

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
LEARNING AND TEACHING SERVICES

**PERIODIC REVIEW EXPLAINED:
GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS AND PANEL MEMBERS**

1. AIMS OF THE PERIODIC REVIEW

The Periodic Review is one of the processes which forms the basis of the University's monitoring and review activity for all taught programmes. The aims of Periodic Review are:

- to evaluate the quality of the student learning experience and consider how it can be maintained and improved in subject specific contexts;
- to relate the student learning experience in specific subject areas to the expectations set out in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and the qualities of the Sheffield Graduate;
- to ensure that a high standard of awards is maintained in each of the subject areas, taking into account that accreditation by professional statutory and regulatory bodies can provide a rigorous process for approving the standards of awards;
- to consider the sustainability of provision within a particular subject area, and to encourage departments and schools to reflect upon their strengths and challenges, highlighting where support might be needed.

2. KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE PERIODIC REVIEW

The emphasis of the Review is on developing supportive and useful conversations to encourage departments and schools to reflect upon their provision, the quality of learning experience provided for their students, the standards attained and how the Department or School would like to see its provision develop. These conversations take place in meetings between departmental/school staff and an independent panel in a visit to a department or school, usually over a period of one and a half days.

The Panel is expected to conduct the review according to the following principles:

- the Panel will establish a clear understanding of the overarching nature of the Department or School's ethos and work with an appreciation of its broad aims;
- the Panel will acknowledge the standards and quality of provision as evidenced through reports relating to previous review activities (information sources are listed in Appendix 1)

- information used by the Panel will be made available to the Department or School, and the Department or School will be encouraged to raise issues and highlight examples of good practice prior to and during the visit;
- the Panel will take account of factors outside the immediate control of the Department or School which challenge its ability to sustain or enhance the quality of its taught provision. Where appropriate, the Panel will highlight these factors in its findings and refer issues for faculty or institutional level consideration.

3. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Review will usually include all taught programmes in which the Department or School is either fully or otherwise significantly involved in delivering at the time of the visit. These include:

- all single honours undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes
- all dual honours programmes (the Panel will consider the elements of the curriculum delivered by the Department or School, as well as the liaison with the partner Sheffield department(s) in connection with the quality assurance and enhancement of the programme(s) overall)
- any programmes which are jointly delivered with one or more external UK or overseas higher education institution(s) (again, the Panel will consider the elements of the curriculum delivered by the Department or School, as well as the liaison with the partner institution(s) in connection with the quality assurance and enhancement of the programme(s) overall)
- the Panel will also look at any service teaching in the form of units which are delivered only to students as part of programmes offered by other departments.

Postgraduate research provision is not included in the scope of the Review. However, arrangements for training and supporting postgraduate research students who teach in the Department or School is included, since this has an impact on the learning experience of taught students.

Departments and schools with professionally accredited provision will be asked to share details of their accreditation processes with Learning and Teaching Services (LeTS) staff at an early stage in review preparations, where appropriate, since there may be some aspects relating to the assurance of the standards of awards that the accreditation process would already cover.

4. COMPOSITION OF A REVIEW PANEL

The standard composition of a review panel is:

- two academic peers employed by the University, from a faculty other than the Department or School's own. The Chair of the Panel will be selected from one of these members;

- two academic peers with subject expertise from other institutions, with recent, relevant experience of teaching, nominated by the Department or School. Note that in professionally oriented programmes, one of these panel members may be an appropriate senior professional in practice.
- in exceptional circumstances, for example, reviews involving particularly large or complex provision, the appointment of an additional external member will be considered where it is felt that this would be in the best interests of the Review.
- up to two senior members of professional services staff;
- up to two student representatives appointed by the Students' Union and LeTS, who are not from the participating department.

