

## Periodic Review of Taught Programmes

### Aims of the Periodic Review Process

- To assure for ourselves the quality and standards of taught programmes provision of the University of Sunderland against internal and external points of reference
- To provide a robust mechanism for re-approving programmes in the light of experience and in the context of subject specialist advice;
- To take a holistic view of taught provision in a subject area and support the strategic planning of programme development;
- To enhance provision by identifying and disseminating good practice, and identifying areas for improvement.

### Membership of the Review Panel

- Member or nominee of University Quality Management Sub-Committee (QMSC) (Chair);
- A member of the Faculty under review but from a different academic area. If this is not possible, an additional member of another Faculty will be appointed to the panel;
- Member(s) of another faculty - to a maximum of 3 so that one member can participate in each sub-group if the panel divides;
- External panel members (subject specialists) - one for each area identified to a maximum of 3;
- An additional subject specialist or an employer representative if required to cover the provision appropriately.
- A student representative identified by the Students' Union whose programme of study was/is in a different Faculty to that under review; (normally an elected sabbatical officer or a School Representation Co-ordinator)
- Where a panel divides into sub-groups, additional student members to be drawn from student representatives whose programme of study is in the Faculty under review, but in a different academic area;
- Service users, patients, carers or the public, where this is a requirement of the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), i.e. Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). QMSC, via Quality Support, are responsible for appointing the service user, patient, carer or member of the public, should the PSRB require attendance on a review panel. Participants will generally be selected from existing lists in place in the respective Faculty. Participants will:

- be aged 18 years or over;
- not be, or have been within the last three years a member of staff or student in the University, nor should they have a close personal connection with the Faculty proposing the programme;
- be eligible to work in the UK.

All participants will have specific training for involvement by the faculty and by Quality Support and will be supported by staff appropriately.

NB: the unplanned absence of a student panel member from either category will not prevent the review from proceeding. Academic Registry will provide the Students' Union (USSU) with a list of periodic reviews in that academic year, and USSU will confirm which elected officer will attend each review.

Notes on the appointment and role of the external panel member are attached as Appendix 1. The panel will be supported by a Quality Officer in Academic Registry.

### Duration of the Review

2 or 3 days. A draft timetable for the review is attached as Appendix 2. However this timetable is in no sense prescriptive and appropriate arrangements will be made for each review.

### Frequency and Coverage of the Review

Each subject area will be reviewed once every 6 years. New programmes approved in the period between reviews will be included in the next review, even if their validation has not expired, so that they are aligned with the rest of the subject area.

### Overview of the Process

The review will cover the following aspects of provision. In all cases the emphasis will be on developments to enhance quality:

- alignment of programme and module learning outcomes with external points of reference particularly subject benchmarks, Northern Ireland Credit and Accumulation Transfer System (NICATS) level descriptors and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ);
- alignment of the modes of teaching, learning and assessment with learning outcomes;
- quality and use of learning resources;
- academic support to promote student learning and achievement;
- student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning;
- outcomes including student progression, achievement and employment data;
- mechanisms to monitor and enhance quality including student feedback, use of external examiners and Annual Review.

## University of Sunderland in London

All our programmes are reviewed on a six-yearly cycle and revalidated in 'clusters' agreed with faculties. This is an academic review of the programme content and standards plus the quality of the on-campus student experience. It is very important that we treat students at the London campus as we would other on-campus students: they are not collaborative provision students whose experience is considered separately at periodic partner review. The proposal is therefore, that whenever programmes are reviewed and revalidated at Sunderland, which have students at the London campus, we should include separate meetings for (i) students and (ii) teaching staff from the London campus on the same basis as Sunderland students and staff (i.e. a similar sample of students and a similar staff group). These meetings could be held by video-conference or in person at either London or Sunderland. If necessary the periodic review will be extended.

