrator said,



It is perceived as onerous and slow. So, a person has a great creative idea, you have to tell them it will be at least two years before you can see this in any form if it is approved. It has a real dampening effect on people's enthusiasm.

**A sense of winners and losers.** Some participants identified direct effects that could clearly be seen as harmful depending on one's frame of reference. For example, a faculty member said, "one or two faculty members were not as supportive of grad program and may not be happy that more resources were steered towards the graduate program" (F2 - 2). Three of the four quality assurance staff identified such situations. "One chair stepped down" (QA1 - 1). This is an effect which might be perceived positively or negatively depending upon the frame of reference of the various parties. A second cited examples such as, "the closure of a program, courses not offered due to low enrolment numbers, and certain expectations not being met" (QA1 - 1). A third said, "I have never seen punitive effects come out of this process – only one or two negative reviewers' reports, though both were turned into opportunities to transform curriculum in two cases where that change was necessary" (QA2 - 1). A senior administrator said, a department "might say it was harmed when they are a round peg made to fit a square hole" (SA1 - 1). This comment speaks directly to the definition of quality as *perfection*.

Almost half the participants reported the review had harmful effects, but went on to acknowledge that either they or their department had ultimately benefited, and turned things around, or that the changes while painful were important, or necessary. This may mean participants genuinely feel differently after the review is completed. This may also be indicative of the Hawthorne effect which suggests participants change their behaviour

when they are being studied (Adair, 1984). Alternatively, it may simply be human nature to try to look positively on the outcome of considerable effort.

The themes identified in cluster four suggest the issues of bureaucratic load, time, effort, and inertia discourages change. The context of reduced funding complicates the institutional quality assurance process with issues of departmental sustainability and resource allocation not teaching and learning.

### **Summary**

This chapter described nine findings organized by the research questions identified in this investigation. Data were collected from individual interviews then analyzed by participant role in the review process, and collectively. Extensive quotations are included to substantiate the findings.

Finding number one determined that definitions of quality considered applicable to universities by senior administrators and those used by others involved in program review at various levels reveal a similar pattern of responses across participants with notable differences. *Transformation, fitness for purpose, and excellence* were the most highly rated. Choices and the rankings were similar with some notable differences. Faculty members' perceptions of senior administrator's rankings least accurate, overestimating senior administrator's rankings of excellence, and underestimating their rankings of transformation, and fitness for purpose. A similar pattern emerged when comparing a quality university with a quality education.

Finding number two determined most participants identify the program review process as more enhancement-oriented than accountability-oriented. However, four fifths of the participants (83%) reported a managerial approach was adopted in conducting the

program review. Roughly half also identified pedagogical (53%) and collegial approaches (49%). While four fifths of the senior administrators identified the process as predominantly bottom up, the majority of other participants (59%) identify the process top down, faculty members in particular (86%).

The third finding was that the majority of participants in each group believed program learning outcomes had produced effects and reported a range of effects brought about by the mandated introduction of program learning outcomes. While most believed changes had occurred, at least one person in each group dissented, or was unsure. Many themes arose across interview questions related to learning outcomes including, outcome escalation, learning outcomes as a catalyst for change, increased curricular responsiveness, and fiscal viability in a financially contracting system.

The fourth finding dealt with the perceived effects of various mechanisms employed to enact and promote the new program review process, concluding that multiple policies had been created as mandated, and also modified multiple times. Financial supports were uncommon or minimal. Five roles were identified by almost half of the participants as supporting the Program review including a senior administrator responsible for the process, teaching and learning centre staff, quality assurance staff support, and some office assistance. The most common resources identified were work timelines and schedules (82%) and roughly half the participants identified availability of templates (55%), and a program review manual (45%).

The fifth finding identified a considerable number of changes reported as resulting from the review. Overall 83% reported positive changes, 14% reported negative changes, and 3% reported little change. Grouping the categories *course changes*, *learning*

*outcomes*, and *curriculum* together reveals nearly half (46%) of the items relate to teaching and learning. Most commonly reported individual categories included administrative changes (25%), curriculum changes (26%), effects on faculty members (15%) and course changes (10%). Nearly half of the changes could be predicted to have more than a short-term impact (43%).

Finding six concluded that half of all participants (13 of 26) report the review *would* affect the quality of the degree program while half were *unsure* or reported it *would not*.

Finding seven revealed over two thirds (18 of 25 [ 72%]) of participants felt the review *had* or *would* lead to greater program accountability. Themes emerging from the qualitative analysis included recognition that change processes were improving accountability, a focus on actions rather than results, and an identified a shift from teaching to learning amongst other themes.

Finding eight identified changes at the department and institution level and determined over two thirds (72%) of participants across four levels believed changes *would* occur at the course level while three out of four department chairs *did not*. Positive effects such as higher quality programs, negative effects such as the considerable efforts and coordination required to prepare the self-study, and effects related to power dynamics such as a heightening of existing patterns were also identified.

Finding nine identified factors affecting a constructive or problematic running of the program review supported by the collected data including: (a) politics; (b) department interactions; (c) department size; (d) leadership; (e) expediency versus efficiency; (f) task perception; (g) use of external supports; and (h) trust (Table 9).

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This multiple-case study aimed to characterize effects and the changes in attitudes perceived by key participants involved in the program review process in Ontario following the introduction of a new learning-outcomes oriented quality assurance framework at four Ontario universities.

The research employed a multiple case study approach with twenty-seven participants from five different levels of involvement in the cyclical program review process in the equivalent academic department at four comprehensive Ontario universities. Data collection included in-depth telephone interviews of sixty to ninety minutes, comprising structured and semi-structured questions. During the interviews, the data were entered by the researcher into survey software (Google forms). This was subsequently coded and analyzed using variable oriented and case oriented strategies.

Research was based on the following questions:

1. How are university Senior Administrators perceived to define a quality university?
2. What approaches and criteria are used to measure a quality university education by those who make decisions?
3. How has the learning outcomes orientation of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process affected university decision-making related to assessment and promotion of the quality of teaching and learning?
4. How has the Ontario Universities Quality Assurance Framework affected university decision-making policies, rewards, structures, and culture to promote the quality of teaching and learning in the Ontario university curriculum?

5. What program-related changes have resulted from the introduction of the Institutional Quality Assurance Process?

The research questions were addressed in chapter four which organized and presented the data collected, and identified nine research findings emerging from extensive cross case analysis. The findings chapter separated and distinguished elements in order to present the nine findings. Insights from the findings will be discussed and interpreted in this chapter.

The discussion will first identify five strategies emerging from the findings as contributing to constructive program review outcomes. Second, it will identify and discuss factors contributing to the impact of the program review process, which will then be applied to an analytical framework. Third, the discussion will revisit the conceptual framework introduced in chapter one and review whether the mechanisms produced effects that differed depending on whether departments were engaged in an approach oriented towards compliance or enhancement.

Given the breadth of the data set, this interpretation and synthesis will focus on the most noteworthy findings. Following these discussions, the subsequent section will address constraints on the research, future directions, and implications of the findings for practice, followed by conclusions.

Miles, Huberman, and Saladana (2014) discuss a strategy of examining extremes as a strategy for identifying patterns and making sense of findings. Applying this approach reveals that while department chairs, and faculty members can be extremely negative about the program review process, there are also comments by department chairs and faculty describing revitalization, reinvigoration, increased cohesiveness, and

collaboration. Reconciling these divergent positions with participant reports reveals factors and actions that may increase or decrease the likelihood of an orientation towards compliance or enhancement

### **Five Constructive Strategies**

A major finding emerging from the study is evidence the program review process is triggering a shift in university climate from a focus on teaching to an increased focus on bringing about student learning (finding 3b and 3i). However, this has not happened consistently across departments, or within universities, and has not happened consistently across the four participating universities. Why is there a difference, and what factors contribute to this division?

An increased focus on curriculum and teaching orientation was not the primary rationale for the new program review process specified by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents, and the Quality Council. The primary objective was described as “bringing Ontario’s universities into line with international quality assurance standards, the Framework will also facilitate greater international acceptance of our degrees and improve our graduates’ access to university programs and employment worldwide” (OUQC, 2017). Since international quality assurance standards were converging on use of learning outcomes as a standard point of reference (EHEA, 2017a), they figured prominently in the Ontario Quality Assurance Framework.

### **Strategies to Facilitate Acceptance of the IQAP**

Five strategies from this investigation of the program review process emerged as generating constructive effects. They can be considered constructive from the perspective of senior administrators in facilitating acceptance of the IQAP, and they can be

considered constructive when described as beneficial or resulting in improved programs by those directly involved particularly department chairs and faculty members. Some of these strategies were introduced intentionally to get the new review process underway and to generate momentum, others produced related constructive effects. The strategies include, promoting and discussing learning outcomes, strong support from senior administration, enlisting support, appealing to the academic discipline, and defining the task.

**Promoting and discussing learning outcomes.** Some participants described senior administrators and staff as broadly promoting and discussing learning outcomes in the program review process (finding 3a). The identification of learning outcomes was mandated by the policy, and in some programs, this acted as a catalyst for discussion and change (finding 3b).

**Strong support from senior administration.** The senior administrators involved in the new process were invested in the success of the degree-level expectations subsequently incorporated within the new program review process. The degree-level expectations were *defined* by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV), and the new program review process was jointly developed by representatives from OCAV, and the fledgling Quality Council (OUCQA, 2017b). This was a process of their own making and they were dedicated to making it succeed by actively promoting the change. It was sold to the universities as pre-empting the possibility of a government imposed process. Developed and promoted in partnership with the Quality Council, a new body at arm's length from both government and the university, the new process could be conducted by employing a more academic, collegial process. As a quality



assurance staff member said, “If we are going to have to do this, let’s make it of value” (QA1 - 1) (appeal to the academic discipline - finding 4.1, and 3b). When senior administrators are not *invested* in the introduction of a new review process, it can have troubling consequences as experienced within the last decade in Sweden<sup>1</sup>.

**Enlisting support.** Another strategy involved enlisting the support of quality assurance staff, and teaching and learning centre staff to assist in the promotion of the new process. This strategy was employed in Ontario from the outset. Neil Gold, Provost and Vice President Academic at the University of Windsor between 1998 and 2010 served as Chair of the Transition Task Force (OUCQA, 2017b). Neil Gold was an early promoter of degree-level expectations and introduced the idea to representatives from teaching and learning centres in southern Ontario. The DLEs were seen as a positive way to connect with academic departments and to promote teaching and learning practices. Neil Gold and the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) then *enlisted* support of teaching and learning centre directors to travel to various parts of Ontario to discuss and promote the implementation of DLEs to interested groups at various universities as this researcher experienced directly (finding 4, mechanisms employed to

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<sup>1</sup>After unsuccessful attempts to modify the program review process in Sweden, the government imposed an audit process on academic programs as part of the Autonomy and Quality reform (Kalpazidou & Schmidt, 2017). In addition to the common self-study document and peer-review from each program, a very small number, 5 to 24 student examinations were reassessed. Final decisions were posted publicly, labelling programs on a three level scale: very high quality, high quality, or of insufficient quality. This produced immediate and troubling consequences for new student recruitment, for the morale of existing students and faculty, and lacked an appeal process. It was precisely this type of unilateral Government imposition of quality assurance standards and procedures Ontario aimed to avoid.

establish the new process including 4.6-structures 4.3-people, 4.4-services). This early involvement of teaching and learning centre staff engaged valuable allies who saw in the DLEs an opportunity to promote teaching and learning in a constructive way beneficial academic departments. This is consistent with change management strategies which promote the idea of identifying people to champion proposed changes (Kotter, 1995), identifying leadership with a belief that change will be helpful (Leucke, 2003), and identifying expertise (Kezar, 2013).

**Appealing to the academic discipline.** Another successful strategy involved appealing to what academic departments value - the academic culture and the academic focus of the discipline itself. When learning outcomes are successfully introduced, the process may engage academics in discussions close to their heart – identifying the essentials of the discipline important to pass on to the next generation of scholars (finding 2.2 - review focus on standards). As a quality assurance staff member commented. “one person said, after the six-month process, we haven’t had these discussions about teaching and learning in over a decade. They were meaningful conversations. Some of the faculty retreats were some of the most fun. It created a sense of renewed energy” (T&L4 - 1). Learning outcomes introduced to substantiate quality assurance became a task with collateral benefits. More academic departments began to consider and discuss the program curriculum as a whole.

**Defining the task.** How a task is described can influence how well it is received. It is difficult to argue that degree level expectations such as depth and breadth knowledge, application of knowledge, and communication skills are not relevant to all programs. In some settings, the new process was introduced and promoted by senior

administrators as a way for the department to collectively confirm and endorse the parts of the academic discipline their department aimed to address. Although the review process is fundamentally perceived by faculty and staff as a top-down, largely managerial and administrative process to assure quality in higher education (finding 2.3), the degree-level expectations are very generic. They are similar to expectations required by the Bologna accord in Europe (EHEA 2017c), similar to expectations specified in Australia (Australian Government, 2016), and similar to the Degree Qualifications Framework in the United States (Lumina Foundation, 2011). It is difficult to argue expectations such as depth and breadth knowledge, application of knowledge, and communication skills are *not* relevant.

When the IQAP is viewed as a purely managerial process, a department can go through the motions carrying out the work without insight until all requirements are met. As a quality assurance staff member commented, “Could they fake it? Yes” (QA3 - 1). A teaching and learning centre staff member said, “In the worst-case scenario the program chair takes it all on him or herself and doesn't involve the individuals the department” (T&L2 - 1). *Feeding the beast*, is how Jethro Newton (2000) described the response of British faculty members to the increasingly metric and outcome driven program review process more than a decade ago. However, the Ontario review process was described by some study participants as constructively engaging faculty members in discussing how (and if) their program developed these generic but essential expectations in the context of their discipline.

The discussion above identified five strategies used to generate constructive effects from the program review process. Several factors that enhance impact also appear to contribute and will be considered next.

### **Factors Contributing to the Impact of the Program Review**

Extensive cross-case analysis revealed multiple factors that contributed to the tendency of any department to employ a constructive or expedient approach. These tendencies manifested in various ways and could influence department behaviour. As Trowler (2014) says,

Research can, however, pick out the factors at play in one site and can offer conceptual clarity about the kinds of factors that are significant, what others could be in other circumstances, and why. ...Research can offer findings which are illuminative in nature and so allow improved conceptualisation of the factors at work in other contexts. (p. 25)

Eight factors appear to influence tendencies toward a constructive or problematic experiences with program review including:

- program vision
- trust
- the nature of department interactions
- academic politics
- supporting structures
- task perception
- expediency versus efficiency
- department size

How each factor contributes to problems or opportunities will be reviewed in turn.

### **Program Vision**

This first factor can be frustrating for founders of the program particularly for a relatively young program, if the shared departmental discussion of the program vision diverges from the original during the review. Academic programs are originally developed by one person or a small group of people with a specific vision. As faculty members are recruited and settle into their roles, courses are adjusted to the reality of the students enrolled, faculty interests, and evolution of the academic field. The program curriculum is likely to shift incrementally away from the original vision, at times with painful results for founders. As a senior administrator commented, “if a department is divided in political views or by necessity and have strongly held beliefs, it can open wounds” (SA4 - 1). Alternatively, a young program may have the unity, and focus of a relatively new endeavour and the vitality of younger faculty members.

Program vision can change for other reasons, for example the discipline of photography shifted from analog to digital technology over a short period of time requiring a significant change program focus, delivery, and organization. In these cases, the review can have substantial implications for curriculum and infrastructure, which may also require upgrading of skills for faculty members. Alternatively, if a program has a well-established reputation, direction, and good research productivity it may seem wasteful to spend time on the review.

### **Trust**

Second, at least two levels of trust influence the program review. For example, *trust between the university and the academic department*. A department may not trust

the institution or senior administration to understand, to value the academic discipline, and to evaluate department activities fairly. The second involves *trust within the department itself*. Some departments are divided and factions may have developed over time based on areas of specialization or for other reasons. Strong personalities or interests can effectively unite or divide departments. A senior administrator said, the review process “does help people get on the same page. It can dispel myths about what is happening in the program” (F4 - 2).

The program review can maintain or strengthen the academic department efficiently allowing the best people to get the program review done. This approach has created leadership opportunities empowering those with trust, interest, and expertise to act on behalf of the whole department. This can involve shared decision-making and a clarification of shared aims.

In a low trust environment, few may be willing to come forward to lead the review knowing the process can further polarize a divided academic department. It may be difficult to obtain cooperation or to engage in constructive discussion, let alone develop consensus. It is understood the process may expose vulnerabilities or trigger a crisis. A senior administrator put it this way, “Often there is a hostility that they are being policed or over policed. They can see it as a decline in academic freedom – a neoliberal shift” (T&L3 - 1). If a low trust department does not trust senior administration to be friendly they may feel further concern.

### **The Nature of Department Interactions**

A third factor, related to trust is the level of collegiality within the department characterized by respectful communications and interactions where ideas can be

constructively discussed and challenged. Faculty members trust they will be consulted in decision making or notified as required. Faculty members share the workload of the review. In a contentious environment, the department may be fractious, and communications can be disrespectful, dismissive, or unilateral. It may be difficult to engage in constructive discussion, in order to collaborate on refining the vision of the degree program.

### **Politics and Power**

A fourth factor is related to collegiality, the political environment within the University. Within the department, it is constructive when politics do not interfere with getting things done, and when departmental interests come before individual or factional interests. Alternatively, they can be problematic when there is political posturing, or behind-the-scenes brokering for special interests. Some faculty members may refuse to engage, stalling or hijacking attempts at collaboration if their perspective is not shared by the group. How influential are the outliers? They can affect an entire department constructively or destructively. A quality assurance staff member commented this can generate “real animosity. In one case a chair has stepped down... In this case, that coming together ignited some folks to attack the leadership and that was considered okay. That one has been very challenging at a whole lot of levels” (QA1 - 1).

### **External Mediators**

Fifth, persons introducing, mediating, and facilitating the review process can play a vital role in receptivity to constructive engagement, positive or negative. Senior administrators, and quality assurance staff, provide a primarily administrative and managerial role. These roles can be seen as providing direction, providing guidance, and

facilitating efficient completion of the review. The theme of leadership arose repeatedly during the study. Participants provided examples where leadership hindered progress.

