

SECTION 3

Institution-Led Subject Review and Course Re-Approval

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1. INSTITUTION-LED SUBJECT REVIEW: OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Institution-Led Subject Review (ILSR) activity focuses on taught provision and does not include evaluation of the research student experience, which is reviewed by a separate process focused on the Graduate School (refer to [Section 6](#) of this Handbook). ILSR does include a linkage to research through consideration of how curricula are kept up to-date, reflecting advancing knowledge and professional practice in the subject. This would typically include linkages to staff scholarship and research activities. The key points would be impacts of staff scholarship and research on curricula, and hence graduate attributes, not on the staff research activities themselves.

Institution-Led Subject Review is the University's process to formally review subject provision and plan future enhancement of its taught provision leading to academic awards. Subject provision is classified, in part, as per the [QAA Subject Benchmark Statements](#). It is implemented on a School basis, although makes provision for differing organisational structures across the University, normally to a six yearly cycle (including the course re-approval element). A single Review event normally incorporates all of the eligible subjects at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels hosted by a School.

The process considers both standards and quality, and combines assurance and enhancement, with a view of 'enhancement' as being concerned with:

- making, or doing it better;
- making the best of opportunities and resources;
- any aspect of teaching, learning, assessment or the student learning experience;
- change, doing the same things better, or doing new, better things.

Enhancement should be guided by the following questions:

- where are we now?
- where do we want to be in the future?
- how are we going to get there?
- how will we know when we get there?

The Review is intended to be a structured process to ask and answer these questions. The answers should emerge, and be developed progressively through the process, including dialogue with the Review Panel, and following the Review Report. The Panel will engage in a consultancy type dialogue with the School about the School's self-evaluation and its ambitions and priorities for the future.

The process is based on evaluation and reflection considering:

- analysis of the key outcomes from past internal quality assurance processes (in particular Annual Appraisal);
- a range of internal and external reference points on strategy, standards and quality;
- future contexts, ambitions and priorities.

Outcomes from the Review inform School-level planning and the associated formal re-approval of the subject course and module portfolio. Outcomes will be also reported to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, Academic Council and the Board of Governors. In addition, the Board of Governors is required to endorse an annual statement relating to *Institution-Led Review of Quality* for submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

Following the Review, there is a three-year Interim Review to monitor progress.

In producing this section of the Handbook due cognisance has been taken of relevant chapters of the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, notably *Monitoring and Evaluation*.

All forms referred to in this section are available from the main Handbook web page: www.rgu.ac.uk/qualityhandbook.

Section 4 provides details of the [Student-Facing Support Services Review](#).

2. ILSR: PROCESS OVERVIEW AND GUIDANCE

[Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the Institution-Led Subject Review process.

2.1 Responsibilities

The Dean is responsible for leading preparation for the Review.

The Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience is responsible for approving the issuing of the Review documentation to the Panel.

The Department for Governance and Academic Quality, through the Academic Quality Officer (AQO), will provide support on aspects of the Review process and in helping the School in terms of documentation requirements.

DELTA (Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment) will provide support to Schools engaging in Review, in particular during the evaluation and reflection phase.

2.2 Preliminary Meeting

The process formally starts with a preliminary meeting (organised by the Department for Governance and Academic Quality), normally at least six months prior to the proposed Review event. This meeting is convened by the Vice-Principal for Academic Development and Student Experience and includes the relevant AQO, Head of Planning and Insight, the Dean and key staff involved in the Review.

This preliminary meeting will inform preparation at School level; the AQO will be responsible for providing a summary of issues from past quality assurance processes, which will act as an *aide-mémoire* for discussion (*AQO Summary Report*). This *AQO Summary Report* will accompany the *Reflective Analysis* (see [subsection 2.6](#)) when it is issued to the Review Panel.

The objectives of the preliminary meeting are to:

- clarify purpose, scope, process and timescales;
- determine a timescale for the Review;
- discuss how the Review should be organised to reflect the profile of provision, and to take account of specific subjects, courses and student groups;
- discuss reference points particularly relevant to the School e.g. professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) criteria;
- consider what international dimensions are significant for the Review;
- discuss likely substantial or significant issues for the School, reflecting recurrent or unresolved issues (in particular from annual quality assurance processes);
- identify support to be provided by DELTA to assist the School throughout the Review;
- discuss the organisation of the Review, considering dimensions of courses, staff, students, other stakeholders and timescale of the Review.

