



# **Academic Quality Framework**

## **Programme Review Process**

**Approved by Academic Council  
1<sup>st</sup> December 2021**

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## Document Control Summary

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## 1. Context

- 1.1. This document sets out the University's procedures for the review of academic programmes. Programme review is a quality enhancement exercise that provides an opportunity for the University to conduct a critical evaluation of a programme or a portfolio of programmes and to make significant changes to the programme or programmes if appropriate. Programme review assures quality, promotes best practice, and embeds opportunities for adding value through the enhancement of the programme quality on a continuous basis.
- 1.2. These procedures should be read in conjunction with the [Protocols for TU Dublin Quality Reviews](#). Programme Coordinators should consult the Academic Affairs website for records of previous reviews, outcomes of internal quality surveys and the suite of current national and international best practice guidelines.
- 1.3. The Programme Review process ensures programme development and approval is aligned to the guidance, checklists and advice in the [Programme Design and Delivery Handbook](#). Although, the process described here assumes that one single programme is being reviewed, this will inevitably include any embedded programmes and exit awards. Furthermore, Discipline Programmes Boards or Faculty Boards may propose to Academic Affairs that multiple programmes, which share stages and/or have many common elements, are reviewed together. A similar proposal may be submitted for programmes where there is an automatic and clear progression, e.g. from a Level 7 to Level 8 programme in the same discipline.
- 1.4. The rationale for Programme Reviews embodies the requirements in international best practice and legislation requirements and regulatory guidelines.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of this document is to outline the policies and procedures relating to the review of a TU Dublin academic programme.
- 2.2. The purpose of a programme review is to:
- a) Ensure that the programme maintains appropriate academic standards commensurate with the University's award and standards.
  - b) Ensure that a viable market demand exists for the programme and that it is sustainable.
  - c) Provide the opportunity for seeking stakeholder feedback including from students, staff, external examiners, community, industry and the professions and other external peers, and to use such feedback to revise the contents and relevance of programmes, including redesign of curricula and delivery strategies;
  - d) Ensure adherence to [TU Dublin Policies, Guidelines and Educational Model](#) related to good practice in learning, teaching and assessment as described in the [Programme Design and Delivery Handbook](#);
  - e) Ensure adequate resource allocation for the effective delivery of the programme;
  - f) Monitor the effectiveness of the University's [Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process](#) for the programme and the implementation of identified quality enhancement plans.
  - g) Ensure that statutory requirements in relation to access, transfer and progression continue to be met.
  - h) Ensure the programme reflects requirements of professional, regulatory, and associative bodies to retain recognition and/or association.

### 3. Scope

- 3.1. A programme review will not form part of the School Review process but can take place prior to the [School Review Process](#), at the behest of the Discipline Programmes Boards or the University Programmes Board, or the need may be identified through another external/internal process such as the [Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process](#).
- 3.2. The scope provides for two types of programme review:
- Full Programme Review – where all aspects of the programme are reviewed, and the programme is revalidated.
  - Focused Programme Review – which focuses on specific aspects of the programme, and is typically triggered by an internal quality enhancement process (e.g. [Making Changes to Programmes & Modules Process](#));
- 3.3. Modifications to the programme are considered as part of the review process. When modifications to a programme are being proposed outside of a review, the procedures described in the [Making Changes to Programmes & Modules Process](#) should be followed. In addition, any modifications to modules within the programme must be approved by the relevant School prior to the programme review through the procedures described in the [Making Changes to Programmes & Modules Process](#).
- 3.4. Any changes resulting from the Programme Review Panel's conditions or recommendations will be approved through the review process itself and the Programme & Module Catalogue will be updated when the Panel's report and the School's response are approved.
- 3.5. It is assumed that any changes approved through the Programme Review process will be implemented in the following academic year, unless specifically stated otherwise within the submitted documentation.

