

STRATEGIC TEACHING AND LEARNING REVIEW
BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Academic Quality Standards and Conduct
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Strategic Teaching and Learning Review

Context

During 2016/17, the University implemented a project to review the quality assurance architecture for the approval, monitoring and review of its provision. With a view to creating a risk-based, enhancement-led framework, proposals for annual monitoring, periodic evaluation, and re-approval processes were developed in consultation with colleagues from across the institution. The proposed new processes were endorsed by Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Education Committee in 2017.

Built upon practice established by the Annual Teaching Review and Periodic Quality Review, the revised processes provide for disaggregation between the monitoring and re-approval of programmes and the review of academic departments' teaching and learning. This allows for consideration of the operational (with a holistic review of programmes and the student experience), and the strategic (with consideration of academic departments' alignment with strategic objectives and planning processes). The new Programme Re-approval and Strategic Teaching and Learning Review (STLR) processes take effect from 2018/19, with Annual Programme Review (APR) implemented in the following academic year.

Purpose

It is important to note that STLR is *not* a quality assurance procedure, but a strategic review and planning opportunity. Within the context of the new monitoring and review framework, APR provides assurance that quality and standards of provision are being maintained, Programme Re-approval ensures that the student experience is secure within a coherent scheme of study, and STLR provides academic departments an opportunity to pause and reflect on where they are, look at what's on the horizon, and consider their teaching and learning activities for the next 5 years.

STLR is primarily forward-focused and enhancement-led, providing a space for academic departments to hold discussions about not just *what* the department does (or wishes to do), but also *how* it does it, or might do it, in the future. It encompasses not just the academic provision it delivers, but may also cover, for example, the resources it has to deliver that provision, the partners it works with, and how the research it undertakes informs its teaching and learning and vice versa.

Academic departments are aided in this process by the STLR Panel, which acts in an advisory capacity as a critical friend of the department's reflections, conclusions, and planned future actions; providing guidance on opportunities and a sense-check on stated ambitions, direction and preparedness.

The STLR process is designed to be facilitate and supportive, not prescriptive, and it does not lead to any formal judgement of the department under review. However, it is strongly recommended that the department shares their STLR SED and outcomes report with appropriate faculty colleagues and appropriate committees for information (e.g. Dean, Associate Dean(s), Faculty Teaching Committee).

The Review Schedule

Academic departments will normally undergo STLR every five years. A schedule of reviews will be prepared in advance of the cycle and in liaison with Faculty Deans and Heads of Departments to account for similar faculty or PSRB activities which may already be planned. Where such activity is

identified, the Academic Quality Standards and Conduct (AQSC) team will work with faculty and department colleagues to determine the extent to which those activities align with the principles of STLR.

In preparing the schedule the aim will be, wherever possible, to ensure a balanced distribution of events across the faculties per year to avoid bunching in one particular area, and to reduce any duplication of effort and burden on any academic department.

Documentation

Academic departments will be required to produce a self-evaluation document (SED) of no more than 3000 words, which will be used to inform the panel and provide a basis for discussions. The SED will draw on monitoring and review activities completed during the period under review, such as annual review reports, external examiner reports, student feedback, outcomes of PSRB interventions, benchmarking data, survey results, etc. Academic departments are encouraged to seek the reflections of colleagues, students, alumni, and (where relevant) employers, to inform the SED.

There is no prescriptive approach to the preparation or format of the document. The SED should, however, include a reflection on the activity of the academic department, consideration of the alignment with stated objectives, analysis of future direction(s) and opportunities, and proposed actions in response to these findings. Academic departments can use the SED as a means of seeking advice and guidance on how best to respond to potential threats and opportunities and to inform subsequent resource planning and portfolio development.

The SED will be distributed to the panel members at least 1 week prior to the event alongside a draft agenda drawn up by the academic department under review which highlights any specific areas that they would like the panel to respond to. In distributing the papers, panel members will be invited to provide any questions or points of interest that they would like to explore in the discussion in addition to any highlighted in the SED. The secretary to the STLR event will co-ordinate the distribution of papers and collation of responses. The panel Chair will provide a final opportunity to add to the agenda at the start of the event.

Panel Membership

Chaired by an Associate Dean (Teaching) from another Faculty, the panel membership for each STLR will be agreed in advance with the Head of Department but should include:

- Two academic peers from other institutions (including at least one who is not an existing or recent External Examiner)
- Depending on the size of the department, 1 to 2 internal academic colleagues most relevant to the provision under review

and is likely to also include representatives from relevant professional services including, for example,

- A colleague from OED, to consider teaching and learning practice and enhancement and professional development needs
- A colleague from ISS, to consider digital enablers and technology requirements
- A colleague from Library Services, to consider resource and support requirements
- A colleague from the Careers Service to advise on employability within the curriculum

- A faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager or Academic Quality and Standards Manager from AQSC to act as secretary for the event¹.

The event should also include the views of current students and, wherever possible, alumni, either through participation in the event or by seeking views prior to the event.

It is for the academic department to determine, within the parameters set out above, the composition of the panel, taking account of the context of their SED, and the advice and guidance they are seeking. For example, if an academic department is keen to establish or expand its use of digitally enabled teaching and learning, it may wish to have a Learning Technologist as a member of the panel, or if a department's ambition is to expand into a new discipline area, an appropriate external advisor would be selected to provide guidance on how best to do that.

The Conversation

Typically the review event will be held over the course of one day (or 1.5 days for larger departments), however the extent of discussions will depend largely on the departmental context, the SED and, where applicable, the requirements of any evaluation activity that is acting as a proxy for the STLR process (professional body reaccreditation, for example).

The review event should be held in the spirit of collegiality, with the emphasis on guidance, support and enhancement. It is anticipated that the panel event will provide an opportunity for open and honest investigation of opportunities for the academic department under review. Discussions should include how current departmental staffing expertise and interests align with teaching requirements for the future, and what resource and development support the department may require to deliver their ambitions.

The panel's role in the conversation is to act as a critical friend, providing a sense-check on the department's findings as set out in the SED and from discussions, and to provide advice and guidance as necessary.

An academic department may choose to have a member of its own staff act as note-taker for the event, in which case AQSC will attend in an advisory capacity to the panel. Where the faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager or an AQSC Academic Quality and Standards Manager is in attendance to provide administrative support, they will take notes of the discussion, handing over those notes shortly after the event to inform the department's outcome report.

The Outcome

There is no judgement taken on an academic department as a result of an STLR, but an output of the event will be an outcome report written by the academic department under review. This report summarises the department's plans for its teaching and learning provision over the next 3 - 5 years, indicating any portfolio changes and/or resource and support requirements accompanied by an action plan.

Where identified as a particular need, the department may also wish to prepare a bid for resource, using the STLR event and the panel discussion as supporting evidence.

¹ Note that QAEM and AQSC involvement is limited to administrative and advisory support, as the focus of the event is enhancement and development rather than quality assurance.

The outputs of all STLRs within an academic year will be submitted to ASQC for report alongside an institutional summary report. These will also inform the annual review prepared by AQSC on behalf of the University Council as part of its statutory annual assurance return.

In addition, it is anticipated that the panel event will also provide opportunities to highlight and share effective practice amongst the wider University community, both in terms of current teaching and learning practice, and proposals for future provision.