Collaborative arrangements, including student exchanges, will be considered as part of the normal ILSR process though the University does reserve the right to conduct a discrete review at the partner institution at any time during the operation of the collaboration where appropriate (refer to [Section 5](#) of this Handbook).

A *Planning Sheet* serves as an agreed framework of timescales and this is drafted by the AQO in liaison with the Dean.

2.3 Review Panel Composition

The Review Panel comprises a combination of external and internal members, intended to provide both subject-specific and generic learning and teaching expertise and perspectives. The composition should reflect the scope and nature of provision. The Panel's collective role is to consider the School's self-evaluation as set out in the *Reflective Analysis*, and to engage in a consultancy type dialogue with the School about the evaluation and the School's proposals for the future. In making informal approaches to Panel members, the School should emphasise the importance of the consultancy role with respect to School selection of external Panel members.

Typically the Review Panel has the following minimum composition:

Convener: A Dean from another School will normally convene the event. The Convener's role is to manage the event, ensure it is conducted in accordance with the University's requirements, and to act as the formal contact between the Panel and the School.

*Two internal members: Internal members of staff will be appointed from outwith the host School by the Deputy Academic Registrar.

Normally, the internal members will include a Dean and a second internal who shall be drawn from the University's database of approved internal Panel members.

One, or more, student members: An enrolled student of the University will be appointed in liaison with the Deputy Academic Registrar. The student will be from outwith the host School, may be a part-time, full-time or distance learner and will normally have experience of representing students' interests at School or institutional level. Where there are a number of subjects to be reviewed during an event, with parallel sessions, it may be appropriate to have more than one student Panel member.

Two, or more, external members: The external Panel members are nominated by the Dean. These individuals should be selected so there is an appropriate balance of subject expertise (academic and industrial/professional) in order that the Panel, as a whole, can contribute effectively to the key agenda items. Wherever possible, candidates should be of senior and/or national/international standing. Normally a minimum of one Panel member should be from within and one from outwith Scotland. Any previous associations which members of staff have had with the proposed Panel members should be declared on the relevant paperwork. Normally any such association within the last five years would preclude appointment to the Panel.

The number of external academics and industrial/professional representatives will depend on the subject(s) covered by the Review and any requirements of PSRBs.

The Panel membership is approved by the Deputy Academic Registrar on the recommendation of the Dean.

* Where a proposed Panel member is domiciled outwith the UK it is essential that the School contacts the University's Legal Office without delay and prior to the nomination of the individual. The Legal Office will confirm the contractual process to be followed.

2.4 Observers

The University may invite such internal or external observers to these events as it deems appropriate. Staff or students who wish to take part as Panel members in future events are encouraged to observe events.

2.5 Evaluation by the School

The evaluation stage is not simply about creating a document. It is intended to be the critical and most valuable part of the process. It should be a collective process, managed at School level, and working with the various internal structures and levels of subject, course, stages/years and modules. It should be inclusive, and should connect with individual staff and students. Engaging with stakeholders, including employers, in the early evaluation phase is crucial.

A model for evaluation based on a set of 'looks' in specific directions is proposed - see the *Overview Diagram – Development of Reflective Analysis* (refer **Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Overview Diagram – Development of Reflective Analysis

Look back

(Over the period since the last Review)

- Significant changes at University and School level and the impact of these in the context of the subject(s) under review.
- Outcomes achieved in response to recommendations arising from the previous Institution-Led Subject Review.
- Changes to:
 - the course portfolio, including rationale and impact; and
 - student numbers and profile.
- Key issues arising from the Annual Appraisal, including strengths, actions and success/achievement, and outstanding/recurring issues.

Look inside

(Institutional Developments and Initiatives)

- Implications of, and opportunities arising from, the University’s strategic ambitions, objectives and priorities, including teaching and learning and the student experience.
- Implications for information provided to students informed by student feedback and institutional developments.

Ambitions, Priorities and Implementation

- Ambitions and corresponding priorities for the period until the next review.
- Implementation Plan for each of the ambitions and priorities identified, including:
 - an indication of timescale;
 - key responsibilities for the action where relevant;
 - dependencies on other areas of University provision, including resource implications; and
 - anticipated outcomes and proposed measures of success.
- Potential risks and mitigating actions.



Look outside

(External Developments and Initiatives)

- External developments and initiatives in respect of:
 - subject(s);
 - teaching, learning and assessment;
 - enhancement of the student experience;
 - student information;
 - graduate employability;
 - professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation/ approval/recognition criteria.