For example, a quality assurance staff member described this as,

*A get it done mentality, a lack of genuine interest in the quality assurance process, a lack of interest in learning outcomes. This person was involved in old UPRAC process and treated this as, we can roll it over, why reinvent the wheel? This affected how programs saw the process. (QA1 - 1)*

When leadership roles are supportive and promote the review as potentially beneficial to the department and program curricula, it can influence whether the review is seen as potentially useful and constructive (finding 3a). Leadership can be pivotal in bringing people together collaboratively. A senior administrator remarked on the characteristics required of a person in this role.

*We did a great job when we hired the person heading up quality assurance... this person is respectful of faculty, the roles they have, and is a natural teacher and facilitator for new programs and for the program review. People see this person as an ally and as having the same goals... staff that thrive in the university can fit into a collaborative collegial environment. But know that faculty are very unique groupings with departmental differences. People who move across these cultures must be flexible, adaptable and have strong facilitative skills. (SA2 - 2)*

Teaching and learning centre staff are also external mediators. Their role can be perceived by departments as administrative and managerial, or as facilitative honest brokers. The teaching and learning centre staff participants were predominantly enthusiastic about the potential of program review to prompt the refining and



reinvigorating of programs, developing consensus, and shared perspectives amongst faculty members within the department. This group was also despondent when working with department chairs and academic faculty members resistant or overtly hostile to discussion of learning outcomes and of program curricula. One quality assurance staff member described it this way, “those who do it because they have to, find it raises uncomfortable questions they don’t know how to answer. They do not want to open Pandora’s box” (QA2 - 1). Why the resistance? In part, this may have to do with involvement of external mediators such as senior administrators, quality assurance staff, and teaching and learning centre staff who do not share the norms, values, and culture of the academic discipline and therefore do not speak the same language. In 2001, Becher and Trowler described the university academy as tribes and territories which outsiders may not understand, and who may not be welcome. Since then, Trowler (2014) has described the situation as far more complex and nuanced.

### **Task Perception**

Sixth, how participants think about the program review process also influences the direction an academic department will take. Quality assurance is an administrative task that is part of managing a department. It can be perceived as a bureaucratic hurdle that must be completed in order to move on to do more important work. A quality assurance staff member described it this way,

The former provost was invested [in the old process] and happy to see it continue. He wasn't interested in the view of who is the administrator taking a managerial approach. They didn't hear the cacophony and the lack of support... it becomes obvious what they value. (QA1 - 1)

Because the task is labor-intensive and requires input, cooperation, and additional work from faculty members it can become a point of dissent or disagreement, particularly if faculty members are feeling squeezed by the pressure of decreasing resources, and contracting departments accompanied by increased class sizes, pressure to obtain external grants, and pressures to publish. A faculty member described the situation in their own department, “the review should have been done by the previous chair rather than the new chair. They should at least have done it jointly. The new chair taking this on has reflected well on them” (F2 - 2). What is not mentioned here, is how this reflected on the chair that evaded involvement (finding 8.4 - avoidance of responsibility, and leadership opportunities).

The task of program review can also be seen in a different light. Participants describe some departmental cultures as collaborative with a sufficiently engaged departmental sense of citizenship that multiple members will contribute to the workload. If discussed and promoted by senior administrators, the quality assurance staff, and teaching and learning centre staff, can be seen as potentially valuable champions (finding 3a) who view the time and effort expended facilitating aspects of the review as constructive, contributing to the identity and direction of the academic department. If conducted effectively, and demonstrating value, the process itself can convert skeptics. For example, multiple participants described the value of the new perspectives gained by developing intended learning outcomes and reviewing a program curriculum map. A senior administrator said, “program learning outcomes have had a massive effect. First, it has improved communication of expectations to students, and second, the way it affects

the conversation between program and staff about what we are trying to develop”  
(C4 - 1).

### **Expediency versus efficiency**

A seventh factor influencing the results of the review is whether the approach to the process aims to be *expedient* or *efficient*. The program review process can be hampered by a process not perceived as delivering value. Participants describe the previous UPRAC process as labor intensive, producing few if any effects, and the resulting self study document destined to sit on a shelf without further attention or follow-up. It is understandable departments would undertake the IQAP process with the same mindset. Departmental leaders who participated in earlier UPRAC reviews were more likely to take an *expedient* approach, making efficient use of time and resources but also engaging in unilateral decision making with little or no input, consultation, or buy-in from the department. An expedient process might get the job done promptly, but it is unlikely to identify, or uncover any underlying issues of concern in a program, let alone plan to address them. Obtaining departmental agreement on decisions may be perceived as inconsequential. Without follow-up to the review, this approach would have few consequences. One faculty member described it this way,

We had poor results given the amount of time put into it. When this came down and the format had changed we thought, let's get it done. Most people figured it just had to be done and anticipated no positive outcomes, or that was the impression. What would have been a positive outcome? (F1 - 1)

To place this in an international context, in some jurisdictions with a longer history of learning outcomes and metric-based program review, performance-based

funding has been applied to reward and to sanction programs in order to force them to take the review seriously. This has involved generating and reporting on metrics of various types, and further, meeting targets to avoid sanctions. Between 1990 and 2008 Australia employed this approach in an attempt to force targets and outcomes in specific government prompted directions (Baird, 2011). Similar approaches have been applied in the United Kingdom (Newton, 2000), and the United States (Zemsky, 2010). This approach has also been discussed in Ontario (Hicks, 2015). This directive approach generated resistance in jurisdictions where processes were perceived as an overly top-down, managerial, officious approach to program review by departments and faculty members.

An *efficient* approach to program review by contrast, divides the workload involved in the preparation of the self-study document. An efficient approach aims to make good use of colleagues' time, and assumes a certain amount of collegiality, trust, and confidence in the leadership for the department level review. With an efficiently conducted review, faculty members could expect they would be consulted as needed, updated on progress, and provided with opportunities to provide input on decisions, thereby sustaining cooperation and buy-in. A senior administrator described how one department carried out this process:

One department lead author sat down at the start and put a spreadsheet together with the department. They had a standing item at each meeting to discuss review progress. That individual and the conversation with the lead in the department was that everyone will be involved, and then everyone will be finished. (SA3 - 1)

A faculty member made the following comment:

We had a unifying chair. Someone who wasn't the best leader is no longer chair and someone who could lead the department in the direction we needed to go, and to facilitate and run the department more efficiently has taken over. (F2 - 2)

### **Department Size**

The eighth factor influencing the program review process emerging from the study, is the size of the department. This can facilitate or hinder the process. Program review requires the same information whether a department is large or small. If the department is *small*, it can be particularly challenging for part-time, or interdisciplinary programs with few faculty members, conflicting schedules, and primarily contract faculty, to meet and share the workload. A small department may find it overwhelming to carry out the tasks required by the program review in addition to regular program expectations. Small, and part-time programs may find the university has little centrally collected data for their programs and may find it difficult to collect enough feedback from alumni, and employers. If such a program is not collegial, these difficulties will multiply. A senior administrator said, “in small universities it is extremely difficult. They aren't senior enough to provide the support needed or bring people together for a workshop” (SA-5). Alternatively, a small collegial program may find it easier to bring people together, develop consensus, divide the workload, and complete the work required.

In a large department, it can be similarly difficult to bring all faculty members together to develop consensus and hear all voices, resulting in complacency, as described by this faculty member,

I'm working on the first floor and someone else is on a different floor; how it all ties together is difficult. We are a large moving body; we don't understand how we all fit together to be the cogs in the wheel... Bringing about change is a nice idea but won't work. It is a lot of work and not a manageable thing to do because it is so big. (F1 - 2)

Leadership is particularly important in a large department. The department chair must be seen as equitable and fair. A larger department is likely to have a longer history, and some voices make carry disproportionate weight. A larger department is also more likely to have sub-disciplinary groups in areas of academic specialization. These groups may comprise the *old guard* and, the *new guard*. A senior administrator said there is, “always a sense of a past glory” (SA1 - 1). Clark and Neave (1992) refer to the “dynamism that disciplines display: growing, morphing and splitting over time” (p. 1721) and Trowler (2014) comments, “in that dynamic process fundamental precepts become challenged by internal debates, new theoretical approaches develop, new questions arise and new research strategies and techniques are deployed to answer them” (p. 1721). Change is sometimes described as requiring faculty retirement. Re-opening discussion of learning outcome expectations for graduates of a program may threaten to shift the direction of the degree program in directions that divide departments. As a senior administrator said, “there is a fight for control over curriculum. I encounter this a great deal” (SA4 - 1).

So, what does this mean? Is this simply a matter of groups competing over scarce resources or does this delve more deeply into concerns involving faculty identity? Related to this may be a fight to marshal limited resources to competing areas of

specialization within the academic discipline, and between departmental groups. However, it is not so simple. Comments also indicate a sense of losing authority, standing, and influence, connected to personal and disciplinary identity. New directions often require hiring specialists in the new domain at a lower level of the hierarchy, often as contract faculty instructors. If a faculty position is available, research stars may be hired with heavy publication and leadership expectations. Some fields are progressing at a bewildering speed as can be seen in the evolving field of genetic mapping. An expert recently said the tools and procedures had progressed so rapidly in this field, that methodology applied in their own research conducted 10 years ago would be considered substandard and inadequate today (O. Hadrath, personal communication, August 14, 2017).

This section has outlined five strategies to encourage constructive engagement with the program review process and eight factors influencing the tendency of the department to experience constructive or problematic outcomes. These will be analyzed further in the next section.

### **Effects of Broad Departmental Involvement vs Limited Involvement**

This section places the factors described above into a framework and uses participant comments from small and large academic departments involved in the study to test their effects on constructive or problematic outcomes. This researcher earlier described assuming the review process would ideally involve the collaborative engagement of all faculty members. However, participant comments did not consistently support this assumption. Involvement in the program review process could be broad or narrow, and result in successful *or* problematic consequences.

Table 10 provides an analytic summary of department involvement. It is organized by the factors described above listed vertically on the left. The first row considers the results of *team effort and broad consultation* involving a larger fraction of academic department faculty, contrasted with *solo or small group effort and minimal consultation*. The table then reviews how each *factor* may influence constructive or problematic results. It captures dimensions and arranges all pertinent data in an analyzable form. It is a conceptually oriented display focusing primarily on the content of the matrix without reference to the original cases. The table will be briefly elaborated below.

### **Constructive Aspects of Team Effort and Broad Consultation**

This approach can be constructive in a *high trust* environment. The shared aims, shared decision-making, and pooling of good ideas helps to develop buy-in. *Departmental interactions* and communications are respectful and interactions are collegial with little *political* posturing and interference. Departmental interests supersede individual or factional interests. *External supports* providing facilitation such as teaching and learning centre staff may help to strengthen departmental unity and maintain a sense of shared responsibility for program curriculum and review *tasks*. While the review may be seen as managerial it may also be seen as producing potentially useful outcomes. Activities are carried out more *efficiently*, and are respectful of people's time. This is effective when a department is small enough to bring everyone together and allow disciplines to feel heard.



### **Constructive Aspects of Solo or Small Group Efforts with Minimal Consultation**

This approach can also be constructive. In a *high trust* environment, this can allow key people to just get the job done. It allows those with interest and expertise to help advance the needs of the full department. If *department interactions* are collegial, and internal communication good, faculty members trust to be brought in as required or notified when their contributions are required. *Politics* do not interfere with the small group getting things done. *External supports* may assist in shifting the perceived responsibility for tasks to minimize identification of local leaders with this largely managerial task. The *task* is seen as part of departmental business, and administration is trusted to do what needs to be done. An *efficient* approach is adopted when faculty members trust their leadership. When a small group works on behalf of a *large department*, and faculty members are responsive and responsible, they can be relied upon to provide input and respond promptly. In a *small department* with high trust, there is often deep knowledge of the overall program by those involved in conducting the review.

In a *low trust environment*, participants also report solo or small group involvement can be *constructive* in that it can allow the self-study to be completed to meet the requirements of the university without interference, delays, or without stoking personality or factional conflicts. This allows departmental review requirements to be addressed despite the lack of departmental buy-in. Fewer people involved in the process means avoidance of departmental politics and fewer opportunities for political posturing. Whether the final self-study is representative of the department overall may be questioned and whether it results in a useful self-reflection is not assured.

Table 10

*Factors Influencing Large and Small Group Departmental Involvement in Program Review Analytic Summary Table.*

Factors	Team effort and broad consultation When program reviews involve more faculty members they can be		Solo or small group effort and minimal consultation When program review involves a solo or small group effort they can be	
	<i>constructive:</i>	<i>problematic:</i>	<i>constructive:</i>	<i>problematic:</i>
Trust	<p>in a High Trust environment if it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarifies shared aims</li> <li>shares decision making</li> <li>pools good ideas</li> <li>develops buy in</li> <li>increases trust</li> <li>increases opportunities to gain status via positive department involvement</li> </ul> <p>In an existing Low Trust environment, it helps to,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintain or strengthen points above</li> </ul>	<p>in a Low Trust environment if it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ostracizes or individuals for speaking up (with positive or negative views)</li> <li>results in loss of status</li> <li>provides platform for gripes</li> <li>allows vocal individuals to derail or hijack the process</li> <li>further polarizes a department</li> </ul> <p>In a High Trust environment, it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>could expose dissent and expose wounds</li> </ul>	<p>in a High Trust environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allows efficiency and the best person to just get it done</li> <li>allows those with interest and expertise to advance needs of the full department</li> </ul> <p>In a Low Trust environment, it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>allows the task to be completed to meet requirements of the department</li> <li>advances department processes despite lack of buy-in</li> <li>avoids exposing personality conflicts</li> </ul>	<p>in a Low Trust environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>there may be no buy-in for decisions made</li> <li>may confirm sense that no one is listening</li> <li>misses the opportunity to build trust, to clarify, to engage in shared decision making etc.</li> </ul>
Dept. interactions	<p>when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communications are respectful</li> <li>interactions are collegial</li> </ul>	<p>when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communications are disrespectful or problematic</li> <li>the department is fractious</li> </ul>	<p>when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interactions are collegial, internal communication is good</li> <li>faculty trust to be brought in or notified as required</li> </ul>	<p>when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communications are disrespectful</li> <li>the department is fractious</li> </ul>

Factors	Team effort and broad consultation When program reviews involve more faculty members they can be		Solo or small group effort and minimal consultation When program review involves a solo or small group effort they can be	
	<i>constructive:</i>	<i>problematic:</i>	<i>constructive:</i>	<i>problematic:</i>
Politics	when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is little political posturing and interference</li> <li>• when departmental interests come before individual/factional interests</li> </ul>	when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is political posturing and interference</li> <li>• there is dissent/factions or other agendas</li> <li>• some faculty members refuse to engage constructively</li> </ul>	when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is no political posturing and interference</li> <li>• when politics do not interfere with getting things done</li> </ul>	when <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there are factions and agendas not supported by the full group</li> <li>• suggested changes don't inform or connect with the rest of the department</li> <li>• one or more individuals stall or scuttle or hijack attempts to work together</li> </ul>
Use of External supports (e.g., teaching & learning support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if it helps strengthen department unity</li> <li>• helps develop/maintain a sense of shared responsibility for task</li> <li>• helps develop/maintain a sense of shared decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if support is required to maintain civility</li> <li>• reveals the extent of dissent</li> <li>• support is used by leadership as a mechanism to manage a fractious department</li> <li>• support is used by leadership to allow departments to vent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it allows tasks be carried out efficiently</li> <li>• it may enable a shift of some responsibility for task to minimize personal identification of local leaders with a managerial task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• external supports are used to pass the buck (it's not my problem)</li> <li>• may mask or be used to rationalize unilateral decision making</li> </ul>

Factors	Team effort and broad consultation When program reviews involve more faculty members they can be <i>constructive:</i>		Solo or small group effort and minimal consultation When program review involves a solo or small group effort they can be <i>constructive:</i>	
	<i>problematic:</i>		<i>problematic:</i>	
Task perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if the task perceived as producing potentially useful outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if the task is seen as bureaucratic waste of time</li> <li>task becomes another focus of dissent or disagreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if the task is part of department business, admin trusted to do what needs to be done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if the task is perceived as a bureaucratic hurdle process that must just be completed to move on</li> </ul>
Expediency vs efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>activities are efficient; make good use of peoples' time and gains buy in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aim is to be expedient; when underlying issues are not addressed and gains only superficial agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when people trust leadership, leave admin to others with belief they will be consulted on important decisions as required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it is an expedient process - makes efficient use of time and resources and involves unilateral decision-making with little to no consultation or buy-in by the department</li> </ul>
Department size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>department is small enough to bring everyone together</li> <li>most participants feel heard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dept. is large - harder for all voices to be heard</li> <li>some voices carry disproportionate weight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the department is large and</li> <li>can efficiently obtain the information required</li> <li>faculty members are responsive and responsible and can be relied upon to respond promptly</li> <li>where there is trust</li> <li>the department is small</li> <li>there is high trust</li> <li>there is deep knowledge of the program by those involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the department is large – too difficult to bring everyone together to develop buy-in</li> <li>faculty members are not responsive and responsible and can't be relied upon to respond promptly</li> <li>where there is a lack trust</li> <li>the department is small</li> <li>there is low trust in those preparing the review</li> <li>there is a lack of knowledge of the program by those involved</li> </ul>

**Problematic aspects of solo or small group effort with minimal consultation.** This approach can be of concern in a *low trust* environment which may fail to garner broad support for decisions made and may confirm the sense that no one is listening, it misses the opportunity to build trust, to clarify, or to engage in shared decision-making. This approach is problematic when *departmental interactions* and communications are disrespectful or contentious, particularly if the department is fractious. *Politics* may be involved and agendas not supported by the full group. It can be problematic when one or more individuals stall, scuffle, or hijack attempts to work together. *External supports* maybe used to pass the buck, mask, or rationalize choices. An *expedient* process is employed that results in unilateral decision making with little or no consultation and consent of the department. If the *department size* is large it can be very difficult to bring everyone together to develop consensus. This is problematic when faculty members are not responsive and cannot be relied upon to respond promptly to requests. This can be problematic for a small department if trust is low in those preparing the review, or for those conducting the review have little interest, or knowledge of what is required.