## 4. Instigation of Programme Review

- 4.1. The need to review a programme may be identified by the Faculty Board, or by the Discipline Programmes Board, which then makes a proposal to the Faculty Board. A Programme Team may also recommend the Discipline Programmes Board makes such a proposal to the Faculty Board. In addition, the [Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee](#) or the [University Programmes Board](#) can make a recommendation to Academic Affairs to start the review process for a particular programme or set of programmes.
- 4.2. A programme review may be triggered by the outcomes of:
- A review of student data (e.g. student numbers, diversity data, progression rates, graduations rates, etc.);
  - Quality enhancement process (e.g. [Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process](#), [School Review](#), [Making Changes to Programme & Modules](#));
  - A review of the number and level of changes made to the programme or its modules since its original validation. The Programme & Module Catalogue will be used by Academic Affairs and Faculty Boards to monitor the number and level of changes made to programmes.
  - Change in the external environment, such as the employment market and regulatory requirements.
- 4.3. Faculty Board, Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee or the University Programmes Board may request that the review be limited to specific aspects of the programme.
- 4.4. Once a programme review has been requested, the School should submit a completed [External Panel Members Nominations Form](#) to the Faculty Board.

- 4.5. To start the review of a programme, the Faculty Board contacts Academic Affairs to request the programme is added to the [Schedule of Programme Reviews](#). For the review of a programme leading to a Major Award, as shown in the process flow chart in [Section 6.1](#), the Faculty Board must also submit the approved External Panel Member Nominations Form to Academic Affairs.
- 4.6. In the case of a review of a programme leading to a [Major Award](#), on receipt of the request, Academic Affairs will:
- In the case of a full programme review, formally establish a Programme Review Panel.
  - In the case of a focused programme review, formally establish a Programme Review Panel, and draft a description of the specific area(s) to be focused on by the Panel.
- 4.7. Any conflicts of interest, current or previous associations between a proposed external panel member and the programme under review must be declared in the initial review.
- 4.8. The review process of a programme leading to a [Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental Award](#) is undertaken at Faculty level, as shown in the process flow chart in [Section 6.2](#). The review process to be followed and the panel membership will depend on the nature of the programme and will be determined by Academic Affairs in consultation with the Faculty Vice-Dean of Education. Where a minor award is a sub-set of a major award, and its review may impact on that major award, a review of the programme leading to the major award, which would inherently encompass the minor award, may be undertaken.

## 5. Procedures for Programme Review

### 5.1 Documentation and Timelines

- 5.1.1 The programme review process provides an opportunity for the Discipline Programmes Board to conduct a critical evaluation of the programme, and where necessary, to consider the pertinent issues that may have triggered the review and/or to make significant changes to the programme, if appropriate.
- 5.1.2 The Programme Self-Evaluation Report (PSER) is the primary document in the review process and is supported by the updated programme documentation. The structure and indicative contents are provided in the indicative [PSER Template](#). When a focused review is undertaken, the PSER template will be amended by Academic Affairs at the start of the review process.
- 5.1.3 Upon completion of the Programme Self-Evaluation Report, the Programme Coordinator creates a draft copy of the programme information currently approved on the [Programme & Module Catalogue](#). The coordinator then makes the amendments that have been agreed through the programme self-evaluation process and submits the draft to the Chair of the Discipline Programmes Board and the relevant Head of School, who reviews the programme from a resources and staffing perspective.
- 5.1.4 The Programme Self-Evaluation Report and the updated programme information is considered by the Discipline Programmes Board, and if approved is submitted (programme documentation submitted via the Programme & Module Catalogue) to the Faculty Board.



- 5.1.5 The Programme Self-Evaluation Report, including the proposed changes to the programme, are considered by the Faculty Board and if approved are submitted to Academic Affairs.
- 5.1.6 Once a Programme Review Panel has been established, Academic Affairs will download the draft programme information from the Programme & Module Catalogue and provide it to the Programme Review Panel along with the Self Evaluation Document and any other relevant documents.
- 5.1.7 The following documents are provided to the Programme Review Panel at least four weeks in advance of the Panel visit:
- Programme Self-Evaluation Report
  - Updated Programme Information (taken from Programme & Module Catalogue)
  - Students Handbook(s)
  - Other documentation where appropriate and relevant
- 5.1.8 In addition, the following documents will be made available to the Programme Review Panel two weeks prior to the site visit via a shared online facility:
- Exemplar assessment materials (e.g. examination, briefs, assignments);
  - External examiner reports for the previous three academic years.
  - Annual Programme Enhancement Reports for the previous three academic years.
  - Work Placement Handbook (if applicable).
- 5.1.9 Other documents can be requested by the Programme Review Panel. The Chair of the Panel will communicate any requests for further information or documentation at least one week prior to the Panel's visit.

