University of Essex

PERIODIC REVIEW OF VALIDATED COURSES

1. Introduction

Periodic review is the formal process by which a course or group of related courses is evaluated and the University assured of the continuing quality of provision at the Partner Institution. The process normally takes place every five years and is the basis for re-approval of the courses with effect from the following academic year. The review process can be brought forward where there is a major variation to a course, or where either a particular concern has been identified. Internal and external peer review is a normal part of periodic review, as it is of the initial approval or validation process.

Periodic review can provide an overview of the activity of departments, centres or subject groups at the same time as reapproving provision. This allows external and internal subject experts to consider the cohesion of the courses offered and their relation to each other as well as the validity of individual courses. This process can also provide teams with an opportunity to review the breadth of their provision and evaluate developments across their area.

2. The purpose of Periodic Review

The purpose of periodic review is:

- to review the continuing validity and relevance of the stated aims and the intended learning outcomes of the course(s), in accordance with relevant external reference points (including the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education\(^1\))
- to ensure that students continue to be provided with learning opportunities of an appropriate quality
- to enable an external subject expert or experts to contribute advice on the course(s)
- to identify good practice for wider dissemination
- to identify areas for enhancement
- to audit the procedures for quality assurance and enhancement and the maintenance of academic standards as they apply to the course(s) under review
- to report to the appropriate Partnerships Education Committee (PEC) with a specific, reasoned recommendation about the future of the course(s) under review. Approval of the Panel's and PEC's recommendations rests with Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

3. Periodic Review documentation

The most important document for the periodic review event is the reflective document provided by the course team(s) under review. This should take the form of a critical commentary cross-referenced to any other documentation provided and should identify those issues the course team would find it helpful to explore in greater depth.

The structure of the reflective document should correspond to the broad agenda themes for periodic review and should be accompanied by supporting information, which is referred to in the reflective document. A periodic review documentation checklist outlines details of what should be included in the reflective document and the supporting information that is required to be provided.

For professional doctorate or postgraduate research degree provision, the reflective document should also cover how the course team’s arrangements comply with the University’s Code of Practice on Professional Doctorates and/or the University’s Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees. Further details about the additional documentation requirements for the periodic review of Professional Doctorates and Postgraduate Research degree provision at partner institutions can be found in the periodic review documentation checklist.

\(^1\) http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code 7
In preparation for periodic review the course team is required to submit all relevant documentation to the Partnerships Team in an agreed electronic format at least four weeks in advance of the validation event. For international partnerships, all documentation should be submitted in English. A longer timescale may be required where professional or accrediting bodies are involved. A briefing pack containing relevant documentation is sent to members of the validation panel at least two weeks in advance of the event.

Once the documentation has been received the Partnerships Team will compile a periodic review pack and distribute this electronically to all panel members. A printed version will be provided to members of the panel upon request. The periodic review pack will typically contain the following:

- Introduction and background to the partnership
- Agenda
- List of the panel members
- Guidance for Panel members
- Review documentation

4. Periodic Review panel

Membership of Periodic Review Panels is designed around the range of courses and provision under review and will account for aspects such as professional body accreditation and requirements. A variety of experience and views should be available among the Panel members. Members will normally be dissociated from the delivery of the course(s), but within the Panel as a whole there should be sufficient understanding of the subject matter and academic context to enable the Panel to make a sound judgement.

As a minimum, the Panel will include an external academic subject expert, a University academic member of staff, a representative from the Partner Institution and a student representative. Where relevant, external Panel members will include representatives from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and employer/industry representatives.

Periodic review panels are appointed by the Dean of Partnerships after consultation with the course team at the partner institution. Each panel is normally constituted as follows:

- Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships, University of Essex or nominee (Chair)
- at least one academic subject expert from outside the University and its partner institutions
- employer or professional body representative (where relevant, e.g. for vocational or professional programmes)
- at least one student representative (normally currently registered on one of the courses under review, although a recent graduate of an undergraduate course who has progressed to postgraduate study may alternatively be appointed)
- at least one member external to the course team(s) concerned but internal to the partner institution
- at least one member of the University's teaching staff, where possible from a relevant subject area
- a Partnerships Manager from the Partnerships Team (Secretary to the periodic review)

The University is responsible for identifying the external academic expert(s) and internal members of the review panel. The partner institution concerned is responsible for nominating all other members of the review panel, including the employer and/or professional body representative. These nominations should be submitted to the Partnerships Team and are subject to approval by the Dean of Partnerships and/or the Chair of the event.

The following criteria are normally applied to the selection of external academics to be members of periodic review panels. The external academic panel member:

- should be a senior academic currently employed in a substantive role at a higher education institution with degree awarding powers;
• should have relevant subject expertise and current experience of delivering provision at the same level as the course(s) being reviewed;
• should not be a previous student or previous member of academic staff of the University or any collaborative provision partner institution, unless at least five years have elapsed between leaving the University or partner institution and the date of the review event;
• should not be a current or previous external examiner employed by the University to oversee provision at the University or any partner institution, unless at least five years have elapsed between ceasing employment as an external examiner and the date of the review event;
• should not have any conflict of interest arising from links with the University or relevant partner institution, or from personal or professional relationships with members of staff or students at the University or relevant partner institution;
• should, where more than one external academic is included on the panel, be from a different institution to any other external representative;
• should normally reside in the UK (approval to appoint a panel member from outside the UK will be granted only exceptionally, usually in the case of international partnerships).

