Departmental Periodic Review: Principles and Process

Key principles and scope

1. Periodic Review is a key process in the University's quality assurance and enhancement management framework. It is one of the principal means by which the University assures itself of the current and future health of its taught courses. The process focuses on the management of academic standards and quality at academic department level against a set of University Expectations.

2. The Periodic Review process identifies and assesses actual and potential risks to quality, standards and the future sustainability of courses by confirming that

   - the academic standards of the course under review are set and maintained at the appropriate level
   - courses remain current, relevant and valid in the light of student demand, developing knowledge in the discipline and practice in its application
   - appropriate opportunities and support for learning are being made available to students
   - there is a well-managed and deliberate approach to quality enhancement and continuous improvement.

3. The process provides confidence in how academic quality and standards are being managed at Department level and identifies areas for development and enhancement as well as good practice for dissemination. Periodic Review therefore makes a significant contribution to University objectives for providing an outstanding educational experience for all students.

4. All Schools, including the Research School, will be subject to Periodic Review. The unit for review will be the academic Department or sub-unit of a School.

5. The scope of review will include all levels of taught provision, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, within a Department. It will normally be based on a six yearly cycle although on occasion there may be a need for more frequent or early review should key indicators suggest this to be necessary. A schedule or reviews is available on request from the Academic Quality Unit.

6. Periodic Review enables departments to take a holistic and strategic view of a complete portfolio of courses with critical advice from a panel of internal peers and external subject experts. Courses remain in continuing approval subject to satisfactory annual evaluation, and it is expected that courses will continuously develop in response to feedback and evaluation. An outcome from the Review may include a requirement to re-approve a course within a certain time period in order to guarantee standards or the quality of the student learning experience. Exceptionally, an outcome may be a recommendation for suspension or closure of a course.

7. Periodic Review includes the review of how a Department manages the oversight of collaborative provision although courses delivered under a collaborative arrangement will be reviewed as part of the Partnership Periodic Review process every six years. The Partnership Periodic Review process will be the mechanism by which continuing

approval of current partnership provision is confirmed or in some cases recommended for re-approval or exceptionally, suspension or closure.

8. The Periodic Review process has been informed by the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](). It is also referenced against the Office for Students (OfS) [Regulatory framework for higher education in England]() with reference to the B Conditions for quality and standards.

Aims

9. The purpose of Periodic Review is to review and evaluate the management of academic standards and quality across the taught provision of a department, whilst also supporting continuous improvement in the student academic experience and in student outcomes.

10. Whilst the quality assurance and enhancement framework at the University is designed to ensure that the processes of course approval, annual evaluation and periodic review complement one another, each process has its specific aims. Those for Periodic Review are to
    - evaluate and confirm whether the suite of courses under consideration for a given Department meet the threshold academic standards required by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Office for Students Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England with reference to the B Conditions for quality and standards
    - critically review how a Department discharges its responsibilities for maintaining and enhancing quality and standards and for managing risk in accordance with University procedures and any PSRB requirements, and as set out in the University Expectations
    - evaluate and confirm whether the quality of learning opportunities for students on all courses under consideration for a given Department meets University Expectations for the effective management of quality and standards
    - consider how the Department development strategy aligns with University and School priorities and agendas
    - identify and share good practice across the University
    - consider trends in student recruitment and student outcomes with reference to, and evaluation of, OfS Condition B3 for continuation (retention), completion (achievement) and progression to managerial or professional employment or further study, and in satisfaction and engagement, across the whole of the Department's portfolio
    - address, in a holistic way, any issues concerning curricula, teaching, learning and assessment.

University Expectations and Review outcomes

11. Review panels are required to make a judgement (see 13 below) against each of the following **University Expectations** that are mapped to the strategic goals of the [University Learning and Teaching Strategy](#).

