Academic Quality and Policy Manual

Chapter 5: Periodic Departmental Review
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1. PERIODIC REVIEW OF TAUGHT PROVISION

In line with the risk based approach of the Office for Students, the University will be taking such an approach with respect to the review of taught provision. With effect from 2019 there will no longer be routine 5/6 yearly periodic reviews of taught provision in departments. However, the University may decide to hold a review of taught provision in a department as a development activity to support the enhancement of provision if concerns are raised over issues such as, but not limited to, the following:

- NSS/PGT survey or other survey scores, e.g. declining scores, continued low scores;
- Negatively flagged TEF scores;
- Increase in student complaints about academic provision.

An Executive Dean can request a review of a department in their School to support enhancement.

The University will continue to routinely hold reviews of University of London Distance learning provision where Royal Holloway is responsible for the academic direction of provision. The Periodic Departmental Review (PDR) Process for University of London provision is set out in Appendix A below.

The Doctoral School will be responsible for arranging the Periodic Departmental Review of the University’s research provision.

1.1 Purpose

Academic departments at Royal Holloway, and partners involved with collaborative courses, may undergo a formal review of their taught provision (undergraduate and postgraduate taught). The purpose of the review is:

- to supplement the annual review process by performing a reasonable test of its effectiveness in each department and faculty, and by creating a periodic opportunity for more fundamental scrutiny of departmental provision for students, using external expertise to recognise, and identify opportunities for enhancement;
- to test and explore the implementation of institutional policy and strategy in departments;
- to gather evidence in order for the University to assure itself of the academic standard and quality of the courses and learning environment;
- to relate current and future plans for teaching, learning and assessment in the department to the University’s strategic planning process.

The review may cover all aspects of academic provision for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the department, including those on collaborative, distance-learning and international programmes of the University of London. Areas of scrutiny broadly include curriculum design, delivery and assessment; the staff; learning resources and support; and arrangements for the review and enhancement of provision.

1.2 Student Voice

The role of students in the review of a department’s provision is considered to be a fundamental element. A representative from the Students’ Union (normally the Vice-President (Education)) is a full member of the Periodic Departmental Review Panel. The Panel meets with relevant elected course representatives from the department under review to obtain views collected from fellow students on a broad range of matters relating to their experience as students in the department and the University. Student feedback which is collected as

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1 The University will continue to routinely hold reviews of University of London Distance learning provision where Royal Holloway is responsible for the academic direction of provision.
part of the annual review process and the results of student surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) are considered as part of the evidence base.

1.3 Review Panel

The review is conducted by a panel, which is convened by the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards) on behalf of the Academic Board. Whilst the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards) may alter the configuration according to the nature and scope of the provision which is under review, normally the Panel will be constituted as follows.

Chair:
- Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards)

Panel Members:
- normally at least two external specialists in the discipline(s) under review
- two members of the academic teaching staff of the University
- the Students’ Union Vice-Principal (Education) or a nominee if the Vice-Principal (Education) previously studied in the department under review;
- Head of Academic Quality and Policy Office

Secretary:
- Senior Academic Quality Manager

The Chair may invite others with particular expertise (for example, staff from Careers and Employability or Support and Advisory Services) to advise and participate in specific aspects of the review. A representative of the University of London Worldwide Programmes will always be invited to observe meetings at which the University of London Worldwide Programmes are reviewed. The names of Panel members and of others who have been invited to participate will be communicated to the department. None of the Panel members or other participants will be from the department which is under review.

1.3.1 External Panel Members

External specialists are full and equal members of the Panel. Their particular role is to advise on the extent to which academic standards, subject benchmarks and professional requirements are being met, and to apply their experience gained outside the University in evaluating and suggesting enhancements to the provision which is under review. At least one external specialist will normally have experience of leading and/or managing an academic unit. They are selected by the Chair, where possible, from a list of nominees provided in advance by the department, although the Chair may also seek advice and nominations from the relevant Executive Dean, and learned societies or professional bodies. The Chair will seek to ensure an appropriate match with the department’s provision in reference to factors such as academic level, range across the discipline, modes of delivery, and professional, vocational and practical elements. All external specialists must be of sufficient authority in the field of teaching to command respect in the discipline and/or profession; familiar with current training (where relevant); with significant experience in the organisation of teaching at a course, departmental or faculty level and be able to provide an impartial review. External panel members would normally be expected to be of Senior Lecturer grade (Principal Lecturer or above if from a post-1992 institution) or above, or the equivalent.

1.3.2 Internal Panel Members

The particular role of the internal academic members of the Panel is to apply their knowledge of University systems and frameworks in evaluating and suggesting enhancements to the provision that is
under review, and to promote the identification and spread of good practice. In order to facilitate this type of interaction, normally one internal academic member will be from the faculty in which the department under review is located, and the other member will be from another School.

1.3.3 Student Representative
The primary role of the Students’ Union member is to ensure that issues raised in the review include consideration of the student perspective. He/she in particular assists the Panel in identifying questions for, and eliciting views from, the course representatives during the review.