## Guidance for Review Panel Members

For each of the following aspects, the review panel should ensure that it discusses with the programme team and provides a brief description of the key features of the provision followed by particular strengths, innovations and examples of good practice and areas of concern or development:

- a) curriculum design and content and alignment with faculty and university strategies, including alignment with the university's priorities in terms of
  - i. employability skills, including curriculum linkages to professional practice; and opportunities for students to meet and work with professionals in their field of study throughout the programme
  - ii. transferable and graduate skills,
  - iii. strategies for student retention.
  - iv. research active curriculum
- b) teaching, learning and assessment
- c) student support including personal tutoring and the quality of information provided to students. This will include specific measures to notify and protect the interests of students on programmes being discontinued
- d) student achievement and progression (including progression to employment)
- e) learning resources
- f) quality management

## Detail of the Process – see Schedule Appendix 3

- Overall schedules will be agreed with Faculty Academic Deans for the forthcoming 6-year period.
- Faculties will be reminded of the planned schedule for their reviews during the academic year before the review is scheduled to take place. This will allow time for the Faculty to:
  - update programme specifications;
  - obtain support for any aspects of the review with which they are unfamiliar;
  - nominate external subject-specialists for the panel

and for review dates to be finalised by Academic Registry.

Approximately 8 weeks before the review is to take place, faculties will provide the initial documentation requested (see Appendix 4).

- Each review panel may subdivide into 2 or 3 sub-groups, each with an external specialist, to review agreed sub-areas within the academic area in parallel. No more than 3 such sub-groups can be managed: if more are required, a separate review must be held for one or more of the sub-areas. Each sub-group should normally consider all the provision in that area – i.e. the sub-division should be by academic area not by programme type or level.
- Meetings will normally be held with:
  - the Academic Dean and key senior staff;
  - representative undergraduate students;
  - representative postgraduate taught students;
  - academic staff in the subject area concerned

These meetings may be amalgamated or subdivided if this is more practicable; additional meetings may be held subject to negotiation between the Chair of the review panel and the Academic Dean.

The Faculty will identify a number of students, proportionate to the student numbers on the programmes, to meet the review panel. Student participants should, as far as practicable, represent all programmes and levels of study, mature, students with disabilities and overseas students.

A review of the use of teaching and learning resources will be undertaken which may necessitate a visit to particular facilities by one or more members of the review panel.

Preliminary oral feedback will be given to the Faculty at the end of the review.

The review will include revalidation of all taught programmes for the next 6 years on the basis of the Programme Specification and of the supporting evidence seen by the panel. The review panel will make recommendations to university QMSC in respect of all the taught programmes reviewed.

The normal period of revalidation is 6 years. This reflects a threshold judgement by the review panel that the programme is fit for purpose, current and well-managed and that students are receiving an appropriate quality of experience.

If the review panel does not believe this to be the case the panel may:

- re-approve a programme for a shorter period of time, typically 1 or 2 years, to allow for major short-comings to be addressed. The required actions must be clearly specified in the recommendations of the report, with a time-scale. A further, smaller-scale, review will normally be carried out at the end of this period to assure the quality and standards of the provision concerned, and to consider extending approval to the end of the six-year term following the *original* review;
- require that a programme be withdrawn and that no further recruitment be carried out. In this case the review panel will give re-approval to cover only the period required to teach-out the existing students. There will usually be a requirement for key recommendations to be carried out as a matter of extreme urgency to support the experience of existing students; however further developmental work would not be expected.

## Note

1. that different decisions may be made in relation to different programmes within the same review: the fact that one programme is given a shorter period of re-approval does not mean that the rest cannot be re-approved for the full 6 years. This should be made clear on the revalidation form.
2. If a programme requires a programme-specific regulation, then this can be recommended by the panel but they cannot approve it. Programme-specific regulations can be approved only by the DVC (Academic) on behalf of Academic Board.