UE1	**Recruitment and Demand**
	• There are sustainable markets for the Department's courses
	• The Courses recruit suitably qualified students from diverse educational and social backgrounds
UE2	**Access and Inclusion**
	The Department demonstrates active implementation of commitments to widening access, inclusion and participation in higher education practice and effectively monitors and addresses differential student outcomes gaps
UE3	**Education for Sustainable Futures**
	• The courses are well designed and align with the University values for inclusion, internationalisation, ethical and socially responsible global citizenship
	• Courses have (or are in the process of) embedding the University graduate attributes
UE4	**Applied and Research Inspired Education**
	• Learning and Teaching is research inspired
	• Curricula provide opportunities for students to engage with research processes and professional enquiry
	• The Department demonstrates commitment to staff development and professional recognition, and extending its external profile for excellence in learning and teaching
UE5	**Assessment**
	Assessment outcomes for all students are strong (or issues are being addressed) and underpinned by effective assessment, feedback, standardisation and moderation processes
UE6	**Academic Support**
	• There are effective arrangements for academic support, including for personal academic tutoring, induction, supporting student module choice and monitoring student engagement/attendance
	• Student <mark>continuation</mark> (retention), completion, and progression is strong
UE7	**Student Voice and Engagement**
	• The Department demonstrates a commitment to working in partnership with students, with genuine involvement of students in quality management and enhancement
	• Students have a high degree of satisfaction with their courses and measures of student engagement are strong
UE8	**Employability and Work-based learning**
	• Graduate employment outcomes (progression to <mark>managerial or professional</mark> employment or further study) are strong and underpinned by clear approaches at course level to developing student employability and the provision of careers education, information, advice and guidance
	• The Department engages with external communities and employers
	• Students have the opportunity to apply their learning through collaboration with employers and/or community organisations
UE9	**Active Flexible Learning**
	• There is effective use of learning technologies for active flexible and accessible learning.

		• Staff and student have well developed digital capabilities
UE10	**Resources** There are sufficient and appropriate resources, including staff and learning resources, specialist facilities and equipment to underpin the curriculum and permit all students to achieve learning outcomes	
UE11	**Academic Partnerships** (where relevant) The management of collaborative partnerships and courses is effective with appropriate attention to risk	
UE12	**Academic and professional standards** - Courses are aligned with external reference points and benchmarks (including the FHEQ and where relevant qualification and classification descriptors) - Courses meet the requirements of PSRB or other accrediting bodies - Students achieve appropriate standards	
UE13	**Applicant and student information** Published information, including programme and module specifications, course handbooks and module outlines are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy	
UE14	**Quality assurance and enhancement** The Department uses data, including the Office for Students B3 data for continuation, completion and progression, to identify and manage risk, and to drive continuous improvement	

Judgements

12. The review panel arrives at a judgement about each of the Expectations based on the evidence provided and the discussions that take place during the review event itself.

13   One of four judgements is possible in relation to each Expectation:

- **Commended:** the Department meets the University Expectation and has a number of examples of good practice that merit further dissemination
- **Meets Expectations**: the Department meets the University Expectation
- **Requires improvement to meet the Expectation**: the Department does not currently meet the University Expectation
- **Pending**: a decision will be deferred until further information has been provided or action taken, within a timescale specified by the Review Panel.

13. On the basis of its deliberations and judgements against the expectations, the Review Panel will reach a rounded conclusion of confidence/limited confidence in relation to the Department's management of standards and quality, as to whether
- academic standards are reliable and meet UK requirements
- the quality of the student academic experience meets University and UK requirements

14. Where the conclusion is of limited confidence, the expectation is that the Panel will make clear the action that must be taken to ensure the reliability of academic standards and/or the action to ensure the quality of the student experience meets UK requirements. Such action may relate to specific courses/provision or to some overall aspect of the management of the Department. In certain circumstances it may be justified for the Panel to recommend that a course be suspended pending a review or re-approval before the next student intake.

15. Where the review identifies a Department requires improvement to meet a significant number of expectations, as confirmed by ASQEC, there will be a further Review meeting

in one, two or three years' time to consider progress, as recommended by the Review Panel, depending on the nature of the concern.

16. In addition to a Judgement, the Review Panel will agree **actions/recommendations, commendations and affirmations** as part of each report.

17. **Actions are** matters to be addressed to secure improvements; **recommendations** are to enable enhancements. The Review Panel will indicate the time period within which each action should be completed or addressed.

18. **Commendations** describe practice the Panel has identified which is considered exemplary, and/or innovative.

19. **Affirmations** acknowledge developments already in place or planned to address previously identified issues.

The Review Panel
20. AQU will consult with the Director of Quality and Educational Development to determine the balance and number of Panel members depending on the size of the event. The Panel normally comprises:
    - The Chair, a senior member of University staff with quality management experience
    - Senior staff member from the reviewing School but from a different Department
    - Senior staff member from another School, usually a Head of Department
    - Student member
    - Between two and four external academic panel members
    - Academic Quality Officer
    - Other post holder (e.g.: international, employer rep etc.)

21. Panel Chairs and Student Panel Members will receive training and development and are generally assigned to Periodic Reviews based on their interest and availability. However, in assembling panels the AQU strives to ensure a balance between different Schools and that there is no close association between any panel member and the Department under review. See "A brief guide for the Student Panel Member" and "The role of the Chair".

