

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW
GUIDANCE NOTES FOR SCHOOLS**

1. INTRODUCTION

Internal Teaching Review (ITR) is the University of Aberdeen's version of periodic review, a requirement of all Scottish HEIs as part of the Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland)'s Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). The QEF was developed by the QAA in conjunction with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), and adherence to its requirements is a condition of SFC grant.

The ITR process provides a formal opportunity for a School to reflect on and critically evaluate its provision and to benefit from a constructive dialogue with senior academics from both within and out-with the University. It is intended to be a positive and constructive activity, supporting the School in the enhancement of their provision and learning experience of their students.

In accordance with Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance, the purpose of an Internal Teaching Review is to:

- i. provide assurance regarding the quality and standard of our teaching provision
- ii. promote dialogue in areas where quality could be improved
- iii. identify good practice for dissemination
- iv. encourage and support critical reflection on current practice

A six-year rolling review schedule is approved, in consultation with the Vice-Principal (Education). Reviews are normally undertaken at School level. The schedule takes account, where possible, of external accreditation timetables.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

Internal Teaching Review covers all credit bearing provision within the School. This includes:

- All Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught provision;
- Any joint degree programmes, including joint degree programmes with other schools or institutions where the University of Aberdeen is the awarding body;
- Service teaching provided for another School within the University i.e. where the School is responsible for the administration, organisation and or content of the courses;
- Collaborative provision, including provision delivery by delivery partners, and student exchange;
- Research programmes

Reviews are normally held in the period October to April when students are available to meet with the Review Panel. The Academic Services team will consult and liaise with the School regarding possible dates.

3. ITR PROCESS

The ITR process is as follows:

(i) Annual Monitoring

Schools submit annual monitoring documentation (Course Feedback Form outcomes, annual course and programme reviews, external examiner reports and School responses thereto, Professional and

Statutory Bodies (PSRB) documentation and school planning KPIs (and associated action plans) to the Quality and Planning SharePoint in accordance with publicised deadlines).

ITR Submission

Schools, following consultation with both staff and students, must submit:

- i. An evidence-based **Critical Analysis (CA)**. The CA allows the Schools' particular contexts to be set out clearly and should have a clear focus on (i) enhancement and (ii) reflection on effectiveness throughout. Clear examples should be provided throughout the document.
- ii. **Curriculum Map(s)**. These should detail how programmes align with the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes and, *where appropriate*, Subject Benchmark Statements. Programmes required to submit curriculum maps will be discussed at the pre-panel visit meeting with the School (see below).

Submission should be made via email, with one copy sent to the Clerk of the ITR and another uploaded to the [Quality and Planning SharePoint](#), allowing extra evidence to be submitted as appropriate.

Submission deadline: 4 weeks prior to ITR panel visit, precise date advised by Academic Services.

(i) Pre-Panel Meeting

Approximately 2 weeks after ITR documents have been submitted by the School, the internal panel members will meet to discuss and agree the themes to be discussed during the Panel visit., Any areas for clarification with the School or, occasionally, requests for additional information prior to the visit, will be addressed at this time. External panellists are welcome to submit their thoughts in writing to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

(ii) Pre-Review Visit to School

Approximately one week prior to the main Panel visit, there will be a pre-review meeting (1h duration) with the Chair, Clerk, Head of School, School Director of Education, School Administration Manager (SAM), and others if requested by the School and/or Chair, to discuss emerging themes for exploring at the panel visit.

(iii) Panel visit

Panel Visits will normally take place in person on campus, over the course of two or three days. Suitable accommodation needs to be provided within the School for the duration of the visit; it is the responsibility of the School to organise this, and for arranging catering during the visit. The aim will be to follow up on key themes identified by the Panel from submission and discussions with the School at the pre-panel visit.