This may include reference to Quality Enhancement Themes, Quality Assurance Agency and Advance HE.

* This will involve appropriate engagement with stakeholders, including students, alumni and employers.

The workload can be split into tasks and allocated to groups and individuals. Working should include discussion and dialogue; e.g. evaluating views of staff could take the form of structured workshops. Outcomes from these activities should be summarised in working notes or documents that can be cited as references in the *Reflective Analysis*, and which may be made available for the Review Event.

The process should be used as an opportunity to stimulate enhancement thinking and action by members of the Course Team.

Students' views are a critical input to the *Look inside* part of the evaluation that informs the *Reflective Analysis*. Inputs should include: routine RGU evaluation questionnaires, National Student Survey results and an evaluation of student engagement with their learning. The expectation would be for students to have the opportunity to review the text in these sections, in particular, prior to finalisation.

As part of the evaluation phase, the School should review its course portfolio.

2.6 Reflective Analysis

The key document of the Review is the *Reflective Analysis*, which summarises the outcomes of the evaluation of the subject(s) being reviewed. It can be supported by additional material, either included with the *Reflective Analysis*, or made available for reference at the time of the Review event. A template is available from your AQO.

Normally, a single *Reflective Analysis* should cover all subject provision. Where several subjects are incorporated within a single Review, some of the content may be common to all subjects, and some may be more subject-specific. The *Reflective Analysis* should distinguish between content that relates to all subject areas and courses, and content that relates to only specific subjects, courses or student groups.

The *Reflective Analysis* should normally follow the structure below:

1. *Introduction and Scene-Setting*

This should include the following:

- A brief overview of the University including its organisational structure and strategic ambitions (standard text will be provided as a basis for this).
- Confirmation of the subject(s) being reviewed and the associated host School.
- An organogram for the School detailing key leadership/management roles, responsibilities and decision making for the subject(s).
- A factual profile for **EACH** subject being reviewed summarising:
 - current course portfolios;
 - current student numbers on each course and mode of delivery along with an associated profile of the student population, including:
 - home/EU students;
 - international students;
 - gender balance;

- articulating students;
 - MD20/40 students;
 - PSRB accreditations;
 - staff resources;
 - specialist resources (where relevant)
- The approach taken to preparing the *Reflective Analysis* including engagement with key stakeholders and data sources.

2. *Key Developments Since the Last Review*

This section should include:

- An overview of any significant changes which have occurred at University, School and/or PSRB levels since the last Review and the impact of these in the context of the subject(s) being reviewed.
- A summary of the outcomes achieved in response to recommendations arising from the last Review.
- For **EACH** subject being reviewed, and drawing on the AQO report as appropriate:
 - detail any significant changes to the course portfolio since the last Review including rationale and resulting impact. This should relate to, for example, changes to award titles, cessation of courses, new courses and changes to modes of delivery as well as any significant changes/enhancements within the courses. A record of approved course changes will be included to support this section. In addition, details of any further enhancements should be provided with an indication of whether these enhancements are minor (less than 25% of the SCQF credit) or major (in excess of 25% of the SCQF credit);
 - detail any significant changes to the student numbers and profile since the last Review;
 - provide a summary of the key issues arising, over the period since the last Review, from Annual Appraisals including:
 - evidence of specific strengths;
 - actions taken to enhance aspects of the student experience or academic standards and evidence of success/achievement;
 - outstanding/recurring issues still requiring action.

3. *Ambitions and Proposed Priorities for the Next Review Period*

This section should open with a critical assessment of the current subject provision, reflecting on the content provided in Section 2. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and/or competitor analysis may usefully be included to support the critical assessment. The section should, thereafter, include reflection and discussion of:

- Potential for strengthening research and scholarly activity to support teaching.
- Implications and opportunities arising from the University's strategic ambitions and objectives, for example:
 - internationalisation;
 - commercialisation;

- widening access;
- enhanced employability;
- interdisciplinarity.
- Sector-wide, including subject specific, developments in respect of teaching, learning and assessment and student experience.
- Other factors which could impact (positively or negatively) on subjects under review.

This section should conclude by drawing on the above to detail ambitions and propose corresponding priorities for the period of the next Review. It should be clarified as to which priorities relate to all subjects under review and those which are subject specific.