This section has described a framework outlining divergent approaches of academic departments to the program review process resulting in constructive or problematic strategies and outcomes. The next section will further integrate interpretation and insights revealed in this analysis.

### **Seeking Compliance or Enhancement: Contrasting Paths to Accountability**

The *constructive* or *problematic* approaches adopted by academic departments during the program review take place in a context of international change. A model of the two extremes of the continuum placed into the larger context of influences described in

this study can be seen in Figure 7 and is elaborated here. The model outlines the contrasting paths followed by universities or departments in carrying out the program review to meet quality assurance objectives.

Higher education has responded to pressure from a variety of international trends: political, economic, demographic, and has responded to increased focus on globalization and preparation for the knowledge economy as described in the literature review. These trends have triggered increased regulatory oversight by governments across the western world. This regulatory oversight has mandated increased quality assurance which comprises accountability and enhancement. The process is fundamentally an administrative and managerial process although in its extreme forms it can manifest in two fundamentally different ways.

**Accountability plus control and compliance.** The program review process can be conducted with a focus on *control and compliance*. This is the *problematic* approach described earlier. The focus is on task completion, deadlines, deliverables, and meeting the required expectations as shown towards the left of the figure. This orientation is generally perceived by academic departments as negative and sometimes harmful. The orientation sees the program review as an imposition, as overly bureaucratic, and generating unnecessary work. A faculty member commented, “that the undergraduate chair spent hundreds of hours on this is detrimental because they could have been doing something more useful with their time” (F1 - 2).

**Accountability plus enhancement.** The orientation, seen on the right side of Figure 7 is also administrative and managerial but adds a focus on program *effectiveness and enhancement*. This is the *constructive* approach described earlier. While the review

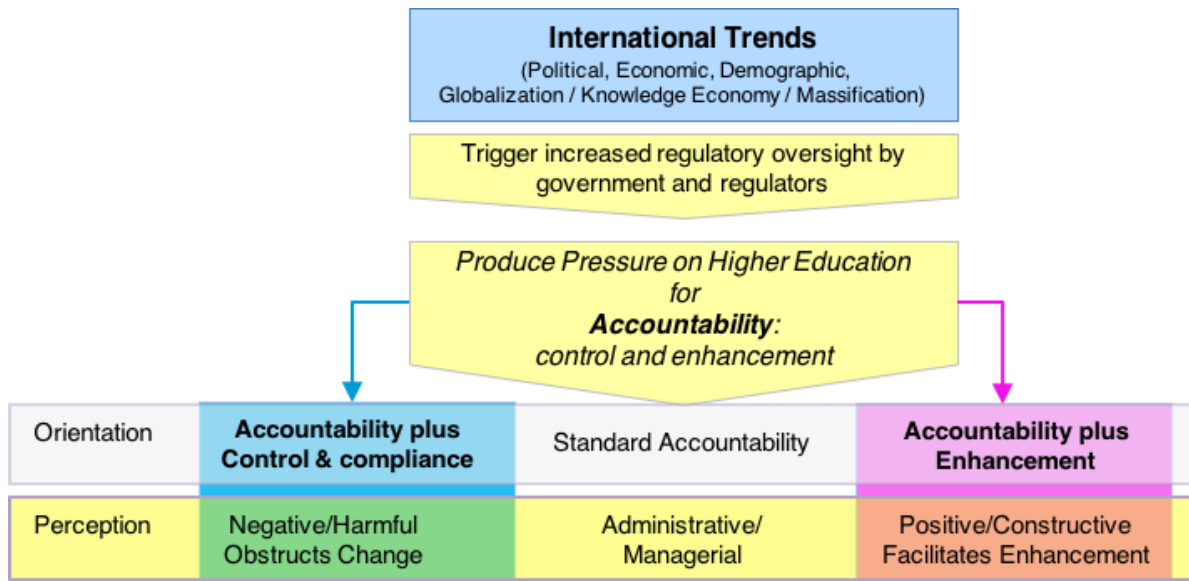


Figure 7. Contrasting paths to accountability.

includes the same expectations in terms of task completion, deadlines, and deliverables, at least certain components of the review are perceived as positive, and beneficial. The current investigation suggests the five strategies identified earlier (promoting and discussing learning outcomes, strong support from senior administration, enlisting support, appealing to the academic discipline, and defining the task) help to encourage departments to engage constructively with the program review. This approach is described by participants as helping to clarify expectations, facilitate improvement of the program, and in some cases, enhance communication within the department. The model outlines the contrasting paths in carrying out the program review to meet quality assurance objectives and consistent with related concepts of retrospective and prospective quality assurance as defined by John Biggs (2001).

### **Mechanisms of Impact**

Drawing together the different levels of analysis and integration from the discussion above it is now possible to revisit the conceptual framework presented in Chapter One to review the impact resulting from mechanisms applied. The impact of quality assurance was seen as resulting from: (a) the *context* of their use (provincial, institutional, departmental); and (b) the *methods* applied (institutional, departmental). Within each university, three levels *impact* were identified (the institution, the department, and the individual) and four mechanisms seen as applied to produce impact (rewards, policies, structures, and cultures).

The three orientations to quality assurance described earlier (control/compliance, standard, and enhancement) emerged from participant comments. This study also asked participants for any effects observed to result from the mechanisms of the conceptual



framework (rewards, policies, structures, and cultures). Their comments provide evidence of *impact* across five levels of participant involvement in the program review process (faculty member, department chair, quality assurance staff, teaching and learning staff, senior administration). Like Figure 7, this table places in the central column the standard orientation to accountability in quality assurance.

This *standard accountability* approach to quality assurance is administrative and managerial in focus, involving a culture of compliance. Administrators and support staff provide *direction* to those carrying out the review to ensure it is carried out appropriately, and the goal is completing the task of assuring quality. A quote representative of this orientation, comes from a faculty member who said, “it is a managerial approach but it is all about making money and running [ the university and academic programs] effectively with the least amount of money; restructure everything to do the most for them with less” (F2 - 2).

The column to the left represents an orientation of a review conducted with a *control and compliance focus*. In addition to the standard approach, this orientation adds a focus on *control*. A quote representative of this orientation comes from a department chair who said “in the earlier review process the cast of characters were pitted against each other. They have been cautioned against pitting one against others. The chair put all of his pet ideas in there and cost issues” (C1-1).

The column on the far right describes the orientation of a review conducted with an *enhancement* focus. Under this orientation, administrators and staff provide direction but also provide *support*. They aim not only for task completion, but additionally aim for the review to be *useful* to the program and department. A quote representative of this

orientation comes from a quality assurance staff member who said, “If we are going to have to do this, let’s make it of value” (QA1 - 1).

Each of the mechanisms identified in the conceptual framework, form a row in the table: rewards and incentives, policy, structures, and culture, and will be discussed below for evidence of resulting impact. For each of the mechanisms, participant comments were reviewed for their distribution on the continuum of orientations from *control* to *enhancement*.

The evidence suggests that universities and departments in Ontario see the full continuum of orientations from *control and compliance* to *enhancement*. Although a single academic department was selected in common across the four participating in universities for in-depth analysis in this investigation, three of the participant groups: quality assurance staff, teaching and learning centre staff, and senior administrators, work across many academic departments in the university and their observations reflect and generalise more broadly across each university.

Overall the conceptual framework of Brennan and Shah (2000) helped to identify effects and served to describe the social causal network applicable in the Ontario context. However, analysis of data collected suggests several modifications to the framework. First, absent from the framework are international influences and trends such as globalization. Second, in addition to the overarching international context, the local context is not only provincial, institutional and departmental but also disciplinary. The disciplinary level shifts independently of other structures, with some disciplines proliferating as in the sciences, and others morphing internally such as the shift from print journalism to new digital forms of journalism. Third, impact is affected by

disciplinary methods such as accreditation requirements that require parallel processes. Fourth, mechanisms should include the role of leadership from various levels of participants (for example, senior administrators, department chairs, program directors, and support staff). Finally, power and values can be seen as underlying the framework, yet, at times this becomes power versus values.

### **Rewards and Incentives**

No substantial evidence of rewards or incentives were found. When asked to identify rewards or incentives, some participants identified various forms of *support* to promote completion of the self-study such as the opportunity to hire part time staff or a student to help collect data; course release for the person taking the lead on the review; availability of resource people, materials, or software; or the cost of food for a review-related workshop. The only items mentioned which were not supports, included approval to connect program review data to requests for funding in the next budget year – which could be a motivation for cash strapped departments; availability of a program development fund; and recognition for those carrying out the work of the review. As a senior administrator said, there were, “no sticks or incentives, no sanctions” (SA1 - 1).

Therefore, it can be concluded that *participants perceived little benefit or reward from this time consuming task*. However, what was not identified as a reward or at least, a benefit resulting from the review, were the positive developments and refinements to curriculum mentioned by a number of participants following the review process. In addition, some of the people successfully leading this unpopular task were recognized for their leadership with promotions to higher administrative positions in the university. The first part of Table 11 below characterizes the three orientations in terms of the following:

actions by leadership, aims, objectives, and departmental or individual response. Table 12 provides quotes representative of the three orientations with quotes related to the *mechanisms* of the conceptual framework (rewards, policies, structures, and culture).

### **Policies**

The current investigation findings suggest the mechanism of *policies* have produced a considerable number of effects, nearly half of which are likely to have a long-term impact. The IQAP policy was designed to bring about effects related to *program accountability*. On the *control* side, participants said the review process exposed gaps in administrative processes (finding 7.5), and that administrative processes interfered with accountability (finding 7.4). On the *enhancement* side, over two thirds (18 of 25 [72%]) of participants felt the review had, or would lead to greater accountability (finding 7.1 and 7.2). Therefore, *the review is perceived to lead to increased program accountability*. The IQAP, was also intended to have effects on degree quality. However, while participant comments indicate the program review is likely to bring about long-term change, opinions were divided as to whether the changes will be constructive for degree programs. If those involved in the process were skeptical from the outset that the time and effort would lead to positive outcomes, this perspective may have become self-fulfilling.

### **Policy Implementation**

Five implications for policy implementation have emerged from the study. First, in order to build on advances from the first round of changes under the new policy, it will be important to formally consolidate, recognize, and reward program improvements in order to progress beyond superficial compliance. Second, a major concern of participants

Table 11

*Three Orientations to Program Review*

General Description	When conducted with a Control and compliance focus	← Standard Accountability → Administrative/Managerial focus	When conducted with an Enhancement focus
Leadership Action	<i>compels and monitors compliance, provides direction</i>	<i>administers and monitors compliance, provides direction</i>	<i>motivates compliance and enhancement, provides direction and support</i>
Aim	<i>task completion</i>	<i>task completion</i>	<i>task completion and program enhancement</i>
Objective	<i>review and assure quality</i>	<i>review and assure quality</i>	<i>review, assure, and advance quality</i>
Dept. or Individual Response	<i>resent, avoid, and resist</i>	<i>tolerate and endure</i>	<i>optimize and leverage if possible</i>
Sample Quote	“in the earlier review process and people, the cast of characters were pitted against each other. They had been cautioned against pitting one against others. The chair put all his pet ideas in there and caused issues” <i>(CI-1).</i>	“Quality assurance revolves around what the Ministry asks for and how must we comply. It is all about the Quality Council and what we must deliver. We must ensure we follow the policies and procedure specified” <i>(QAI - 1).</i>	“If we are going to have to do this, let’s make it of value” <i>(QAI - 1).</i>

Table 12

*Participant Quotes Representative of Three Orientations to the Program Review Process by Mechanism*

Mechanism	When conducted with a Control and compliance focus	← Standard Accountability → Administrative/Managerial focus	When conducted with an Enhancement focus
Rewards available	<p>“No rewards no incentives. This is mandatory – there is an enormous threat for not doing this. University paid for a full day workshop and provided lunch” (FI - 1).</p> <p>“we have significantly under resourced the process” (QAI - 1).</p> <p>“Administration wants these things cut to reduce expenses and increase revenue, but the faculty members care about the quality of the student education and experience” (FI - 2).</p>	<p>“Only as much as paying for a lunch - it is hard to go through this without any extra help” (FI - 2).</p> <p>“Individual faculty are required to engage in program development” (T&amp;L2 - 1).</p>	<p>“It created a stronger sense of collegiality and collaboration” (T&amp;L4 - 1).</p> <p>“A dynamic forward-looking review, actual reviewing of outcomes. We looked at grades with averages and surveyed them [students] for satisfaction. It was an exponentially different experience” (F4 - 1).</p> <p>“Quality assurance can be used to make change in departments and colleges. I’m in discussion with a program that is trying to get things done in advance of the review. It can be used to encourage action and change” (C4 - 1).</p>
Policies	<p>“Asking departments how they align with strategic plans, you can see if they are confused, or are going in a different direction” (QA3 - 1).</p> <p>“Examples, one department was fifteen months late; because it has been top down the responses to the department the message is "you need to get it in" (QAI - 1).</p>	<p><i>Institutional Quality Assurance Process policies introduced within all universities in Ontario. Modified 1-5 times</i></p> <p>“I’m not sure it has any effect at all it is just a process that is mandated. I’m not sure how they use this information higher up” (F4 - 2).</p> <p>“more information is consistent across departments and programs. They use the same template. In future, it will be easy to see there will be good info to mine” (QA3 - 1).</p>	<p>“It does help people get on the same page. It helps to dispel myths about what is happening in the program and helps to bolster peoples’ thoughts on the program...it can pull the department together” (F4 - 2).</p> <p>“In all honesty, the value is at department level. You get the feeling you [prepare the self-study]and it will sit on the shelf. The process of doing it is useful, but the formal process is excessive” (C-3).</p>

Mechanism	When conducted with a Control and compliance focus	← Standard Accountability → Administrative/Managerial focus	When conducted with an Enhancement focus
Policies (continued)		“we have a responsibility to address external standards; accreditation is external with some flexibility... The IQAP is our own, but this is because we have to say that. There is value in the QAF and defending to others; having the standardized language” (QA1 - 1).	“It is remarkable extent to which Learning outcomes have gone from peripheral to what a large number of folks accept as something they need to do over a short time... This is what happens when you put student learning at the center of program design” (SA2 - 3).
Structures	<i>structures provide direction</i>  “Some [departments] complain because they are not in an area of growth in the strategic mandate agreement – and you can see the difficulties they face” (QA3 - 1).	<i>multiple structures enact the policy, (e.g., dept. and institution level committees)</i>  “Office of Alumni affairs worked extensively with this office” (F4 - 1).  “Institutional research and planning support were told to send a data package and that is where their responsibility stops” (QA1 - 1).  “more information that is consistent across departments and programs. They use the same template. In future easy to see there will be good info to mine (QA3 - 1).  “QA person and some admin support in that office mostly to oversee timelines and process” (C4 - 1).	<i>structures seen as providing support and direction</i>  “There has been a shift around the value of the program review. Years ago, I only heard it was useless. Early on the response had to do with the de-centralized approach. No one knew who to go to for help, there was no oversight and big picture, no feedback on reports, and things would get shelved every 7 yrs. This is something I genuinely care about. We exist to make processes more efficient and effective. The orientation of the support unit matters” (QA2 - 1).

Mechanism	When conducted with a Control and compliance focus	← Standard Accountability → Administrative/Managerial focus	When conducted with an Enhancement focus
Structures (continued)		<i>Task completion focus</i>	
	<p>“Asking departments how they align with strategic plans you can see if they are confused, going in a different direction, and they see it is not in our hands” (QA3 - 1).</p> <p>“Examples, one department was months late. Because it has been top down, the responses to the department have been, you need to get it in” (QA1 - 1).</p>	<p>“Administration do not conduct facilitation. It would be seen as intruding. An overview is done by staff” (SA2 - 3).</p>	<p>“[the information] comes out in stages. [university planning] stagger the info coming out so they aren't overwhelmed” (SA3 - 1).</p> <p>“how to do the self-study. All lead authors, and chairs are invited, library, teaching and learning is invited, institutional analysis, people who did the review last year - the survivors. They go over the whole manual. There is an orientation for follow-up explaining, here is the form and this is how you fill it out properly. The teaching and learning office offers workshops for departments or work with departments for mapping and learning outcomes. They are very flexible” (QA3 - 1).</p> <p>“we meet with each program individually and the person responsible and will talk about processes, assistance and resources available for this. This is all done in advance of the review cycle” (SA4 - 1).</p> <p>“director of academic program &amp; policies, a staff member responsible for engagement with different units” (SA4 - 1).</p> <p>“Leadership support by Senior Administration. Deans, department heads, and chairs would provide support, retreats and verbal support” (T&amp;LA - 1).</p>



Mechanism	When conducted with a Control and compliance focus	← Standard Accountability → Administrative/ Managerial focus	When conducted with an Enhancement focus
Culture	<p><i>Culture of resistance</i> <i>Avoidance of participation in small or large groups</i></p> <p>“You get hired to do research in this area and to teach these courses without any idea how it all fits together. A retreat helps a bit” (F1 - 2).</p> <p>“The department is split - we don't all have the same values and beliefs” – <i>faculty member</i></p> <p>“resistance in the past and resistance to thinking of curriculum that way, you can't predict meaningful learning” (F2 - 2).</p> <p>“At one session only two faculty showed up. One was seconded to be lead writer and asked the department to come and only one other person showed up ... the chair. The two who showed up were highly resistant” (T&amp;L3 - 1).</p> <p>“This is different for us because we aren't afraid to state anything - we have a strong program - some arts departments go into it tepid because they don't want cuts” (F2 - 1).</p>	<p><i>Something that must be done</i> <i>Avoidance of participation</i></p> <p>“it reinforces the existing culture” (T&amp;L1 - 1).</p> <p>“minimal or no effects” (F1 - 1).</p> <p>“Program review was seen as a hoop to jump through rather than something to improve programs” (C4 - 1).</p> <p>“people weren't engaging because they wanted to, but because it was required” (QA2 - 1).</p>	<p><i>Discipline oriented culture</i> <i>Program faculty work collaboratively as a small or large group</i></p> <p>“staff thrive in a university because they can fit into a collaborative collegial environment. But know that faculty are very unique groupings, with many department differences” (SA2 - 2).</p> <p>“one person said after the 6-month process – I haven't had these discussions about teaching and learning in over a decade – meaningful conversations.... it created a sense of renewed energy” (T&amp;L4 - 1).</p> <p>“Dramatic changes - my department is very cohesive but very traditional, content based. Everyone taught as though students would go to grad school. It was an epiphany realizing more of what the students need, rather than what they need to know. To meet the skill sets” (SA4 - 1).</p> <p>“It does help people get on the same page. to dispel myths about what is happening in the program and helps bolster peoples' thoughts on the program” (F4 - 2).</p>

was the onerous workload related to program review. Greater buy-in for progressive change would emerge from a streamlined process that emphasized constructive, forward-looking enhancements. Third, it will be important to clarify the aim of the program review policy in order to draw distinctions between program review and other institutional and management review processes such as institutional targets and budget models. Fourth, encouraging honest program appraisal *without penalty* has encouraged enhancement efforts. Tying performance targets to funding is likely to result in a superficial program review process so as to present data in the best possible light for program protection. This is the greatest threat to the success of this process. Finally, a sharing of best practises should be encouraged and supported. The Vice Provosts Academic responsible for the program review process have already shared promising processes and practices. Similarly, educational developers from across institutions have shared processes, practices and tools to increase the effectiveness of the program review process.