The Panel will hold a minimum of 6 meetings:

- QA session with Head of School, Director of Education, Director of Research, School Admin Manager and others as required (1.5h).
- Enhancement-focused discussion with academic staff, with the range of staff depending on themes being discussed (1.5h). Staff attending should be agreed between the Head of School and the ITR Clerk and Chair prior to the review.
- Enhancement-focused discussion with support staff, including a range of administrative and technical staff from within the School (1.5h). In addition, staff from relevant Professional Services teams will be invited (Registry, Careers Service, Student Support).
- Enhancement-focused discussion with students from a variety of levels of study and modes of engagement, where possible (1.5h)

- Pedagogic Partnership Session, to include students and staff (excluding those present at the initial QA session) (2h). The aim of this meeting will be to have an open-ended discussion of challenges and potential solutions informed by a small number of key questions. The aim of the PPS is to inform the creation of the Action Plan for the School to take forward.
- Final closing session with HoS, School DoE and others as requested by Head of School/Chair, to provide a summary of the ITR and an outline of actions likely to be noted in the action plan.

NB1: The Panel may explore some topics in more than one meeting and will not be restricted from exploring others as they arise on the day.

NB2: Schools are asked to ensure that the students who attend the Pedagogic Partnership Session include representatives of as many different strands of the student body as possible, e.g., each level of study, mode of study (part-time, full-time, distance learning) etc

(iv) Report

The outcome will be a report consisting of three parts:

- Part A** gives the overall impressions of the teaching provision within the School, formed from the ITR process as a whole
- Part B** covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on the themes identified prior to and during the review
- Part C** details the School action plan which will form the basis of the annual follow-up reports

The annual follow up reports will consist of an update on progress on the action plan. Exceptionally, QAC may request a response within a shorter timescale, if deemed appropriate. QAC will review the progress reports to ensure that the recommendations have been adequately addressed and reported, including evidence of dissemination of recommendations to students. The report and subsequent actions will be considered by the QAC and posted to the institutional ITR web pages.

4. ITR TIMELINE

Milestone	Indicative timeline
School is contacted by Academic Services to initiate the planning of the ITR	6 months before
Initial meeting with Panel Chair and Clerk, Head of School, Director of Education and School Admin Manager to explain process and information required	4 months before
School is provided with a draft schedule for comment	2 months before
Critical Analysis is submitted to the Panel	1 month before
Agreement of Themes meeting attended by internal and (optionally) external panellists	2 weeks before
Meeting with Panel Chair and Clerk, Head of School, Director of Education and School Admin Manager to confirm themes for discussion during the Panel visit	1 week before
ITR report is sent to School for factual accuracy check and input on suggested action plan	2 weeks after
ITR report is finalised and sent to Panel, School, Professional Services Leads, and Clerk to QAC for inclusion on the next meeting agenda of the Committee	4 weeks after

5. ITR PANEL

The ITR panel will comprise *at a minimum*:

- **Panel Chair:** The Panel Chair will normally be an independent member of the QAC, i.e. not the QAC member whose responsibility it is to review the School's QA documentation annually. This gives a fresh perspective on the School's education provision;
- At least **two external subject specialists** from other HE institutions, industry or related profession, normally in the UK with one from outside Scotland;
- **A student representative** from out-with the School (normally a School Convener);
- **Two experienced members of academic staff** from out-with the School who have learning and teaching roles;
- **An administrator**, normally from Academic Services, who will also act as clerk to the panel.

External subject specialists: the number of external subject specialists appointed to the panel will take account of the range and volume of provision to be reviewed and ensure that the panel as a whole is able to bring a range of experience, perspectives and understanding to the process. It is normally expected that there will be one external subject specialist for each group of cognate programmes within a School. They may come from a UK or overseas institution (costs allowing), from industry or from professional practice, and must have an awareness of the Scottish or UK HEI system. They cannot be drawn from colleagues who have been a member of staff, a student or an external examiner of the University of Aberdeen in the three years prior to the review. The Head of School will be asked to suggest external subject specialists and forward their CV / online profiles for the consideration of the Vice-Principal (Education) who approves the full panel composition. When nominations are approved, Academic Services will contact the individuals concerned. External members will receive a fee plus reimbursement of expenses. Schools are responsible for the payment of costs of external specialists.

Internal panel members: other internal panel members will normally be drawn from a pool of academic staff, approved annually by the Vice-Principal (Education). These academics will have a key role in overseeing teaching and learning provision in their own Schools, will also be acutely aware of the institution's education priorities and agenda. Internal panel members are often drawn from Schools who will shortly undergo ITR, with a view to giving context to the process within their own School.

Student panel members: student representation will be drawn from School Conveners external to the School being reviewed. The inclusion of a student member provides the panel with a greater focus on the student experience and an additional perspective on other issues from the student point of view.

