

Part 8

Periodic Academic Review

1 Scope of Academic Review

- 1.1 Academic Review is a systematic evaluation of the operation of an academic grouping within UEL, usually at School level. It involves a self-critical evaluation of performance by the grouping concerned followed by a review by a panel comprising members drawn from across UEL and external subject specialists drawn from other higher education institutions and from business and/or the professions.
- 1.2 Whenever possible, an Academic Review will cover **all** programmes (undergraduate, postgraduate, post-experience) within a School as it is recognised that the **management** of the academic grouping is crucial to the quality of the provision. Large Schools however cover more than one academically coherent discipline area. In these circumstances it is appropriate to hold separate Academic Reviews for the different groupings.
- 1.3 The Quality & Standards Committee agrees the Academic Review schedule five years in advance, following consultation with the relevant Heads of Schools. There is a typical review rate of four Academic Reviews conducted in each academic year. However, this may fluctuate as a result of other considerations.
- 1.4 Each academic grouping is subject to Academic Review at least once every six years. However, the Quality & Standards Committee reserves the right to conduct an Academic Review at any time.
- 1.5 An Academic Review **cannot** be used to approve new programmes. The purpose of the review and structure of the review event is not designed to deal with such proposals. There are separate procedures for the approval of new programmes.

2 Purpose of Academic Review

- 2.1 Academic Review evaluates programmes offered by a School/discipline area and confirms that they continue to meet UEL's Quality Criteria and engage with relevant national benchmarks, frameworks and codes of practice.
- 2.2 Academic Review helps the School and the institution to assure the quality of the total student experience. Academic Review aims to review all aspects of the student experience and capture those which are outside the immediate

confines of the programme which have an impact on the quality of that experience.

- 2.3 Academic Review helps the School and the institution to evaluate the extent to which the School/discipline area has been successful in achieving its stated aims and objectives within the overall context of the UEL vision.

3 Preparing for Academic Review

- 3.1 The Head of School and the Senior Quality Assurance Officer establish a series of regular meetings with relevant staff from the academic grouping to be reviewed in order to co-ordinate preparation for the Academic Review.
- 3.2 The first meeting will determine the approximate timing of the review and discuss the requirements for external representation on the review panel.
- 3.3 The Senior Quality Assurance Officer provides advice and guidance throughout the process.
- 3.4 The School Quality Standing Committee is responsible for co-ordinating a School's preparations for Academic Review.

4 Documentation

- 4.1 Central to the Academic Review process is the Self-Evaluation Document (SED). The document fulfils two functions:
 - 4.1.1 To provide a frank and critical appraisal of the academic grouping under review by evaluating performance and changes since the last review, the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students and the standards achieved by students;
 - 4.1.2 To identify perceived strengths and areas for development by referring to appropriate evidence, to indicate actions being undertaken to address such areas for development and to comment on the success, to date, of such actions.
- 4.2 The Self-Evaluation Document is structured as follows:
 - 4.2.1 Overall aims of the academic provision under review;
 - 4.2.2 Evaluation of the academic provision under review: learning outcomes;
 - 4.2.3 Evaluation of the academic provision under review: curricula and assessment;
 - 4.2.4 Evaluation of the academic provision under review: quality of learning opportunities;
 - 4.2.5 Evaluation of the academic provision under review: maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality;

- 4.3 Further guidance notes on the writing the Self-Evaluation Document are available from Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement and are provided to the academic grouping under review at the beginning of their preparation period.
- 4.4 Programme Specifications for all programmes included in the review process should be appended to the Self-Evaluation Document.

