

# Periodic Review Guidance

## Briefing statement for review chairs & servicing officers

### Preparing for Periodic Review

Please read through the self-evaluation documentation as soon as it is available. The servicing officer should contact the panel as soon as the documentation has been received, asking for their comments using the agreed proforma and providing a date by which these comments should be received.

The servicing officer will also contact members of DAQ and the relevant Faculty Head of Quality to ask if there are any areas for concern that they are aware of with regards to the provision under review. If any new issues are raised these will be discussed with the chair prior to the pre-meeting. The servicing officer and chair should liaise prior to the pre-meeting to identify the key issues arising from panel members' comments, which will form the basis of the review day. External panel members are asked to comment on the learning outcomes, their validity and the ways in which they are being met.

### The Pre-meeting

The pre-meeting is an important stage of the review process. The purpose of the pre-meeting is to:

- Give teams an opportunity to present an overview of the provision under review.
- Allow the chair and servicing officer to raise any issues of factual accuracy or misunderstanding that may have arisen from the panel's reading of the SED.
- Provide an opportunity to share with the review team the issues that the panel will be focussing on during the review day. If no issues have been raised by the panel regarding the learning outcomes then it should be made clear to the review team at this stage that they will not form a focus of the review.
- Request further information if necessary (preferably to agree deadlines for circulation prior to the review day).
- Finalise the programme for the day.

The pre-meeting is **not** designed to be an opportunity for the team to rehearse answers to questions, nor should the review team be asked to give detailed responses to issues other than matters of factual accuracy. It is envisaged that the meeting will last no longer than an hour. As a result of the pre-meeting, the servicing officer will produce a brief report, confirming the key themes for discussion on the day, and outlining anything else agreed at the pre-meeting. This will be circulated to the panel and to the review co-ordinator.

### The Review Event

From the outset the Chair should set a constructive tone for the day both with the panel and in the meetings with the staff. This is to encourage open discussion and good dialogue with the subject team. The purposes of review should be re-iterated and the panel should be provided another opportunity to note formally that they are happy with the learning outcomes of the provision as described in the documentation.

The servicing officer should attend the day with a laptop to ensure that the electronically available supporting documentation is accessible to aid discussions. Using the laptop to formulate the improvement plan and good practice at the end of the day may also be helpful.

Chairs are encouraged to:

- Manage the debate by indicating who will lead questioning and balance the time available to the topics in proportion with importance.
- Discourage aggressive or adversarial questioning styles that put the team on the defensive.
- Be transparent by making sure all the issues are on the table – share any concerns with the subject team and ensure panel members expose their 'hidden agendas'.
- Ensure that the issues raised by subject teams (section 11 of the SED) are properly followed through during the periodic review.

- Encourage everyone to participate but don't let individual members dominate – you may need to cut short contributions that are unproductive or repeating earlier business.
- Keep to time. Whilst certain lines of questioning may be producing excellent discussions, you need to ensure that there is enough time to cover all those areas identified. The servicing officer will prompt if timing becomes an issue.
- Ensure that the questions for students are well focused and designed to give the panel additional information, rather than duplicating information that the students have already provided in their commentary on the SED. Panel members should be directed to focus on those questions which will provide additional information about specific strengths or areas for improvement for the subject under review.
- When drawing judgements, encourage the panel to add value to the subject team's own self-evaluation and not simply reflect back the team's own analysis. Where the panel's conclusions are based directly on the subject team's own analysis, ensure that due credit is given to the team for the quality of their own evaluation of the provision.
- Ensure that the final written report of the periodic review provides a clear impetus for change and there is no ambiguity in the panel's reported conclusions, particularly where serious issues need to be addressed.

## Outcomes

At the conclusion of discussions with the programme and faculty staff, the panel will meet in private to agree the outcomes of the review event.

Firstly the Chair must seek the assent of the panel members that they are satisfied with the quality and standards of the provision under review; that the characteristics and learning outcomes for the programme are valid; that learning outcomes are being met and appropriate standards being attained. This acknowledgment is summarised in the following phrase at the beginning of the Periodic Review Report:

***The panel is pleased to confirm to the Academic Quality Committee (AQC) that it has confidence in the quality and standards of the provision under review. The panel, and in particular the external panel members, were pleased to confirm that the characteristics and learning outcomes for the programme were valid. Furthermore, they were confident that the learning outcomes were being met and appropriate standards being attained in light of external reference points such as QAA benchmarks and Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies. The panel therefore recommends that the programme under indefinite validation should continue in approval, subject to further periodic review. Areas where the panel has identified scope for improvement and enhancement are specified in the enhancement plan.***

Secondly the panel will identify areas of good practice and will outline that the team will need to demonstrate in the six month update how these areas of good practice will be disseminated and embedded both within the faculty and wider university.

The panel will then draft an enhancement plan – see template available via the DAQ website. This plan will identify areas which the panel concluded were still in need of attention or would, at the least, benefit from further attention. For these areas the panel can, if deemed necessary, list a number of essential actions and/or recommendations.