This model of panel membership allows the greatest dissemination of good practice between Schools and ensures panel members bring knowledge of institutional learning and teaching issues and priorities.

6. DOCUMENTATION

Schools, following consultation with both staff and students, must submit an evidence-based **Critical Analysis and (ii) a Curriculum Map(s)**.

Critical Analysis (CA): The CA allows the Schools' particular contexts to be set out clearly and has a clear focus on (i) enhancement and (ii) reflection on effectiveness. The CA must be **evidence-based** throughout, i.e. examples should be provided wherever possible.

Documentation provided to the Quality and Planning SharePoint as part of annual monitoring or the school planning process does not need to be re-submitted, but should be explicitly referred to, where appropriate, throughout the CA. Examples of the documentation useful to help Schools support their

evidence-based CA reflections are available in 9, below.

The CA is prepared (normally) by the School Director of Education, in conjunction with other School staff and students. Normally, students are consulted via Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings and/or focus groups, to elicit input to the reflection on provision and establish whether it reflects their experience of the School and their programmes.

The format of the CA should follow the guidance provided in 9, below. Should Schools wish to discuss a draft critical analysis they should contact their ITR Clerk in the first instance.

Curriculum Map(s): should detail how programmes align with Aberdeen Graduate Attributes and, *where appropriate*, Subject Benchmark Statements. Programmes required to submit curriculum maps will be discussed at the initial meeting with the School 4-6 months before the ITR virtual panel visit takes place.

Supporting Documentation: to evidence your critical analysis, reflections should be referenced/hyperlinked where possible. Schools are free to use their areas on the Quality and Planning SharePoint site to facilitate this if they wish. It is expected that the following documentation would be referenced to support the CA as a minimum. Please note, the ITR Panel reserves the right to request additional documentation expected of Schools or alluded to in School submissions at any time.

1. Details of School/Discipline organisation, management, and administration (including collaborative arrangements). Please include an organogram and list of key post holders including Disability Coordinator, EDI Lead, Communications Champion etc.
2. Examples of School (discipline)-specific course and programme information provided to students e.g. course and programme handbooks, mapping of any School marking scales, assessment and feedback guidance, standard MyAberdeen templates used within the School etc.
3. In addition to School Education Committees and Staff-student Liaison Committees already on SharePoint, please include membership and remits of any School/Discipline committees concerned with teaching, learning and assessment activities, including Programme Advisory Boards (or equivalents).
4. Other documentation (e.g. minutes, agendas, reports) relating to operation or review of courses and programmes (e.g. minutes of meetings about the School's programme portfolio, agendas of School Away Days etc. This should already be available on the School area of the Quality and Planning SharePoint site. In reviewing the School's submission, ITR Panel members will be asked to consider the extent to which the CA is reflective, evaluative, and constructively self-critical and discusses School's strengths and weaknesses. It will also consider how staff and students have contributed to its development. Additionally, ITR Panel members will be asked to focus on particular aspects:
 - a. Internal Panel members focus on the robustness of the School's procedures and mechanisms for assuring quality and its plans for enhancement, particularly plans related to institutional Education Strategy including engagement with University Task and Finish Groups, current priorities and enhancement initiatives including the national Enhancement Themes.
 - b. External subject specialists are asked to focus on reviewing the School's taught provision and approaches to educational delivery in the light of relevant national subject benchmark statements and other external reference points, including the requirements of any relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (where relevant) and the appropriateness of the School's mechanisms for assuring the standards of awards.
 - c. Student panel members focus on student related matters such as mechanisms for communicating with and engaging students, the usefulness key

information, opportunities for students to engage in curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment development and innovation; and the effectiveness of mechanisms for obtaining and responding to student feedback.

7. ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ITR

Student engagement and participation is a much valued and vital aspect of all ITRs.

Schools are asked to inform students about the review at an early opportunity e.g., at the first SSLC meeting in the academic session in which the review will be held. Further, Schools are expected to engage with their students and to incorporate students' views and feedback whilst producing the documentation submitted for the review. This is usually achieved by liaising with the wider student body on an early draft and then again later to seek endorsement prior to submission. Most Schools tend to do this via its network of School Convener and Student representatives, or by posting a draft on MyAberdeen, or by convening a focus group(s). Schools should also refer to student feedback obtained via routine quality mechanisms e.g. Course Feedback Forms, SSLCs, and annual monitoring reports, student surveys, etc.