1.3.4 Head of Academic Quality and Policy Office
The Head of Academic Quality and Policy Office ensures equivalence of process across all periodic reviews and assists the Panel Chair in identifying the key commendations and recommendations for the department and University.
1.4 Conduct of Review

1.4.1 Briefing for Department

Normally six months in advance of the Review the Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards) and the Head of the Academic Quality and Policy office will brief the Head of Department of the process and requirements of the review. This is followed by a meeting of the Senior Academic Quality Manager and an Academic Quality Officer who are supporting the review, with the Head of Department, the Department Manager and other members of the department, as appropriate. This meeting covers the collation of material and the organization of the review.

1.4.2 Evidence

The review is conducted on the basis of documentation and structured meetings with course representatives, teaching staff and other relevant stakeholders. In order to ensure that the review is relevant and does not generate undue expenditure of effort, as far as possible the Panel will restrict its attention to documentation that is generated routinely by the department and University. The purpose of the meetings is to gain a more direct impression of students’ experiences of the department, to explore issues through discussion with staff, and to test claims which are made in the documentation.

1.4.3 Documentation

The core documentation is collected three months in advance of the review but will be submitted to the Panel six weeks prior to the review with the Departmental Overview and SWOT analysis. The Panel will also be provided with information such as the results of student surveys (including the NSS and PTES), curriculum information as set out in course specifications and module specifications, data relating to recruitment, TEF, degree outcomes as determined by the Chair, student academic appeals received, suspensions of regulations sought, and student assessment offence cases benchmarked against School and University norms.

The Panel will also seek the views of internal key stakeholders, which will normally include the Executive Dean, the Head of Careers and Employability, Director of Library Services, the Head of Student Advisory and Wellbeing, the Head of the Educational Development Centre, and the Head of CeDAS, to comment in writing on the extent and effectiveness of their interaction with the department as soon as they are received. The purpose of this is to provide a transparent mechanism through which the Panel can retrieve information which has built up over time through the department’s interaction with other areas of the University, and use this to help plan and give focus to the review. All information received will be shared with the Department before the Review.

The department may be asked to provide access to online materials and forums. There will be an additional submission from the University of London Worldwide Programmes in cases where external provision is under review.

Additional documents may be requested from the department or the University either before or during the review as particular themes and/or issues are identified.

1.4.4 Departmental Overview and SWOT analysis

The Head of Department is provided with the documentation for the review, normally 3 months ahead of the review so that the Departmental Overview and SWOT analysis can be prepared in consultation with staff in the department. The completed Overview and SWOT analysis must be submitted to the Academic Quality and Policy at least six weeks in advance of the Review for circulation to the panel. It is the only document written by the department for the specific purpose of the review.
The purpose of the Overview is to provide a brief summary of the department but more importantly an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the current taught provision (internal) and the opportunities and threats (external) and its provision.

1.4.5 Review Meetings
All the core documentation, except the examples of students’ work, is sent to the Panel at least six weeks before the review meetings are due to take place. Each Panel member is asked for structured feedback on the documentation and recommendations on any areas which they believe would warrant further investigation during the review. The Chair uses this feedback to determine a detailed plan and lists of required attendees for the review meetings, and to identify any further documentation which might be required from the department.

Normally the review meetings will take place over two days, but in cases where the provision under review is especially broad or complex the meetings may extend to three days. The schedule always includes separate meetings with undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, a number of meetings with teaching staff, and a final session at which the Chair provides brief, oral feedback to the department on the Panel’s key conclusions. Meetings with representatives of partners on collaborative courses and technical staff who have teaching or training responsibilities may be included. In cases where courses under review have a strongly vocational or professional focus, the Chair may also ask to meet with a representative sample of employers. The schedule may also include a tour of departmental learning and support facilities. In order to promote the School’s ownership of the review outcome, the Executive Dean is invited to join the Panel for the beginning session and the final discussions on the findings and conclusions reached, and for the feedback session with the departmental staff.

1.5 Outcome and Feedback

1.5.1 Report
The review report is drafted by the Panel Secretary and circulated to Panel members. It is subject to final approval by the Chair. As part of the drafting process, the department under review is invited to comment upon any errors of fact, as well as any instances where it is felt that comments or judgements are based on a misconception of the facts of the matter. However, information will be taken into account at this stage only if it was made available to the Panel previously as part of the review. The report lists the commendations and any recommendations for the Department, School and University.

1.5.2 Action Plan
Once the report has been finalized by the Chair, it is remitted to the Head of Department and the Executive Dean for the development of an action plan to implement recommendations and for sharing with departmental staff at a Departmental Board meeting or a meeting specially constituted for this purpose. Departmental input is central to the development of the action plan, which may require staff with administrative roles such as Director of Undergraduate or Director of Postgraduate Education to address particular recommendations. The Executive Dean, in consultation with the Senior Academic Quality Manager, works with the Head of Department to produce an action plan which should address the recommendations for the department, School and University. The Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards), as chair of the panel and the Head of the Academic Quality and Policy Office will meet with the Head of department/school, the Executive Dean and the Panel secretary to finalise the action plan.