***Outcomes and metrics.*** On the *control* side, money issues figured prominently, with many participants describing effects such as an increased focus on budgets, sustainability, and viability in a financially contracting system. Many expressed concerns about the escalation of outcomes and metrics, increased comparisons with other jurisdictions, and as costs increased, pressure to deliver value for the money spent (findings 3c to 3h, 3k and 3l). These findings led to the conclusion that some participants at all levels have confounded the objectives of the program review with the closely timed, if not concurrent budgetary review. This confusion inadvertently or by design resulted in a greater emphasis on fiscal issues. On the *enhancement* side, effects related to learning

outcomes were described as catalyzing change, prompting curricular renewal, and increasing the focus on assessment of learning outcomes. Of the changes identified as resulting from the program review, 46% dealt with curriculum, learning outcomes, and course changes. Therefore, the requirement of all programs to identify learning outcomes focused renewed attention on student learning, on courses, and on curricular design.

### **Structures**

*While structures (people, offices, and committees) fundamentally provide direction on how to carry out the review, the attitude adopted - either controlling or supporting - can influence how the process was carried out and the extent to which the effects are perceived as beneficial.* Structural mechanisms produced effects in the form of activities directing, monitoring, and supporting the review process. The control, standard, and enhancement orientations all provided *direction* in the form of rules, deliverables, timelines, and deadlines. The control and standard approaches look similar except comments characterising the *control* side describe structures as rigid and bureaucratic, as going through the motions, and as feeling coerced. The *enhancement* side adds statements from administrators about the value of the review, and a focus on curricular alignment and forward-looking program development by support staff. Therefore, while structures in the form of people, offices, and committees fundamentally provide direction on how to carry out the review, the orientation adopted - either controlling or supporting - can influence how the process is carried out and the extent to which the effects are perceived as beneficial.

## **Culture**

Institutional and departmental culture influences the content, effects, and impact of the review. All three orientations have the goal of task completion with an emphasis on timelines, deadlines, and deliverables. How a specific institution or an academic department perceives the activity is coloured by the culture, defined as norms, values, and assumptions of the group. Perception of the review can be influenced by factors such as the profile and level of research intensity of the university, or of a department. Accredited programs with health and safety implications such as engineering or nursing are familiar with and accept the obligation of demonstrating quality assurance for their programs, as a requirement for preparing future practitioners. Such programs might be described as representing the standard accountability approach - program review is simply a responsibility that must be completed.

On the *control* side, multiple reasons may account for a culture of resistance. Department faculty members primarily view the review as an administrative task that interferes with the real job responsibilities: first, research, then teaching. A task perceived as principally bureaucratic (finding 2.1, 3.1) can elicit avoidance behavior, leaving the unrewarding task to those willing to be good departmental citizens (finding 8.4). If the discipline is evolving there may also be resistance to participating in a process which may shift the academic focus in a direction requiring change and perhaps changing the status and importance of courses or individuals in the department (finding 3i). The review may disclose a disconnect between the espoused curriculum and the delivered curriculum (finding 3.2) which may generate more work for faculty. Some resistance may also originate from personality conflicts and departmental discord (finding 8.5 and 9). In some

cases, it is the nature of the discipline to resist external imposition of what is perceived as controlling structures (finding 3k and 8.5). And finally, resistance may result from departmental despondency from increasing expectations within a fiscally contracting system (finding 3c to 3f, and 3j and 3k). Therefore, resistance is concluded to originate from perceived effects including conflicts with defined job responsibilities, recognition of disciplinary evolution and related changes in faculty status, disclosure of curricular gaps and overlap, departmental discord, disciplinary epistemological positions, and increased work expectations from declining resources. In short, the rationale for resistance reported by participants are numerous.

On the *enhancement* side, an institutional or departmental culture and leadership can positively drive or influence the process and effects. When administrators at various levels of the university, and support staff members provide constructive and consistent messages communicating the value of learning outcomes and the importance of curriculum coherence this can shift the culture towards enhancement (finding 3a, and 3i) prompting a constructive sense of curricular revitalization (finding 3b, 3h, 7.6, 8.1 – 8.5). Leadership was recurrently identified as an important factor at the institutional, faculty, and staff level influencing the perceived value and the potential benefits of the process. The activities of program review, can shift cultural discourse, aligning trends across Ontario (finding 8.8). Therefore, institutional and departmental cultures can produce effects that undermine or enhance perceptions of the program review. While many factors can influence the direction taken, constructive and consistent messages, actions, and support from leadership can make a difference.

Each university in the study displayed aspects of the all three orientations to accountability. The standard, control, and enhancement orientations aligned to varying degrees with perspectives espoused by their senior administrators. The continuum of responses varied to some extent within the academic departments studied more closely. The attitudes communicated at the level of the academic department broadly resembled those of senior administrators from the same institution. Enthusiastic senior administrators had correspondingly more constructive responses from the academic department involved. Senior administrators from institutions perceiving the process as more challenging, were aligned with more responses of concern from the representative academic department. Although many factors influenced how institutions and departments responded as a whole, the comments of participants emphasizing the role of leadership suggests senior administrators may have influenced the perspectives adopted by the departments<sup>2</sup>.

### **Summary**

This discussion has reviewed and integrated themes and conclusions across twenty-six participants, from four participating institutions, with involvement from five levels of the program review. The research has identified five strategies that contribute to constructive impact of the program review at the institution and departmental levels, and eight factors influencing the orientation adopted by universities and academic

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<sup>2</sup> Recall that three of the four participating universities had recently changed budget structures and conducted budgetary reviews around the same time. The budgetary reviews influenced participant comments with some confounding of the overlapping objectives of the two reviews.

departments in the program review. These factors were applied to an analytical framework and substantiated by participant comments. The extensive cross-case analysis enables the reader to follow lines of argument based on evidence from comments at different levels of involvement in the review process, across institutions to identify commonalities and differences in view point, and to determine plausibility. The discussion then returned to the mechanisms listed in the conceptual framework (chapter one) for effects identified by participants, including those that might produce longer term results which would be considered indications of impact. The next section will review constraints on the research, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

### **Limitation of Perspectives**

The current study included a selection of perspectives from those directly involved in the program review process and did not include other potentially valuable views such as the perceptions of students, institutional planning staff, and external reviewers were not included. Students were not included because their involvement in development of the self-study document often involves little more than survey responses. In addition, since very few students are directly involved in the process of program review there is the additional difficulty of identifying and encouraging student participation, the students engaged may not be representative, and the level of student impact on the IQAP would vary between departments. Other groups such as Institutional planning staff provide key program data required for the review and could contribute another valuable insights. External reviewers constitute another potentially important perspective on the peer review component of the review. These additional perspectives

would be promising to pursue in future studies and were not pursued due to a limitation of time and resources.

### **Universities are Not Treated as Cases**

Participating universities are not treated as cases in themselves; an academic discipline was selected in common from each university. While senior administrative roles and support staff are comparable across the university, there is tremendous variation in experiences between departments themselves. To reliably characterize the experiences of a university as a case study would require multiple departments and a larger sample of participants beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, perceptions of *science* departments may differ from that of the *humanities* from a disciplinary perspective, as explored by Becher and Trawler (2001).

No analyses or conclusions of a statistical nature were drawn due to the nature of the research and sample size. Instead, the study relies on carefully selected key individuals directly involved in the program review process across multiple levels of involvement in program review for their direct experience and information-rich reports.

The current research examines cases from the first five years of policy implementation formally mandated by the Quality Council. The first program reviews under the new process began in 2011. Any conclusions drawn are preliminary based on experiences before universities had settled into regular implementation, processes, and supports.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions made prior to collecting data, and encountered during analysis may be useful to reconsider. This study assumed the *perspectives* of participants in the



program review process would vary by institution, by role, and also by individual - an assumption supported by participant comments. Qualitative research is an inductive and emergent process influenced by each researchers' experience, the collection of data, and analysis of results (Creswell, 2013) which does not claim to identify an objective truth. This investigation has applied a scientific approach to research but does not claim to ascribe cause and effect. Qualitative research inquiry involves application of logical steps and accepts the reality of multiple perspectives representing the various realities experienced by participants. Perceptions of reality are dependent on the worldview of participants (Patton, 2015). Thus, this research employed a multiple case study design focusing on people at five levels of involvement in the program review who made decisions regarding program quality. The research examined how decisions about quality assurance were experienced by those directly involved in the review process.

Another assumption identified at the outset generally held by government, was that *increased oversight may prevent the waste of public funds*. If one takes participant comments as the measure, the escalating requirement for collection of metrics and measures is counterproductive. Responses by participants reveal considerable stress and frustration with the increased workload of larger class sizes and declining supports. As a senior administrator commented, "the dilemma is that we are asking programs to solve problems they know are bigger than themselves" (SA1 - 1).

The assumption that increased quality monitoring will *increase the quality of education* appears to be true only when faculty members are able to engage collegially in a process perceived as constructive and beneficial to the program, and when refinements are carried out and followed through. The increase in quality monitoring does result in

*analysis of finances*, but when conducted with a control and compliance focus, or when applied without insight, it can trigger defensiveness and resistance. Recurrent references to the requirement that universities align with the priorities of the provincial government has produced a sense of winners and losers (finding 8.10). Universities must identify targeted areas of strength to promote, which results in corresponding areas of stagnation. As a quality assurance staff member remarked, “some complain because they are not in an area of growth identified in the Ontario Strategic Mandate Agreement - you see the difficulties they face, and see very uneven buy-in” (QA3 - 1).

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this multiple-case, mixed methods study was to characterize the effects and the changes in attitudes perceived by key participants involved in the program review process at four universities, five years after the introduction of a new learning-outcomes oriented quality assurance process across the province of Ontario.

What follows is a discussion of the major conclusions from the findings of this research followed by recommendations. The findings identified in chapter four followed the sequence of questions asked of participants. This section applies a different order derived by looking across findings, and grouping related findings together in order to draw conclusions.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The first major finding is that Senior Administrators and support staff have raised the profile of learning outcomes and changed the discourse around quality assurance. It can be concluded that *leadership has influenced institutional perceptions and brought about change by discussing outcomes publicly and following through with actions and*

*support related to the program review.* Public discussion of learning outcomes by leadership has influenced the discourse. Learning outcome related discourse is reported as having an impact across the university. These actions communicate that student learning outcomes and the review process is valued, supported, and reinforced in multiple settings, and it will be followed up. Some self-study documents submitted without appropriate attention to learning outcomes statements and curricula are reported to be being sent back to the department for revisions.

A related conclusion is that discussion of outcomes has not been restricted to *student learning outcomes* connected to program review. Outcome-related language has expanded to areas beyond program quality assurance and review, permeating other domains of the university (e.g., increased focus on outcome measures for various purposes such as department sustainability, or drafting of student's outcome statements for extracurricular activities). A related and further conclusion that can be drawn is that the collection and review of information required for program review is being applied in other areas of university work because it is perceived to have value.

### **Curricular Refinement**

The second major finding is that development of learning outcomes has been a catalyst for curricular change. In this first round of implementation of the new process, programs are required to identify program learning outcomes, thereby raising awareness of curricular alignment gaps and overlap in program design. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that *engaging faculty members in discussing, identifying, and prioritising intended outcomes for students frequently triggers curricular refinement,* resulting from discussion of the appropriateness of the existing structure. A related

conclusion that can be drawn is that *the curriculum of many programs does not align with the intended learning outcomes*, requiring adjustments. A further conclusion that can be drawn is that *discussion of the curriculum enables discussion of the appropriateness of the existing structure in light of developments in the discipline*.

### **From Teaching to Learning**

The third major finding is that a shift from a focus on delivering teaching to bringing about student learning is slowly having an impact on higher education. It can be concluded that the increased profile of learning outcomes promoted by senior administrators, builds on and extends the international trend which has increased the emphasis on teaching and on student learning outcomes. Activities such as administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted every three years in Ontario has raised awareness and the profile of learning outcomes. The NSSE, the IQAP process, the provincial Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) and the increased focus on experiential learning are now being promoted by the provincial government; all emphasize the intended outcomes of student learning. Whether this will result in improved student learning outcomes would require additional research. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has been testing various approaches to measure improved student learning outcomes in recent years. This has included the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), the Tuning Project, and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an initiative of OECD, called the Education and Skills Initiative (EASI) in Ontario.

A further conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that *the focus on teaching and learning has resulted in greater alignment of teaching and assessment methods to*

*strengthen the learning process.* These various influences, contribute to the shift of attention to the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Long Term Impact of the IQAP**

The fourth major finding is that the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) *has produced some effects likely to have a long-term impact* – some constructive and some problematic. It can be concluded that policies creating the IQAP have shifted the landscape of higher education in the directions intended (e.g., learning outcomes, teaching and learning, changes at the course level, program planning, administrative changes) but also in directions unintended by the quality assurance review (e.g., triggering crises, sense of department coercion, increased workload). A related conclusion that can be drawn is that while the landscape is changing, some faculty describe the review as stating the obvious, and note *a disconnect between what is stated and what is delivered*. Faculty subsequently question the value of describing intended student learning outcomes, as well as questioning the reality and sustainability of changes described.

### **Money, Metrics and Muddling**

A fifth major finding is *an escalating focus on money and metrics*. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that programs are feeling burdened by mounting requirements to collect, analyze, and provide information for various purposes. This includes data collected for the Strategic Mandate Agreement with the province, Key Performance Indicators, alignment with the university mission, alignment with the faculty and department vision, academic program review (IQAP), and the new budget processes.

A related conclusion is that *the increased focus on metrics has resulted in a blurring or muddling of processes, with participants confounding the program review with other objectives and purposes* such as budgetary review and measures of the fiscal sustainability of the academic department. Contemporaneous with the Ontario introduction of the IQAP, was the introduction of new budget models, and budget reviews at many Ontario universities. That the two processes involved collecting and reviewing program information and occurred within a relatively narrow timeframe resulted in a blurring of processes, with participants confusing requirements for the program review with budgetary review and measures of fiscal sustainability of the academic department. While this blurring may have been helpful to rein in costs, it may be harmful in the long run as people associate curricular review with budget cuts.

A further and related conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that collection of data from one domain is available for application to other domains (e.g., budget processes). When resistance for departments to provide metrics and measures is weakened with one process like the budget process, it appears to be easier to make similar requests for other purposes. The blurring of processes has led to *an increase in pressure and focus on deriving value for money leading to increased comparisons with other jurisdictions and between outcomes of various forms*. Program review not only requires collection of common metrics, but requires comparison as part of the process. The danger with this muddling of metrics across domains is that it appears to feed into feelings of futility; of just going through the motions, and “feeding the beast” (Newton, 2000) without prospect of insight, or enhancement.

### **Increased Accountability**

The sixth major finding is that two thirds of participants felt the program review process had or would lead to greater accountability. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that most people involved in the review process believe it is doing what it is intended to do. However, participants also feel the review process has exposed gaps in administrative processes and that these processes interfere with accountability.

### **Skepticism about Improved Program Quality**

A seventh major finding is that participants are equally divided as to whether the review process would affect the quality of the degree program. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that *participants are divided as to whether the review process will enhance, diminish, or leave academic programs unchanged*. That three out of four department chairs did not believe the program review would improve degree quality is a measure of the lack of confidence in the review process to enhance programs. Whether the approach Senior administrators take makes a difference is unclear since there are multiple factors at play. Though it appears enhancement without trust is unlikely to succeed.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that this may represent an improvement in outlook compared to the previous review process. The previous UPRAC process was described by department chairs as a self-study produced by one or two individuals, and unanimously described as previously destined to sit on the shelf without further attention, action, or follow-up. Although 50% is not a resounding endorsement, comments by all other participants were more optimistic than those of the department chairs.

The eighth major finding is that *participants across four levels of involvement in review believed it produced effects on department program planning, culture, and individuals*. It can be concluded that the IQAP policy has produced effects and impact in anticipated directions (e.g., program planning, departmental communication, discussion of curriculum) and unanticipated directions both positive and negative (e.g., leadership opportunities vs precipitation of crises) like deepening the footsteps in snow created by other western nations, this can be helpful or precipitate a tumble.

### **Amorphous Quality or Flexible Rationalization**

A ninth major finding is that *the ill-defined nature of the term quality, allows decision-makers to focus on quite diverse directions within existing policies and practices*. It could be concluded from this finding that diverse definitions of quality will not hinder a leader from feeding the beast, or making progress on taming the beast. The difficulty, is persuading others to follow suit. It is encouraging that many report senior administrators to have promoted enhancement and constructive engagement with curriculum.

