

University of Aberdeen

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

INFORMATION FOR PANEL MEMBERS AND COORDINATING REVIEWERS

BACKGROUND

Internal Teaching Review (ITR) has been a key feature of the University's quality assurance procedures since 1994. The ITR procedures were revised in 2000/01 to complement the new external arrangements for Subject Review that were implemented by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to assure the quality and academic standards of taught provision.

SHEFC (July 2002), following a consultation exercise, confirmed a new approach to quality in higher education institutions, developed in partnership with Universities Scotland and the QAA Scottish Office. From academic year 2003/04, the emphasis has been shifted from quality assurance to quality enhancement, with the new approach being based on the following:-

- ending universal Subject Review by the QAA;
- a four-year cycle of Institutional Audits;
- improved public information on educational provision;
- a greater voice for students in quality processes;
- a new programme of enhancement themes.

During 2002/03, the University's Internal Teaching Review procedures were therefore revised again to reflect the new emphasis on quality enhancement. At the same time, the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate) brought forward procedures for review of a School's arrangements for training and supervision of research students to be incorporated as part of the full ITR process.

In 2008/09, a review of the role of University's ITR process and documentation was undertaken to ensure ITR complemented the Learning & Teaching Framework and helped the institution work towards its strategic aims. In addition, in light of SFC requirements (ref: circular SFC/30/2008) following the review of quality led by the Joint Quality Review Group (JQRG), ITR documentation was updated to more overtly recognise the role of support services in contributing to the quality of the student experience, and to ensure a more central role for student engagement in the ITR process.

AIMS

The aims of an Internal Teaching Review are:-

- to provide a formal opportunity for a School to reflect on, and critically evaluate, its learning and teaching provision and to benefit from a constructive dialogue with, and commentary by, a Panel of senior academics from outwith the School, an external subject specialist(s) and a student representative;
- to monitor a subject provider's arrangements for course and programme design, approval, delivery, monitoring and review and to satisfy the University that quality and standards in learning and teaching are being maintained and enhanced, and that any areas of concern in this regard are addressed;
- to highlight any enhancements, innovations and successes in learning and teaching that School's have implemented, and any plans for future changes, with a view to (where appropriate) wider dissemination within the University.
- to identify any impediments to the development of higher quality learning and teaching provision;
- to discuss the School's arrangements for training and supervision of its research students
- to re-validate degree programmes for continued delivery.

THE PANEL

A Panel is appointed for each Internal Teaching Review. Normally it will consist of:

- an academic member of the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate) (i.e. a Director of Undergraduate Programmes) acting as Convener;
- two other members of academic staff, drawn from a cadre of trained staff, one from within, and one from outwith, the parent College;
- normally, a minimum of two External Subject Specialists (ESS), including where possible, at least one ESS from another Scottish institution, one from an institution outside Scotland and one of whom should have international expertise. In cases where a School's provision relates to more than one of the national Subject Groups (as defined by the QAA), there should be one ESS from each national Subject Group to which a School's provision relates;
- a student member of the Senate (who shall also be trained).

The internal members will be appointed by the Convener of the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). The External Subject Specialist(s) will be appointed by the relevant Head of College, in consultation with the UCTL Convener. The Panel will be clerked by an administrator from within the central Administration.

External Subject Specialists should not be current External Examiners to the School nor honorary members of staff of the School.

THE PROCESS

The ITR forms the culmination of a rolling six-year cycle of quality processes. It is also designed to act as the starting point for the next six-year cycle. The ITR process itself can be summarised as:-

- submission of documentation by a School;
- review of the documentation by the ITR Panel;
- ITR Panel Visit to the School to meet staff and students;
- production of a Report, for consideration by the School;
- consideration, by the Academic Standards Committees (ASC), of the Head of School's and Head of College's response to the Panel's recommendations¹;
- consideration, by the ASCs, of the Head of School's progress report on implementation of the recommendations one year following the ASCs' consideration of the Panel's Report.