1.5.3 Approval and Monitoring
The report and action plans follow a pre-determined schedule which sets out the committee and date of meetings when the PDR report and action plan will be considered, approved, and monitored. (This normally all takes place
within 12 months). The action plan and the report are submitted together to the School Education Committee. The role of the School Education Committee is to support the Head of Department and Executive Dean in producing an action plan which provides the most effective response to issues and good practice identified in the report. Members of the School Education Committee should share their experience of finding solutions to similar issues, or may identify issues which apply equally to them and which could be resolved collaboratively. After consideration by the School Education Committee, the Executive Dean submits the action plan to the Academic Board, via the Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee, for approval.

The Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee considers the report and action plan:

- as an inter school committee, in order to advise on any inter school issues and any University-wide issues;
- as steering committee to the Academic Board, in order to advise on whether specific issues should be remitted to other committees;
- as a planning committee, in order to consider issues relating to the availability and use of resources which may need to be taken into account during the annual planning process.

The role of the Academic Board is to scrutinize the report and action plan, together with any additional comments made by the Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee, in order to assure itself that the review conducted in its name has been conducted satisfactorily within agreed guidelines (Academic Board may also recommend that the guidelines should be amended in future); and that the proposed action plan constitutes an adequate and appropriate response to all the issues raised in the report. If the Academic Board is not satisfied with either the report or the action plan, it may refer the matter back to the Head of Department, the Executive Dean or the Chair as appropriate. Individual members with genuine concerns about the review may also contact the Chair of Academic Board to request access to the documentary evidence considered by the Panel.

Once approved by Academic Board, the report and action plan should be shared with the students in the department by circulating it via student departmental email addresses and notifying them that the report and action plan will be discussed at the next meeting of the Staff-Student Action Meeting.

Progress on action points is monitored according to the PDR schedule by the School Education Committee and the Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee. The Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee acts on behalf of Academic Board to review all recommendations including those which are outside the immediate remit of the Assessment and Quality Assurance and Standards Committee.
Appendix A

Periodic Departmental Review (PDR) Process for University of London provision

• Purpose
• Review Panel
• Conduct of Review
• Outcome and Feedback

Purpose

The purpose of the review is:

• to gather reliable evidence on the academic standard and quality of distance learning courses delivered through the University of London and to report on this as appropriate;
• to identify areas for enhancement;
• to identify and share examples of good practice;
• to supplement the annual review process.

Review Panel

The review is conducted by a panel, which is convened by the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality & Standards) on behalf of the Academic Board. Whilst the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality & Standards) may alter the configuration according to the nature and scope of the provision which is under review, normally the Panel will be constituted as follows:

• Chaired by the University’s Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Quality and Standards);
• Two internal panel members from Schools within the University;
• One relevant external discipline specialist for each programme;
• Head of the Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO);
• Representative from the Students’ Union;
• Observers from the University of London Worldwide Quality team

A Senior Academic Quality Manager from AQPO will act as Secretary.

The Chair may invite others with particular expertise (for example, staff from Professional Services) to advise and participate in specific aspects of the review. None of the Panel members or other participants will be from the department which is under review.

External Panel Members

External specialists are full and equal members of the Panel. Their particular role is to advise on the extent to which academic standards, subject benchmarks and professional requirements are being met, and to apply their experience gained outside the University in evaluating and suggesting enhancements to the provision which is under review.

Internal Panel Members
The particular role of the internal academic members of the Panel is to apply their knowledge of University systems and frameworks in evaluating and suggesting enhancements to the provision that is under review, and to promote the identification and spread of good practice.

**Student Representative**

The primary role of the Students’ Union member is to ensure that issues raised in the review include consideration of the student perspective. He/she in particular assists the Panel in identifying questions for, and eliciting views from, students during the review.

**Head of Academic Quality and Policy Office**

The Head of Academic Quality and Policy Office ensures equivalence of process across all periodic reviews and assists the Panel Chair in identifying the key commendations and recommendations for the department and University.

**Conduct of Review**

**Evidence**

The review is conducted on the basis of documentation and structured meetings with students, teaching staff and other relevant stakeholders. In order to ensure that the review is relevant and does not generate undue expenditure of effort, as far as possible the Panel will restrict its attention to documentation that is generated routinely.

**Documentation**

In advance of the review the following documentation will be circulated to the members of the panel:

- Programme Specifications;
- Programme Regulations;
- Annual Programme Planning and Review (APPR) Reports;
- External Examiner’s Reports;
- Student data and feedback;
- Exam Board minutes;
- Departmental Self Evaluation document;
- QAA Subject Benchmark statements;
- QAA Quality Code;
- FHEQ Credit Framework

The Chair of the panel may liaise with panel members in advance, particularly external advisers, to discuss any issues of concern and develop more focused themes for scrutiny during the event.

**Review Meetings**

The two days of the review process will comprise a series of review meetings focussing on:

- Curriculum design;
- Student achievement, progression and completion;
- Teaching and Learning;
- Student support;
- Assessment and Feedback.
Outcome and Feedback

A written report will be provided by the Panel and may include both recommendations and commendations. An Action Plan will be required from the Departments. Both the written report and the action plan will be considered at School and University Level and by the University of London Worldwide.