### **Final Statement**

Research into the effects of quality assurance processes on higher education has been criticized for not including those directly involved in conducting the program review and focusing on perceptions reported by upper level administration, which generally concludes that quality assurance outcomes are precisely those intended (Brennan & Shah, 2000, Leiber et al., 2015). The current study addressed this gap in the literature to achieve a more balanced perspective in three ways: (a) including a cross-section of participants from different levels of involvement in the program review process



from across the university for in depth insights at each level; (b) employing a multiple case study approach to facilitate comparison and triangulation across roles in the program review and across sites; and (c) including four comprehensive universities.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study, the researcher offers recommendations for: (a) policy makers; (b) Senior Administrators; and (c) recommendations for further research.

#### **Recommendations for Policy Makers**

- Modify policy and procedures to sustain and enhance effective processes and to consolidate advances. Progress beyond superficial compliance.
- Review and streamline processes to reduce the workload related to program review and to emphasize constructive forward-looking development to enhance and assure programs. Streamline data collection to essentials that provide value.
- Gather, support, develop, promote, and share promising constructive practices from other jurisdictions in partnership with stakeholders. Develop processes and tools to facilitate the update and review of programs to reduce effort and to increase benefits observed by departments.

#### **Recommendations for University Policy Makers and Senior Administrators**

- *Clarify the task.* Ensure the aim of the process is enhancement not maintenance of the status quo.
- *Follow up.* Constructively reinforce and consolidate processes and practices with required but not onerous follow up once or twice between reviews to encourage a climate of ongoing development of academic programs.

- *Recognize and reward ongoing program enhancement.* To further promote effective program development, provide recognition, rewards, or incentives to programs to better align teaching and assessment methods to develop student learning outcomes.
- *Focus.* Clarify language to minimize confusion. The impact of the term *outcomes* will be weakened if applied too broadly (e.g., intended learning outcomes, budget outcomes, counselling outcomes, co-curricular outcomes). If possible, distinguish with different terminology.
- *Develop a culture of constructive enhancement.* To consolidate gains, university policy makers, and senior administrators should formalize, and streamline structures. Consolidate program advances and require incremental follow up in subsequent review cycles to develop a culture of ongoing enhancement. Recognize and celebrate notable improvement and achievements. This is to avoid what was observed in Europe where the greatest programs gains were reported to take place in the first cycle of review. A lack of consistency and follow up will reinforce the mindset of “feeding the beast” (Newton, 2000), and the perception of going through the motions described prior to introduction of the IQAP.
- *Shift the culture.* Promote and reward a quality culture that values regular departmental discussion, development, and refinement of program and curriculum components. Leverage support staff to facilitate discussion and mediate constructive program engagement.
- *Identify attainable goals and recognize progress.* Consider promoting and rewarding departmental identification of manageable focused targets for enhancement on a regular basis to develop ongoing progress such as focusing on specific program

learning outcomes. For example, reviewing writing assignments across the program to scaffold expectations, and providing better feedback to students across the program to improve results.

### **Recommendations for Academic Departments**

- *Engage in incremental enhancement.* Focusing departmental collaboration on aspects of review meaningful to the group, such as clarifying intended student learning outcomes and focused development is more likely to result in constructive participation.
- *Identify a leader who can unite.* Select a person to lead the self-study who is able to constructively unite the department.
- *Build trust.* Intentionally build trust between departments and Senior Administrators with regular meetings, frank discussion and follow up on issues of mutual concern.
- *Include external support.* Reach out to university support structures such as the institutional research office, teaching and learning centre, or quality assurance support.
- *Start early, and work incrementally and intentionally.* Include discussion and follow up on the review process as a standing agenda item at departmental meetings. Plan activities and book time with the full department well in advance to encourage participation.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Any research project takes place within a finite time frame and limited resources. Looking to the future, promising directions include the following. Pursing the same academic discipline with an increase in participants would increase the generalizability

and reliability of the findings, and would allow a statistical confirmation of findings. The current research reviews experiences across five levels of involvement in program review, and one academic department in depth. Additional levels of participation in this research process could contribute additional perspectives including the Institutional Planning office staff (who provide data to departments), and external reviewers. Given the considerable diversity of academic disciplines it would also be useful to pursue the same research questions with additional disciplines to identify similarities, differences, and factors at play. It would be instructive to note differences between the social sciences, the sciences, humanities, and the arts. Comparing or contrasting implementation differences amongst the various categories of universities such as Medical/Doctoral, or primarily Undergraduate universities would also provide valuable perspectives.

It would also be informative to repeat this study in five years when academic programs have completed two cycles of review under the current process to determine: (a) stability of findings; (b) evolution of processes; and (c) evidence of further advance or retreat in the shift from teaching to learning.

The Quality Assurance Framework, and the IQAP policy both employ the basic four step process of quality assurance adopted in much of the western world. An international comparison would be valuable and may suggest promising new directions. This might include comparison of: (a) processes; (b) the evolution of processes; (c) the role of regulatory bodies; or (d) the extent of collaboration of processes between universities.

This research identified factors influencing constructive or problematic outcomes of the review process. This model could be tested for similarities and influences in other

jurisdictions. Are the same factors at play? If not, what factors influence the orientations adopted and outcomes observed.

To explore factors influencing the direction of university orientations in greater depth, it would be informative to identify outlier institutions where learning-outcomes oriented review is either highly successful or highly problematic.

Leadership is frequently cited as influential in bringing about constructive enhancement. It would be helpful to study the role of leadership in quality review to determine whether different styles or strategies influence outcomes, and if so how this might be promoted.

**Haiku**            **Quality beckons**  
**Eyes and ears close or open,**  
**What future entreats?**

**Limericks**      **Once said a fine Chair from Ontario,**  
**Reviling the IQAP scenario,**  
**I'll say what they want,**  
**Our progress I'll flaunt,**  
**The report will see a fine burial.**

**An Ontario skeptical chair,**  
**Prepared the self-study with care,**  
**To her great surprise,**  
**Insights did arise,**  
**Aligned learning without compare.**

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Script of Invitation to Invite Departments

Note: I have attached here some talking points to discuss when inviting a department to participate in the study

My name is **Name**; I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Brock University studying the possible effects of recent policy changes to the program review process. My supervisor at Brock University is Dr. Louis Volante, associate professor in the Faculty of Education. I would like to invite your department to participate in this study.

- This research will be studying effects at similar programs across Ontario from departments of <department name or related category, e.g. Biology or Science>
- Since your <department/school> has recently conducted a program review, I would like to invite your department to participate.
- This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # 14-240). If you have comments or concerns about participants' rights or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

#### What would be involved:

- This would involve an interview of individuals who have participated in the process of about 60 mins.
- The questions deal with the participants' experience and perceptions of the program review process.
- It will be conducted via a focus group format or via individual interviews, <face to face or by phone> depending on what individuals prefer.
- All results would be confidential, and no information identifying the institution or individuals will be published.
- Do you think your department would be willing to participate?
- I will follow up by sending details of the research by email.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.



## Appendix B

### Script of Conversation with Chair

My name is Name Here; I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Brock University studying the possible effects of recent policy changes to the program review process. My supervisor at Brock University is Dr. Louis Volante, associate professor in the Faculty of Education. I would like to invite your department to participate in this study.

- This research will be studying effects at similar programs across Ontario from departments of <department name or related category, e.g. Biology or Science>
- Since your <department/school> has recently conducted a program review, I would like to invite your department to participate.
- This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file # \_\_-\_\_). If you have comments or concerns about participants' rights or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

I recently spoke with <Main Contact> who confirmed your <department/school> has recently conducted a program review.

- As you may know, the policy dealing with program review in Ontario changed in 2010. As a result, each institution developed an Institutional Quality Assurance Process (the IQAP) to direct their program review. This research asks, what are the effects (if any) of the Learning outcomes oriented approach on the Ontario program review?
- I am interested in investigating the effects (if any) of these policy changes in Departments of <common department category e.g., English> across Ontario.
- I would like to invite your department to participate in a research study examining the effects of the program review process on decision-making.

#### **Would you like to know what would be involved?**

- I would like to interview people involved in the program review process at various levels. This would include:
  - A key person in the department/school involved in directing the process
  - A few faculty members involved in the process (either a focus group or individual interview, whichever they prefer)
  - Possibly a staff member actively involved in the process
- I will treat all results as confidential, and no information identifying the institution or individuals would be published.
- I aim to conduct the study in departments of <common department category> in various universities in Ontario.

### **Request Permission**

- Could I have your support to conduct this study in your department?
- I would like to contact department members by phone or email.
- I would like to confirm you support department/school participation.
- Would you be willing to send the department a note indicating your support of the research? If you wish, you can send an email of my invitation for the department to participate. (See Appendix (b))
- Did you, or a colleague, take the lead in the program review?
  - <If the Chair led the program review process>
  - Since you were actively involved, would you be willing to participate in an interview?
    - Can we set up a time? or <I will follow up by email to coordinate a time>
  - I will follow up by sending the particulars <and the list of questions> by email.
- Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

**Appendix C**  
**Letter of Information and Request for Support of Chair**

Date: <Date>

Subject Line: Invitation to participate

Text:

Dear <Name of Chair>

My name is Name Here, I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Brock University studying the possible effects of recent policy changes to the program review process. My supervisor at Brock university is Dr. Louis Volante, associate professor in the Faculty of Education. I would like to invite your department to participate in this study.

Since your department has recently participated in a program review I am very interested in the experiences of your department under the new process. I will be studying <departments of [department name] or related departments> across Ontario.

Would you support this study in your department? I would like to interview 3 to 5 persons involved in the program review to participate in either a focus group (schedules permitting) or an individual interview of approximately 60 minutes. I would like to contact them by phone or email and let them know you support department participation. If a staff member was very involved in the process they would be helpful to engage as well.

If you agree, it would be helpful to know the name of the person who led the program review in your department (often someone designated by the chair). I will also send an invitation to all faculty members in your department.

All results would be confidential, and no information identifying the institution or individuals will be published.

More details are attached to this email (see **Letter of Information and Informed Consent**).

Thank you for your time,

Name Here

<b>Doctoral Candidate</b> Name Here, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Faculty of Education, Brock University <a href="mailto:Pb11sg@brocku.ca">Pb11sg@brocku.ca</a>	<b>Faculty Supervisor</b> Dr. Louis Volante Associate Professor  Faculty of Education, Brock University 905-547-3555 ext. 3621
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## Appendix D

### Script of Telephone Invitation to Participants

I am a doctoral student of Ed Leadership & Policy studies at Brock University

- Since your <department/school> recently conducted a program review, I invited your department to participate in a research study examining the effects of the review process and your <Chair/Director> has supported this participation.
- <Colleague/Chair/Director> suggested you might be a good person to ask. Even if another person suggested your name, participation is entirely voluntary; you are under no obligation.
- I will be investigating the possible effects of policy changes to the program review process in Departments of <common department category e.g., English> across Ontario.

#### **What would be involved:**

- This would involve an interview of approximately 60 mins.
- The questions will deal with your experience and perceptions of the program review process.
- It will be conducted in a focus group format, or via individual interviews <face to face or by phone> depending on what you prefer.
- The interview will be audio recorded with your permission
- All results would be confidential, and no information identifying the institution or individuals will be published.

## Appendix E i)

### Interview Scheduling Request E-MAIL

**Email Subject Line:** Scheduling the Interview

Dear <participant>

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study *Effects of Outcome-Oriented Program Review Policy Changes in Ontario Universities*. I have received your signed consent form and now I would like to schedule your interview and send you a copy of the interview questions.

Please provide a few dates and times that would work for you.

- <for faculty members and staff>

Would you prefer to be interviewed?

In a group with faculty from your department (face to face)

Individually

Either is fine (group or individual interview)

- <for administration>

Would you like to meet in your office, or is there another quiet location you would prefer?

For individual interview, would you prefer the interview to be conducted:

Face to face

By telephone

Finally, are there other individuals at your university that have been involved in developing, implementing, or providing support for the quality assurance process you think might provide a helpful perspective? If so, can you provide me with a brief description of their role regarding program review, their name and contact information, if you have it?

I will send you a copy of the interview questions by email. If you have further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address provided below. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research!

Sincerely,

Name Here

Doctoral Candidate, Brock University

[pb11sg@brocku.ca](mailto:pb11sg@brocku.ca)

Tel: 905-336-7090

## Appendix E ii)

### Interview Scheduling Request Telephone SCRIPT

Hi <participant>

- This is Name Here, the doctoral student conducting research study on the Effects of Outcome-Oriented Program Review Policy Changes in Ontario Universities.
- Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study. I have received your signed consent form and now I would like to schedule your interview and send you a copy of the interview questions.

Before we proceed, a few organizational details,

- Can you provide a few dates and times that would work for you?
- <for administration> Would you like to meet in your office, or is there another quiet meeting location you would prefer, or would you prefer to conduct the interview by telephone?
- <for faculty members or staff>

•

Would you prefer to be interviewed:

in a group with faculty from your department (face to face)   
individually   
either is fine

Would you prefer the interview be conducted

Face to face   
By telephone

Optional

Are there other individuals at your institution that have been involved in developing, implementing, or providing support for the quality assurance process you think might provide a helpful perspective? If so, can you provide me with a brief description of their role regarding program review, their names, and contact information if you have it?

- I will send you a copy of the interview questions by email. If you have further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address provided below. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research!

Thanks very much,

Name Here  
Doctoral Candidate, Brock University  
[pb11sg@brocku.ca](mailto:pb11sg@brocku.ca)  
Tel: 905-336-7090

## Appendix F

### E-Mail Script Interview Confirmation

**Email Subject Line:** Interview Confirmation

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study *Effects of Outcome-Oriented Program Review Policy Changes in Ontario Universities*. Based on our discussion, I have scheduled our <interview or focus group> for:

Date: *To be determined*

Time: *To be determined*

Location: *To be determined*

< I will contact you at: *telephone number if the interview will be conducted by phone or location as earlier specified*>.

I have attached the questions that will guide the interview. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Name Here  
Doctoral Candidate  
Brock University  
[pb11sg@brocku.ca](mailto:pb11sg@brocku.ca)

*Attachment: Interview Guide*

## Appendix G

### Letter of Information and Informed Consent

Date: <Date>

Project Title: Effects of Outcome-Oriented Program Review Policy Changes in Ontario Universities

<b>Doctoral Student</b> Name Here, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Faculty of Education, Brock University <a href="mailto:Pb11sg@brocku.ca">Pb11sg@brocku.ca</a>	<b>Faculty Supervisor</b> Dr. Louis Volante Associate Professor  Faculty of Education, Brock University 905-547-3555 ext. 3621 <a href="mailto:Louis.Volante@Brocku.ca">Louis.Volante@Brocku.ca</a>
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#### Invitation

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The aim of this research is to identify the effects (if any) of recent policy changes to the program review process. In particular, the effects of the inclusion of program outcomes on institutional management decision making processes. This research includes various people involved in participating, supporting, and leading, the program review process at your university (i.e., faculty members, staff, and administration).

#### What's involved

As a participant, I am asking you to consent to participate in an <focus group or one-on-one>, interview conducted <in-person or by phone> of approximately 60 minutes of your time that will be audio recorded. I will conduct the interview on a date and time convenient to you. If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form and email it back to me; this form indicates you are voluntarily consenting and agreeing to participate.

I will book your interview date and time, and you will receive the questions that will guide the interview. The questions asked in the interview will be related to your knowledge and experience of the program review process. If you prefer not to answer a question, we can simply move to the next. A few days prior to the interview, I will send a reminder email, then on the day of the interview, <I will meet you at the arranged location> or <I will phone you at the number you provide>.

#### Potential benefits and risks

The results of the study will be shared with all interested participants. This interview will invite you to reflect on the process of cyclic program review. A benefit of this reflection may be an increased awareness of the process and procedures which may in turn help inform decision making at your institution or inform policy makers, educational leaders and administrators.

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. If you feel uncomfortable talking about your opinions or experiences, please let me know. You can skip over any question you would prefer not to answer or which might make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop taking part at any time.



If you participate in a focus group with colleagues, I will request all participants keep comments, opinions and perceptions expressed by others completely confidential. I will keep all materials confidential.

I describe below the steps I will take to protect your privacy.

### **Confidentiality**

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified in any published materials. No one but the researcher will know that you participated unless you <participate in a focus group with your peers or you> choose to tell them. However, there are limits to confidentiality; the researcher cannot prevent possible disclosures made by other participants in focus groups or related social risks.

Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. Your name will not appear in any thesis, publication, or any report that results from this study. If I use a quote from you, I will assign it a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified. If there are any revealing details in your quote, I will change the details so that they are more general in nature.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet and password protected computers and encrypted computer servers. The only persons who will have access to the research data are the doctoral researcher, my supervisor (Dr. Louis Volante), and my doctoral advisory committee. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed after 7 years.

### **Focus group** (for those participating in a focus group)

All information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with responses from other participants. Given the format of this session, we ask you to respect your fellow participants by keeping all information that identifies or could potentially identify any participant and their comments confidential.

### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even if another person suggested your name you are under no obligation and they will not be informed. If you do not wish to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. At any time, you can decide to stop (withdraw), even after signing the consent form or partway through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you decide to withdraw, you will receive an email from me confirming you have withdrawn and explaining that I have removed and destroyed your data.

### **Publication of results**

When you take part in the interview I will ask if you would like to receive a summary of the research findings. If you state that you would like to receive it, I will send you a report following defence of my thesis, hopefully before 2017. Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences.

### **Contact information and ethics clearance**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact me, Name Here; or my supervisor, Dr. Louis Volante, at the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University

(file # \_\_-\_\_). If you have comments or concerns about participants' rights or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca).

**Consent form**

I agree to participate in the study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw at any time.

- a) I agree to the audio recording of the interview
- b) I prefer that the interview not be audio recorded

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please keep a copy of this form for your records, and thank you for your assistance in this project.

Please return a copy of this form in **one** of the following ways:

- Scan and email [pb11sg@brocku.ca](mailto:pb11sg@brocku.ca)
- Fax to: 416-979-5237 (Please add Attention to: Name Here), or
- Return in person during the interview.

## Appendix H

### Interview Guide

*Before we get started,*

#### **Consent request**

*<if conducted face to face>*

*Those who have submitted a signed Informed consent:*

- Thank you for submitting the signed consent form, OR
- Please read over the information letter and consent form. If you agree, please sign the form.