5. ROLE OF THE PANEL

The aim of conducting a review with a panel is to have an independent group with expertise in the subject area being reviewed, the University's learning and teaching priorities and policies and the student voice. Panel members are expected to:

- Work as a team to undertake the review under the direction of the Chair and with the advice and guidance from LeTS
- Act as 'critical friends' to the department/school to assist them in reflecting on the strengths and challenges in their taught provision
- Review a wide range of information and actively participate in meetings with staff and students during the Review
- Reach a series of conclusions to assist the department/school in maintain and further developing taught provision
- Work in a professional manner, treating all information both written and verbally presented and private meetings of the panel as confidential

6. NOMINATING AND APPOINTING PANEL MEMBERS

External panel members

The Department or School is responsible for nominating the external panel members and providing LeTS with contact details. It is important that nominations are made as early as possible.

Appointment criteria

External panel members should:

- Have sufficient standing and credibility within the discipline to be able to command the respect of academic peers;
- Be academic staff (preferably senior lecturer or above) with current responsibilities for or recent experience of learning and teaching in higher education;

- However, in professionally oriented provision one external panel member may be drawn from the profession. In this case, the person should have extensive professional experience of higher education learning and teaching matters;
- Have considerable expertise in one or more of the subject areas under Review;

Conflicts of interest

There should be no conflict of interest which might prevent an external panel member from participating in the process with full impartiality. Departments are expected to exercise their judgement in this respect but as a guideline, the following nominations would usually be considered inappropriate:

- a person who is either currently an external examiner for the Department or School or has acted in this capacity within the last three years;
- a person who currently teaches in the Department or School as a visiting lecturer or who has until recently (within the last three years) taught regularly in the Department or School;
- someone who is a personal friend of senior staff in the Department or School;
- a person who has nominated a senior member of staff in the Department or School for an award;
- a person who has (or has recently had) any other significant involvement with the Department or School

There may well be other potential conflicts of interest. If there are any doubts about the suitability of a candidate for the role of external panel member, the Department or School is asked to discuss these with LeTS at the earliest opportunity.

Once nominations are received, LeTS will contact the nominees to confirm the agreement and conditions of the appointment. External panel members will be paid a fee of £400, less tax, upon completion of their involvement in the Review. They will also be reimbursed for any reasonable expenses (e.g. travel, meals, accommodation, etc.). These costs will be met by LeTS.

Internal academic panel members

Two internal academic panel members will be appointed to the Review by LeTS from a pool of potential panel members, one of whom will be appointed to Chair the panel. The pool of panel members includes senior colleagues from across the University with extensive experience of and strong interest in learning and teaching. Internal academic panel members are appointed to reviews in faculties other than their own.

Professional services panel members

Up to two panel members may be appointed from professional services staff in the University by LeTS, in consultation with the Head of the appropriate professional service. Departments and Schools have an opportunity to indicate

whether there are any particular areas they would wish to explore as part of the Review for which a particular professional service could contribute a panel member. LeTS would then seek to appoint a member of staff from the service. Where departments or schools have no particular preference, LeTS will appoint one panel member from the professional service of its choice.

Student panel members

Usually, two student panel members will be appointed to the Review by the Students' Union and LeTS, from a pool of potential panel members. The Students' Union and LeTS appoint students to this pool based on students' interest in the role and experience of contributing to learning and teaching in the University through, for example, student representation roles. Student panel members are paid £100, less tax, upon completion of their involvement in the Review, and are not appointed to Reviews in their own department or school. Students who act as panel members can use this experience to contribute to the Sheffield Graduate Award, under the category 'Activities Supporting the University'.

7. SUPPORT FROM LeTS

Each Review will be supported by a Faculty Adviser in LeTS and a Panel Secretary, who will be appointed in the initial planning stages.

The Faculty Adviser, who will normally work with the Faculty to which the Department or School belongs, will offer advice and support to the Department or School in preparation for the Review. The Faculty Adviser will gather information for the Review which is held centrally, and will advise the Department or School on what information it should provide.

The Panel Secretary will support panel members in understanding the process and ensure that the Panel has sufficient information to undertake an effective review. The Panel Secretary will be present at all meetings during the review visit, to advise the Panel and afterwards prepare a draft report of the Review in consultation with other panel members. The Panel Secretary will also ensure that practical arrangements are in place to allow the Review to run smoothly.