4. *Proposed Implementation Plan*

A proposed Implementation Plan should be provided for each of the priorities identified in the preceding section. The Plan should include:

- An indication of timescale.
- Key responsibilities for the action where relevant.
- Dependencies on other areas of University provision, including resource implications.
- Anticipated outcomes and proposed measures of success.

In addition, risks associated with the successful implementation of the Plan should also be identified and mitigating actions proposed.

Appendix 1: Information on Course Provision: Accuracy and Effectiveness

This will be a standard University-wide statement on the provision of information to prospective students and how we ensure that the information on course provision is accurate, effective and accessible. This statement is available from the AQO.

Appendix 2: Portfolio of Summary Case Studies of Effective Practice in the School

A portfolio of case studies of effective practice in the School will form an integral part of the *Reflective Analysis* document. The case studies should illustrate specific points in the text of the *Reflective Analysis*, particularly highlighting the School's capabilities and what is working well. A template is available from your AQO to record the case studies.

Appendix 3: Course Specifications

The two-part *Course Specification* is the University's key document for describing a course:

- Course Specification: Core Award Data
- Course Specification: Student Learning Experience

Generated from the University's *Course Information Database*, *Course Specifications* will be provided electronically as useful background information for the Panel.

2.7 Meeting of Internal Panel Members

2.7.1 Review of Evidence

A meeting of the internal members of the Review Panel is scheduled prior to the Review event, typically two weeks in advance. External Panel members will be given the opportunity to attend the meeting and, in lieu of attending, will be invited to submit comments on both the *Reflective Analysis and the draft programme* for consideration at this meeting.

The main objective of this meeting is to consider the completeness and effectiveness of the School's analysis and reflection on messages from internal quality assurance processes, in particular the Annual Appraisal Process, including statistical indicators, student evaluations, PSRB activities, and any other relevant inputs. The *AQO Summary Report* is key in this respect. The key questions that will guide these internal discussions are as undernoted:

- Are there any significant issues for the School arising from review of quality assurance, since the last Review?
- Have these been adequately addressed in the *Reflective Analysis*?
- Is the School's appraisal of its current situation comprehensive?
- Are development priorities obvious from the above?
- Are the proposed developments appropriate and achievable?
- Are there any omissions?

The outcome will be a *Briefing Note* for the Review Panel produced by the AQO. This may include an action note to the School requesting additional information on any outstanding issues.

The aim of this process is to assist the main Review event to focus on substantial or significant issues relating to future enhancement, by providing an initial check on how effectively issues from the past have been considered by the School.

2.7.2 Review Programme

The second objective of the meeting of Internal Panel members is to develop a draft programme for the Review event (based on an initial draft prepared by the AQO), which will include identifying associated groups of staff and students for each meeting.

The Dean will be asked to attend the last part of this meeting in order to help firm up the programme. The Review programme is designed to reflect the *Reflective Analysis* themes.

2.8 Review Event

The Review event normally spans two full days. The initial draft programme, developed at the meeting of Internal Panel Members, (refer [subsection 2.7.2](#)), is finalised at the initial meeting of the Panel. This will be informed through Panel members' scrutiny and evaluation of the *Reflective Analysis* and also through Internal Panel members' preliminary views/discussions (refer [subsection 2.7.1](#)). The six questions, which guide discussions of the Internal Panel members are also pertinent, and provide a useful starting point, for the Review event.

Each Review programme is effectively a series of meetings:

- private, involving the Panel only;
- Panel and staff;
- Panel and students;
- Panel and alumni; and
- Panel and employers.

Each Review programme is bespoke, reflecting the *Reflective Analysis*' themes and tailored specifically for each Review event. At the start of the event, there will normally be a number of obligatory sessions, including meetings with the Dean and senior staff and a session on strategic subject approaches to learning and teaching, including "snapshots/case studies" of good practice. Thereafter, meetings are arranged with staff, students and employers (as appropriate) broadly in line with themes outlined in the *Reflective Analysis* and these meetings may be School-wide, or organised on a subject-specific basis, depending on what is appropriate. A tour of facilities is not obligatory, but can be built into the programme where this is pertinent to the event.

If the Panel is satisfied with the comprehensiveness of the School's contextual awareness (as conveyed in the *Reflective Analysis*), it is anticipated the bulk of engagement between the Panel and School will focus on exploring the School's future direction and plan, including priority actions to achieve the plan, with the Panel endorsing the School's proposals or providing further advice.