5 Panel Membership and Selection

- 5.1 The size of an Academic Review panel depends on the size of the provision to be reviewed. Normally, it will consist of six people.
- 5.2 A member of staff with significant experience in quality assurance, and who is independent of the academic grouping under review, is appointed as Chair of the panel (usually a member of the Quality & Standards Committee).
- 5.3 There will normally be three external subject specialists on a panel. Where appropriate the external membership of the panel includes representation from business or the professions.
- 5.4 In order to involve the widest possible range of staff from across the institution and improve overall engagement and understanding, each review team will also include two members of UEL staff, one of whom who has not previously been involved in an Academic Review (as a reviewer). No panel member may be closely associated with the academic grouping under review.
- 5.5 Early in the process, the Head of School (or designated co-ordinator) nominates appropriate external subject advisers to take part in the review. The suitability of the external nominees is determined by the chair of the event. The following criteria are taken into account:
 - 5.5.1 the depth of subject knowledge;
 - 5.5.2 the relevance of subject knowledge;
 - 5.5.3 prior experience of teaching on programmes at the same level or above;
 - 5.5.4 impartiality (the nominee should not have any formal links with the School offering the programme during the last five years as a former member of staff or the last three years as an external examiner);
 - 5.5.5 professional expertise (for vocational courses, at least one of the advisers should be a 'practitioner' drawn from a relevant business or professional background);
 - 5.5.6 prior experience as a QAA reviewer or auditor.
- 5.6 It is unlikely that any single nominee will meet all the requirements. In making judgments about the suitability of the proposed external subject advisers the chair takes into account the overall balance of expertise presented by the external advisers. The chair may reject a nominee or

require the Head of School (or designated co-ordinator) to propose additional external subject advisers in order to ensure the balance of the panel.

- 5.7 The membership of the review panel is agreed with the academic grouping under review.

6 Agenda for Academic Review

- 6.1 Academic Review is conducted over a period of two days.

- 6.2 An Academic Review panel reports on the following areas:

6.2.1 evidence of academic standards: the match between aims and objectives and learning outcomes, evidence of achievement of learning outcomes, the match between student achievement and UEL's regulations on the standards of awards, accuracy and delivery of programme specifications, accuracy of student handbooks, currency and validity of programmes in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline and practice in its application;

6.2.2 quality of the student experience: teaching and learning, student support and guidance from admission to completion, learning resources;

6.2.3 activities to ensure and enhance standards and quality: use of external examiners, second and anonymous marking, student and employer feedback mechanisms, effective monitoring of performance, use made of external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements, staff development (including peer observation of teaching), local procedures for the approval of new programmes, implementation and effectiveness of the Review & Enhancement Process.

- 6.3 In preparing its report, the panel will have regard to the requirements of the summary of the review to be published on the national Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site. These requirements include providing an overview of the School/discipline area in relation to content and approach; identifying notable strengths and aspects which are particularly innovative or which represent good practice; and identifying aspects for the further enhancement of quality and standards, with an indication of significance and urgency in the latter.

- 6.4 Although all panel members contribute to the discussion and decision making on all of the above areas, each panel member will focus on one of the above areas and provides a written response which will be used to help prepare the final report.

- 6.5 The further documentation listed below must be made available to the panel during the review:

6.5.1 student handbooks;