## The Review Report – see Appendix 5.

- The report will be structured to reflect the main aspects of quality and standards
- The text will provide the content for each requirement, recommendation and commendation and justify the conclusions drawn. All requirements, recommendations and commendations will be cross-referenced to the relevant parts of the text.
- A draft report will be sent to the review panel for comment and then, within 4 weeks of the review visit, to the Faculty for comment on factual errors. The report will be sent to programme or subject leader(s) as appropriate and copied to the Academic Dean. The draft report should be returned by the Faculty to the supporting officer for the review panel within a further 2 weeks. The final report will be confirmed and sent to the Faculty within a further 2 weeks.

## Follow-Up Procedures

New Programme Key Information Set Form to be completed by the Programme Leader with the relevant member of Academic Registry. Where appropriate this may be delayed until relevant requirements have been met; otherwise it may be completed immediately after the event. *(This form applies to new programmes and to those brought back for revalidation as the result of major changes. It does not apply to on-going programmes revalidated in periodic review unless there are major changes at that point).*

The report will be copied to the Head of CELT who will support the Faculty in areas of development, for example by directing colleagues to resources and examples of good practice. He will also note good practice identified in the report for dissemination.

Corrective action will be divided into two categories: Requirements - those requiring immediate action (for which a timescale may be stipulated) and Recommendations - those to be considered within the annual monitoring process.

### **Requirements** (requiring immediate action):

The Faculty must provide evidence of actions taken by the stated deadline. This should be sent to the Quality Officer of the review panel who will liaise with the Chair of the panel to consider whether the requirements have been met appropriately. Other members of the panel, particularly the external representative(s) may be consulted. Further evidence may be requested if necessary.

Faculties are advised to structure their response to requirements as follows:

- Requirement
- Notes of action taken and other relevant comments
- Append evidence of the action

If the Chair of the panel is satisfied with the response, QMSC (or the Chair of QMSC on its behalf) will receive a copy of the requirements of the panel and the follow-up action. If the Chair is not satisfied with the response, the Faculty will be asked to engage in further development and/or to produce further evidence.

As one of the aims of the periodic review process is to re-approve programmes, if the stated deadline for requirements is not met, the programme team will need to submit a request, via Academic Registry, to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), for additional time to complete the response to requirements.

In the event of dispute between the panel Chair and the Faculty, the matter will be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

**Recommendations** (to be addressed at a future date, generally at the next annual monitoring review):

Evidence must be provided of the actions taken in response to the recommendations. The evidence will comprise:

- Extract from Development Grid and appendices of relevant evidence

Academic Registry will liaise with the Chair of the panel to consider whether the recommendations have been met appropriately. Acceptable signatories (in order of preference) are:

- The original chair of the panel
- A member of the original panel
- Chair of Quality Management Sub Committee

Other members of the panel, particularly the external representative(s) may be consulted. Further evidence may be requested if necessary. If the Chair of the panel is satisfied with the response this will be reported to QMSC. If the Chair is not satisfied with the response, the Faculty will be asked to engage in further development and/or to produce further evidence. The outcome of this will be reported to QMSC.

In the event of dispute between the panel Chair and the Faculty, the matter will be referred to the DVC (Academic).

### Combined Subject Programmes

Subject-specific contributions to Combined Subject degrees will be assessed within each review. A separate review of the Combined Subject programmes will be undertaken to explore the overall management of the programmes including the structure of permitted student choice, academic support and opportunities for student feedback. This is likely to require a one-day review only.

### Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation

PSRB visits may be articulated with internal review to minimise the burden on Faculties and to ensure alignment between the recommendations of accrediting bodies and of the University. In doing this it is important, however, that the internal review process is not

compromised; in particular external specialists should not be asked to represent both the University and the PSRB as this could represent a conflict of interest. Each case will be considered on its merits but the following options should be considered:

- the clustering of programmes for internal review may group those with a particular accreditation requirement together, with other programmes handled through a separate review;
- internal reviews may take place more frequently than every 6 years to align with PSRB schedules, for example when these are quinquennial. Under no circumstances may an internal review cycle be longer than 6 years;
- a PSRB visit may take place slightly in advance of the internal review so that the review panel will be aware of the recommendations of the PSRB and can take these into account;
- an internal review may take place before a PSRB visit so that the internal review can support a Faculty in preparing for accreditation;
- documentation required for a PSRB visit may be used for the internal review provided that it covers the same ground as that required internally, with any additional material required internally being supplied.

