

University of Aberdeen

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

INFORMATION FOR THOSE PREPARING FOR INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

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.

UNITS OF REVIEW

The unit of review for Internal Teaching Review will normally be the School¹. All credit-bearing provision will be subject to Internal Teaching Review once every six years. The Review will include all taught undergraduate provision, taught postgraduate provision and training and supervision arrangements for research students.

In cases where a School's provision relates to more than one of the national Subject Groups (as defined by the QAA), the Panel will meet with representatives from each subject.

Continuing Education provision will be reviewed in a review of the Centre for Lifelong Learning rather than *ad hoc* in School/College Reviews.

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;
- 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 of whom one 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 Learning and teaching (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.

¹ The schedule and exact format of review will be agreed with the Heads of Colleges.

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 (ASCs), of the Head of School's and the Head of College's response to the Panel's recommendations²;
- 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 Panel³
- Additional comments or documentation requested by the Panel prior to its Visit
- Evidence gathered in the discussions held as part of the Panel Visit
- 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
- other documents that the School wishes to submit as Appendices

SELF-EVALUATION DOCUMENT

A standard format for the main Self-Evaluation Document (Annex A) has been approved, and can be downloaded at:

² The ASC(PG) will consider only those aspects of the Report that specifically relate to postgraduate taught and research students.

³ 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, the University Equality and Diversity advisor the School's recent External Examiners

APPENDICES

The following Appendices **must** be submitted alongside the SED:

- a list of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes offered in the current academic year
- a list of teaching staff for the current academic year, indicating the grade (and, for part-time staff, the fte). If appropriate, staff should be listed by subject area. The list should also identify specific responsibilities allocated to staff
- a list of training courses or other educational development opportunities (internal and/or external) undertaken by staff within the last two years
- the **Research Student Training and Supervision Report Form**
- a list of research students, to include qualification aimed for (and, if different, qualification presently registered for), field or title of research, and names and Schools (or equivalent affiliation) of supervisors
- a summary of the organisation of the School. This summary should identify all committees concerned with teaching, learning, research postgraduates and student support matters, and should also show the key links by which relevant individuals or committees report to other individuals or committees (a diagram may be the best way to show these reporting links)
- minutes of Teaching Committee (or equivalent) meetings for the last two years
- minutes of Staff-Student Liaison Committee (or equivalent) meetings for the last two years
- **Programme Review Reports** for each undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme grouping for which the School is responsible
- Reports from Professional or Statutory Bodies (PSBs) if appropriate
- Programme Specifications for current programmes⁴
- a School **QE Action Plan**

It is expected that Schools will already have this documentation on file, or that it should be quick to put together.

Programme review reports

Schools are required to submit programme review report forms for each major programme grouping. Where multi-disciplinary programmes are delivered by more than one School, the programme review will be undertaken by the 'owning' School⁵. Programme review reports should:

- summarise and justify changes made to the programme's content since the last review;
- identify strengths and weaknesses, drawing on feedback from staff, students, graduates, external examiners, and other stakeholders such as employers or professional bodies, as well as statistical data provided by the Registry⁶;
- provide a critical commentary on teaching methods, learning opportunities, types of assessment used and wider support arrangements;
- state any changes to be made as a result of the review exercise.

The **programme review report form** (Annex B) is designed to guide Schools through this process. The form can be downloaded from the Registry's website:

⁴ It is not necessary to produce Programme Review Reports for those programmes in their final year of delivery.

⁵ The 'owning' School would normally be the School contributing the highest proportion of credits to the programme.

⁶ These data are extracted from the Institutional Academic Profile, so that the Programme Review procedures match the wider public information requirements of the Quality Enhancement Framework and Freedom of Information legislation.

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

The ITR Coordinating reviewer will advise on the grouping of programme review reports to be submitted, and the relationship between the SED and the individual programme reviews.

Programme revalidation

Procedures for formal revalidation of programmes are an integral part of ITR/programme review (since 2005). Panels will examine the programme review reports, the current programme specifications and other evidence submitted (e.g., external examiners' reports), and will make one of three recommendations to the relevant ASC for each of a School's programmes:

1. Unconditional revalidation;
2. Revalidation conditional upon a satisfactory response to specific recommendations;
3. Refuse revalidation.