*<If conducted by phone>*

- I would like to confirm you have had an opportunity to read the **Letter of Information and Informed Consent** I sent earlier by email?
- Would you like me to review that information with you now? (Yes, No)
- Do you agree to participate in the study based on the information in the Information-Consent Letter sent earlier by email?  
 yes  no

#### **Consent to audio record**

- Do you agree to the audio recording of this interview?  yes  no
- Do you have any additional questions before we get started? You may certainly ask any questions you may have in the future and you may withdraw from the study at any point.

Thank you for taking the time to engage in conversation with me about your experience of the program review process.

The questions I provide will guide the conversation, but they are flexible enough to allow for tangents depending on the path the conversation takes.

I will likely ask short follow-up questions

to confirm my understanding what I'm hearing (e.g. "So, are you saying that...?"),

to get more information (e.g. "Please tell me more about that"),

to clarify perspective (e.g. is that your own perspective, your view of the university/department, or the view of the university?),

The **purpose** of the study is to investigate the effects of decision making on policy changes related to program review.

## Questions

The following questions will guide the interviews:

1. In general, would <Sr administrators/ Administrators/ faculty/staff> at your university define a **QUALITY UNIVERSITY** in terms of: *(definitions provided)*  
*If more than one fits, how would you rank them?*

	Rank
Fitness for purpose ... <i>the university meets its stated purpose</i>	
Excellence ..... <i>exceptionally high standards of achievement</i>	
Perfection ..... <i>consistency of outcomes</i>	
Transformation ..... <i>enhancing and empowering the participant</i>	
Value for money ..... <i>value for money spent</i>	
Other?	

2. In general, would your institution define a **quality university EDUCATION** in terms of:  
*If more than one fits, how would you rank them?*

	Rank
Fitness for purpose .. <i>the university meets its stated purpose</i>	
Excellence ..... <i>exceptionally high standards of achievement</i>	
Perfection ..... <i>consistency of outcomes</i>	
Transformation ..... <i>enhancing and empowering the participant</i>	
Value for money ..... <i>value for money spent</i>	
Other?	

3. In carrying out the program review, which approach do you think your university/department/school takes?

Choose a category then explain why. They can choose more than one

managerial approach    a focus on institutional requirements, policies and procedures  
 collegial approach     a focus on subject knowledge and curricula  
 pedagogical approach   focus on teaching skills, and classroom practice  
 employment approach   focus on graduate standards and outcomes for employers  
 other?

4. Which of the following **better applies?**  
 4.1. At this **university**, the program review:

primarily aims to address <b>external</b> standards	OR primarily aims to address <b>own</b> standards
functions to <b>affirm</b> current practices	OR functions with a focus on <b>development</b>
focus on <b>past</b>	OR focus on <b>future</b>
top down	OR bottom up
climate of <b>control</b>	OR climate of <b>development</b>
structures strictly <b>control</b> department/school process and procedures	OR structures <b>allow some flexibility</b> in process and procedures
seeks to identify <b>flaws</b>	OR seek to identify <b>patterns</b>
data is used to render a <b>judgement</b>	OR data is used to <b>inform</b> future directions

- 4.2. Which of the following **better applies**  
 In this **department/school** the program review:

primarily aims to address <b>external</b> standards	OR primarily aims to address <b>own</b> standards
functions to <b>affirm</b> past practice	OR functions with a focus on <b>development</b>
focus on <b>past</b>	OR focus on <b>future</b>
top down	OR bottom up
climate of <b>control</b>	OR climate of <b>development</b>
structures strictly <b>control</b> department/school process and procedures	OR structures <b>allow some flexibility</b> in process and procedures
seeks to identify <b>flaws</b>	OR seek to identify <b>patterns</b>
data is used to render a <b>judgement</b>	OR data is used to <b>inform</b> future directions

- 4.3. Possible follow up: Why the difference (if any)?  
 Open-ended response

Now I would like to talk a little more specifically about the program review itself:

5. Are any resources, rewards, or incentives made available for program review?

5.1. No/Yes

- 5.2. If yes, what are they?

Open-ended response

Some prompts:

	y/n	comment
<b>5.3. Financial support</b>		
Funds for administrative help		
Releasing a faculty member from a course or part of a course		
Funds to hire a writer		
Ability to connect the review to requests for funding in the next budget year		
Applications for program development funds		
<b>5.4. Services</b>		
Workshop or facilitation support from the administrators		
Workshops or facilitation by university staff		
Project Management support		
<b>5.5. People (&amp; structures)</b>		
Teaching and Learning Centre support		
Quality Assurance office support (or equiv.)		
Vice Provost or equivalent office support		
Availability of administrators/staff to answer questions		
Institutional research or planning group support		
<b>5.6. Resources or documentation</b>		
Program review Manual		
Timelines, schedules		
Templates		
Specialized software for project management		
Specialized software for curriculum mapping		
Specialized software for course outlines		

6. What **structures or positions** support the program review? e.g., Committees? Offices? Specific Roles?  
Open-ended response

- 6.1. Structure prompts, if necessary.

<b>For example:</b>	<b>how?</b>
. Quality Assurance Office	
. Institutional analysis/planning group that provides data for this	
. Program review committee	
. Department Curriculum Committees	
. Other?	

6.2. Position prompts, if necessary.

<b>Positions</b>	<b>What sort of support?</b>	<b>New positions in last 6 years or so?</b>
Vice Provost Teaching and Learning or equivalent		
Director or Head of Quality Assurance		
Curriculum specialist		
Educational developer (Teaching and learning centre staff)		
Project Management staff		
Contract staff for writing		
Contract staff to assist with program review		
Administrative staff reassigned to help		
Other:		

7. Do you know if any recent **policy** changes have been made related to the Program Review?  
open ended response

Now I would like to talk a little more specifically about the program review itself:

8. During the program review process who participates (participated) in developing or refining the <department/school> program learning outcomes?

**Impact on quality**

9. What types of changes (if any) do you think have, or will, result from the program review?  
Open-ended response

10. Do you think the review will result in changes at the **course** level?  
Open-ended response

11. Do you think the current program review process is likely to affect the quality of:  
Open-ended responses to each I will follow with, why do you think that?

11.1. the degree program/s

11.2. program accountability (being responsible to students and the public for the programs offered)

12. Did the development/refinement of program learning outcomes have any effects?  
Possible prompts: on the department, program, activities, conversations?

13. What effects (if any) would you say the program review has had on (or will have on):

Prompts:

program planning?

individuals in the department/school?

departmental/school culture? (shared values, beliefs, assumptions)

the institution itself

Open-ended responses to each

14. Do you think the program review has affected:

14.1. the power dynamics within the department/school?

open-ended and sample prompts

- Did you have the sense that all faculty members' comments were considered of equal value? How might that have been demonstrated?
- Did the program review affect the power dynamics; was it **affected by** the power dynamics
- Do you think anyone gained (or lost) credibility or status as a result?

14.2. the power distribution within the university?

Do you think anyone has either gained or lost power as a result of the current process?

15. Has the program review had any harmful effects on programs?

Open-ended response

16. Are there any other effects the program review has brought about directly or indirectly?

Open-ended response

If the person participated in more than one program review:

17. In what ways (if any) did the process and procedures of the most **recent** review differ from the previous review?

Open-ended response

Additional questions to ask:

18. Are there any other individuals that I should consider involving in this study?

19. Would you like to receive a summary of the findings when they are available?



## Appendix I

### E-MAIL INTERVIEW REMINDER

**Email Subject Line:** Interview Reminder

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study *Effects of Outcome-Oriented Program Review Policy Changes in Ontario Universities*. This is a quick reminder of the interview we have scheduled on:

Date: *To be determined*

Time: *To be determined,*

Location: *To be determined*

And I will contact you at: *<telephone number if conducted by phone>*.

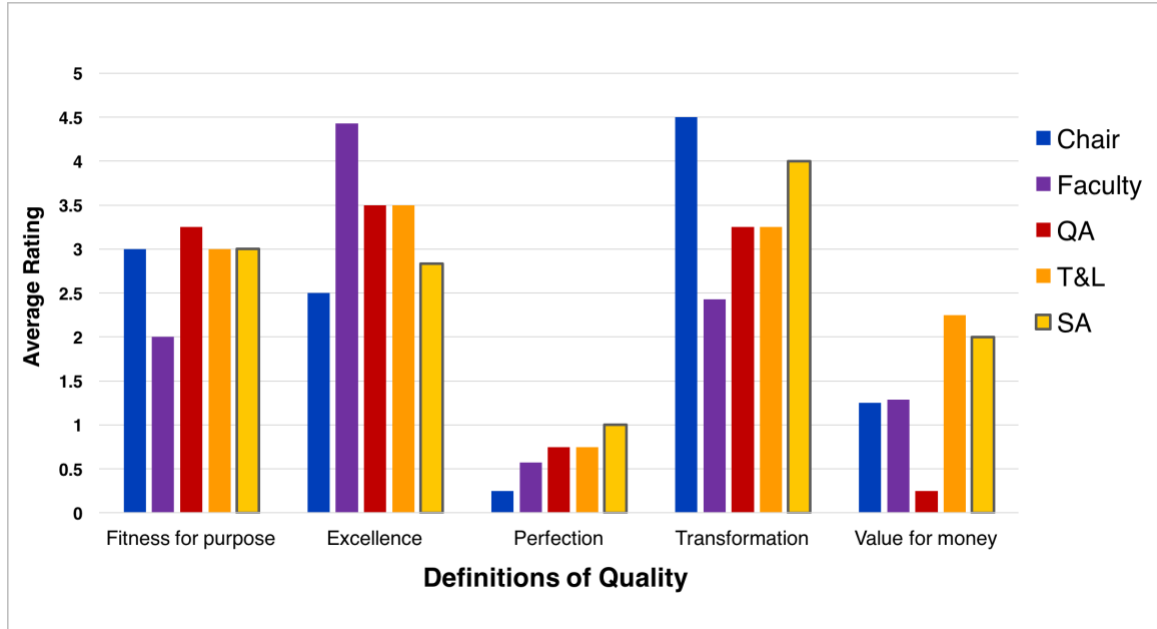
Attached you'll find the questions that will be used to guide the interview. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Name Here  
Doctoral Candidate  
Brock University  
[pb11sg@brocku.ca](mailto:pb11sg@brocku.ca)

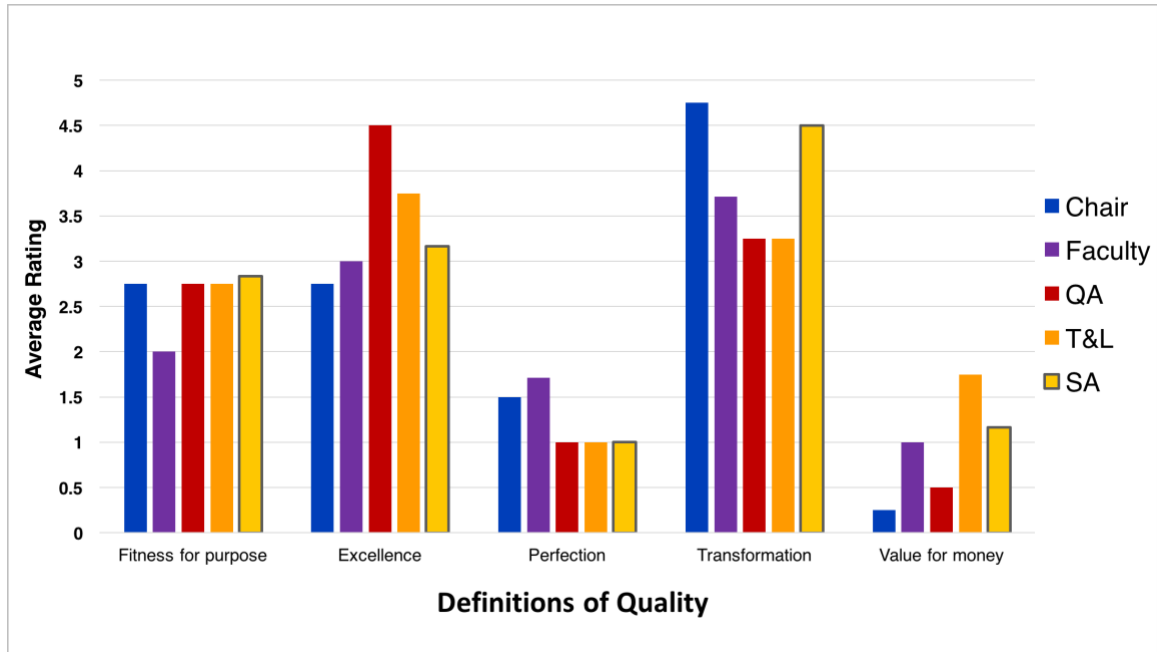
*Attachment: Interview Questions*

## Appendix J



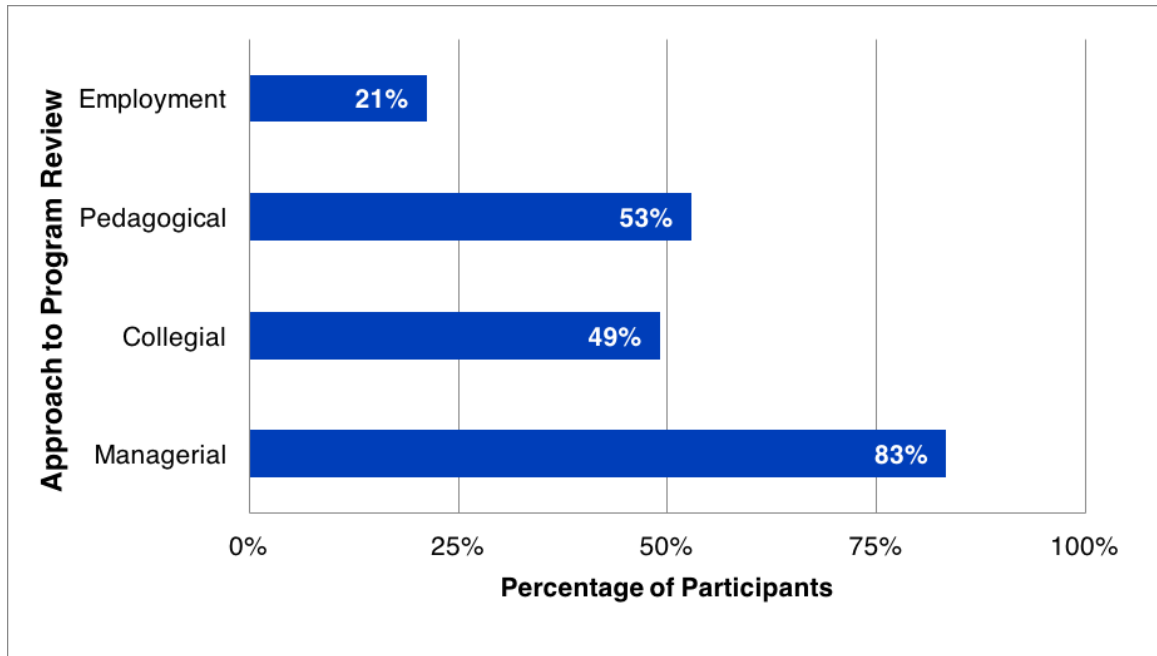
*Figure 8.* How senior administrators are perceived to define a quality university by various groups. Participants selected all definitions they believed Senior Administrators would apply. Yellow outlined bars indicate Senior Administrators' own response. n = 26.

## Appendix K



*Figure 9.* Definitions of quality that apply to my university. Each group identified the definitions of quality that applied at their university.