6.5.2 Review & Enhancement Process reports and action plans for the three previous years;

- 6.5.3 external examiners' reports for the three previous years;
 - 6.5.4 evidence of the school's engagement in the observation of learning and teaching;
 - 6.5.5 academic staffing list and profile (giving main teaching/research interests and administrative responsibilities);
 - 6.5.6 report and action plan from the previous periodic review process;
 - 6.5.7 any other documentation referenced in the Self-Evaluation Document.
- 6.6 Additional documentation may be requested by the review team to assist them with their deliberations. Such documentation might include:
- 6.6.1 a staff development statement (covering both subject development and pedagogical development and including a research profile and details of other staff development activities e.g. provision for staff induction);
 - 6.6.2 list of research/consultancy publications (following the classification used for the research assessment exercise);
 - 6.6.3 reports by professional bodies (where appropriate);
 - 6.6.4 student intake and progression data covering the last three intakes;
 - 6.6.5 a description of student support/welfare services, plus any recent analysis of student use, subject to normal constraints of confidentiality in respect of counselling and similar activities;
 - 6.6.6 examples of students' work to reflect the range of programmes, levels and attainment and including: examination papers/scripts, course work, project/lab reports scripts, project reports and dissertations;
 - 6.6.7 marking and feedback sheets and assessment criteria.
- 6.7 The programme for the review is agreed during the preparation period. Variations to the standard programme to reflect the character of the academic grouping under review are acceptable provided that all areas described in paragraph 6.2 are adequately covered.
- 6.8 Where more than one academic grouping is being considered during one Academic Review, it may be necessary to provide feedback which discriminates between the different groupings. Occasionally this may mean holding separate meetings for different groupings. Agreement on how this will be managed is established during the preparation period.
- 6.9 If the academic grouping is responsible for the operation of programmes offered in collaboration with another institution, the programme for the review must include a session in which consideration of these programmes, and the implementation of quality assurance arrangements which govern the programmes, are considered in detail. The Academic Review programme may include a visit to any or all institutions involved in such collaborative

arrangements. Alternatively, representatives of the collaborating institutions may be asked to take part in relevant sessions of the Academic Review programme at UEL.

- 6.10 The programme includes at least one meeting with existing students, former students and, where appropriate, employers.
- 6.11 The programme includes meetings with staff to discuss the various aspects on which the panel reports.

7 Arrangements for Academic Review

7.1 Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement is responsible for:

- 7.1.1 convening the Academic Review panel;
- 7.1.2 sending out documentation to panel members;
- 7.1.3 making arrangements for overnight accommodation for external members;
- 7.1.4 room bookings;
- 7.1.5 catering arrangements;
- 7.1.6 servicing the meeting.

7.2 The Head of School (or designated co-ordinator) is responsible for:

- 7.2.1 providing the agreed documentation for circulation in advance by the deadline;
- 7.2.2 arranging for the attendance at relevant parts of the event of relevant school and service staff;
- 7.2.3 arranging for the attendance of any agreed external people, such as former students, employers or representatives of collaborating institutions;
- 7.2.4 arranging for the attendance of current students.

8 Outcomes of Academic Review

- 8.1 In reaching its judgement, the panel has regard to the UEL Manual of General Regulations & Policies, the Quality Criteria, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and the QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Standards and Quality in Higher Education.
- 8.2 The conclusions and recommendations of the review represent the views of the panel as a whole.

- 8.3 For Academic Review to serve its purpose, it is essential that feedback be provided quickly and in sufficient detail to enable improvements to be made at an appropriate pace. Feedback is given in two ways:
- 8.1.1 oral feedback to the academic grouping at the end of the review;
 - 8.1.2 full written report.
- 8.4 The written report highlights the strengths of the provision and makes recommendations concerning improvements which can be fully considered and acted upon at School and institutional level.
- 8.5 The Academic Review panel will normally confirm that the programmes under review merit continued approval for a further six years.
- 8.6 If the review panel has fundamental concerns about the quality of provision it may decide that a second review meeting should be held. If, by the date of the second meeting, there has been inadequate improvement, the panel has the right to recommend to Academic Board that a programme, or series of programmes, cease to recruit until the relevant improvements have been made. It will be for the review panel to determine how much time the School/discipline area under review is given to make the required improvements.

9 The Report of the Academic Review

- 9.1 Following the review, a draft report is produced by Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement and will be circulated to the Head of School and other key members of the provision under review for comment concerning factual accuracy. The report is also circulated to members of the Academic Review panel for comment. The confirmed report is then produced and circulated to the School and to members of the panel.
- 9.2 The Quality & Standards Committee will consider the report of the review on behalf of Academic Board. The School is required to produce an action plan based on the outcomes of the review process.
- 9.3 The Quality & Standards Committee, on behalf of the Academic Board, will consider all action plans at subsequent meetings to ensure all agreed actions are completed. Action plans will remain on the Quality & Standards Committee agenda until completed.