Proposals to align an internal review with a PSRB visit should be discussed between the Faculty concerned and the Quality Manager in Academic Registry and brought to the Chair of Quality Management Sub-Committee for approval.

Confirmation is required whether service users, patients, carers or public involvement is required in the review of the cluster. Clarification is required as to whether this is due to a PSRB requirement and the extent of the involvement, i.e. by attending the review or whether an alternative mechanism is needed to ensure involvement.

## **Appointment of External Reviewers for Periodic Review**

1. The number of external reviewers required will be agreed with Academic Registry in the light of the spread of programmes under review, to a maximum of three. For each reviewer required, two reviewers should be nominated if possible, in order of preference, following consultation with colleagues, by the Academic Dean of the Faculty whose provision is to be reviewed. The consultation process should elicit consensus that the reviewer(s) chosen will have credibility with colleagues. (Two nominations will save time should the first nominee be unable to assist with the review).

The nomination should be sent to Academic Registry for approval by the Quality Manager on behalf of QMSC at least three months before the review is scheduled to take place. Brief details of the individuals' academic credentials are required. Academic Registry will approach the nominated individual to ask if he/she is willing to serve and to discuss the review dates.

All external panel members will be employed by the university by being paid a fee and therefore their eligibility to work in the UK must be checked and details sent to Human Resources Department ([Checking Eligibility of External Panel Members to Work in the UK](#)). This check will be carried out by Academic Registry.

2. To avoid conflict of interest a nominated reviewer should not be/have been:
  - currently or recently (within the last 5 years) an external examiner of the provision to be assessed;
  - a member of staff in the Faculty under review within the last 5 years;
  - a student in the Faculty under review within the last 5 years;
  - have any other close link (e.g. close research collaboration or a personal association).
3. A nominated reviewer should be:
  - an experienced, practising teacher of the subject area in higher education with at least three years relevant experience within UK HE;
  - be able to comment on the portfolio as a whole;
  - a specialist in an area or areas covered by the provision to be reviewed;
  - qualified to a level which matches or exceeds all awards that are being considered for approval.

## **The Remit of the External Reviewer**

1. The external reviewer will be a full member of the review panel. Since he/she is likely to be the only subject specialist on the panel he/she may be asked by the Chair of the review panel to pay particular attention to reviewing curriculum, academic standards (as defined by the subject area benchmarks) and subject-specific issues relating to teaching and learning including learning resources. However this does not exclude the input of the external reviewer into other aspects

of the review or of other members of the panel into curriculum, standards and teaching aspects. All views reached by the review panel are the combined responsibility of the full panel.

2. The external reviewer will be asked to commit him/herself to:
  - (a) participating fully in the review;
  - (b) commenting on the draft report;
  - (c) if required, commenting on any factual amendments to the report requested by the Faculty reviewed;
  - (d) if required, commenting in writing on the Faculty's response to the requirements and recommendations of the report;
  - (e) if required, advising the University further on any issues of concern arising from the follow-up process.
3. An inclusive fee will be payable for this assistance, plus travel and subsistence. The cost of this will be met centrally.

## Appendix 2

### **Example Timetable for Periodic Review**

Note: this timetable is an example. The details of meetings should be negotiated with the Academic Dean by the supporting quality officer in consultation with the chair of the review panel in advance of the review.