## 5.2 Programme Self-Evaluation Report

- 5.2.1 The key element in a review of a programme is the critical self-evaluation and reappraisal of all aspects of the programme.
- 5.2.2 This self-evaluation exercise will be coordinated by the Programme Coordinator, on behalf of the *Discipline Programmes Board*, with the outcome being a Programme Self Evaluation Report, which is presented to a Programme Review Panel along with an updated programme document. The self-evaluation enables the Review Panel to probe and interrogate evidence in the documentation against best practice and/or innovation benchmarks, hence the Review Panel can adjudge if the outcomes of critical evaluation, have been comprehensively addressed to ensure quality enhancement of the programme in review.
- 5.2.3 This self-evaluation is designed to enable the Discipline Programmes Board to evaluate a programme's performance and to enable the Faculty and University to verify the programme's performance over a defined period of time. It should be derived at least partly from the Annual Programme Enhancement Reports during the period since the initial validation or the previous programme review. It is not a description, but rather an evaluation of the effectiveness of various aspects of the programme, including positive developments as the programme evolved, achievements and any challenges. Hence, the outcome is a thorough but concise Programme Self-Evaluation Report that aims to be an objective statement of the views of the Discipline Programme Board, informed by stakeholder feedback, on the overall quality of the student learning experience on the programme.
- 5.2.4 The evaluation of the programme should be underpinned by a statistical analysis of student data where appropriate. The following questions should be answered in the Programme Self-Evaluation Report:

- a) Do the aims and objectives of the programme fit within the University Strategic Plan?
- b) How well does the programme align to the TU Dublin Educational Model?
- c) What actions have been identified to enhance the programme's strengths and address any weaknesses?
- d) How have industrial, commercial, and professional developments impacted on the programme?
- e) Have the access, transfer and progression arrangements been implemented successfully to ensure achievement of the TU Dublin Strategic Plan (e.g. intake policy and procedures, admission requirements and standards of those admitted, advanced entry / transfers into a programme, and numbers progressing through the programme);
- f) How does the programme structure and curriculum ensure that prescribed programme outcomes are achievable?
- g) Are there opportunities for students to develop, obtain feedback and be assessed on an agreed set of Graduate Attributes?
- h) How well does the programme align to the TU Dublin Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and how effective is the programme-based approach to learning, teaching and assessment been in ensuring:
  - I. All students receive the relevant information and support to make a smooth transition into your programme and develop core skills for success.
  - II. Students achieve and appropriately evidence the learning outcomes.

- III. Manageable and realistic workloads for students and staff, in the context of ECTS and associated learning hours (timetabled and independent);
- IV. A balance of assessment for, of and as learning.
- V. Provision of effective and timely feedback that supports the development of students as self-regulated learners.
- VI. Academic integrity within all assessment and associated processes.
- VII. Are authentic 'real world' tasks and assessments employed across the programme?
- VIII. What strategies have been used to ensure equality and inclusion of all students within learning and assessment processes, and for supporting and fostering diversity within the student cohort?
- IX. Are practice placements appropriate and fit for purpose, having regard to the requirements of professional, regulatory, and associative bodies, in the context of student achievement of learning outcomes and in the overall student experience?
- X. Are work placements and/or community-based learning projects appropriate and fit for purpose in the context of achieving the learning outcomes of the programme and in the overall student experience?
- XI. Are international student exchanges appropriate and fit for purpose in the context of students achieving the learning outcomes of the programmes, the overall student experience, and the fostering of international links to the programme?
- XII. Have the graduates of the programme gained employment or progressed to further learning?

- XIII. How has feedback from key stakeholders, e.g. staff, students, employers, graduates, and external examiners been used to inform the programme development;
- XIV. What has been the impact of the learning environment, both physical and virtual, on the programme delivery and the student learning experience?
- XV. How have learning resources (Library, VLE, IT, etc.) been used to support and enhance learning within the programme and what has been their impact on the student learning experience?
- XVI. How has the Annual Academic Quality Enhancement process been used to identify issues and actions to continually enhance the programme and student learning experience?
- XVII. How has research, scholarship of teaching and external engagement underpinned and informed the development of the programme?
- XVIII. How effective has the student handbook and other information channels been in communicating with students?
- XIX. How are students with specific needs supported in the programme?