EVIDENCE TO BE USED/DOCUMENTATION

The Panel's Report will draw on a range of evidence accumulated prior to the ITR, and as part of the ITR process itself. This evidence will normally include:

- Programme Review Reports
- Subject Benchmarks for all areas under review (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp>)
- External Examiners' Reports
- Course Review Reports submitted by the School to the ASCs on an annual basis
- Programme Specifications
- Documents submitted by the School as part of the ITR process
- Proforma detailing staff development activities undertaken
- Comments from third parties on the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) invited by the Panel²
- Additional comments or documentation requested by the Panel prior to its Visit
- Evidence gathered in the discussions held as part of the Panel Visit

¹ The ASC (PG) will consider only those aspects of the Report that specifically relate to postgraduate taught and research students.

² The Panel will normally wish to invite comments on the SED from some or all of the following: the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Academic Registrar, the Head of College, the Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), the Convener of the Academic Standards Committee (Postgraduate), the appropriate Senior Adviser, DIT, CLT, the University Careers Service, the University Disabilities Officer/Student Support Services, the Centre for Lifelong Learning, and the University Equality and Diversity advisor.

- Other evidence made available to the Panel from other sources (any such evidence must be approved by the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) and copies of this evidence must be given to the School)

The documentation submitted specifically for the Internal Teaching Review will consist of three elements:-

- the Self-Evaluation Document (SED)
- required Appendices (including Programme review reports)
- other documents that the School wishes to submit as Appendices

External subject specialists will normally be sent (as a minimum):

- the Self-Evaluation Document (SED)
- Programme Specifications
- a selection of course, programme or School handbooks, and/or directions to appropriate websites, to allow them to form an initial view on the curricula (see section on 'Roles' below)
- the Research Student Training and Supervision Report Form.

External subject specialists are welcome to request that they be sent additional documentation from the above list should they consider it necessary to fulfil their role. They are invited to discuss this matter with the ITR Coordinating Reviewer. External subject specialists will have access to the full set of documentation during the visit.

REVIEW OF DOCUMENTATION

The Panel will review the submitted documentation and other available evidence as appropriate prior to the visit. The internal (including student) members of the Panel will hold an initial meeting approximately two weeks prior to the Panel Visit, at which they will also receive comments on the School's submission from the External Subject Specialist(s). The Panel will then agree the areas and issues to be covered in the visit, and will identify the individuals/groups which it will meet (see below).

The types of issues to be addressed and the groups/individuals to meet the Panel are indicated in the instructions of the SED template. Further details can be found in *Guidance Notes for Staff invited to meet Internal Teaching Review Panels* and *ITR: An Introduction for Students* (Appendices 3.9 and 3.10 of the Academic Quality Handbook).

In particular, the Panel will wish to:-

- satisfy itself that staff are conversant with the relevant School and University policies and procedures in relation to the assurance of quality and standards in learning and teaching, and understand their obligations in regard to the University's policies on Disability, Discrimination and Diversity and Equality.
- discuss with staff the various components of the "academic infrastructure"³ and how these have informed and influenced the design, delivery, assessment and review of programmes and their constituent courses;
- confirm that students are given every opportunity to attain the highest possible standard of achievement and are satisfied with the School's and University's arrangements for support and guidance, and with the quality of their educational experience;
- explore with staff and students any examples of good practice, and to identify any impediments to quality enhancement.

INITIAL MEETING

An initial meeting of internal Panel members and the Coordinating Reviewer will be held approximately two weeks before the date of the School visit. The primary purposes of this initial meeting will be to:-

³ The "academic infrastructure" includes: the University's Academic Quality Handbook, Programme Specifications and Curriculum Maps, the relevant national subject benchmark statements (where appropriate), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the QAA Code of Practice for Assuring Academic Quality & Standards, and other external reference points (including the requirements of professional and statutory bodies, where relevant).

- consider the written comments submitted by the External Subject Specialist(s) on the documentation (see Role below);
- receive and discuss oral comments from Panel members on the submission;
- identify perceived strengths and weaknesses arising from the review of documentation;
- identify any issues for clarification before the visit;
- identify any additional (extant) documentation that the Panel would wish to see before the visit;
- identify those staff and students whom the Panel would wish to meet during the visit;
- provisionally agree the issues to be discussed in the various meetings with staff and students.