## Appendix L



*Figure 10.* Approaches taken to the program review. Indicates the percentage of respondents selecting each approach. n = 26

## Appendix M

### Paired Statement Table

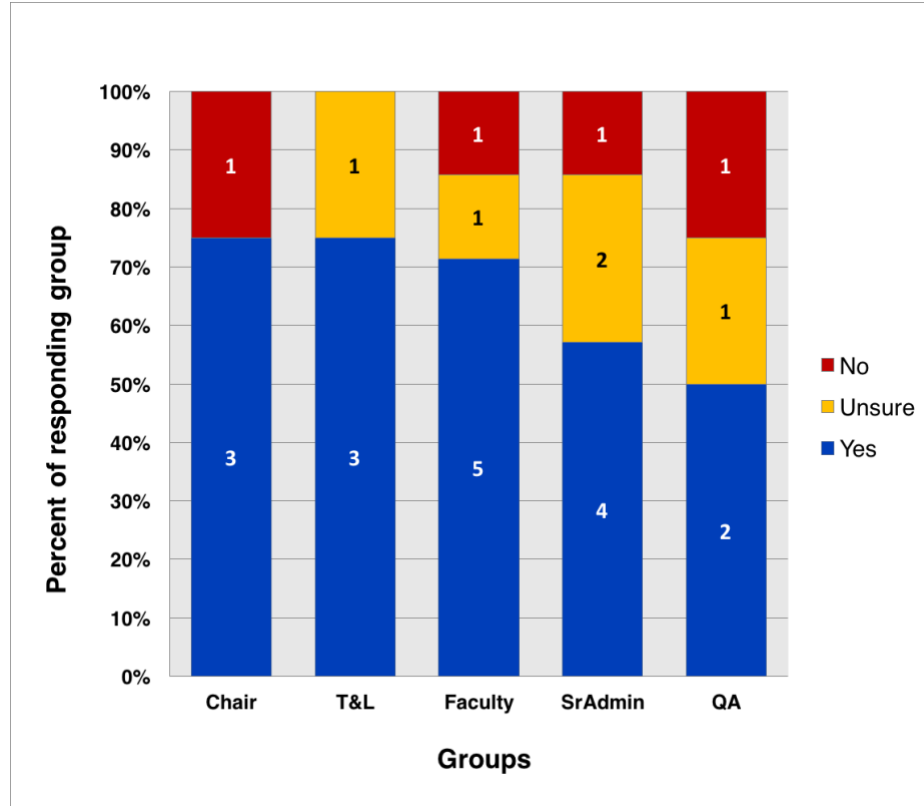
Table 13

*Participants Were Asked Which of the Following Statements Better Applies, at this University the Program Review*

	Seeks to identify flaws	Seeks to identify patterns	Structure strictly controlled department/school process and procedures	Structures allow some flexibility in process and procedures	Climate of control	Climate development	Top down	Bottom up	Focus on the past	Focus on the future	Functions to affirm current practices	Functions of a focus on development	Primarily aims to address external standards	Primarily aims to address own standards
Chair	25%	75%	0%	100%	0%	100%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	25%	75%
Faculty	43%	57%	14%	86%	57%	43%	86%	14%	43%	57%	71%	29%	29%	71%
QA	50%	50%	25%	75%	25%	75%	50%	50%	25%	75%	25%	75%	50%	50%
T&L	25%	75%	0%	100%	50%	50%	50%	50%	25%	75%	50%	50%	25%	75%
Sr Admin	17%	83%	0%	100%	17%	83%	17%	83%	33%	67%	33%	67%	67%	33%
All but Sr Admin	36%	64%	10%	90%	33%	67%	59%	41%	36%	64%	49%	51%	32%	68%

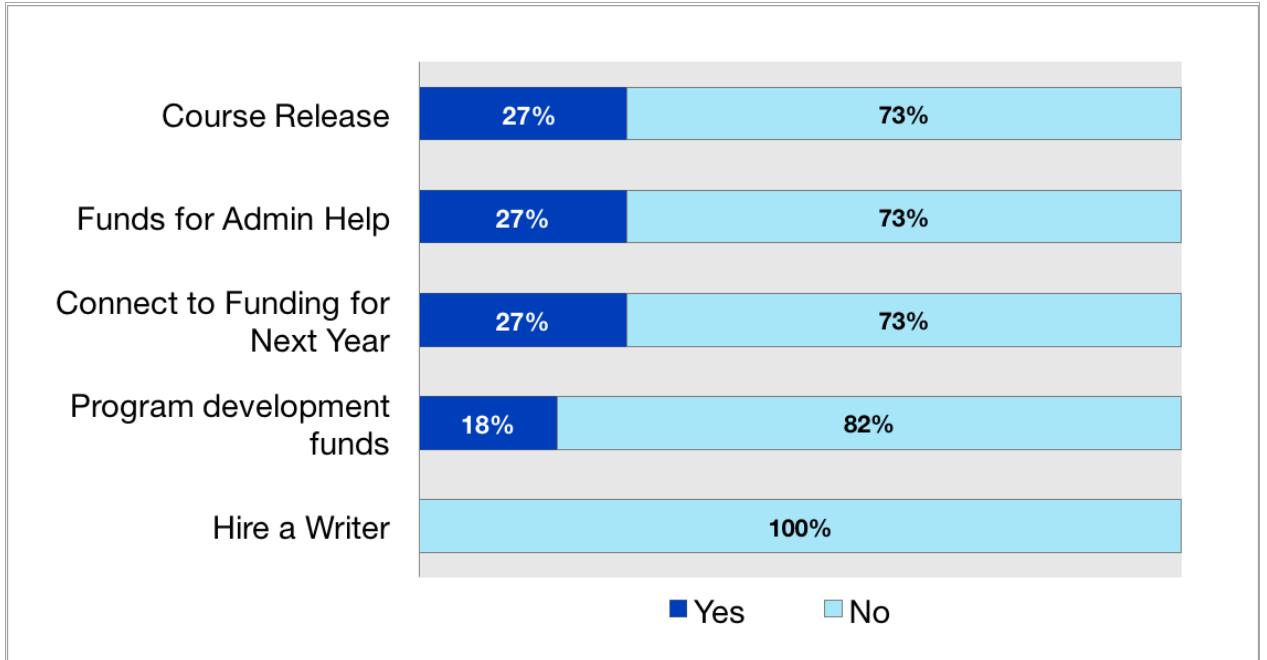
Note. For graphed results see Figures 5 and 6.

## Appendix N



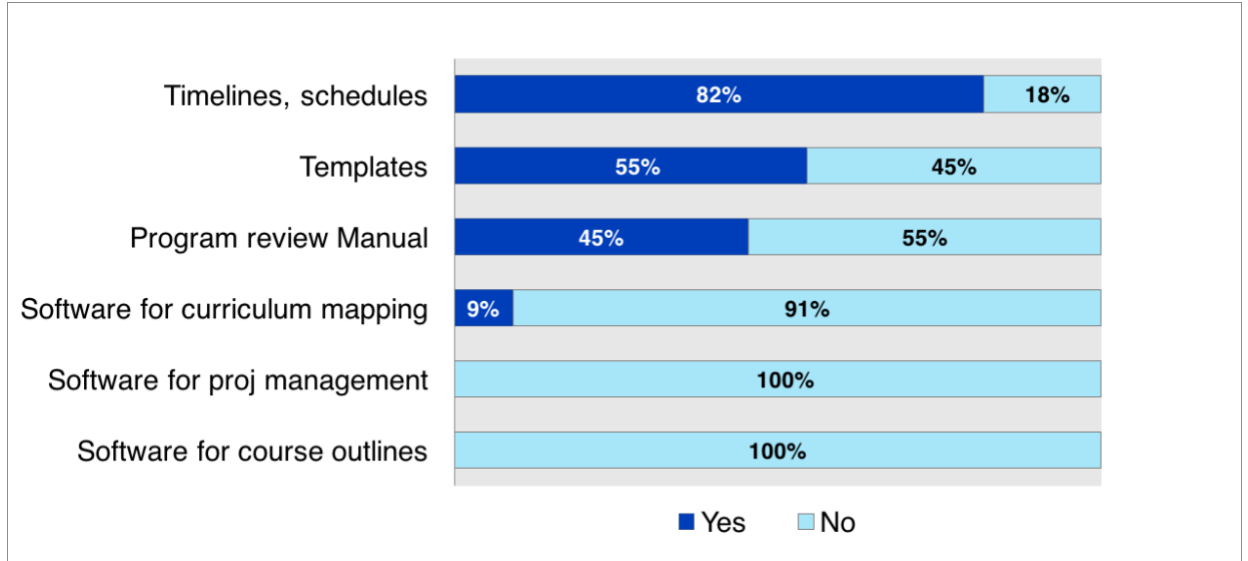
*Figure 11.* Did development of Learning Outcomes have any effects? Percentage for each group. With Individual counts displayed. n = 26.

## Appendix O



*Figure 12.* Forms of financial support available for program review identified by participants. Mean score from each group averaged together.

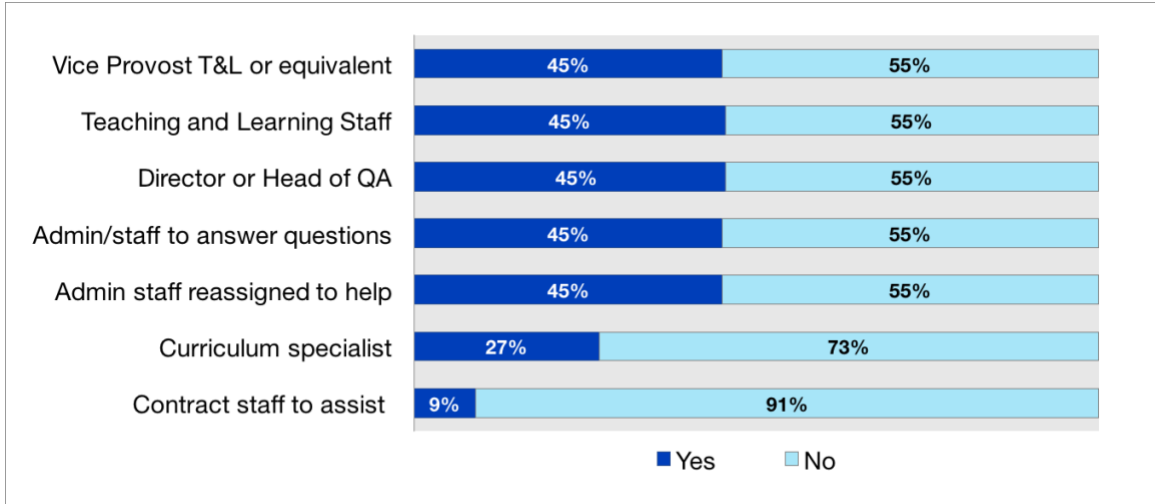
## Appendix P



*Figure 13.* Forms of resources or documentation available for program review identified by participants. Mean score from each group averaged together.

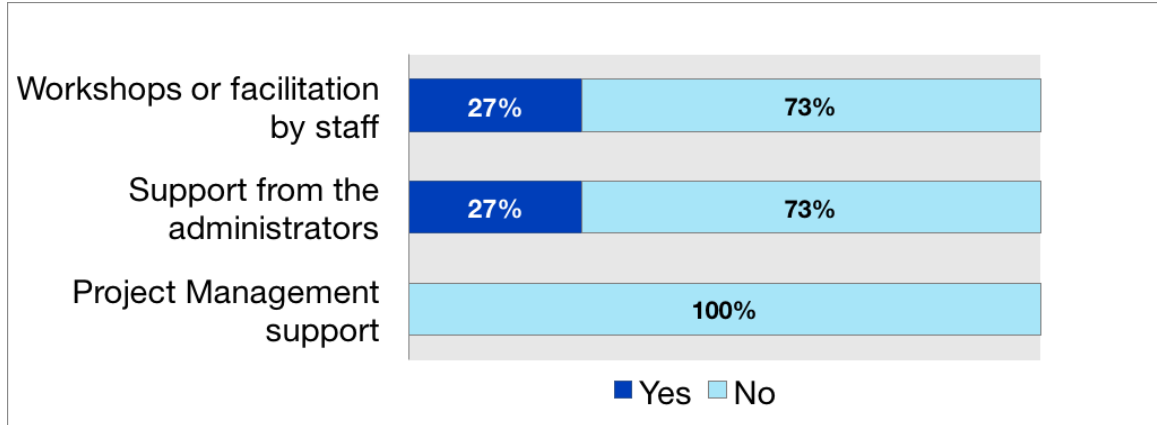


## Appendix Q



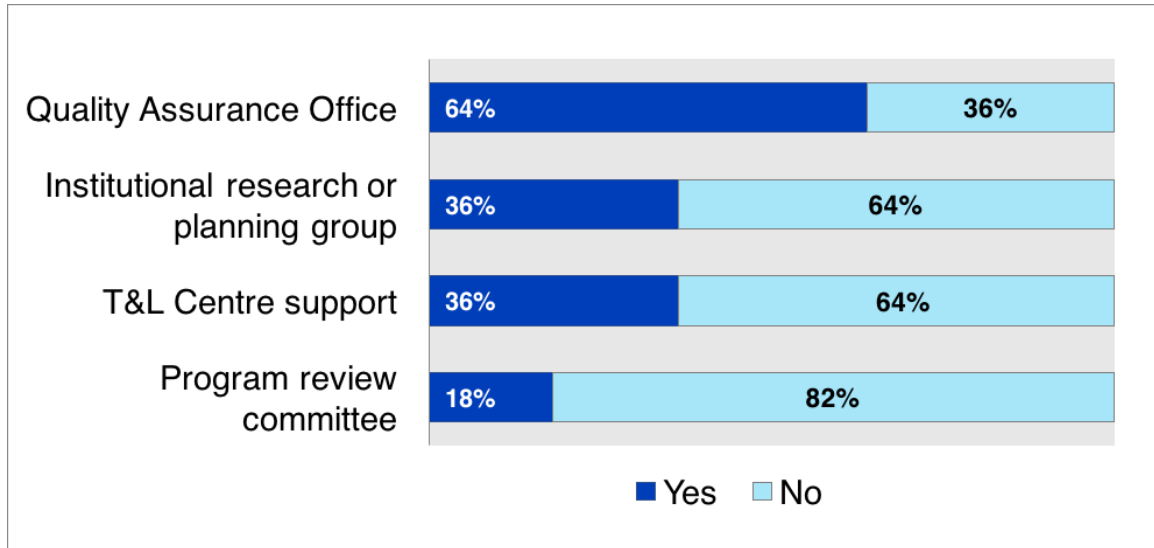
*Figure 14.* People or positions identified as providing support for the program review. Mean score from each group averaged together.

## Appendix R



*Figure 15.* Additional services or support identified as available to support the program review. Mean score from each group averaged together.

## Appendix S



*Figure 16.* Structures supporting the program review. Mean score from each group averaged together.

## Appendix T

### Clustered Questions Addressing Impact on Quality

Please note numbers are not sequential. Related responses are clustered together. Numbers below correspond to the interview questions within each cluster.

#### Cluster one: Possible effects of the program

9. What types of changes (if any),
  - 9.1. do you think have, or will, result from the program review?
  - 9.2. do you think will, result from the program review?

#### Clustered two: Quality of the degree and program accountability

11. Do you think the current program review process is likely to affect the quality of:
  - 1.1.1. the degree program/s
  - 1.1.2. program accountability (being responsible to students and the public for the programs offered)

#### Cluster three: department related changes

12. Did the development/refinement of program learning outcomes have any effects?
10. Do you think the review will result in changes at the **course** level?
13. What effects (if any) would you say the program review has had on (or will have on):
  - 13.1. program planning?
  - 13.2. individuals in the department/school?
  - 13.3. departmental/school culture? (shared values, beliefs, assumptions)
  - 13.4. the institution itself
14. Do you think the program review has affected the power dynamics within the department/school?
15. Has the program review had any harmful effects on programs?

#### Cluster four: Changes to the institution.

- 13.4 The fifth cluster deals with changes to the institution itself.

#### Cluster five: Power and harmful effects

16. Do you think the program review has affected the power dynamics within the department or university?
17. Has the program review had any harmful effects on the program

## Appendix U

Table 14.

### *Categories of Change Reported*

No.	Category	Abbreviated Change Reported	Level
1	Faculty Attitude	fewer complaints about accountability and micromanagement	Sr. Admin
2		more positive attitude toward curriculum support services	T&L Staff
3		more serious discussion regarding teaching	T&L Staff
4	Administrative	ability to see changes in program over period of time	Sr. Admin
5		able to compare programs to comparators at other institutions	Sr. Admin
6		able to see how our programs compare to other programs	Sr. Admin
7		access to data	Faculty
8		all programs must develop a Strategic Plan	QA Staff
9		all programs are provided with common data	Sr. Admin
10		Introduced annual reports	Sr. Admin
11		asking difficult questions of a program is a change	QA Staff
12		benchmarking is now possible	Sr. Admin
13		deadlines are now more strict	QA Staff
14		external review process is entirely new	Sr. Admin
15		follow up is mandated as part of the process	QA Staff
16		follow up reporting required by institution	QA Staff
17		follow up to reviews is mandated	Sr. Admin
18		follow-up on recommendations is now required	QA Staff
19		greater alumni engagement	Sr. Admin
20		greater awareness of and increased profile of curriculum support services	T&L Staff
21		greater emphasis on QA Staff with new Quality Assurance office	T&L Staff
22		greater engagement of stakeholders	Sr. Admin
23		increasing clarity around definitions e.g., major modifications and new programs	Sr. Admin
24		minor things structural to the institution	Chair
25		modified how we completed exams	Chair
26		more consistent data available across programs	QA Staff
27		Justified a new academic advisor	Faculty
28		new faculty hires	Faculty
29		new process for graduate program is one more layer of bureaucracy to make program changes	Sr. Admin
30		procedural changes	Faculty
31		program must articulate alignment with university plans	QA Staff
32		programs are more accountable	T&L Staff
33		programs are more accountable for submissions	QA Staff

No.	Category	Abbreviated Change Reported	Level	
34	Administrative (cont'd)	quality of data provided improves annually	QA Staff	
35		recommendations require follow up	QA Staff	
36		reduced autonomy	Sr. Admin	
37		required university to consider how majors are counted	QA Staff	
38		review has a higher profile	QA Staff	
39		review provided the evidence for a major curriculum change	Chair	
40		review recommendations are more likely to be implemented	Sr. Admin	
41		struggling program joined a stronger program to mutual benefit	QA Staff	
42		too much bureaucracy for a graduate program	Sr. Admin	
43		transparency regarding admission	Faculty	
44		Curriculum	a lot of curriculum reorganization across programs	Sr. Admin
45			all programs going through curriculum mapping	Sr. Admin
46			curriculum as a living document	Sr. Admin
47	Increased curricular awareness from conducting self-study		QA Staff	
48	curricular awareness from external reviewers		QA Staff	
49	better strategies for assessing program outcomes		T&L Staff	
50	changing fields		Sr. Admin	
51	clarity about why some majors excluded from courses		Faculty	
52	created minors		QA Staff	
53	curriculum mapping to review and consider gaps		Sr. Admin	
54	data laid groundwork for curriculum change		Faculty	
55	students can declare major at a later point		Chair	
56	definitions about major modifications or new program		Faculty	
57	deleted majors		QA Staff	
58	we are developing deliberate thoughtful integrated curriculum		Sr. Admin	
59	curriculum development		Faculty	
60	feedback on minors and majors		Faculty	
61	forward planning for a future oriented curriculum		QA Staff	
62	Identified gaps & overlap		QA Staff	
63	graduate and undergraduate programs being linked		Sr. Admin	
64	greater engagement with curriculum support services		T&L Staff	
65	identified need for more writing in program	Faculty		
66	informal communications now mired in formal communications	Sr. Admin		
67	introduced options or fields	Sr. Admin		
68	introduced streams	Sr. Admin		
69	major curriculum overhaul	Chair		
70	minor modifications but major for the department	QA Staff		
71	program development	T&L Staff		
72	program divided into three distinct areas	QA Staff		
73	program level change	Faculty		
74	program structure	T&L Staff		