Costs covered by LeTS will include the printing of advance information and hospitality for panel members and students, as well as external panel members' fees and expenses and fees for student panel members. External panel members' expenses will include the cost of hotel accommodation and reasonable travel expenses. Hospitality will include refreshments throughout the review visit (including for students attending meetings with the Panel) and dinner for the Panel at the end of the first day.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to reimburse any expenses incurred by the Department or School due to the limited budget available.

8. FORMAT OF THE REVIEW VISIT

A review visit usually takes place over one and a half days. Following a briefing meeting of the Panel during the first two hours of the visit, there will be a series of meetings with a selection of departmental staff and students.

A tour of local learning resources is usually included. This could include a 'virtual tour' or demonstration of on-line learning and teaching resources.

Teaching observation will not be conducted, as it is not possible to observe sufficient sessions within the timescale of the visit from which general conclusions can be drawn.

LeTS will draw up a specific schedule for each visit in consultation with the Department or School and the Panel. An example schedule is included in **Appendix 2**.

9. LOCATION OF THE REVIEW VISIT

The review visit will normally take place within the Department or School. A room should be made available for the duration of the visit, in which the Panel can hold private meetings.

If this room is sufficiently large, other meetings with staff can also be held in the room. The panel will need to be able to access the University's intranet throughout the review, and so would need access to either a networked PC with printer, or Wifi, preferably in the room in which the Panel would be based.

Meetings with students are usually held at another location, in an informal setting if possible. Departments and Schools are encouraged to enable all staff who have contributed to the Review to be able to attend the verbal feedback meeting at the close of the visit, and so this meeting is usually held in a larger venue. LeTS will be able to provide advice on suitable space, and assist in finding alternative venues outside the Department or School if necessary.

10. OUTCOMES FROM THE REVIEW

At the end of the visit, the Chair of the Panel will provide the Department or School with a brief verbal summary of the findings including any specific commendations and action points. To ensure consistency between visits, the Panel will be expected to apply the following criteria when commending good practice and recommending action points:

Good practice: the Panel will commend good practice or innovation where processes operate particularly effectively. Good practice would include practice over and above any minimum expectations set out in University policies, and practice over and above expectations within the discipline.

Action points: action will be recommended where there is evidence that this is required to improve or maintain standards and/or the quality of the student learning environment or to improve sustainability. In some cases, the Panel may

acknowledge that the need for action has already been identified by the Department or School.

11. AFTER THE VISIT

The report

A summary report will be drafted by the LeTS adviser outlining the findings of the Panel. Once the Panel has commented on the draft report, this will be sent to the Department or School for comment on matters of factual accuracy. The final report will then be sent to the Department or School and the Panel, Faculty Officers, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching and a senior member of staff in the Students' Union. It may also be sent to senior professional services staff as appropriate.

Faculty monitoring

Once the report has been finalised, the Faculty will monitor action taken in response to the review, usually by means of a follow-up meeting to consider the outcomes of the review in the context of faculty strategies. The Faculty will be expected to take a lead in progressing issues identified in the review which are beyond the scope of the Department or School. Departments should also be expected to report on action taken in respect of review findings in their Annual Reflections.

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The following staff in the Learning and Teaching Services are available to provide guidance in addition to the designated LeTS Advisers:

Ms Sue Davison	Email: s.davison@shef.ac.uk	Ext. 21359
Ms Angela Gascoyne	Email: a.gascoyne@shef.ac.uk	Ext. 21366

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION SOURCES FOR A PERIODIC REVIEW

Existing written sources of information are used to inform the Periodic Review wherever possible, and the Department or School should be asked to provide only those documents which provide a basis for understanding the taught provision. Departments and schools will not usually have to produce additional documents specifically for the Review, with the exception of an outline of the Department or School's strengths and challenges and approach to learning and teaching (if this cannot be found elsewhere), and a description of the committee structure for learning and teaching within the Department or School.

Information is made available to the Panel in two stages. Firstly, an 'information folder' is sent to the Panel in advance of the review visit. Secondly, supporting information is made available during the visit to inform the panel's discussions. The information folder should aim to provide the Panel with a clear understanding of the nature of the taught provision;

- to highlight the principal issues with which the Department or School has engaged over recent years and provide an initial impression of the Department or School's capacity to continuously evaluate and enhance the quality of its taught provision;
- to enable the Panel to identify potential lines of enquiry to be followed during the visit.