To assist the ITR Panels, the ASC Conveners (or, if nominated by the Convener of the ASC(Ug) the appropriate Director of Undergraduate Programmes) will be asked to scrutinise programme review reports prior to the visit, highlighting issues for the Panel to address. The list of the Panel's revalidation recommendations will form an annex to the ITR Report. The relevant ASC will then be invited to confirm the Panel's recommendations as part of the ITR follow-up procedures. If the Panel recommends conditional revalidation, the ASC will decide whether or not a School's response to the Panel's recommendations is satisfactory. If the Panel recommends that validation be refused, the relevant ASC can require full revision and resubmission of the appropriate programme documentation.

Research Student Training and Supervision Report Form (Annex C)

This can be downloaded from the Registry's website:

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

Quality Enhancement Action Plan

The ITR submission should include an action plan that identifies key points for action at the School level. The action plan should be prepared with the emphasis on strategic management of quality enhancement. It should act as a focus for a School's thinking, and as a concrete guide for both Panel discussion and follow-up activities involving the parent College and the ASCs.

Additional materials

Schools are encouraged to submit other documents that provide information about their activities and/or highlight particular areas of good practice. The SED should make appropriate reference to any such documents.

Schools must provide hard copies of the SED + core documents such as programme review reports and other appendices that will be frequently referred for each internal and external panel member, plus one extra copy for Office use. Additionally, all documentation should also be provided on CD (i.e. SED + all appendices). Submission are expected no later than 6 weeks before the panel visit.

LIAISON WITH REGISTRY

All Internal Teaching Reviews are coordinated by a member of administrative staff in the Registry: the ITR 'Coordinating reviewer' who is a full and equal member of the review Panel. Schools preparing for ITR are encouraged to liaise with the Coordinating reviewer. It is anticipated that staff members responsible for preparing their School's ITR submission will wish to arrange a meeting with the Coordinating reviewer as they start to put their

submission together, and will continue to interact with the Coordinating reviewer in the run up to the ITR itself. The Coordinating reviewer acts as a point of contact between the School, the central administration and the Panel members. He or she will be happy to answer queries or to offer advice: e.g. on how to interpret or complete sections of the SED, or on what additional documentation to include alongside the SED and compulsory appendices. The Coordinating reviewer will also assist with logistics, such as confirming the date(s) and venue(s) of the visit, or the appointment of External Subject Specialists.

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 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"⁷ 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.

PANEL VISIT

To allow the Panel to undertake the above, 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.

In all cases the schedule for the visit will be agreed with the Head of School. The ITR Visit may include meetings, *inter alia*, with any of the following: Head of School; Heads of Subject; the College Director of Teaching & Learning; Advisers of Studies; the Disability Co-

⁷ The "academic infrastructure" includes: the University's Academic Quality Handbook, Programme Specifications, 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).

ordinator; members of the School Teaching Committee (or equivalent); staff members of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee; the Examinations Officer; Course or Programme or Year Co-ordinators; staff with responsibility for the provision and maintenance of particular learning resources; the School's Director of Postgraduate Research (or equivalent, and if applicable); any staff with specific research training responsibilities, a selection of research student supervisors; secretarial, technical or administrative staff who have specific responsibilities in support of teaching, learning or assessment; academic staff appointed within the last three years; Teaching Assistants/Fellows; Demonstrators and Research Students who teach students; representatives of the Employers Liaison Group, where applicable; College Information Consultants. Time may also if requested, be set aside for staff to meet with the External Subject Specialist(s). The Panel will also meet a representative section of undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students, to include both student members of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee(s) (SSLC) and students who are not SSLC members.

REVIEW REPORT

The ITR process is intended to be positive and constructive. The formal outcome of the process is a Report, drafted by the Coordinating reviewer. The Report will list those met by the Panel during the visit and will give the Panel's overall impressions. A commentary on each section of the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) will be provided, which will include reference to issues raised during the visit as well as those arising from the SED or Appendices submitted by the School. Where relevant, the Report will include a commentary on how the School has addressed any issues arising from previous external reports and/or a previous Internal Teaching Review. The Report will highlight aspects of a School's arrangements which are to be commended, and will also make recommendations to assist a School in further enhancing the quality and standards of its educational provision, drawing attention to any areas of concern and suggesting how these might be addressed. The Report will also highlight any matters of institutional interest, particularly those relating to quality enhancement. A Summary of the Report will be produced. This will consist of the Panel's overall impressions, and a list of its commendations and recommendations. In exceptional cases a separate, confidential, annex to the Report may be prepared solely for internal management purposes.