The Coordinating Reviewer will send notes of the initial meeting to all Panel members at least seven days prior to the visit. *As some issues raised at this meeting might not be covered in full as part of the Panel's visit, but will possibly appear in the Report, External Subject Specialists are asked to check these notes, and inform the Coordinating Reviewer of any further comments they may have.*

The Coordinating Reviewer will also liaise with the Head of School in regard to any additional documentation requested and the identification of staff and students to meet the Panel.

PANEL VISIT

The Panel will visit the School and meet with individuals and groups of staff and students. Visits will take place during teaching periods (i.e. not during the formal revision and assessment periods) to allow the Panel to meet with students. The length of the visit will be negotiated by the Head of School in consultation with the appropriate Head of College, the ITR Coordinating Reviewer and the Panel's Convener. It is anticipated that two days will be necessary to accommodate multiple subject areas/External Subject Specialists, training and supervision of research students, and meetings with students.

ITR PANEL ROLES AND REQUIREMENTS

General

All academic members of the main 'ITR' Panel should:-

- be experienced teachers who have a demonstrated commitment to quality assurance and enhancement;
- be familiar with the QAA's approach to the assurance of quality and academic standards in Scottish Higher Education;
- have an awareness of the principle and intention of benchmarking, and the relationship to programme specifications;
- be familiar with the national subject benchmark statement for their own subject and have read those for the subjects which they are asked to review;
- be familiar with the University's procedures for Course Review, Programme Review and Internal Teaching Review;
- normally have attended a training/briefing session (internal members only).

Review of Research Student Training and Supervision

At least one academic member of the Panel should:

- have ample experience of and expertise in training and supervision of research students;
- be familiar with internal and external guidelines governing the training and supervision of research students, including the University's Postgraduate Structured Management Frameworks (*Academic Quality Handbook*, Appendices 8.2-8-7), the University's Code of Practice: Postgraduate Research Students (*Academic Quality Handbook*, Appendix 5.4), the relevant part of the QAA's *Code of Practice* (Section 1: Postgraduate Research Programmes), the Joint Statement of the Research Councils'/AHRB's *Skills Training Requirements for Research Students* and SHEFC's *Threshold Standards for Research Degree Programmes*.

Normally, more than one of the internal academic Panel members will meet these criteria, as well as the general criteria specified above. It is also recognised that, in many instances, the External Subject Specialist(s) will have appropriate experience and knowledge, and will wish to make a contribution to this aspect of the ITR process.

External Subject Specialists

Normally, at least one academic member of the Panel should:

- be from another Scottish institution
- be from an institution from outside Scotland
- have international expertise

External Subject Specialists will have a key role in discussion with staff and commenting on:-

- how the School has used the various components of the academic infrastructure and their impact on learning and teaching provision;
- the standards in the subject set by the School when compared with those set by other institutions with which the External Subject Specialist is familiar;
- the appropriateness of the teaching, learning and assessment practices in regard to the achievement of the subject-specific learning outcomes of the courses and programmes;
- the School's approach to describing levels in relation to the subject provision and benchmarks, and the role of levels in defining the academic standards being set by the School;
- any distinctive aspects of the School's provision or teaching, learning or assessment practices;
- the School's arrangements for the training and supervision of research students (where appropriate).

To achieve the above, External Subject Specialists will be expected to:-

- provide the Convener, via the ITR Coordinating Reviewer, with an initial, written commentary on the Self-Evaluation Document and the other documentation which they have received, to inform discussion at the initial (pre-visit) meeting of the internal Panel members;
- elucidate any concerns or other issues prior to the visit, if contacted by the Convener;
- be given the opportunity to participate fully in the meetings with staff and students during the visit;
- comment on the draft Report of the Review, within two weeks of receipt if possible.

To help the University to improve its quality assurance/enhancement framework, the external subject specialist will also be asked to comment on the procedures used as part of internal teaching review.