Much of the supporting information provided during the visit may be made available electronically, either on a pen drive or via U-Space.

Prior to or during the course of the visit, as issues unfold, the Panel may request further information. Such requests will be kept to a minimum.

1. INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO THE PANEL IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT

Departments or schools should provide one electronic copy of the following to LeTS at least five weeks before the visit (approximately 10 copies will be needed if information is in the form of, for example, printed glossy prospectus material):

- i. the Department or School's Proposition statement;
- ii. an additional statement on the nature of learning and teaching in the Department or School;
- iii. a description of the organisation of the Department or School's committee structure indicating the roles, responsibilities and lines of reporting for each body within the structure. This might take the form of a diagram with a brief explanation if required;
- iv. the most recent professional or statutory body accreditation reports, where applicable. If accreditation is conducted on an annual basis, reports for the last three years should be provided;
- v. an outline of the process for student evaluations plus one or two examples of how the process has led to improvements in the student experience;
- vi. information provided to students e.g. prospectus leaflets, programme or subject handbooks and study skills guides.

LeTS will provide

- i. Introductory information on the Department or School, drafted in consultation with the Department or School (if this is not covered in the Proposition and additional statement), for example, details of the shape and size of the provision, staff and student groups, particular features of the subject as delivered at the University of Sheffield;
- ii. The Faculty's Learning and Teaching Strategy;
- iii. Annual Reflection documentation for the last three years. This includes departmental reports, extracts from the minutes of the faculty meetings at which the reflections were considered, where applicable, and the final faculty reports.

iv. Management Information data

The data is intended to provide the Panel with an overview of the principal trends affecting the Department or School's taught provision. The following data will be provided for the range of programmes under consideration, for the last three years, starting with the furthest back.

- Number of students by A-level score group
 - Results from the National Student Survey, the University's Student Satisfaction Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and the International Student Barometer, where available
 - New entrant wastage/progression rates
 - Degree classifications data
 - First destination data
 - Complaints and appeals data
 - Module results
- v. reports of External Examiners.
 - vi. programme specifications and regulations for all programmes within the scope of the Review (electronic copies);
 - vii. information regarding the University's strategies, policies and procedures, regulations, and governance (links to University web pages);

2. INFORMATION TO BE MADE AVAILABLE DURING THE VISIT

The following documentation should be made available to the Panel in the designated room from the start of the visit. Access to a networked PC with printer is required (preferably in the room in which the Panel will be based) to access institutional information, the Department or School's web site and any relevant online learning resources.

Department or School to provide:

- i. extracts from meetings of Examination Boards which relate to issues of process and programme content and quality (which should not include any information relating to individual students). This is intended to supplement reports of External Examiners, where limited comments have been made in the reports themselves;
- ii. minutes of the key departmental committees which are responsible for either the strategic development or operational management of the taught provision for the last

- three years, e.g. Executive Committee, or Planning Group, Teaching Committee, Staff-Student Committee, etc;
- iii. if available, records of any additional ad-hoc meetings to discuss learning and teaching issues e.g. staff away days, curriculum reviews, consultation with employers etc;
 - iv. examples of the student evaluation questionnaires and summaries of responses for the last three years;

Data Protection Act

Information provided for the Review should not contain information relating to the performance, progression or special circumstances of individual students.

Minutes relating to reserved business, or those sections of minutes of Examination Boards which refer to decisions made regarding individual students should not be included in any information prepared for the Review. Usually, information contained in committee meetings of relevance to the Review would not relate to individual students in this way. However, in the rare event that this occurs, the student name and any details relating to the student should be blanked out. Departments and Schools are asked to seek the advice of their Faculty Adviser in LeTS for further clarification if needed.

