Guidance for the Annual Review of Courses and Institutional Annual Review Partner Institutions

References in this document to departments and faculties also refer to alternative structures such as schools and centres.

Annual Review of Courses

1. Why we do annual review of courses

1.1. Annual Review of Courses (ARC) brings together in one place a concise summary of all developmental activity undertaken and planned by a department in relation to course/group of courses. As such, the reports are intended to be a useful resource for departmental staff, faculties, external examiners and external auditors.

1.2. Specifically, ARC enables the department to:

- Review and evaluate the course to inform quality assurance and enhancement
- Develop action plans that ensure the enhancement of the courses under review
- Ensure excellence in the quality of education
- Identify and share good practice

1.3. ARCs allow both the University and its partner institutions to have oversight of themes that are emerging across departments and faculties that need to be acted upon, and to share good practice across the institution.

1.4. From an external point of view, an effective ARC is a necessity if we are to demonstrate to external auditors the currency, security and validity of our awards.

1.5. In order to be effective, ARC reports need to act as a focus for reflective evaluation of curriculum, delivery, student experience and the achievement of students. They also need to look forward to the next delivery of the curriculum, building on the experience and evidence of the previous year, and thereby facilitate the active enhancement of quality and standards.

2. When reports should be submitted

Undergraduate: By noon on Wednesday 16 November 2016
Postgraduate: By Wednesday 1 February 2017

2.1. The Deans will review reports and provide the Partnerships Education Committee with an overview at the meetings on 30 November 2016 (UG) and 1 March 2017 (PG). It is therefore essential that these reports are submitted by the deadlines above, or earlier where possible.

3. How courses should be combined in reports

3.1. Reports should be written at department-level (or equivalent), so reports cover a range of courses within an area. Partners may wish to produce reports at course level for internal purposes. Where this is done, these should be combined into relevant groups or departments in line with the institution’s structures before sending to the University. There may be exceptions, for example due to the requirements of an accrediting body – please contact your link manager in the Academic Partnerships Office if this is the case.

3.2. Any significant issues or areas of good practice at course-level should, however, still be highlighted in the Annual Review of Course report.
4. Preparation for writing the report

Single Honours

4.1. The ARC report should be an evaluative document, reflecting on the previous academic year and identifying actions for the current and future years which will contribute to the enhancement of quality and standards. This report should be written after the department has considered all the different pieces of evidence set out below, and the content of this report should be discussed at a meeting of all academic staff. The final ARC report should be submitted before the end of the autumn term.

4.2. At least one student representative for each course should be included in the constituency of the departmental meeting and should be given an opportunity to submit comments by correspondence if the meeting is held at a time of year which makes it inconvenient for him/her to attend. The student representative(s) should normally be the Students’ Union departmental representative(s) and the total number of student representatives should not outnumber academic staff representatives.

Joint Honours

4.3. The lead department should, in negotiation with the other department(s) involved, determine how the ARC report is produced. As with single honours courses, the content of this report should be discussed at a meeting of all academic staff. Alternatively, an individual Course Director may be asked to take responsibility for preparing an ARC report in discussion with academics on the courses for which he/she is responsible.

4.4. Where there are 10 or more students registered on a joint course, a meeting of the course leaders must consider the ARC report. Where there are fewer than 10 students a meeting of the course leaders is not compulsory although it would represent good practice.

4.5. As far as is practicably possible, at least one student representative for each course should be included in the constituency of the course leaders meeting, or in the Course Director’s preparation of the report. The student representative(s) should be given an opportunity to submit comments by correspondence if the meeting is held at a time of year which makes it inconvenient for him/her to attend. The student representative(s) should normally be the Students' Union departmental representative(s) and the total number of student representatives should not outnumber academic staff representatives.

5. Writing the ARC

What to write in the report

5.1. Use the previous action plan as a starting point. The ARC should indicate clearly what progress has been made on the action identified in the last report, and indicate any further action that is still required. The questions on the form guide departments through the areas and supporting data and evidence that should be considered.

5.2. Care should be taken to ensure that any issues raised in the report and the action plan are clearly cross-referenced.

5.3. Some departments have found it helpful to create a file for ARCs, into which relevant information is placed during the year. This means that when the report comes to be written, most of the information needed to complete it is readily to hand.

5.4. Section 1 requires an update on progress from the previous action plan, and should include who is responsible for the action being completed. The measure of whether an action has been completed should provide evidence of the impact of steps taken to address areas identified for enhancement.

