

## **4 SUBJECT REVIEW AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE REVIEW**

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### **THE NEED FOR SUBJECT AND SERVICE REVIEWS**

- 4.1 Subject and service reviews form one element within the university's quality framework. They are intended to provide assurance to the university and to external stakeholders of the standards of awards and of the quality of the student learning experience provided within the university.
- 4.2 Both the Scottish Funding Council and QAA require that institution-led quality reviews are conducted in all Scottish HEIs, and indicate that these are an essential element of an institution's quality framework.
- 4.3 The purpose of subject review is to provide periodic in-depth reflection on and analysis of how the requirements and the standards of the awards and the quality of students' learning experiences are being managed and enhanced throughout the subject network and its supporting structures.
- 4.4 The purpose of service review is to provide periodic in-depth reflection on and analysis of how the quality of students' learning experiences are being managed and enhanced throughout the university and its supporting structures.
- 4.5 The reviews will make evidence-based judgements on how effective the academic management, teaching and learner support across the subject network / service are, and the extent to which they sustain a culture of ongoing reflection and enhancement. The panel will explore with subject network / service teams how issues and initiatives already identified through other quality monitoring and approval processes are being progressed. The panel may make recommendations on how the subject network / service might further develop or be supported, and will identify areas of good practice for sharing within the university.
- 4.6 The review process will refer to the expectations and indicators of sound practice of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and other external reference points.
- 4.7 The subject / service review process and outcomes are subject to scrutiny by QAA through Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). The ELIR team will examine how the university uses the review process effectively to manage and enhance the quality of provision, and to what extent the process meets sector-wide expectations. This includes how subject / service reviews link to other quality processes, such as annual monitoring, approval and re-approval. Particular attention will be given to how the university addresses and monitors the outcomes of reviews, and what actions are taken as a result. The university will draw on evidence of subject / service reviews in producing the Reflective Analysis document for ELIR.

### **SCOPE OF SUBJECT REVIEW**

- 4.8 The scope of subject review will include all higher education provision within a subject network. The review will include all taught programmes within the subject network, including postgraduate awards, HN programmes, continuing professional development (CPD),

collaborative and overseas provision, online and distance learning and provision which provides only small amounts of credit.

- 4.9 The review will also examine areas that have specific relevance to the university, such as the delivery of SQA programmes, articulation arrangements, and the management of the student learning experience for dispersed groups of students. It will look at the ways in which quality is enhanced, identify practice that others might learn from and how this might be disseminated more widely. It will also encourage the subject network to reflect on the strategic development of the subject area.
- 4.10 The review panel will require access to student work, therefore it is necessary to retain examples of student work from all programmes (a sample of modules / units), including degree programmes, SQA provision and any HE-level programmes validated by other bodies.
- 4.11 A sample of student work (examination scripts and coursework) would normally include examples of lowest (fails) and highest achievement, and borderline cases, along with the feedback from the marker / moderator. Examples of student work should be available for the three years preceding the subject review.
- 4.12 Subject network leaders should, through the subject network committee, ensure that all programme leaders are aware of the requirement to retain samples of assessed work and assist them, if necessary, in determining which assessments to sample.

#### **SCOPE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE REVIEW**

- 4.13 The scope of each student support service review will include all activities within that service which are student-facing and/or intended to enhance the student learning experience. The scope will cover the relevant service across all academic partners, however it is provided and resourced, recognising that such services will support both HE and FE students.

#### **CYCLE FOR SUBJECT AND SERVICE REVIEW**

- 4.14 Subject and service reviews will normally be conducted on a six-year cycle, with the schedule of activity determined by Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Where appropriate, one or more student support services may be reviewed jointly.

#### **RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER QUALITY PROCESSES**

- 4.15 Subject and service reviews form one element within the university's quality framework. They are intended to draw on the outcomes of other quality processes, such as annual monitoring and programme (re)approval, as well as to feed into them.

#### **PRINCIPLES OF SUBJECT AND SERVICE REVIEW**

- 4.16 The subject / service review process is based on the following principles:
- the review will be based on a self-evaluation undertaken by the subject network / service, making appropriate use of performance indicators, student feedback and student data
  - the review will draw on and inform other quality processes
  - the review panel will include external representatives and a student member

- the review will be open and based on a process of peer review
- the process of review will engage staff and students from the subject network / service
- the review will be flexible in scope to accommodate the characteristics of the subject network / service
- whilst not sacrificing the need for assurance, the review will be conducted so as to be enhancement-focussed, for the subject network / service, and the university as a whole.

#### **PREPARATION FOR REVIEWS**

- 4.17 Planning and preparation for subject / service review will begin the year before the review takes place. The focus of the review will take into account the characteristics of the subject network / service, and will be the subject of consultation in the planning stage, whereby subject network and faculty or service staff may identify any particular questions or issues they would like the review to include in its focus. There will also be consultation on preferences for the composition of the review panel and the timing of the review within the academic session.
- 4.18 It is the responsibility of the subject network leader / nominated service review co-ordinator to co-ordinate the writing of the self-evaluation document and to lead the preparations for review. Support in preparing for the review will be provided by Academic Directorate.
- 4.19 Staff from every academic partner offering provision within the subject network will be required to contribute to the preparations for subject review and the self-evaluation document.
- 4.20 Staff from every academic partner will be required to contribute to the preparations for service review and the self-evaluation document.