## Essential actions

These actions are given in the event that the panel believes that the programme(s) under review will be perfectly acceptable once a specific issue is addressed. Essential actions **must** be completed by the programme/faculty teams, within a specified timeframe, **before continued approval can be confirmed**. The teams are **obliged** to act on these and will be required to report on their completion to the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC) and to AQC.

## Recommendations

These are given in the event that the panel is satisfied with the programme(s) under review, but believes it/they could be further enhanced by undertaking certain actions. As recommendations, the programme/faculty teams may choose to carry out the actions or not to, as they believe is best for their students and the integrity of the programme(s) but they must consider the recommendations. If the team chooses not to act on the recommendations it must have a sound rationale for not doing so. In either case, the response must be reported to FAC and AQC.

## Good practice

The periodic review panel should look to identify areas of good practice that support enhancement of the student experience and encourage the team to consider ways of sharing and embedding this practice with the rest of the faculty and wider. It should be recognised that it is acceptable and often appropriate to nominate practice as potential good practice thus identifying it as worth further investigation given time to fully explore practice is limited during the periodic review process. Panels can commend, for example, the team's approach to the periodic review or the quality of the documentation if appropriate but not classify it as good practice. Please see the Periodic Review Guide appendix 4 'Good Practice in Higher Education' and discuss with DAQ as appropriate.

## Urgent remedial action / Lack of confidence

Exceptionally a panel may conclude that a programme or cluster of programmes is in need of urgent remedial action because:

- resource deficiencies are such that students will not have a reasonable chance of achieving programme outcomes, and there is no strategic commitment to address the shortfall; or
- the intellectual challenge of the programme is not set at the correct level and is defined without reference to national reference points.

If the panel is not confident that deficiencies can, or will, be remedied through actions specified in the enhancement plan, it should indicate this lack of confidence to AQC and the PVC Teaching and Learning as an outcome of the review. This is summarised in the review report with the following phrase:

*The panel does not have confidence that the quality or standards of the provision meets acceptable levels for the University. Essential action is required to address significant shortfalls, as specified in the enhancement plan. The panel recommends that AQC gives urgent consideration to the outcomes of this review before the next intake of students.*

## Boundaries

It is important to remember that, while panel views are welcomed and respected; there are limitations on what the panel can demand of the programme team(s). The panel cannot request essential actions that:

- Contradict University or Faculty policy or strategy.
- Fundamentally change the content or structure of the programme(s) under review.
- Demand additional funds or resources.
- Could disadvantage existing students.
- Are dictated by the "hobby horse" of one panel member.
- Are related to issues outside of the programme team's control.

## Dealing with resource issues

The periodic review may lead to judgements based on the shortfalls in resourcing, whether this is accommodation, equipment, staffing levels or administrative support. When making judgements and formulating recommendations for the subject team and the faculty, review panel chairs might consider whether the problem is explained by any of the following:

- Is there a need for a more strategic approach to ensure resources are effectively managed to support the curriculum?

- Is there a mismatch between the faculty's resource planning and the programme design and delivery in terms of the demand on resources?
- Have the resource deficiencies been created by a rapid change in the programme Student Staff Ratio (SSR)?
- Have new initiatives been introduced without due regard for an assessment of the risks and associated plans to limit such risks?

Review chairs must highlight resource deficiencies where these present a serious threat to students having a reasonable chance of achieving programme outcomes. The review panel should highlight where it believes there is a mismatch between the aspirations for a programme and the faculty's ability to deliver within its available resources. It is also useful to give feedback where, in the panel's judgement, alternative approaches to delivery should be considered. The panel should refrain, however, from directing Deans into how to solve their resource problems.

### **After the event**

The servicing officer will seek to write up a summary report, including the enhancement plan and good practice, within two working days of the event. This will need prompt approval by the Chair so that it can be sent to the review team as draft feedback.

The servicing officer will draft the full report within two weeks of the review, to be sent to the Chair for approval.

The Chair will have one week to provide comments/approve the draft report before the servicing officer circulates it to the rest of the panel for comment. Chairs are asked to ensure that they prioritise the approval of the enhancement plan and report wherever possible.

The other members of the panel will be given two weeks to return comments/approve the draft report.

Once the panel members have given their approval of the draft report, it is sent to the faculty through the Review Co-ordinator to allow the programme/faculty team to check it for factual accuracy. Comments are to be returned to the servicing within two weeks. It must be stressed that the programme/faculty team may comment on **factual accuracy** only; they may not make changes to the record of discussions or the conclusions shown in the report.

After two weeks the servicing officer will correct points of accuracy as necessary and the draft report will be confirmed as final.

In all cases, non-submission of comments/amendments within the deadlines will be taken as tacit approval.

Six months after the review event the programme/faculty team will be expected to provide an updated enhancement plan for monitoring at FAC and AQC. This will summarise actions taken in response to essential actions and recommendations, and give the rationale in the case of the team(s) choosing not to act on the recommendations.