5.2.5 A Programme development plan must be included in the Programme Self-Evaluation Report. This will contain:

- Outcomes of the review of learning, teaching and assessment approaches;
- A description and rationale for all proposed changes to the programme under review.
- Updated programme schedule incorporating proposed changes.

5.2.6 Where the review of the programme leads to significant changes in the programme outcomes, or the sequence/replacement of modules, the Programme Development Plan must describe any transition arrangements that need to be in place for continuing and repeating students.

### 5.3 Consideration of Programme Self-Evaluation Report by Faculty Board

5.3.1 The Programme Documentation is drafted by the Programme Coordinator, with support of members of the Programme Team, on behalf of the Discipline Programmes Board. When the Discipline Programmes Boards is satisfied the documentation is complete and accurate, the Chair or nominee submits the Self Evaluation Report to the Faculty Vice Dean of Education.

5.3.2 Faculty Board considers the Programme Self-Evaluation Report to ensure the critical evaluation has been completed, all requirements have been satisfied, all relevant strategies and policies have been adhered to, and the document is of an appropriate standard.

5.3.3 The Head of School responsible for the programme, confirms the availability of all resources and facilities described within the document. If satisfied, the Chair of the Faculty Board (or nominee) submits the Programme Self-Evaluation Report to Academic Affairs.

### 5.4 Programme Review Panel

5.4.1 In the case of programmes leading to [Major Awards](#), the *Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee* approves the external member nominations and formally establishes the Programme Review Panel.

5.4.2 The membership of Programme Review Panel will be constituted to suit the programme needs. For instance, in the case of a multidisciplinary programme there may be a need to increase the number of subject matter experts on the panel. The minimum number and type of members is as follows:

- Chair (TU Dublin senior academic)
- One internal TU Dublin Academic staff member (from outside the faculty where the programme is located)
- Two external academics
- One external industry/employer/profession/community representative
- Academic Affairs Representative

5.4.3 In the case of a programme leading to a [Minor, Special Purpose or Supplemental Award](#), the review process to be followed (shown in [Section 6.2](#)) and the panel membership will depend on the nature of the programme and will be determined by Academic Affairs in consultation with the Faculty Vice-Dean of Education.

5.4.4 As per Section 4.5 above, at the start of the review process, Schools shall provide an external panel nominees shortlist, as set out in the [External Panel Member Nomination Form](#).

5.4.5 The review panel composition shall proactively account for gender balance and reflect the spirit of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity.

5.4.6 The Programme Review Panel's role is to make an impartial judgement on the overall standard of the programme and on its acceptability when compared with other similar programmes nationally and internationally.

5.4.7 The Panel reviews and considers the critical Programme Self-Evaluation Report and any revisions proposed to ensure that the revisions are appropriate. An outline of the key issues to be addressed is provided in the [Guidance Document for Validation/Review Panels](#). The primary purpose of the review event is an objective assessment of the issues identified in the Programme Self-Evaluation Report.

5.4.8 The Review Panel will be tasked with:

- Reviewing the Programme Self-Evaluation Report, programme information and supporting documentation prior to the visit, considering any information presented during the site visit, and ensuring the programme meets the requirements set out in TU Dublin academic policies and the Quality Framework;
- Participation in planned site-visit;
- Preparing an interim report specifying its findings and recommendations and to communicate the same to School management, Chair of the Discipline Programme Board and the Programme Coordinator at the Exit Meeting.
- Finalising the Programme Review Report that will provide the basis for the subsequent response and action plan emanating from the School.
- Considering the School's response to the Programme Review Report and making an overall recommendation to the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee.