#### **DAY 1**

9.00-10.30: meeting of review panel to identify key issues. The supporting quality officer will present a summary of the bullet points identified by the panel in advance of the review and the panel will identify:

- a) strategic issues in relation to the development of the programmes
- b) good practice to be explored further
- c) possible areas of concern to be explored further
- d) issues which can be closed as a result of the information already presented

10.30-12.30: meeting of review panel with key staff (Academic Dean, Deputy Dean, Heads of School). This should focus on strategic issues including the forward development of the programmes in the context of the mission of the University and the Faculty, and resource issues

12.30-2.00 (with lunch): private meeting of review panel to review information to date and identify further issues to be considered by parallel meetings of review panel members allocated to each identified subject area.

2.00-2.30: panel divides, if required, into 2 or 3 sub-groups, each with an external subject specialist, to review previously agreed sub-areas within the academic area. The parallel sessions last until 12.00 on day 2.

2.30- 4.00: meeting with undergraduate students. The panel should explore systematically students' experience / awareness of:

- a) pre-entry information, open days, the application process
- b) induction and coming to terms with student life
- c) understanding of the programme and its requirements, including learning outcomes and the transferable skills developed
- d) the quality of teaching
- e) learning support materials and resources (including library, IT, use of the VLE, handbooks, subject-specific resources such as labs)
- f) the assessment process – do they understand what is required, are they aware of the assessment criteria, do they believe the processes to be fair?
- g) personal tutor support or equivalent
- h) support for students with particular problems – disabilities, English language problems, personal difficulties etc.
- i) opportunities to give feedback including awareness of how questionnaires are used in programme development (ask for examples of changes they are aware of in response to student comments)
- j) opportunities to put theory into practice – e.g. placements – where applicable
- k) opportunities for employment and/or further study following completion of the programme. In particular, students are to be asked whether they feel undertaking their programme has enhanced their employability
- l) accessing external examiner reports.

Encourage students to identify good practice as well as things which they would like to see improved.

4.45-5.30: panel meeting to summarise issues raised

## **DAY 2**

9.00-9.30: panel meetings to agree issues to be raised with postgraduates.

9.30-11.00: meeting with taught postgraduate students (agenda as for undergraduates above)

11.00-12.00: tour of resources if required

12.00-1.00: sub-groups summarise conclusions to date

1.00-4.00 (with lunch): panel reassembles, shares conclusions to date, identifies and reviews further documentation if required, and agrees issues to be raised with staff

4.00-5.00: further scrutiny of documentation, or additional meetings if required, e.g., with employers or members of Student Journey or with support staff in the Faculties or with new academic staff to explore particular issues

The panel should review good practice, areas of concern and planned developments in relation to:

- a) currency of the programmes and alignment with subject benchmarks
- b) alignment with professional requirements where applicable
- c) alignment of learning outcomes of the programmes with academic standards of the FHEQ and the NICATS descriptors
- d) alignment of programme learning outcomes with module outcomes and modes of teaching, learning and assessment
- e) student progression and achievement (entry qualifications, progression / wastage, employment destinations)
- f) student support including retention
- g) quality management including annual monitoring

## **DAY 3**

9.00- 12.00: meeting with programme leaders and other staff to explore issues identified on day 2.

12.00-2.00 (with lunch): panel identifies commendations, requirements and recommendations for the review report

2.00-3.00: oral feedback on key findings to Academic Dean, and programme leaders

Appendix 3  
**Review Schedule**

- 3 months or more

Meeting arranged by the supporting quality officer, to include the panel chair and the faculty team to discuss the arrangements for the event. This includes finalising the list of programmes to be reviewed, Faculty nominates external specialist(s) to be approached by Academic Registry to serve on the panel.

- 8 weeks

Faculty submits documentation required in advance. Academic Registry assembles additional documentation.

- 6 weeks

Academic Registry sends documentation to panel members.

- 4 weeks

Panel members send supporting officer bullet points of:

- a) areas of good practice, identifying the document(s) on which this is based;
- b) issues of concern, identifying the document(s) on which this is based;
- c) points which require further clarification and an indication of the evidence which might provide this.

