INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

AN INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

These notes, produced jointly by the Students’ Association and the Registry, provide important background information on the University of Aberdeen’s Internal Teaching Review (ITR) scheme. They have been written for all students wishing to know more about ITR, but should be of special benefit to those students invited to meet with the main review Panel.

What is Internal Teaching Review?

Internal Teaching Review is exactly what it says it is: an ‘in-house’ review of a School’s teaching-related activities. The aims of the review are:

- to assess the overall quality of teaching – what is taught, in what ways, at what level, and how it is assessed;
- to encourage the School to consider how existing practices can be improved;
- to provide students with the chance to comment on the quality of teaching, learning and other aspects of life at the University, in a way that contributes directly to the first two aims;
- to identify and share examples of ‘best practice’ so that all of the University’s students benefit.

What happens?

The Review is carried out by an independent Panel made up of staff from the University, a student representative appointed by the Students’ Association, and one or two specialists from other institutions brought in to offer an outside perspective on the School’s teaching activities. The process is managed by staff from the University Registry. The Panel examines a range of documentary evidence supplied by the School, follows this up with a series of interviews conducted with staff and students, and finally writes up its findings as a formal report.

What is the difference between SCEF and ITR?

The SCEF exercise invites students to comment on specific aspects of individual courses. In contrast, ITR takes a wider view: it sets out to address more general issues, including many things that course evaluation questionnaires tend not to cover (eg advisers of study and other support systems, the class representative system, careers advice, what students think about their degree programme as a package). ITR also provides a perspective from outside the School: the Panel sets out check the School's opinion of itself against the views of its students, and, depending on its findings, has the power to make recommendations to which the School must respond.

Why is Internal Teaching Review important?

The Panel’s report will publicise those things that a School does well, but it will also identify those areas in which there is room for improvement. The report will be circulated to important decision makers in the University, and contributes to the external review of quality across the whole University carried out every four years by government agencies. A year after the report’s production, a follow-up check of the School will be made to ensure that issues identified by the Panel have been addressed.
Why speak to me?

The University’s students are the reason that it teaches, so it is necessary to place students firmly at the centre of the review process. We are interested in what students think of their course and the facilities for learning and support available in the School. We are also keen to discover how effectively the School takes account of students’ views. You can expect to be asked questions about these topics, with the Panel’s student representative guiding the conversation. For the review process to work well, it is important that you answer honestly and constructively. Please do not be afraid to tell the panel what you and other students think. Your name will not appear in the report, so it will not be possible to trace remarks to particular individuals.

What questions will I be asked?

As part of the ITR process, we want to hear what students think about:

- What is taught
- How it is taught
- How well it is taught
- How it is assessed
- The types of support, both academic and extra-curricular, available to students, and how well these work
- The accommodation, equipment and other facilities, including library and IT support, for learning and teaching
- In general, whether or not students are happy with their experience of education at the University of Aberdeen

The categories given above cover a wide range of possible questions. The Annex at the end of this document provides a longer list of more detailed questions that the Panel might ask. It is important to stress that ITR is not an exam! It is the School that is being assessed, not you. Thus, there should be no need for you to prepare for your meeting with the Panel, although you might like to read through the questions and think about any issues that you want to raise. If the Panel does not ask questions about something that you feel is important, do not be afraid to bring it to their attention. Please remember that your information will be used to improve learning and teaching not just in the School that is being reviewed, but across all of the University.

Where can I find further information?

The document ‘Information for those preparing for Internal Teaching Review’ gives a fuller, and rather more formal, description of the ITR process. This is Appendix 3.8 of the University’s Academic Quality Handbook, and can be found online at: http://www.abdn.ac.uk/quality/appendix3x8.pdf

ITRs are coordinated by an Administrative Officer in the University Registry: the ITR Coordinating Reviewer. He or she will be happy to answer any questions that you have, and can be contacted through the Registry at 01224 273936 or academicservices@abdn.ac.uk.
POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS MEETING ITR PANELS

These questions are provided as a guide for students only. Because of time constraints, the Panel will not be able to address all of these issues in its meetings with students. The Panel might also ask other questions not included on this list. Students participating in ITR meetings will also be invited to raise issues with the Panel.

Student representation and inputs to quality control processes [Class representatives in particular are likely to be asked questions of this type.]

- How are students’ views sought?
- Are the format and work of the Staff–Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) successful?
- Are students’ views influential? If so, can you provide examples?
- How are issues identified for referral to the SSLC?
- Is the ‘feedback loop’ to students closed? For example, have changes been made as a consequence of students’ comments, or, if not, have students been told the reasons why their views have not been acted upon?
- How is feedback given to the rest of the student body?
- Are students represented on committees other than the SSLC? If so, which ones and what is the students’ role?
- Did students make a contribution to production of the Self-Evaluation Document?
- Are the School means of communicating with students appropriate? Are they clearly understood by students?

Admission, progression and support

- Why did you choose to study at Aberdeen?
- What admission and induction procedures are in operation at the level of the School?
- What are the arrangements for academic and personal support? How well does the Advising system work?
- Do these arrangements for support extend to work experience, placements, study abroad and other off-campus experiences?
- What skills and attributes are acquired? Do they enhance employability?
- Do students receive effective support?
- Do students know how to go about making a complaint about some aspect of a School’s provision or about a more general, University issue?

Learning resources and their deployment

- How good are the library services in terms of opening hours, access, user support and availability of books and journals?
- What IT support is there? Are opening hours, access, user support and availability of workstations and software appropriate?
- Are suitable subject/programme-specific materials available?
- Are the accommodation and equipment for learning and teaching adequate?

The curriculum and intended learning outcomes

- Are students made aware of the aims and intended learning outcomes of degree programmes? If so, by what means?
• Are the aims and learning outcomes of individual courses clear?
• How well do the expectations of students, the intended learning outcomes and the curricular content match up?
• Does the curricular content encourage the development of knowledge and skills?
• What is its relevance to further study and prospective employment?
• Are timetables and workloads appropriate?
• What opportunities are there for practical and vocational experience?

**Learning and Teaching**

• Is the range of learning and teaching methods appropriate for delivering the curriculum?
• How do students perceive the quality of the teaching?
• Is there effective support and guidance for independent study?
• Overall, are students satisfied with the learning and teaching provision?

**Assessment and achievement**

• Is written information provided by the School adequate (eg in relation to course-work deadlines; in-course assessment and written examination weightings; any penalties for late submission of course-work; how to reference the work of others in order to avoid plagiarism; criteria for entry to Honours)?
• Do students understand the criteria for assessment and the methods employed? Are the criteria for the award of CAS marks explicit and understood by students? Are Honours students aware of how their degree classification will be determined?
• Does assessment include qualitative feedback that can help to improve future performance (ie formative assessment) or is it restricted to the award of a mark to indicate a certain level of achievement (ie summative assessment)?
• What feedback arrangements are there? Is feedback prompt and effective?
• In students’ experience, have the intended learning outcomes been achieved?
• Do academic staff discuss student achievement with students?
• Are further study and career aspirations likely to be satisfied?
• Are students satisfied with the extent to which their graduate attributes have been developed (eg IT skills, writing skills, team working, critical thinking and problem solving)?
• Were the above attributes developed progressively through related courses (eg links between different levels)?