## 5.5 Programme Review Event

5.5.1 The review event is organised by Academic Affairs in consultation with the relevant Head of School.



- 5.5.2 The Programme Review Panel visits the school to review the documentation, to discuss the programme and self-evaluation of the programme with the Programme Team, students and graduates of the programme, and to view the facilities available to the programme.
- 5.5.3 Academic Affairs will prepare the agenda and timetable for the review visit in consultation with the Programme Coordinator, based on the [indicative Programme Review Agenda](#).
- 5.5.4 The School will be responsible for organising the relevant staff and stakeholder inputs and meetings and arranging for access and visits to the relevant facilities and services. Meeting rooms to accommodate stakeholder meetings will be made available, to facilitate meetings with School management, students registered on the programme, graduates, staff teaching on the programme, employers and external representatives from any industry, professions, community organisations involved in the development or delivery of the programme.
- 5.5.5 The School will also arrange a meeting room where the review panel can meet privately, and which can be used for refreshments and lunch.
- 5.5.6 The visit will end with an Exit Meeting, in which the panel will provide the indicative outcomes of the review exercise.

## 5.6 Exit Meeting

- 5.6.1 The Exit Meeting accords the Review Panel the opportunity to communicate their provisional findings to the Head of School (or nominee), the Chair of the Discipline Programme Board, and the Programme Coordinator. The Panel Chair will present the findings in the form of Recommendations and Conditions.

5.6.2 The purpose of the Exit Meeting is to provide initial feedback and to make points of clarification. It is not intended as a discussion of findings as they are at this point provisional and may be amended following clarification and further evidence, post visit discussion and reflections by panel members.

5.6.3 The outcome of the Programme Review event is the draft Programme Review Report.

### 5.7 Programme Review Report

5.7.1 The Programme Review Report is expected to provide formative feedback aimed at the quality enhancement of the programme.

5.7.2 The Review Panel and Academic Affairs will agree a timeline for finalisation of the report, sign-off and returning to the Academic Affairs. Typically, this will be within 2 weeks after the end of site visit.

5.7.3 The Programme Review Report contains the following sections:

- Programme Details
- Membership of Programme Review Panel
- List of documentation reviewed by Programme Review Panel
- Schedule of Review Event
- Details of Facilities/Resources viewed by Programme Review Panel
- List of any derogations from University regulations
- Summary of Review Panel's findings (highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and inherent opportunities for improvement)
- Overall Recommendation to Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee
- List of Conditions & Recommendations