Report conclusions

The Report will not make formal summative judgements, but it will provide a commentary on four specific aspects as follows:

- *Academic standards* (i.e. what is taught, at what level, using what methods of delivery and assessment and with what intended outcomes)
- *Quality of learning opportunities* (in terms of teaching, learning and educational support practices, opportunities for progression and available resources). In addition, the Panel may draw attention to *individual* aspects of a School's provision that it considers to be **exemplary**
- *Quality of support for postgraduate research students*
- *The Panel's level of confidence in the School's procedures for assuring and enhancing quality and standards*

The list of the Panel's revalidation recommendations will form an annex to the ITR Report.

Stages in the production and circulation of the Report

- Coordinating reviewer drafts Report.
- Draft Report circulated to ITR Panel members for comment and amendment.
- Revised Report sent to Head of School.

- Head of School to inform Coordinating reviewer of factual inaccuracies in the Report as soon as possible. Errors corrected, subject to the approval of the ITR's Convener (as appropriate).
- Following appropriate consultation with staff and students, including the College Director of Teaching and Learning, Head of School to meet with Head of College to agree Response to the Report's recommendations. To promote a strategic approach to quality enhancement, as part of the agreed response to the ITR, the College should: a) include a short commentary on a School's action plan; b) comment on what it has learned from the ITR, including identification of issues for wider action or dissemination. It is expected that the report and School/College response will be discussed at College Executives and College Teaching & Learning Committees.
- Summary of Report and agreed Response from Head of School and Head of College submitted to the appropriate ASCs for consideration. ASC clerks will feedback comments from the ASC to Heads of School, and forward any issues of institutional concern as appropriate.
- Final version of the Report (corrected for factual errors) together with the agreed Response from Head of School and Head of College lodged with the Registry. This, along with subsequent comments from the ASCs and the follow-up report once produced, will be made available to the QAA for the purposes of institutional review.

“Publication” of the Report on the Intranet/World-Wide Web

The full text of ITR Summary Reports will normally be “published” on the Registry’s website (www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/itr) following submission of the report to the Academic Standards Committees. The summary Report will only be available to staff and registered students at the University of Aberdeen (i.e. Intranet publication). The agreed response of the Head of School will also be published on the Intranet, as will the follow-up report once it is available. However, should the agreed response be delayed, the Report will be published in order to ensure the currency of its content, and the response added to the website once it is prepared.

Schools will be free to publicise part or all of their ITR Report in their own documentation, or to link their own web pages to the ITR section of the Registry website should they so wish. They will also be invited to place the SED on the same website if they feel this is useful. Material considered to be sensitive or confidential will not be published on the web. Heads of Schools and Heads of College should submit any requests for material to be held back to the ITR Coordinating reviewer in the first instance.

ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP REPORT

Heads of School will be asked to submit a follow-up Report approximately one year after the internal Report has been considered by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) (the date for submission of the progress report will be agreed with the Head of School). The follow-up Report should be a summary (of the order of 800 words) of the School's progress in addressing the Panel's recommendations and a critical evaluation of the relative success of any new practices that have been implemented as a consequence of the Internal Teaching Review. Appendices may be submitted to support any aspect of the follow-up report if considered appropriate. It should be submitted initially to the Head of College, and thereafter to the relevant ASC(s) with the Head of College's comments. Following consideration by the ASC, the follow-up Report will be lodged with the Registry alongside the initial Report and Response, and will be made available to the QAA for purposes of institutional review.

TIMETABLE

Internal Teaching Reviews normally will take place once every six years. The timetable for Internal Teaching Review (and Programme Review) has been agreed by Heads of College, in consultation with Heads of School and the University Committee on Learning and teaching [Annex D,].

Normally, Panel visits will take place in the Spring or Summer Terms.

QUERIES

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

Extension: 3505

E-mail: registry@abdn.ac.uk