



# **Academic Quality Framework**

## **School Review Process**

**Approved by Academic Council**

**1 December 2021**

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## 1. Context

- 1.1 It is University policy to carry out an internal cycle of reviews of its Academic Schools on an ongoing basis for purposes of quality assurance and quality enhancement, and as per relevant statutory obligations. Best practice guidelines require on-going monitoring and periodic review of Schools, including review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures, to ensure that they achieve their objectives and respond to the needs of students and society at large. Such reviews will lead to continuous improvement of designated activities, hence, any action(s) planned or taken as a result of the reviews are communicated to all stakeholders.
- 1.2 These procedures should be read in conjunction with the Protocols for TU Dublin Quality Reviews. Schools should consult the Academic Affairs website for records of Annual Quality Reports (AQR) to QQI, outcomes of internal quality surveys and the suite of current national and international best practice guidelines.
- 1.3 The rationale for School Reviews embodies the requirements in international best practice, 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 School.
- 2.2 The purpose of a School Review is to:
  - Ensure, through structured collation of evidence and critical reflections that the School can plan for its academic programme delivery and strategic development in a manner compatible with the School and Faculty objectives, and towards impactful contribution to the overall University mission and strategic plan.

- Ensure maintenance and continuous enhancement of quality standards in teaching learning, assessment and research, and that emerging issues are identified and appropriately addressed.
- Benefit from objective critique from expert review panel members external to the School, and which will accord it the opportunity for benchmarking with similar Schools nationally and internationally.

### 3. Scope

Procedures covered in this document relate to quality review of Schools in TU Dublin in order to ascertain:

- 3.1 Contribution of the School under review to the strategic aims and initiatives of the Faculty, and how they are objectively addressed in the broad contexts of the University's thematic goals in the Strategic Plan.
- 3.2 Observance, effectiveness and rigour of internal quality assurance protocols within the School under review.

### 4. Procedures for School Review

- 4.1 Once TU Dublin internal review cycles are agreed, it is intended that the School Reviews will feed into Faculty Reviews, which in turn will feed into the overall Institutional Review (CINNTE Review).
- 4.2 The decision to initiate a School Review shall be formally launched by each School under guidance of Academic Affairs. Academic Affairs will write to both the Faculty Dean and the Head of School at least 18 months prior to the School Review Panel visit date, specifically requesting nomination of the review panel members. The full School Review process is shown in the flow chart in Section 9.

- 4.3 Panel composition will be determined per the university guidelines for such nominations, as outlined under Section 5.2 Panel Composition and Member Nomination below.
- 4.4 All communication with the nominated panel and panel members will be through Academic Affairs.
- 4.5 Academic Affairs will liaise with the selected panel nominees to confirm the composition of the final review team and confirm availability and preferred review dates. Subsequently, Academic Affairs will liaise with the Head of School and Faculty Dean to confirm suitable dates aligned with the panel members' preferences.
- 4.6 Academic Affairs will communicate the review panel composition and agreed dates to the school and all panel members.

## 5. Review Panel

### 5.1 Panel Composition and Member Nomination

- 5.1.1 The composition of a School Review Panel will typically include a Chair and Vice-Chair, both of whom shall be senior academics. The Chair will be external to the university, while the Vice-Chair will be selected from areas outside of the Faculty of the School under review.
- 5.1.2 The School under review shall establish a Review Coordination Committee from the ranks of its own academic staff and professional services staff.
- 5.1.3 The Review Coordination Committee will also include student and/or graduate representation, to account for learning experience in both undergraduate and postgraduate offerings, and apprenticeship and part-time programmes offerings in the school.

- 5.1.4 The Review Coordination Committee shall identify External Experts in the academic disciplines covered by the School under review, with at least two members from relevant industry/professional practice. The proposed External Experts shall have demonstrated leadership experience within a leading international university, industry or professional practice.
- 5.1.5 Upon notification of the start of review planning process, the School shall provide the external panel nominees shortlist as set out in the External Panel Member Nomination Form. Any conflict of interest, current or previous associations between a proposed external panel member and the School under review must be declared in the initial review consultation process, as per the requirements in the External Panel Member Nomination Form.
- 5.1.6 The External Panel Member Nomination Form shall provide sufficient background information to allow for informed decision on final panel selection. Where profile or background information is not accessible on internet or other open/public information sources, Academic Affairs will contact the nominees directly to request CVs.
- 5.1.7 Academic Affairs will consider the shortlist of the proposed reviewers in consultation with the Faculty Dean and/or Head of School. If the School to be reviewed does not provide nominees to be considered for the School Review Panel by the agreed deadline, Academic Affairs will propose the composition of the School Review Panel in consultation with the Faculty Dean.
- 5.1.8 A representative from Academic Affairs will be a member of the Panel and will draft the final School Review Report based on the inputs from the other Panel members.
- 5.1.9 The School Review Panel composition shall proactively account for gender balance and reflect the spirit of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity.
- 5.1.10 The final selection of the panel will be made independently of the School under review by the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (sub-committee of Academic Council).