Internal Panel Members

All internal Panel members will be expected to:-

- review the documentation submitted by the School or provided by the Registry;
- attend a pre-meeting, approximately two weeks prior to the date of the School visit, the purpose of which is described above;
- participate in the Panel visit to the School;
- send their comments on the draft Report within two weeks of receipt, wherever possible.

Conveners

In addition to the general requirements above, Panel Conveners have a specific responsibility for:-

- liaising with the External Subject Specialist before the initial (pre-visit) meeting, to clarify any points raised in the External's written comments;
- visiting the School with the Coordinating Reviewer, prior the initial (pre-visit) meeting and after consultation with the Head of School, to observe the School's noticeboards, and any other facilities, including social facilities, that the Head of School wishes to bring to the attention of the Panel;
- chairing the initial meeting of the internal Panel members, and ensuring that all issues are addressed, as described above;
- approving the notes of the initial meeting, for circulation to all Panel members prior to the visit;
- chairing the various meetings with staff during the visit, and ensuring that each Panel member is aware of their role in the meetings with staff and students;
- ensuring that the Coordinating Reviewer is aware of the key issues arising from the Review, to assist in their drafting of the Report, including the identification of commendable and exemplary features and the areas to be covered by the Panel's recommendations;

- approving the draft Panel Report, prepared by the Coordinating Reviewer, prior to circulation to the other Panel members;
- finalising the Report in the light of any comments from the other Panel members on the draft and, subsequently, from the Head of School in regard to possible factual inaccuracies;
- providing the Head of School with informal feedback, once the Report has been finalised, including any feedback on issues not included in the Report (e.g. if the review has highlighted any concerns that are deemed to be of a confidential nature).

Coordinating Reviewers

The principal roles of the ITR Coordinating Reviewer are to:-

- liaise with staff members responsible for preparing their School's ITR documentation prior to its submission;
- act as a point of contact between the School, the central administration and the Panel members;
- assist with logistics, such as confirming the date(s) and venue(s) of the visit, or the appointment of External Subject Specialists;
- arrange the date of the initial (pre-visit) meeting with the internal Panel members, to be approximately **two** weeks before the Panel visit, and book a room;
- circulate a brief (standard format) agenda for the initial meeting, to include the External Subject Specialist's written comments (see above);
- circulate notes of the initial meeting to **all** Panel members for their consideration at least seven days prior to the Panel visit;
- liaise with the Head of School in regard to (a) any additional documentation requested by the Panel at the pre-visit meeting and (b) the groups of staff and students whom the Panel would like to meet during the visit;
- visit the School with the Convener prior to the initial (pre-visit) meeting, to observe the noticeboards and facilities;
- take notes at each of the meetings during the Panel visit;
- draft the Panel's Report and send it to the Convener, for comment/approval, no later than **four** weeks after the date of the Panel visit;
- send the draft Report, as approved by the Convener, to the other Panel members, for comment;
- liaise with the Convener in regard to any comments from the other Panel members, and send the Report to the Head of School for the identification of any factual inaccuracies;
- liaise with the Convener in regard to comments from the Head of School, and send the finalised Report and Summary to the Head of School and the relevant Head of College or Provost for further consideration;
- arrange for the Report to be published on the appropriate part of the Registry's website;
- liaise with ASC Clerks to ensure that follow-up procedures (i.e. consideration by the relevant ASCs of the (i) agreed response to the Panel's recommendations and (ii) the one-year-on progress report) are efficient and effective.

QUERIES

Any queries concerning the Internal Teaching Review exercise should be referred to the **ITR Coordinating Reviewer** in the Registry:

Registry, University Office, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Aberdeen, AB24 3FX
 Telephone: 01224 273505
 E-mail: registry@abdn.ac.uk

Useful websites:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/itr>

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality>

The University of Aberdeen's *Academic Quality Handbook*, Section 3 covers "The Assurance and Enhancement of Academic Quality and Standards in Learning and teaching", and the Appendices provide further details on various aspects of the quality assurance processes.