- 2 weeks

Supporting quality officer, in consultation with the chair of the review panel, collates the summaries provided by panel members and shares this with the faculty team. If applicable, requests additional documentation from the Faculty, to be available on the day of the review (not in advance).

- 0 weeks

Review: 2 days.

+ 2 weeks

Draft review report circulated by supporting officer to panel members for comment.

+ 4 weeks

Report sent to Faculty for factual corrections, and a meeting arranged between the supporting quality officer and the faculty team to discuss and clarify the requirements, recommendations and commendations

+ 6 weeks

Factual comments submitted by faculty to Quality Support

+8 weeks

The final report will be confirmed and sent to the Faculty and to the DVC (Academic)

+14 weeks

Faculty responses to requirements and recommendations approved by the Academic Dean or nominee and returned to Quality Support.

Responses and report sent to panel chair for approval

+16 weeks

Panel chair approves responses and Quality Support submit final versions to Quality Management Sub Committee

## **Documentation for Periodic Review**

### **To be provided by the Faculty 8 weeks before the review**

- a) Programme specifications, in the current approved format, updated to reflect all changes since the last (re)validation, and including all appendices\*
- b) Handbooks for each programme under review (but not module handbooks)
- c) A strategy and teach-out plan for all programmes which are to be discontinued and which will have students in teach-out
- d) External examiners' reports and a note of actions taken in response to them for the last 2 years (a relevant minute of letter to the external summarising the actions taken is suggested)
- e) Annual monitoring reports (up to and including 2015/16) Portfolio reports and Development Grids from 2016/17 onwards) for the last 2 years with supporting documentation
- f) National Student Survey (NSS) data for the last 2 years and a note of actions taken in response to the feedback this will either be part of the Faculty action plan if issue identified by URSSAG or on development grid (Summary of student feedback for the last year; the last years' worth of Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC) minutes
- g) The most recent accreditation report(s) if applicable and a note of any actions taken in response to the report(s) (a relevant minute is suggested showing actions taken)
- h) Progression data for each programme showing entry grades, progression between years and levels, degree classification data (or equivalent for non-classified awards)
- i) Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) data (– formerly FDS, First Destination Statistics) for the last 2 years
- j) The latest set of minutes for Programme Studies Board;
- k) If any of the programmes being reviewed are being amended such that the review is approving the changes, then a statement is required for each which details the arrangements for the existing students. This must take into consideration the content of the document [Consulting with applicants and students following significant changes to a programme](#)
- l) \* Although module descriptors and module resources are not required as part of the documentation, they must be in the current format and up-to-date.

**Note:** where a piece of documentation requested above is included in another item (e.g. if external examiners' reports are included in the annual monitoring report) there is no need to provide them separately. Please include a note stating where the documentation will be found.

Faculties may also provide any material which they believe will be of use to the review panel. In particular Faculties are encouraged to provide information about any quality enhancement activities, teaching development projects etc. which have been undertaken.

### **To be provided by Academic Registry**

- a) A copy of the review process documentation;
- b) A copy of the relevant subject benchmarks as referenced in the programme specifications;
- c) A copy of the Key Information Sets Unistats data where applicable;
- d) A copy of the NICATS and FHEQ qualification and level descriptors;
- e) A copy of the Student Success Strategy
- f) A copy of the previous review report;

- g) A copy of the Pre-Event Form for Programme Specification Review. This is to be completed by each panel member and returned to the officer prior to the event. It supports the quality assurance function of a review by enabling the panel members to identify and share any issues/concerns/areas of good practice in advance of the event, assisting in the preparation of an agenda by identifying areas for further exploration, and providing a clear audit trail that key issues have been considered, even if the outcome of that consideration is wholly positive.

**To be available to the review panel on request during the review**

- a) Module outlines
- b) Module handbooks or similar supporting materials if used
- c) Access to VLE for the relevant programmes and modules

Other documentation, such as committee papers or Assessment Board minutes, will be requested if required. These will be sourced from Academic Registry if needed.