The ITR panel will ask to meet a variety of students (undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, student representatives, online and on campus, and from all across all years of study) to share their views on learning, teaching and assessment, and their wider experience as students of the School. Schools will be asked to arrange for the students to meet the Panel and experience dictates that students are willing to participate, and can do so most usefully, if they have had an early briefing from the School about the review and have been engaged in the School's preparation for it.

During the panel visit, students will be full partners in the Pedagogic Partnership Session which is convened to inform the creation of the Action Plan for the School to take forward.

Following the review, Schools are asked to inform students about the review outcome and share with them the report and action plan. This can be provided for consideration at SSLCs or posted to MyAberdeen.

The School will be asked to report on the steps it has taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review and on the actions taken in the annual follow-up reports / updated action plans to QAC.

8. ENGAGEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES IN ITRs

The involvement of student-facing Professional Services in teaching and learning is an explicit part of the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) process. Staff from relevant Professional Services, including the Registry, the Careers & Employability Service, Student Experience, and Student Support engage in each School's ITR to review the extent and quality of their interactions with a School and its students. ITRs should demonstrate strengths (and weaknesses, if any) of Professional Services in education-related matters.

9. GUIDANCE FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The **Critical Analysis (CA)** should be *evidence-based, including specific examples throughout*, and structured around the headings which follow. Its preparation should involve staff and students, and Schools should refer to their School Action Plans and planning metrics. Annual Course (ACR) and Programme Reviews (APR) and External Examiner Reports since the Schools' previous ITRs, and PSRB reviews and reports where applicable should also be drawn upon.

Internal Teaching Review covers **all credit-bearing provision**: i.e. taught undergraduate provision, taught postgraduate provision, and the training and supervision arrangements for research students, online, on campus and at branch campuses. Please ensure the CA makes reference to matters relevant to all areas of activity as appropriate.

The CA should identify:

- How it was prepared and approved
- How students were involved and the impact of that student engagement
- Brief background information about the size and scale of the School
- The School's overarching strategic priorities

The CA should provide information about the contextualisation of the School, to include areas where the School considers it demonstrates good practice, areas prioritised for development and /or enhancement, and areas that continue to present a challenge. This information should be summarised in the opening section of the Critical Analysis, cross referenced to later sections to provide greater detail as appropriate. The School should refer to the data it uses in its School planning process in identifying its strengths and challenges.

As ITR is contextualised, it is understood that the themes explored in each review will reflect the strategy, priorities, strengths and challenges of the School concerned. Schools are expected to address each of the 4 sections of the CA, but it is recognised that the volume and focus of the content provided by each School will vary. It is generally recommended that the CA should be no longer than **25 pages (approximately 11,000-12,000 words)**, excluding appendices.

The CA documentation should focus on the following four thematic areas:

- i. School context**
 - a. student numbers, demographics, and outcomes;
 - b. any areas of teaching and learning practices that are specific to the School;
 - c. a summary of the School's response to the previous ITR.
- ii. Positive aspects of the School's teaching and learning**
 - a. examples of positive practice and particular strengths of the School;
 - b. how this good practice is shared both within the School and beyond.
- iii. Challenges that have been encountered in the School's teaching and learning provision**
 - a. potential areas identified for improvement;
 - b. an action plan for how the School intends to handle them. These issues can also be discussed at the ITR.
- iv. Future plans**
 - a. areas for development in the next few years;
 - b. intended new course or programme developments;
 - c. intended partnership proposals.

In the context of the CA, Schools should ensure they outline:

- What is distinctive and what is typical about the School
- What the key areas of strength and challenge are
- How the School has evaluated its policy and practice
- How the school intends to build on good practice or address areas for development
- A consideration of both UG and PG (taught and research) provision

- A consideration of Collaborative, Online and Transnational Education (TNE) provision

NB: this should be particular to the School, and not just evidence of School adherence to expected institutional practice.

Be open and honest. Do not be afraid to discuss aspects of concern. The spirit of ITR is intended to be constructive, not punitive or judgemental, and the exercise is intended to contribute to enhancement of teaching and learning across the University as a whole.