## 5.2 Panel Objectives and Functions

5.2.1 The overall objective of the Review Panel is to verify that the School has planned for its academic programme delivery and strategic development in a manner compatible with the School and Faculty objectives and contribute to the overall University mission and strategic plan. It is also intended to draw parity with best practice, and to make the necessary recommendations for performance enhancement.

5.2.2 The Review Panel will specifically evaluate:

- The alignment of the School's strategic plan to the overall TU Dublin Strategic Plan and University Compact with the HEA.
- School's role and impacts of its contribution in both Faculty and University contexts based on the agreed KPI's under TU Dublin Strategic Intent themes.
- The overall standards of academic delivery and effectiveness of the adopted policies and procedures for their monitoring and enhancement (Quality Framework at School Level).
- Efficacy of external/civic engagement activities including internationalisation.
- Intended roles and performance of linked and collaborative provisions.
- The quality and management of research activities in the School.
- Student learning experience and achievement in the overall award classifications at exit to employment. Key factors that could be considered include: progression to immediate employment; the contributions made to student achievement by the quality of teaching; opportunities for learning (including any integrated co- and/or extra-curricular activities); learning resources (including qualified staffing) and other support provisions aimed at eliciting excellence.
- Performance in processes in the student life cycle from admission and induction, through progression in designated pathways and the designated academic supports.
- Quality of learning facilities and services and their relevance to continued achievement of learning outcomes.
- Staffing and staff development programmes.

- Integrated learner assessment strategies for the individual programmes and the inherent pathways which evaluate the extent to which students can demonstrate achievement of TU Dublin graduate attributes.

5.2.3 The Review Panel will be tasked with:

- Considering the School Self-Evaluation Report, including any supporting information and onsite evidence as presented.
- Participation in planned site-visit to the School under review to scrutinise the evidence.
- Reviewing any other of the activities that contribute to meeting the strategic intents and student learning experience in the School.
- Preparing an interim report specifying its findings and recommendations and to communicate the same to the School at the Exit Meeting.
- Finalising the School Review Report that will provide bases for subsequent actions emanating from the School Review.

## 6. Review Documentation

### 6.1 Outline of Material Relevant to the Submission

6.1.1 The School Self-Evaluation-Report (SSER) shall be the primary documentation to be submitted as part of the School Review process.

6.1.2 Other supporting elements for the submission, which will vary by Faculty/School/discipline/subject areas, may include (but not limited) the following information linked to the School in review (samples from at least three preceding academic years):

- Previous School Review Reports;
- Internal Programme Review Reports;
- Staff profiles;
- School strategic plan including its alignment to the Faculty and overall TU Dublin Strategic Intent and University Compact with the HEA;



- Outcomes of relevant stakeholder consultation processes;
  - School profile comprising staff and student statistical information (e.g., disciplines, trends in applications, enrolment progression, completion, retention, etc.);
  - Where applicable, most current professional accreditation reports;
  - Quality Enhancement Plans from aligned Discipline Programme Boards;
  - School's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies;
  - School organisation chart in the context of overall Faculty/University structure,
  - Current information on teaching and learning grants, research grants and other Non-exchequer income related to the School's academic remits;
  - Programme specific budgetary information;
  - Outline of processes for capturing, analysing and considering stakeholder feedback;
  - Minutes of Discipline Programmes Board meetings and other relevant Academic Committees;
  - Programme Design and Delivery Handbook for staff, sample student handbooks, and programme advertisements and student recruitment literature;
  - Employability and Employment Guidelines for programmes in the School.
- 6.1.3 The supporting elements above are in no particular order, and some will be evidential support to the narrative in the SSER and will require submission to the Review Panel in advance of the visit or supplied in electronic format in agreed media or shared repository specific to the School Review.
- 6.1.4 Other appropriate evidence to be available to the Review Panel during the site visit.