5.5. Please ensure that updates are provided for all objectives identified in the previous year’s Annual Review of Courses as well as objectives that are still outstanding from the Annual Review of Courses of previous years. You should also indicate whether objectives are to be carried forward, and make sure that all objectives being carried forward are included in the updated action plan.
Identifying and monitoring objectives and actions

5.6. Objectives and actions should be allocated unique identifiers to allow progress to be clearly highlighted and tracked within and across reports. IDs should be allocated as set out in the guidance on Section 4 below. Where items have been carried forward from a previous year, please keep the original ID to ease cross-referencing.

5.7. **Section 2** of the document should be written using the appropriate evidence from relevant Partnership Performance Indicators, the NSS, Internal Student Satisfaction Survey, DLHE, Module Evaluation, Student Staff Liaison Committee (or equivalent), student entry profile, progression, retention and achievement data, equality and diversity data, and External Examiner reports. Departments and course teams should also consider their response to internal and external influences, including how they have engaged with the University’s institution-wide developments such as Curriculum Review.

5.8. Triangulating evidence should present a clear overview of the course strengths, and the departments’ awareness and response to areas to improve or which need to be monitored.

5.9. Where you have indicated that a strength or enhancement requires further work, a relevant objective and action must be generated in the action plan (Section 4). When completing the table in Section 2, please ensure that the unique ID reference is provided in brackets for the corresponding objective and action given in Section 4.

Strengths and enhancements

5.10. The first part of this section (Section 2a) asks for an overview of strengths and areas where enhancements are, or might be, needed. Please indicate where you have identified good practice which could be shared, and where you have adopted good practice from other departments.

External engagement

5.11. This section of the report provides an opportunity to show the level of external engagement and influence on course changes and developments, and how external feedback has been acted upon. This could, for example, be linked to liaison with External Examiners over proposed course changes, or consultation through the Employer Advisory Boards. Changes could also have been made in response to the requirements of a professional body. The answers are not intended to go into great detail, but to summarise the action taken. For example, a mapping exercise might have been carried out to ensure a course aligns with a professional body’s new requirements. Or a skill identified as being important by the Advisory Board might have been included in a module.

5.12. Departments are also asked to highlight how they have responded to changes in the QAA subject or qualification benchmarks.

Employability and work-based learning

5.13. Departments should consider their DLHE and employability data in comparison with other centres or schools elsewhere, and how initiatives which have been introduced or planned have, or might in future, affect the results.

5.14. The complete form should provide assurance that there are effective arrangements for managing, supervising, monitoring and reviewing work-based learning, and highlight improvements made or planned. An evaluation should also be made of how effective work-based learning has contributed to student learning opportunities.

Periodic Review and course validations

5.15. Where departments have undergone periodic reviews or validations in the last 12 months, the ARC should always include an update on action taken in response to conditions, recommendations and other issues that may have been raised during periodic reviews or course validations.

5.16. In the first year after a review the department should provide a comprehensive update on action taken to address any issues and/or disseminate good practice. In subsequent years, an update on ongoing action should be provided.
Staffing and resources

5.17. Section 2b asks for information about facilities and resources, staffing, and staff development and scholarly activity, setting out any impact these have had on the course design and delivery.

5.18. **Section 3** of the document is a checklist to ensure the department continues to comply with the University’s expectation for quality assurance and enhancement. This checklist requires a brief explanation of the process and evidence to show that this process is taking place, for example dates of meetings, minute references and web links. It isn’t necessary to attach extensive sets of evidence in support of this section (for example, please do not attach the meeting minutes). However, audits will be carried out to ensure that the information provided can be evidenced, or to review activity in a particular area. Copies of evidence should therefore be retained with your copy of the ARC so this is available if requested.

5.19. **Section 4** requires an action plan. The action plan should summarise all the things the department needs to do over the coming year to address areas identified in the report as being in need of enhancement. This section should also include any objectives or actions which have been carried over from the previous year.

5.20. There needs to be an effective means of measuring the impact of actions, and each action needs to have a timescale and someone responsible for overseeing that the action will be completed. The action plan should also detail how good practice will be built upon and disseminated.

**Identifying and monitoring objectives and actions**

5.21. To allow progress to be clearly highlighted and tracked within and across reports, each objective should be allocated a unique identifier in the left hand ID column which should remain the same across all reports.