22. External panel members are nominated by Departments and are normally senior academic Department managers with relevant subject portfolio expertise and quality management experience, from other higher education institutions. The number of external academic panel members depends on the size and complexity of the Periodic Review. See "A brief guide for External Panel Members".

23. In addition, taking into account the nature of the Department under review, it may be appropriate to include additional panel members with relevant expertise, e.g. an employer representative, or a panel member with partnership or international expertise.

Documentation
24. Documentation will be sent to the Panel electronically at least 3 weeks ahead of the first panel meeting. The Head of School or nominee must provide signed confirmation that they have checked and approved the Evaluation and Development Document (EDD) and Review documentation as fit for circulation to the Review Panel before sending to the designated AQU Officer. See List of Documentation Required for the Review.

25. Through the life-time of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2020-25, embedding the University graduate attributes will be an explicit matter for discussion at Departmental Reviews.   Departments will be expected to present to the Panel their current approach to developing graduate attributes, and their plans for further development.

26. The Head of Department in association with School and Department colleagues produces an Evaluation and Development Document (EDD). The EDD is an evaluative review of Department performance in terms of strengths and weaknesses, effective innovation and good practice, drawing on the available evidence (metrics and qualitative evidence) to demonstrate impact on student learning, experience and outcomes as appropriate. The EDD also includes a Department Development Plan.

27. AQU produces a Briefing Paper for the Periodic Review.

28. In addition to the Briefing Paper and the EDD, panel members will have access to all current Programme Specifications, a selection of Module Specifications, and the most recent Course Annual Evaluation Reports. The sampling and allocation of documentation to be considered by the panel will be led by AQU. This is done to avoid duplication and to ensure a broad and appropriate sample is achieved.

29. In advance of the first panel meeting all panel members will be requested to complete a template based on an initial review of the documentation provided, and to return it to the AQU Officer responsible for the Periodic Review at least a week before the first panel meeting.   See Internal Panel Member Feedback Template / External Panel Member Feedback Template. At the first Panel meeting, the Panel will identify any additional documentation or information it requires based on its reading of the documentation.

Process
30. Each Periodic Review is planned individually in consultation with the relevant School, and normally takes place during the Autumn Semester (September - January). AQU will initiate contact at least six months ahead of the Review to begin planning. Periodic Review is a phased and iterative process involving the Department, the School and the Periodic Review Panel in evaluative activity over a 12-month period.

School Review and Updating of Documentation
31. In Semester Two of the academic year preceding a Periodic Review, the School will carry out a comprehensive review of the course related documentation for the courses within the Department that will have a Periodic Review in the following semester. This is to ensure that all documentation is current and meets University and external requirements and good practice. This is the documentation that will be available to students for the academic year in which the Periodic Review takes place.

32. The School will ensure the completeness, accuracy and currency of information, and consistency between different documents, the use of current templates and alignment with University guidance/requirements.   The School will also ensure that the presentation and content of the documentation is fit for purpose and meets professional standards for publication. The Department should upload the documentation to the Periodic Review OneDrive folder three weeks before the First Review meeting.

33. The review and updating of documentation should be seen as a key element of Periodic Review. The School Quality Coordinator and the Head of the Academic Department undergoing Periodic Review will take the lead in planning and implementing the Review, supported by the School Quality Administrator. The AQU Officer for the School will work with the School to provide advice and guidance.

First Review meeting

34. Six weeks before the Second Review meeting the panel meets for the first time and, from their preliminary reading of the documentation:

   - Agrees 'lines of enquiry' (based on the University Expectations) and may assign them to individual panel members for detailed reading in advance of the Second Review Event.
   - Discusses the documents received and identifies any additional information that needs to be provided
   - Holds meetings with student and employer/stakeholder representatives (see below)
   - Sets an indicative agenda for the second review day
   - Reaches some preliminary judgements against the University Expectations.

35. External Panel members are encouraged to attend the First Review meeting but are not required to, and can participate either remotely, or via advance correspondence. External Panel Members will be asked to complete a template particularly commenting on the Department course portfolio and student outcomes, including the currency and sustainability of courses, academic standards and quality of the student learning experience. See External Panel Member Feedback Template.

36. An employer/stakeholder meeting is part of the first panel meeting. The number and range of participants will be agreed in advance between the School and AQU. The School is responsible for selecting and contacting employers/stakeholders and making arrangements for their attendance. Employers/stakeholders receive advance notice of the meeting's purpose and agenda. Notes are taken by the AQU Officer. See "A brief guide for employers and stakeholders".