#### **DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED**

- 4.21 The main document required for subject / service review will be the self-evaluation document (SED): a single SED will be produced for each subject network / service undergoing review. In addition, for subject reviews, current programme documentation will be required for each degree programme.
- 4.22 The SED will provide a framework for review based on testing and verifying statements made by the subject network / service. It should demonstrate a process of reflection and analysis, identifying areas of strength and good practice, as well as areas for development, and any activities put in place to address these.
- 4.23 The subject network SED should demonstrate that the subject network has evaluated:
- the appropriateness of the academic standards set
  - the effectiveness of the curriculum in delivering the intended outcomes
  - the effectiveness of assessment in measuring the attainment of the intended outcomes
  - the extent to which the intended outcomes are met by students
  - the quality of learning opportunities for students
  - the quality of learning resources, including staff and library resources.
- 4.24 The service SED should demonstrate that the service has documented and evaluated:

- the provision and structure of the service
- the service's routine or annual monitoring processes
- notable recent developments and achievements
- the extent of alignment with external reference points and other benchmarks
- the engagement with students and other stakeholders
- the service's impact on the student learning experience
- the professional development of staff contributing to the service
- the quality of resources (for staff contributing to the service and for students).

4.25 The SED will be a key document in the review, and detailed guidance on its production will be provided to subject network / service teams.

## **REVIEW PANELS**

4.26 Subject review panel composition will take account of the range and volume of provision within the subject network. The review panel will normally include:

- a. a senior member of university staff, who will chair the review
- b. two external members with relevant subject background from other UK universities or colleges
- c. one or two internal academic representatives, such as a subject network leader or programme leader with no involvement in the subject network under review
- d. a quality manager
- e. a student member, from another subject network
- f. an officer from Academic Directorate.

4.27 Service review panel composition will take account of the scope and characteristics of the student support service. The review panel will normally include:

- a. a dean, who will chair the review
- b. up to two external members: senior service managers with relevant experience from another UK university or college
- c. two internal members of staff: staff with management-level expertise in any student-facing service (other than the service under review), including managers with a mixed remit
- d. a student member
- e. an officer from Academic Directorate.

4.28 Where a review is particularly large or complex, the chair may decide that additional academic or specialist expertise is required on the panel.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

4.29 The review will be conducted through:

- a. analysis of the SED and supporting evidence
- b. examination of existing documentary evidence. For subject review, indicative evidence would include programme specifications, annual programme SEDs, committee minutes, student handbooks, samples of student work and feedback to students, student evaluations, external examiner and moderator reports, statistical evidence of student recruitment, achievement and progression, information on the resources available (including staff), academic plans. For service review, indicative evidence would include strategic and operational plans, annual review documents, team or practitioner group

records, PSRB documentation, external accreditation outcomes, samples of promotional and guidance material, and internal and external survey results

- c. discussion with subject network / service staff and relevant senior managers to explore issues arising from the documentary evidence, and issues that they wish to raise
- d. discussion with students, normally including a range of students enrolled at different academic partners and enrolled on different programmes
- e. discussion with employers, professional bodies and / or graduates.

- 4.30 It is not expected that staff from every academic partner will necessarily meet with the review panel, however, there should be a sufficient mix of participants to represent the range of curriculum provision or student support activities, and the contexts in which they are delivered.
- 4.31 It will not be a requirement that the review panel visits all or any academic partners, however they may choose to do so if they feel it is necessary to make judgements for the review.
- 4.32 The reviews will be organised and supported by Academic Directorate and overseen by QAEC.

## **REPORTS AND OUTCOMES**

- 4.33 The report will be drafted within eight weeks of the review event and the subject network / service team invited to check the report for factual accuracy within a further two weeks. Subject review reports will include judgements on whether degree programmes should continue and may make requirements and recommendations for all programmes. The report may make recommendations on how the subject network / service might further develop or be supported, and will identify areas of good practice for sharing within the university.
- 4.34 The report will be presented to QAEC and published, and the outcomes will be presented to Academic Council.
- 4.35 Within six months of the review, an action plan will be drafted by the subject network leader and dean or the service review co-ordinator, addressing all requirements and recommendations identified in the report, which will be presented to QAEC for approval. Where institution-level recommendations are identified, QAEC will refer the issue to the appropriate person or committee, and will be responsible for monitoring progress.
- 4.36 Within one year of the review, the faculty or service will be required to make a formal response on how any requirements and recommendations have been addressed, based on the responses and actions of the subject network / service. This will be discussed at a formal meeting between the chair of the review panel, the chair of QAEC and the dean and the subject network leader, or the service review co-ordinator.
- 4.37 The formal response will be presented to QAEC for approval, although QAEC may require further assurances or actions prior to approval.