5.22. IDs should be in the following format: serial number / year of origin. The ID for the first action during 2016 would therefore be 1/16, the second 2/16 and so on. Where there are multiple actions linked to an objective, these should be allocated a letter. For example, if there are two actions linked to the first objective identified in 2016, these would be referenced in the report as 1a/16 and 1b/16.

5.23. Where an action is cross-referenced in a future report, or carried forward, its unique ID should be retained.

6. **How the reports are considered by the University**

6.1. The ARC reports are considered by the Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships. The Deans provide feedback for each report. This response allows the Deans to give course-specific feedback, to ask for additional information, and to refer issues and good practice as well as key themes from ARC reports across all institutions to the Partnerships Education Committee or other partner/University Committees as appropriate.

6.2. Partner institutions are also required to produce Institutional Annual Review reports, summarising key themes arising from course level reports, as well as addressing institution-wide areas such as Student Support. These reports are also considered by the Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships, and reported to the Partnerships Education Committee.

7. **Follow-up activity**

7.1. The ARC report must be received by the appropriate student-staff liaison committees (or equivalent) and the other committees responsible for the academic standards and quality of HE courses. For joint courses, this applies to all contributing departments.

7.2. Throughout the year the action plan generated by the ARC reports should be revisited by the appropriate departmental committees and progress on the action recorded. Where appropriate the student-staff liaison committee (or equivalent) should also be advised of progress made on ARC report action. Action taken should be reported on and evaluated in the following year’s ARC report.
8. **Record keeping by the department:**

8.1. The department should keep a copy of all the papers forming part of the ARC report, together with records of feedback from the Deans and follow-up action taken. ARC documentation should be available for consultation by the Dean of Partnerships, Deputy Dean of Partnerships, Partnerships team, Quality and Academic Development team and external reviewers on request.

8.2. Copies of the ARC report and follow up action should be kept by the department for 6 years.

8.3. In the case of courses involving more than one department, it is the responsibility of the Head of the lead department/school to ensure that these records are kept, and that the archive is transferred if there is a change of lead.

**Institutional Annual Review**

Partner institutions with larger scale provision (as determined by the Dean of Partnerships), should also complete an Institutional Annual Review, which summarises the key points arising from undergraduate and postgraduate course-level reports.

1. **Aim and format of Institutional Annual Review reports**

   The aim of these reports is to provide an overview of the key themes emerging from the Annual Review of Courses, and to inform quality assurance and enhancement at an institutional level. Institutional forms therefore mirror the format of course-level forms, with the addition of overarching themes which affect all courses, such as student support.

   **Identifying and monitoring objectives and actions**

   As set out in the guidance for Section 5 of the ARC reports, to facilitate cross-referencing and future monitoring, each objective should be allocated a unique identifier in the left hand ID column which should remain the same across all Institutional Annual Review reports.

   Where references are made in the Institutional Annual Review to specific IDs in ARC reports, please take care to identify the ARC report where needed.

2. **When to submit institutional reports**

   Institutional Annual Review reports are submitted by:

   - **Wednesday 1 February 2017**

   Institutional Annual Review reports are also considered by the Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships, who will provide feedback to each partner individually. The Institutional level reports are received by the Partnerships Education Committee, and the Deans will report key themes which emerge from these reports to the Committee.

3. **Follow-up activity**

   The reports will also be a valuable source of institution-wide enhancement activity, as well as highlighting other areas of best practice to feedback to staff and students, for example through student-staff liaison committees (or equivalent) and the other committees responsible for the academic standards and quality of HE courses.

   Institutional action plans should be revisited by the appropriate committees and progress on the action recorded. Where appropriate the student-staff liaison committee (or equivalent) should also be advised of progress. Action taken should be reported on and evaluated in the following year’s report.
Frequently asked questions

General Questions

1. **What is annual review of courses (ARC)?**
   An annual review of each course is carried out to:
   - review and evaluate the course to inform quality assurance and enhancement
   - develop action plans that ensure the enhancement of the courses under review
   - ensure excellence in the quality of education
   - identify and share good practice

2. **What courses are reviewed annually?**
   ARC reports are required for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards.
   ARC reports should cover undergraduate single honours, joint honours and postgraduate courses, unless this conflicts with the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body.
   Reports should be written at department-level (or equivalent), so reports cover a range of courses within an area. Partners may wish to produce reports at course level for internal purposes. Where this is done, these should be combined into relevant groups or departments in line with the institution's structures before sending to the University.