## 6.2 Structure and Contents of School Self-Evaluation Report

- 6.2.1 With a formative objective at its core, the School Self-Evaluation Report (SSER) will provide evidence-based reflection of the School's strengths, challenges and opportunities.
- 6.2.2 Overall, the SSER narrative will articulate the School's approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement in its operations (including any linked or collaborative provisions); specifically, a critical self-reflection of the effectiveness of the key aspects of its academic provision, including any associated deliveries of service.
- 6.2.3 It is recommended that the SSER document should be no longer than 50 pages, allowing for additional appendices where necessary. Guidelines on the structure and content of the SSER document are outlined in the indicative SSER Template. A standardised SSER is not envisaged due to the diversity of Schools and Faculties in the University.

## 6.3 Consideration of School Self-Evaluation Report by Faculty Programmes Board

- 6.3.1 Prior to forwarding of the SSER to the formal Review Panel process, the draft SSER will be considered by the Faculty Programmes Board and any matters arising will be reverted back to the School for appropriate amendments. The final document will be forwarded to Academic Affairs to proceed to the review stage.
- 6.3.2 In order to approve progress to review stage, Faculty Programmes Board will consider:
- If the SSER has appropriately addressed the relevant academic quality review procedures.
  - If the outcomes of the previous School review were integrated into the School Quality Enhancement Plan and appropriately executed in the period covered by SSER.

- How and where the School's quality enhancement procedures and teaching and learning enhancements are informed by stakeholder feedback processes.

## 7. Protocol for Site-visits in School Review

### 7.1 Pre-visit Planning

- 7.1.1 Planning for the site-visit to the School under review is central to successfully conducting a review. During the pre-visit planning, Academic Affairs will liaise closely with the Review Coordination Committee of the School. The objective is to develop and agree upon the steps and timelines for the review. The visit dates will be agreed upon during the pre-visit planning. Typical schedule for the site-visit will be 2 to 3 days (depending on size and diversity in the School). Academic Affairs may also seek for inputs from the panel Chair.
- 7.1.2 Academic Affairs will be responsible for all contacts with the internal and external reviewers regarding the review, including arrangements for travel and accommodation for external panel members as may be required. However, the School shall have allocated the necessary budget to cover the costs associated with participation of external panel members.
- 7.1.3 The dates for the site-visit will be determined by Academic Affairs in consultation with the School under review. Academic Affairs will prepare the agenda and timetable for the review visit in consultation with the Review Coordination Committee.
- 7.1.4 The School under review will be responsible for organising the relevant staff and stakeholders inputs and meetings, and arranging for access and visits to the relevant facilities and services. Stakeholders will include (but not limited to) samples of students in the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within School, graduates from relevant programme pathways, and a selected range of employers of its graduates.

7.1.5 The Review Coordination Committee will arrange for a Pre-visit conference call for the Review Panel. This is intended to provide an opportunity to panel members to seek clarifications or further information related to the submitted SSER documentation.

## 7.2 Review Panel Visit

7.2.1 The itinerary of the review panel visit shall be arranged to accommodate the indicative School Review Agenda and timetable from the pre-visit planning and as provided by Academic Affairs. The itinerary will describe headline items in the programme of work to be undertaken.

7.2.2 In order for the review panel visit to progress in an efficient and timely manner, the following facilities shall be provided by the School under review:

- Meeting rooms to accommodate the expected diverse meetings such as with the Faculty/School management team, Head of School and the Review Coordinating Committee (where necessary a representative group of the academic, administrative and technical staff not on the Co-ordinating Committee), current/continuing undergraduate and postgraduate students, graduates, employers and any other relevant stakeholders.
- The School will arrange a meeting room where the review panel can meet privately and which can be used for refreshments and lunch.
- The School shall arrange for a guided tour for the panel members to the principal facilities and ancillary services/service points that relate to its programme.

7.2.3 The visit will end with an Exit Meeting, in which the panel will provide the indicative outcomes of the review exercise.

## 7.3 Exit Meeting

- 7.3.1 The Exit Meeting accords the Review Panel the opportunity to communicate their provisional findings to the School under review. The Panel Chair (or the nominated external member of the review panel) will present their findings in the form of headlines/points covering salient Observations, Commendations, and Recommendations for improvement.
- 7.3.2 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. The indicative period for receiving the panel report by the School under review will be communicated at this meeting.
- 7.3.3 In keeping with best practice, after the site visit, any contact between the staff of School under review and the Review Panel on any matters relating to the SSER, the concluded site visit, or the School Review Report will be conducted through Academic Affairs.