37. A student/graduate group meeting is also convened as part of the initial panel meeting. This should include student academic representatives. The size and constitution of the student/graduate group is negotiated between AQU and the Department under review and takes into account the breadth and complexity of its provision and the available modes of delivery. It would be normal for a maximum of 10 students, with representation from each course, with varying years of study. Previous students could be considered if they have recently graduated. If they have graduated two or more year ago they may be better represented within the employer/stakeholder meeting. The School is responsible for selecting and contacting students/graduates and making arrangements for their attendance. Students receive advance notification of the meeting's purpose and agenda. Notes are taken by the AQU Officer. See "A brief guide for Student Group".

38. Notes of the Panel Meeting and of the employer/stakeholder meeting and the student meeting will be collated by the AQU Officer and distributed to the Panel within two weeks. Notes of the employer/stakeholder and student meetings will also be circulated to the Head of Department and School Quality Coordinator.

Provision of additional documentation

39. The Review Panel will agree at its first Panel meeting a sample of course-related documentation and/or other documentation it wishes to review in order to test the effectiveness of the Department's arrangements for managing academic quality including the quality of information available to prospective and current students. The list of requested documentation will be provided to the Department by the AQU Officer as soon as possible after the first panel meeting.

40. The Department should upload the requested documents to the Periodic Review OneDrive folder two weeks before the Second Review meeting.

Pre-Review meeting

41. Approximately one week (five working days) before the Second Review meeting, AQU will liaise with the Head of the Department, the School Quality Coordinator and College Director to confirm the indicative agenda, the attendance for the Second Review meeting, and indicate key lines of enquiry notified by Panel members.

The Second Review meeting

42. The Second Review meeting is normally conducted over one full working day beginning with a private Panel meeting to confirm the agenda, followed by discussions with members of the Department/area under review. Panel Chairs and AQU Officers have particular responsibility for managing these discussions, ensuring that the agenda is explored fully and that all participants have had the opportunity to contribute. Discussions are conducted in the spirit of academic peer review and are collegial, but rigorous.

43. The Panel meets with members of the School Senior Management Team, including the Head of School, the Head of the Department under review, the Quality and Learning and Teaching Leads, and College Director, plus any other relevant post-holders (e.g. Head of Collaborative Programmes). The Head of Department will be asked to lead a tour of specialist resources/facilities if this is deemed appropriate.

44. The Panel also meets with key members of the Department under review, including the Head of Academic Department, course leaders for major courses and/or courses identified by the Panel, the relevant Academic Liaison Librarian, and any other post-holders identified by the Department or the Panel (e.g. Link Tutor).

45. Following all meetings, the Panel will agree its judgements against the University Expectations and its overall conclusions regarding standards and quality. The Panel will also identify any actions/recommendations, commendations or affirmations. Subject to the agreement of the Panel, the Head of Department and Quality Coordinator are permitted to be in attendance for the final part of this session to receive the outcomes of the Periodic Review Event.

46. The AQU Officer will produce a Chair's approved draft of the Periodic Review Judgements and conclusions for all members within five working days of the Second Review meeting.

The Periodic Review Report and Follow up

47. Following the Second Periodic Review meeting, the AQU Officer drafts a report for the Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement Committee, based on a standard template. The draft report is produced and approved by the chair within ten working days of the Second Review meeting.

48. A Chair's Approved Draft is circulated to the rest of the panel for verification and to the Department which is invited to comment on factual accuracy, within ten working days.

49. The Department provides a written response to the Panel's Actions within fifteen working days of receipt of the final version of the Periodic Review Report. This should be appended to the Review report. Once finalised, the report is received at the next available meeting of ASQEC.

50. In considering, the Periodic Review Report ASQEC determines how progress in meeting any actions will be monitored. This may be delegated to the College Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Committee, require approval from the Periodic Review Chair

or other senior University officer, or require regular reporting to ASQEC. In any case, one year after the Periodic Review, the September ASQEC meeting will request/receive a progress update <mark>demonstrating evidence of impact.</mark>

Approval/Review Table

Item	Notes
Version Number	v1.4
Date of Approval	June 2017
Approved by	ASQEC
Effective from	March 2021. Links updated November 2021
Policy Officer	Head of Academic Quality
Department	Academic Quality Unit
Review date	March 2024
Last reviewed	**November 2017** - Amendments following consultation **July 2018** - Amendments following feedback after first year of implementation, ASQEC 17/55 **March 2021** - Review and updating to take account of new L&T Strategy 2020-2015 and external developments in terms of outcomes expectations. Key sections updated are revised University Expectations and revised EDD approach **September 2023** – Reference to the Office for Students Condition B3: Student outcomes
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	March 2021
Accessibility Checked	March 2021