APPENDIX 2

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR THE PERIODIC REVIEW

The following example schedule shows what a typical visit might involve. The precise schedule for each visit will be agreed in advance between the Department or School, LeTS advisers and the Panel. Groupings of staff or students and/or the inclusion of special activities can be tailored as appropriate. Occasionally, a panel may request an unscheduled meeting once the visit has started, for example, in response to a line of enquiry which emerges during the visit. Although this is a rare occurrence, departments should bear in mind that there is a possibility that such requests might be made.

In scheduling meetings, a key objective is to avoid disruption to the work of the Department or School as far as possible. It is, however, very important that sufficient staff and students do attend the scheduled meetings to allow the Panel to review the provision effectively. The Department or School will be asked to provide details of confirmed attendees for all meetings shortly before the visit.

The Department or School is therefore responsible for making sure that all those involved in the visit attend, know where and when they are expected and have been briefed on the nature of the review. LeTS can assist in briefing staff if required.

Day One

Time	Meeting	Participants	Venue
12 noon* – 2.00pm	<i>Panel meeting</i> with lunch To make introductions, discuss the scope and conduct of the review, and agree areas to be explored	All panel members Panel secretary	
2.00pm – 2.30pm	<i>Panel meeting</i> To confirm the standards of awards	All panel members Panel secretary	
2.30pm – 3.00pm	<i>Meeting with the Head of Department</i> To introduce the Panel, summarise the scope of the review and to allow the Department or School to present an overview of the provision	All panel members Panel secretary Head of Department or Deputy Director of Teaching Departmental Administrator FDLT	
3.00pm – 4.00pm	<i>Meeting with undergraduate students</i> over coffee and cake	A selection of the Panel including a student Undergraduate students from the Department or School from a range	

		of programmes	
3.00pm – 4.00pm	Meeting with postgraduate students over coffee and cake	A selection of the Panel including a student Postgraduate students from the Department or School from a range of programmes	
4.00pm – 4.45pm	Panel meeting To discuss the outcome of the meetings with students	All panel members Panel secretary	
4.45pm – 6.00pm	Meeting with members of the Teaching Committee To discuss learning and teaching issues	All panel members Panel secretary Selection of Teaching Committee members Learning and Teaching Advocate	
6.00pm – 6.30pm	Panel meeting To feedback on the meetings so far	All panel members Panel secretary	
Evening	Dinner at a local restaurant	External panel members Chair of the Panel	

Day Two

Time	Meeting	Participants	Venue
8.30am – 9.30am	Panel meeting To agree the conduct of the remainder of the visit	All panel members Panel secretary	
9.30am - 9.45am	Briefing with the Head of Department To give the Head of Department a brief summary of any emerging	Chair of the Panel Head of Department or designated colleague	

	themes		
9.45am – 11.00 am	<p>Meeting with Management Team</p> <p>To discuss issues relating to the Learning Teaching and Assessment strategy</p>	<p>All panel members</p> <p>Panel secretary</p> <p>Members of the management team</p> <p>Learning and Teaching Advocate</p>	
11.00am – 11.30am	<p>Panel meeting with coffee and pastries</p>	<p>All panel members</p> <p>Panel secretary</p>	
11.30am – 12.30pm	<p>Meeting with other staff (including research students who teach, if not previously seen)</p>	<p>Panel members</p> <p>Panel secretary</p> <p>A sample of staff, who might include recently appointed staff, teaching only staff, technicians, administrative staff and graduate teaching assistants</p>	
12.30pm - 1.15pm	<p>Tour of learning resources/online demonstration</p>	<p>Panel members</p> <p>Departmental staff</p>	
1.15pm – 2.45pm	<p>Panel meeting and lunch</p> <p>To agree the final outcomes of the visit and the verbal feedback to the Department or School</p>	<p>All panel members</p> <p>Panel secretary</p>	
2.45pm – 3.00pm	<p>Verbal feedback</p> <p>To provide brief verbal feedback to a group of staff from the Department or School on the findings of the review</p>	<p>All panel members</p> <p>Panel secretary</p> <p>Staff from the Department or School including the Head of Department, Director of Teaching, Departmental Administrator, Learning and Teaching Advocate</p> <p>FDLT</p>	

*- a later start on Day One may suit external panel members with long journey times