No.	Category	Abbreviated Change Reported	Level
75	Curriculum (cont'd)	pruning back or expanding streams, options fields	Sr. Admin
76		rehailed the whole program	Faculty
77		reinstated a minor	QA Staff
78		Reorganized – merged two majors	QA Staff
79		shift from request for resources to curriculum focus	QA Staff
80		streamlined electives	T&L Staff
81		focus on student learning rather than faculty teaching	Sr. Admin
82	Course related	added writing and library skills	Faculty
83		changed crediting of courses	Faculty
84		changed weighting of courses	Chair
85		changed own courses	T&L Staff
86		courses never offered formally deleted	Faculty
87		deleted low enrolment courses	Faculty
88		deleted courses	Faculty
89		Course development	Faculty
90		identified gaps and overlap in courses	T&L Staff
91		more cohesive – previously no cohesion between courses	Sr. Admin
92		more course development	Faculty
93		more electives	Faculty
94		we now talk about how program courses relate to each other	Sr. Admin
95		redistribution courses	Chair
96		shift away from thinking of courses as content	Sr. Admin
97	Effects on Faculty Members	collegial discussion regarding teaching and learning	T&L Staff
98		departmental group reflection	T&L Staff
99		discuss pedagogical matters	Sr. Admin
100		discussion about outcomes	T&L Staff
101		discussion about teaching	T&L Staff
102		external peer review is helpful so people feel heard	Faculty
103		more engagement with faculty	Sr. Admin
104		faculty peer learning	T&L Staff
105		faculty told to communicate more	Chair
106		increased departmental reflection	T&L Staff
107	increased efficient departmental collaboration	T&L Staff	
108	increased evidence based focus	Sr. Admin	
109	increased load	Sr. Admin	
110	increased roadblocks	Sr. Admin	
111	process helped reduce influence of dysfunctional faculty	Faculty	
112	reduced autonomy	Sr. Admin	
113	Reflection	T&L Staff	
114	Reflection	Faculty	
115	rethinking putting students through what faculty went through	Sr. Admin	
116	retirements sometimes facilitate change	Sr. Admin	

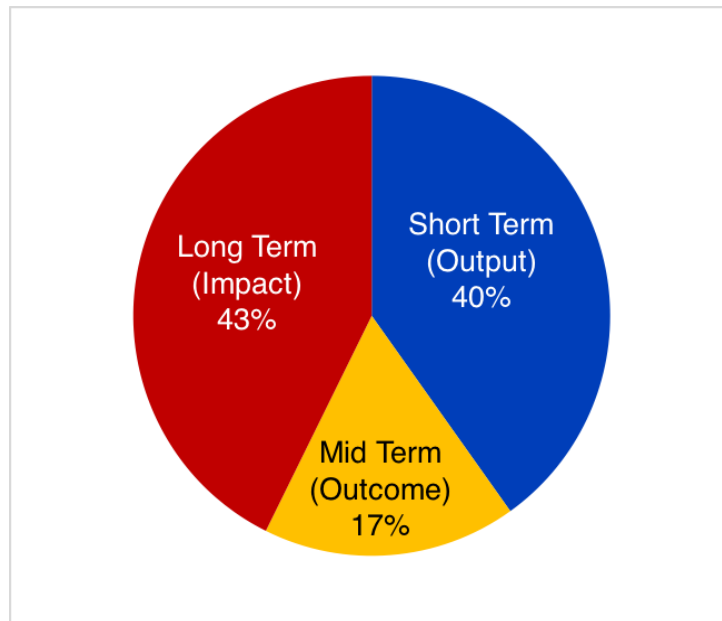
No.	Category	Abbreviated Change Reported	Level
117		some programs have changed significantly	Sr. Admin
118		talk about significant issues	Sr. Admin
119		thinking about programs and degrees and curriculum not just what students choose to take [more intentional]	Sr. Admin
120	Learning Outcomes	all programs have learning outcomes	Sr. Admin
121		articulating learning outcomes in a developmental way somehow advances individual learning	T&L Staff
122		being more explicit about communicating learning outcomes	T&L Staff
123		connection between thesis and courses	Sr. Admin
124		discussion of learning outcomes feels beneficial	T&L Staff
125		firmed up purposes for courses	T&L Staff
126		sharing perspectives; opportunity for common ground	T&L Staff
127		Faculty pay more attention to program Learning outcomes	QA Staff
128		Refined thinking	T&L Staff
129		awareness the process involves curriculum and supports are needed so students can be successful	Sr. Admin
130		more articulated than before but no real change on the ground	T&L Staff
131		more directly considered	Sr. Admin
132		there is now a connection between curriculum and learning outcomes	Sr. Admin
133	No Change	anticipate no changes will occur for problems identified	Faculty
134		changes that would have occurred anyway	Chair
135		curriculum	Faculty
136		done now it will sit on the shelf	Chair
137		hardly any	T&L Staff
138		no substantive changes	Chair
139		recognition resourced with no change	Faculty
140		nothing direct	Chair
141	Pedagogical	assessment is in its infancy	QA Staff
142		assessment is starting to become a focus	Sr. Admin
143	Faculty Reflection	documentation of increased need with no follow up	Chair
144		recognition program under resourced	Faculty
145		changes to maximize limited resources	Faculty
146		consolidate to save resources	QA Staff
147		consolidation of departments to maximize resources	QA Staff
148		data made case for new equip resources	Faculty
149	Student Related Changes	awareness of student accomplishments	Faculty
150		Increased communication with students	Faculty



151	gaps in programs - added minor to address student needs	QA Staff
152	people thinking about outside expectations	Sr. Admin
153	process centered on students	Faculty
154	strengthened resources for students	QA Staff
155	student expectations are now a consideration	Sr. Admin
156	student feedback is solicited	QA Staff
157	student focus	Sr. Admin

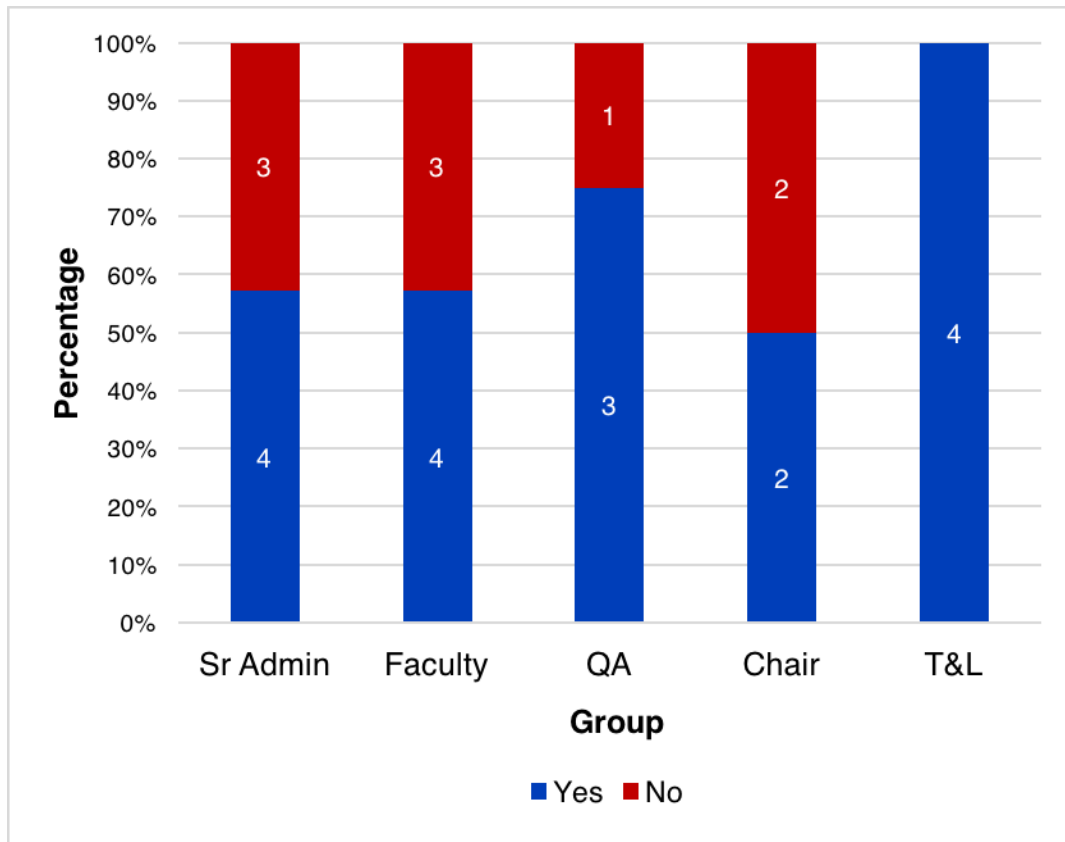
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## Appendix V



*Figure 17.* Expected impact: short, mid and long term as identified by participants.

## Appendix W



*Figure 18.* Will changes result from the program review? Average distribution for each group. Individual counts displayed. n = 26

## Appendix X

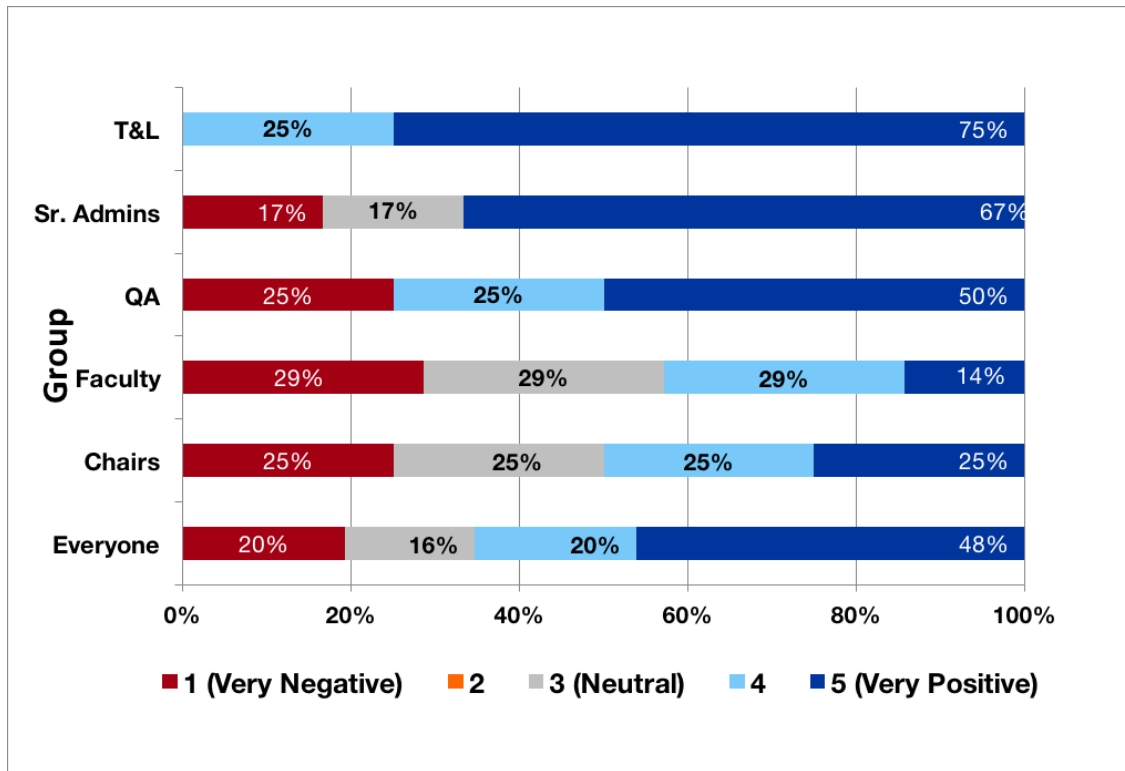
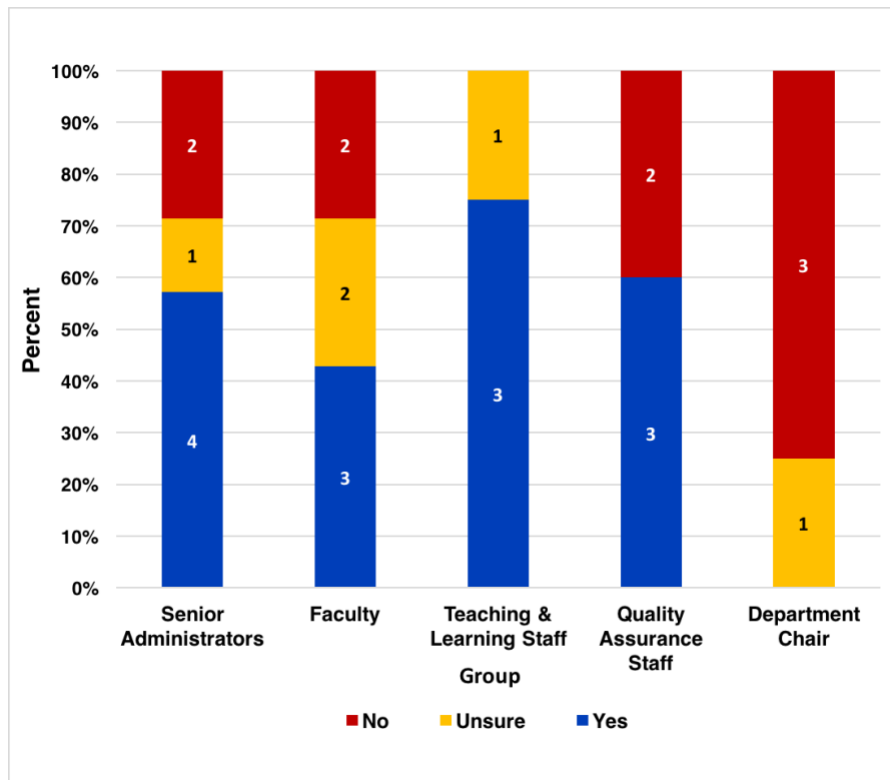


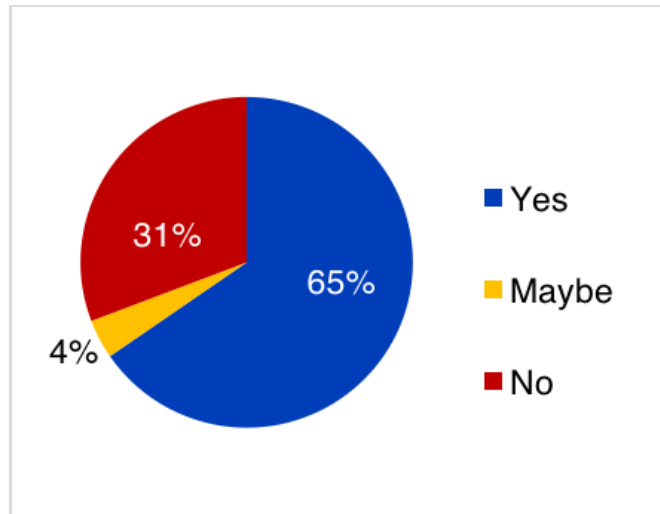
Figure 19. Attitudes regarding future changes. Percentages by group and overall average, n = 26.

## Appendix Y



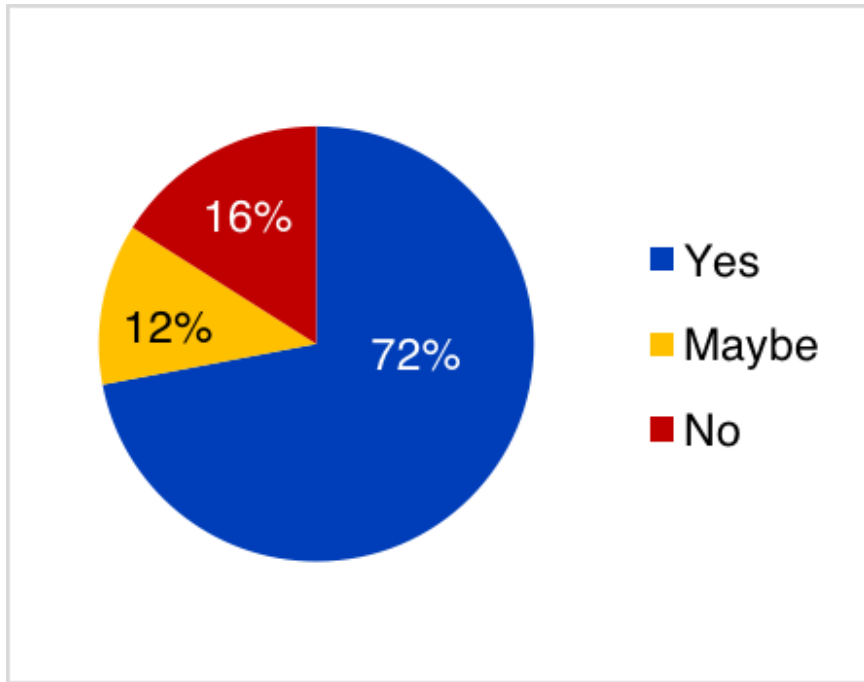
*Figure 20.* Will the Review Process Affect the Quality of the Degree Program?  
Responses averaged for each group. Individual counts displayed, n = 27.

## Appendix Z



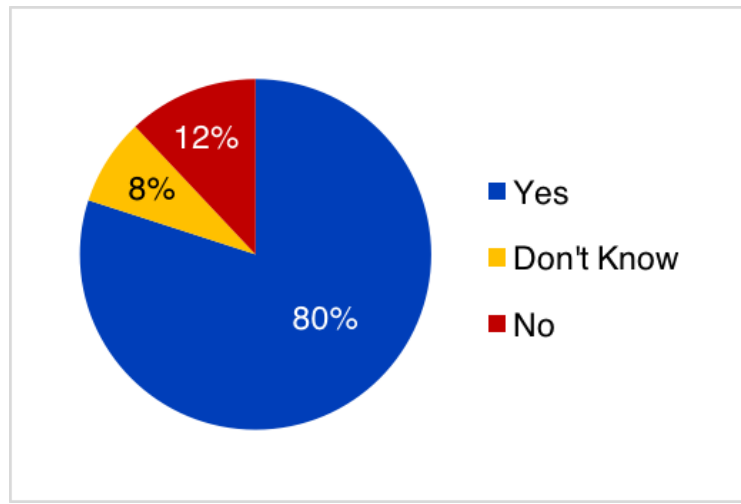
*Figure 21.* Likelihood of the review process affecting program accountability. Proportion of responses. N = 25 (one senior administrator did not respond to this question).

## Appendix AA



*Figure 22.* Will the Review result in course level changes? Proportion of participant responses. N = 25 (one response not provided).

## Appendix BB



*Figure 23.* Will the review affect Program Planning? Proportion of participant responses.  
n = 25.



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