2.9 Review Report

A formal report of the Review event is prepared by officers from the Department for Governance and Academic Quality. The report is focused on high level outcomes; the Panel's views of the School's future agenda and key areas of development, including a statement on the continued relevance and validity of the School's taught provision to the market. The Report will also include (as an appendix) the approved changes since the last Review, proposed enhancements and the mechanisms for processing those enhancements following the event. The report does not provide an account of all discussions and so the full details underlying the outcomes would not necessarily be incorporated into the report. The information would be available, should the School have any queries/require the context to help inform the School's response to the outcomes. After the report has been approved by all members of the Panel, the *Confirmed Review Report* is made available to relevant parties and an executive summary is published on the University's website.

2.10 School Response

The School is required to produce a succinct report in response to the Review report. The School Response should include the School's view of the Panel's commentary contained within the Review report and how this will inform future plans. An updated statement of future directions and plans should be provided. The School Response must be approved by the Convener of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, prior to being issued to the Review Panel. The School Response must be produced no later than three months after the Review event.

2.11 Evaluation of Process

As part of its commitment to continuous enhancement of its quality assurance procedures, the University will annually review the efficiency and effectiveness of the Review process. To assist in this process, Panel members and the Dean involved in the Review event are asked for feedback, as appropriate.

2.12 Interim Review

Three years after the original Review, the School is required to produce an interim report providing an update on actions/developments arising from the Review. The extent of the report will clearly be dependent on the outcome of the initial Review. The report will be produced by the Dean, who is responsible for formally recommending it for approval to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

3. COURSE/PROGRAMME RE-APPROVAL

3.1 Timing and Process

The normal expectation is this re-approval activity will happen within six years of the previous ILSR activity. The approval mechanism will be tailored for each course and will normally be based on the following model:

- where PSRBs are involved then such provision may necessitate a separate event ([refer Section 1](#));
- substantial changes to existing provision, i.e. changes in excess of 25% of the SCQF credit, and/or approval of new course provision will be undertaken through a validation/re-approval event ([refer Section 1](#));
- any other categories of changes, i.e. evolutionary changes, will be approved through the School Academic Board (SAB) as a separate, distinct item on the SAB agenda. The School shall identify a member of staff from another School to be in attendance for this item. This staff member will provide internal input from outwith the School to the approval process and will also facilitate the sharing of practice across Schools.

Once the appropriate approval mechanism and timescale has been agreed for each course and credit rated provision (refer to [subsection 2.9](#)), the AQO will draft a *Course Re-Approval Planning Sheet*, which serves as a framework for the establishment of timescales and deadlines, and is used to monitor progress against these targets.

Once all relevant provision has been re-approved, the AQO ensure that the *Course and Module Databases* are up-to-date and will notify Academic Administration and any other relevant departments of the changes. It is the responsibility of the School to keep other Schools informed of changes which might impact upon them.

3.2 Scope

The course re-approval activity must incorporate any collaborative courses (refer to **Section 5** of this Handbook), corporate provision (refer to **Section 1, subsection 9** of this Handbook) and also credit-rated short course activity (refer to **Section 1, subsection 2.2** of this Handbook).

Only course(s)/programme(s) and credit-rated short courses that are continuing to be delivered require re-approval. All continuing courses will require re-approval, even those that have been recently validated or re-approved.

3.3 Documentation Requirements

Documentation requirements will depend on which approval mechanisms are being used. As a minimum, for all continuing award bearing courses a *Course Re-approval Proforma* with relevant extracts from the *Course Specification* and associated *Module Descriptors* will be required. The School should ensure that appropriate liaison has taken place with any other Schools affected by changes. For credit rated short courses revised *Module Descriptors* will be needed. The involvement of PSRBs may require additional documentation. A summary of changes for each award bearing course should be produced and a summary of changes affecting credit rated modules only where changes affect aspects as per **Section 1, paragraph 6.1** of this Handbook. The School must liaise with the AQO regarding specific requirements and approval mechanisms to ensure this activity is undertaken as efficiently and effectively as possible.

4. STUDENT-FACING SUPPORT SERVICES REVIEW

Areas for improvement and/or review in relation to their impact on teaching, learning, and the quality of the student experience, will be identified as part of the Annual Appraisal Process. The nature of any review process will be determined on an individual basis. Review themes may focus on a particular aspect of the student experience, and may require services to work collectively to address a specific issue.