3. **Who do we send the reports to?**
   All reports should be signed by the appropriate Head of Department, collected together and submitted to the Dean of Partnerships, via the Quality and Academic Development Office (e-mail: quad (non-essex users should add @essex.ac.uk)) by the relevant deadline. The report should be sent electronically. If electronic signatures have not been attached a hard copy should also be supplied.

4. **When do we need to submit the reports?**
   **Annual Review of Courses reports**
   - Undergraduate Reports: by noon on Wednesday 16 November 2016
   - Postgraduate Reports: by Wednesday 1 February 2017
   **Institutional Annual Review reports**
   - By Wednesday 1 February 2017

5. **What happens after we have submitted the reports?**
   Please refer to the guidance notes for information on how the University considers the reports and on follow-up activity.

6. **Do students need to be involved in the process?**
   Yes. The guidance notes on preparation for the report for both single honours and joint honours reports detail the level of student involvement in the annual review of courses.
Specific types of courses

7. **What if there are no students on a course?**

A course’s failure to recruit should be considered under section 2 of the ARC. You should include a few paragraphs about the course under ‘what issues have arisen this year’ and in the action plan. You may, for example, wish to change the course’s title, modify its content or withdraw the course from the department’s portfolio.

8. **What if we have suspended or are discontinuing a course?**

If you have suspended or are discontinuing a course, but there are still students on it, then you will need to include consideration of it within the ARC. Consideration is likely to concentrate on issues in relation to the student experience.

Writing the report

9. **Do we need a separate report for every course?**

No. All undergraduate courses within the department (or equivalent) should normally be considered in one report. All postgraduate courses within the department should normally be considered in one report. Exceptions to this rule may apply where it conflicts with the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body.

Partners may wish to produce reports at course level for internal purposes. Where this is done, these should be combined into relevant groups or departments in line with the institution’s structures before sending to the University. Any significant issues or areas of good practice at course-level should, however, still be highlighted in the Annual Review of Course report.

10. **What should we include in the report, and in the action plan?**

The guidance notes include information on what to include in the report and action plans.

11. **How do we consider student evaluation of modules results in ARC?**

Authors of ARC reports should have access to summaries of the results of student evaluation of modules. These should be discussed at the departmental meeting and should inform the report in section 2 and the action plan. The student evaluation of module results should be triangulated with other pieces of data, for example satisfaction surveys, to draw out what the themes are. In some cases individual issues arising from the student evaluation of modules may need to be commented on separately.

12. **How do we consider internal satisfaction survey (ISS)/NSS/PTES results in ARC?**

Authors of ARCS should have access to Internal Satisfaction Surveys (ISS), and NSS result summaries, and should use these to inform their report in section 2 and the action plan. The results should also be discussed at the departmental meeting. The ISS/NSS results should be triangulated with other pieces of data, e.g. external examiner reports, to draw out what the themes are. In some cases individual issues arising from the ISS/NSS may need to be commented on separately.

13. **How do we address issues of disability?**

Departments integrate reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010, including areas as set out below. Where appropriate good practice and areas to improve should be commented on throughout the report.

- Under the Equality Act 2010, the University has an obligation to make reasonable adjustments in order to ensure its curriculum is fully inclusive. In light of students with disabilities, reasonable adjustments should be made to remove any unfair disadvantage that might come as a result of a disability. When determining how to ensure inclusivity, you may wish to consider the following questions:
  - Do you make supporting materials e.g. handouts, lecture notes, visual display materials available to students? Is this in electronic format (students can use
electronic materials with software to read text to them)? Is this in advance (this can aid note taking)?

- Are a variety of teaching and learning methods to be used, supported by accessible written and visual material? For example:
  - positive communication e.g., by facing the student group when speaking
  - whiteboards
  - electronic presentation packages
  - audio-visuals
  - invitations for student input

- Is the material displayed on electronic presentation packages, and whiteboards, including graphs and charts, explained orally? Are they available in written form for transcribing purposes?

- Is complex information summarised through bullet-pointed summaries?

- Will plain language be used when speaking and to explain specialist terminology, thus avoiding jargon and colloquialisms?

- Have you made any adjustments for individuals or changes to the way field work or labs are conducted? For example, will students have access to assistive technology or human support if required?

- Are varied forms of assessment used?

- Are students given as many opportunities to declare a disability as possible whilst ensuring an individual’s confidentiality is maintained?

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