5. Duties of the review panel

It is the duty of the Review Panel to:

• critically examine the review documentation and undertake discussion with the course team
• make a collective judgement on the continuing quality and academic standard of the course(s) under review, to ensure that the award(s) conferred by the University are of an equivalent standard to comparable awards throughout the UK, and that UK threshold standards are being achieved
• review the quality of the learning opportunities and information that is provided to students
• review the Partner Institution's procedures for quality assurance and enhancement and the maintenance of academic standards as they apply to the course(s) under review
• make a recommendation as to whether the course(s) should be reapproved

The Panel will need to be assured of the continuing rationale for the course(s) concerned and that the course team has the necessary resource base for the continued successful running of the course(s). In addition the Panel would expect to be assured that issues identified through annual review of courses, including the comments of students and external examiners, and issues from other sources (e.g. Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body reports), have been addressed.

6. Periodic Review event

The periodic review event may take place over a half or full day, depending on the size and nature of the award(s) being reviewed. The agenda, agreed by the chair of the review, is normally based upon a standard programme which may be modified as appropriate for each review event.

A successful periodic review will be characterised by constructive dialogue, structured around a self-evaluation document (the Reflective Document) provided by the course team. The Reflective Document is designed to take the form of a critical commentary, cross-referenced to any other documentation provided, and should identify those issues the department would find it helpful to explore in greater depth.

Additional documentation in support of the Reflective Document provides more details of the courses under review, including documents such as annual review of courses reports, external examiner reports, student survey results and course statistics. As a consequence, each periodic review will be slightly different, in order to both meet the specific needs of the course and to address any particular issues or concerns the Panel might have.

Student meeting

A meeting will normally be held with a group(s) of students registered (or previously registered) on the courses under review. The course team will not be present for this part of the review. As well as meeting students, the documentation will include summaries of NSS results and actions taken by the course team in response, in order to provide a complete view of student feedback.
Course team meeting
The agenda will include one or more blocks of time in which the Panel may discuss the course(s) in
detail with the course team, and in which the course team will have the opportunity to respond to
points raised.

Outcome
After discussions, it is usual for the course team to depart to allow the Panel members to determine
their recommendations. The Chair normally commences this private meeting of the Panel by
summarising the issues and the course team’s responses and s/he will conclude the meeting by
agreeing the outcome of the event with the Panel before inviting the course team back for verbal
feedback. A unanimous decision of the Panel is required for the conclusion of the review event.

During the feedback session, the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the course
team of any conditions and/or recommendations that should be addressed or considered. A deadline
will be set by which the conditions and/or recommendations should be met and/or responded to by
the course team. The Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that draft conditions and
recommendations are circulated to the course team as soon as possible after the event, and the
secretary will also produce a detailed report to circulate to the Panel and course team.

7. Periodic Review report

The periodic review report summarises the Panel’s conclusions and specifies any conditions that are
to be met to successfully complete the periodic review process. It is usual for the Panel to specify the
date by which the conditions must be met and to recommend when the course would be subject to the
next periodic review, which for most courses is five years.

There are normally two possible outcomes from a periodic review event:

- **Recommendation for the course(s) to continue to be offered**, in which case no further
  action by the departmental team is required

- **Recommendation for the course(s) to continue to be offered with conditions and/or
  recommendations**, in which case the course team must provide the Chair with evidence,
  within any agreed timescales, that the conditions have been met, and must respond to any
  recommendations. The review Panel may not set further conditions after it has reported.

  - **Commendations** allow the Panel a chance to congratulate the departmental team
    on aspects of good practice.
  
  - **Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the
    review Panel prior to successful periodic review, by agreed deadlines or through
    the Annual Review of Courses Report process.
  
  - **Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered, possibly
    beyond the start of the following academic session.

In exceptional circumstances the report may recommend suspension of the periodic review process
whilst the course team undertakes a major revision to the course(s) under review.

The Periodic Review report will be submitted to the Partnerships Education Committee to request the
Committee’s recommendation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The authority for final
approval rests with Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

In addition, the Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships may refer Partner Institution-wide issues raised
in reports for consideration by the Partnership Management Board.
8. Course team’s response

The course team makes a formal response to the periodic review report, by the agreed deadlines, evidencing how specific conditions have been met and addressing any recommendations that were made. This response is submitted to the Partnerships Team for onward submission to the review panel Chair and the Partnerships Education Committee which monitors the response and reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee when conditions have been met.

The formal response from the course team should include:

- amended documents (using tracked changes to highlight any amendments);
- a brief summary of how each condition has been met with reference to the amended documents;
- how each recommendation has been considered;
- any other appropriate evidence.

Any revisions and amendments to the documentation should be mapped and cross-referenced to the new documentation.

When the Chair of the periodic review panel is satisfied that all conditions have been met and that all recommendations have been responded to appropriately, he/she completes a sign-off sheet to confirm the periodic review decision.

9. Final approval

The Partnerships Education Committee considers the periodic review report and makes a recommendation to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee that the course(s) be re-validated for delivery at the partner institution for a given period of time (usually for five years), subject to any conditions contained in the report being met. The Partnerships Education Committee subsequently reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee when the conditions have been met.