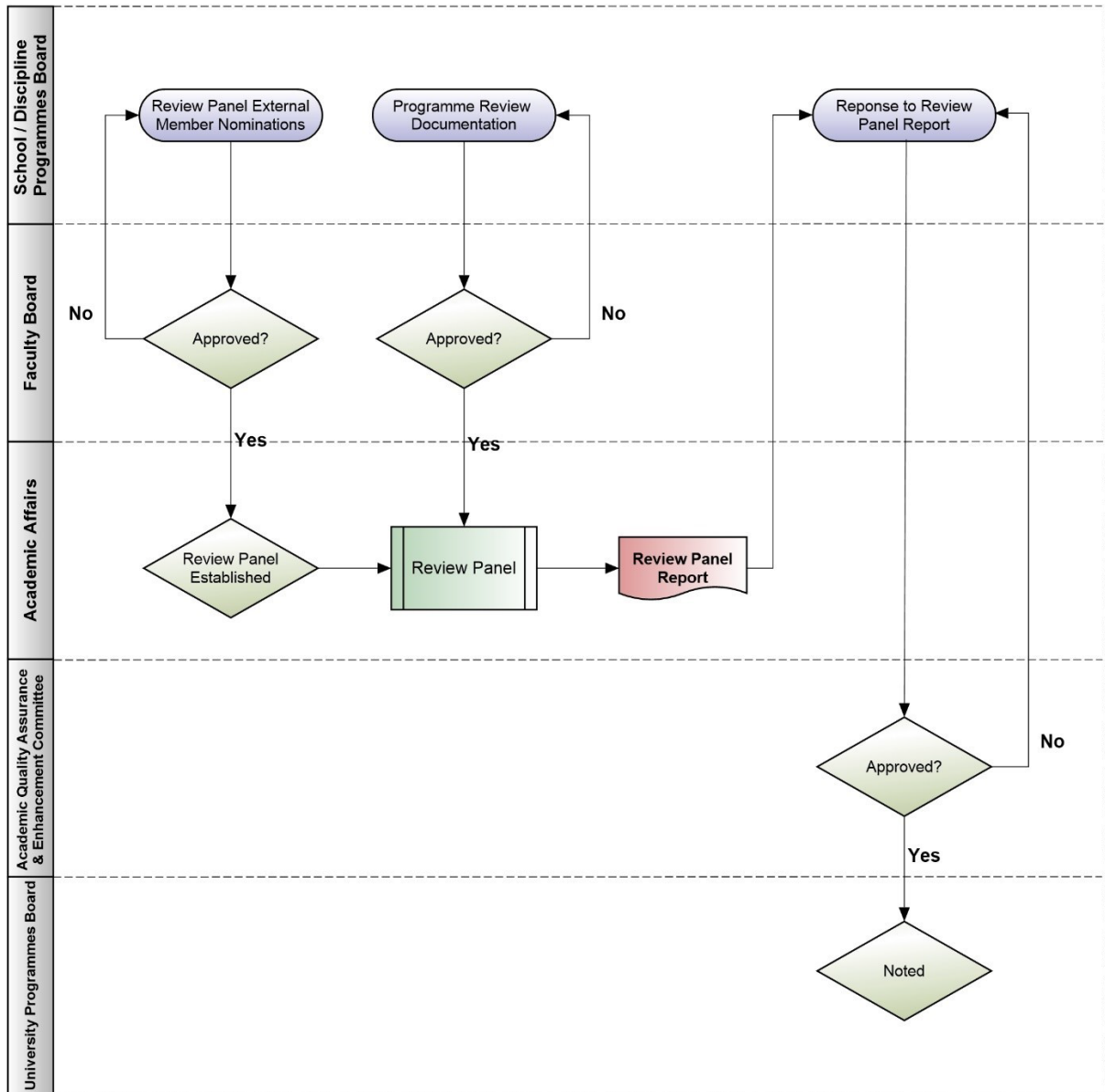
## 5.8 Post Review Event

- 5.8.1 At the end of the Programme Review event, the Chair will provide a verbal draft report with the overall recommendation and identify a provisional list of conditions and recommendations.
- 5.8.2 The Academic Affairs representative will complete the draft report within two weeks of the review event and circulate to the Review Panel members.
- 5.8.3 The review panel members will have one week for factual accuracy checking of draft report and providing any comments/feedback to the Academic Affairs representative.
- 5.8.4 Unless any significant issues are raised in the panel members' feedback, the Academic Affairs representative will finalise the document and send to the Review Panel Chair for sign off. Once approved by the Chair, the Academic Affairs representative will submit the report to the Head of School.
- 5.8.5 The Head of School will have one week to check for factual accuracy. Assuming there are no inaccuracies, the school will have one month to respond to the Programme Review Panel's report clearly identifying how the conditions have been met and the recommendations have been addressed.
- 5.8.6 For conditions or recommendations that may require long-term changes or resourcing, the school's response must present the actions, including timelines, that will be taken to ensure these conditions will be met and recommendations addressed in a specified time.
- 5.8.7 Where the conditions or recommendations lead to significant changes in the programme outcomes, or the sequence/replacement of modules, the school must update the Programme Development Plan, and describe any additional transition arrangements for continuing and repeating students.

- 5.8.8 Academic Affairs will send the school's response to the Programme Review Panel members who may submit additional comments to Academic Affairs regarding the School responses.
- 5.8.9 The Programme Review Panel's report, the school's response and any additional comments from the Panel members will be tabled at the *Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee* for consideration. If satisfied all conditions have been met and all recommendations have been addressed, the Report and School response will be submitted to University Programmes Board for noting. Where conditions have not been met, the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee decision will be deferred until such time as all conditions have been met.
- 5.8.10 Once approved, the school will update the Programme & Module Catalogues to capture any changes to the programme and modules arising from the response to the Panel's conditions and recommendations.
- 5.8.11 If the Programme Review Panel identified conditions and/or recommendations that could not be addressed in the short term by the school, the actions can be added to the Discipline Enhancement Plan. However, the Programme Review Panel must be satisfied that this is the appropriate course of action. Similarly, if the conditions or recommendations need to be considered at the Faculty or University level, the actions can be added to the Faculty or University Enhancement Plans.
- 5.8.12 Completed Programme Review Reports and the School Responses will be published on the TU Dublin Academic Affairs website, in accordance with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

## 6. Process Flow Charts

### 6.1 Review of Programmes Leading to Major Awards



## 6.2 Review of Programmes Leading to Minor, Supplemental or Special

### Purpose Awards