## 7.4 School Review Report

- 7.4.1 The School Review Report is expected to provide formative feedback to the School as the review process outcomes are aimed at quality enhancement. Whereas the School Review Report will be expected to draw substantially from the SSER in both structure and part contents, it will mainly pitch its commendations and recommendations purely from a critical review of the SSER. This will have been corroborated with evidence obtained both orally in the scheduled review forums and in direct observations during the panel visit.
- 7.4.2 The Panel Report will be prepared by the Review Panel as *Peer Reviewers*. Therefore, the Review Coordinating Committee should take cognisance that this has an important bearing on the selection of the review panel, specifically the external experts on the panel.

- 7.4.3 It will be expected that, within two week after the site visit, the Academic Affairs representative on the Review Panel will have developed a draft report, with critical and well supported views and opinions to validate the Panel's Observations, Commendations and Recommendations.
- 7.4.4 The Review Panel and Academic Affairs will agree a timeline to finalisation of report, signoff and returning to the Academic Affairs. Typically, this will be within 6 weeks after the end of site visit (after accounting for any time period that may be required to consider additional evidence that would have been requested at the visit).
- 7.4.5 The panel report will be sent to the Head of School for checking of any factual errors, and if required a brief response to recommendations and/or feedback to panel on the review process. The rejoinder will be limited to the report contents only, as this is not an opportunity to initiate any further dialogue on the School Review.
- 7.4.6 Any minor editorial corrections will be completed in consultation with the Chair of the Review Panel. At this stage, any editorial aspect demanding more significant alteration to parts or sections of the draft report, and which arise from more considered reflection on the initial draft, will be considered exceptional. These may necessitate a coordinated resolution between Academic Affairs, and the Review Panel Chair with possible consultation with specific panel members.
- 7.4.7 All subsequent communication between Academic Affairs and the School will be conducted through the Head of School or nominee.
- 7.4.8 To enable consistency in reporting, Academic Affairs will retain editorial responsibility for the final School Review Report, which, when completed, will be forwarded to the Head of School, Faculty Dean, University Registrar and the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee.
- 7.4.9 Completed Review Reports incorporating the associated action plans will be published on the TU Dublin Academic Affairs website, in accordance with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

## 8. Post-Review School Quality Enhancement Plan

- 8.1 The School will have developed an action plan within the School Self-Evaluation Report, which can be updated to include additional actions to address the recommendations of the School Review Panel to form the School Quality Enhancement Plan.
- 8.2 Upon approval and publication of the Review Report, Academic Affairs will liaise with the reviewed School to agree on the period/duration within which the School Quality Enhancement Plan will be completed and submitted.
- 8.3 Prior to forwarding of the School Quality Enhancement Plan to Academic Affairs, it shall be considered by the Faculty Programmes Board and any matters arising will be reverted back to the School for appropriate amendments. The Faculty Programmes Board can take ownership of any actions where it determines those actions are better addressed at Faculty level. In this case, those actions are added to the Faculty Quality Enhancement Plan (see Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process).
- 8.4 When satisfied with the School Quality Enhancement Plan, the Faculty Programmes Board submits the document to Academic Affairs.
- 8.5 Academic Affairs will send a copy of the report to the Panel members who may submit additional comments regarding the School's responses. The School Review Report, the School's response, including the School Quality Enhancement Plan, and any additional comments from the Panel members will be tabled at the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee for review and approval. The Head of School, of the School under review, will be expected to attend the Academic Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee meeting at which the documents are being considered, to speak to the School's response and enhancement plan.
- 8.6 If the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee determine actions are required at University level, it will add those actions to the University Quality Enhancement Plan (see Annual Academic Quality Enhancement Process).

- 8.7 Academic Affairs will formally arrange with the Head of School for verification and sign-off of review process completion, and final status reporting to the QAEC and Academic Council for noting.
- 8.8 The final status report will be lodged into the Academic Affairs repository for feeding to the follow-on Faculty and Institutional Review.
- 8.9 The School shall submit a Progress Report to the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee within one year after submission of the School Quality Enhancement Plan. Concurrent progress review drawing from updated Faculty and University Quality Enhancement Plans will ensure integrated quality enhancement.



## 9. School Review Process Flow Chart

