Heriot-Watt University

Review of Academic-Related Professional Services

Handbook

Academic Registry
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June 2012
Approved by the Quality and Standards Committee

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Approved by Senate
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1. Introduction

Academic Review is one of the University’s processes for assuring and enhancing the quality and standard of its services. In addition to the professional services, processes are in place for assuring the quality of academic programmes and are being developed for academic themes such as the VLE. Each Professional Service will be reviewed on a 5-year cycle.

This Handbook sets out the guidance for the first cycle of Professional Service Reviews to be undertaken from 2012-2013 to 2016-17 inclusive.

It is a priority for the University to provide:

- high quality student-facing professional services;
- services in an environment that is robust, safe and secure;
- services that are effective and efficient.

Part of the judgement about the quality of a Service must be made by the professional staff involved in its delivery. However there is also a role for occasional independent validation of these judgements. This document describes such a process and is termed as 'Review of Academic-Related Professional Services'.

The process used is based on the established process for assessing academic activities which has been in place since 2002. This style of review was also used for a review of the Library in 2009 and is in line with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidelines which require universities to undertake a review of student services as part of their review of academic activities. The outcomes of the reviews will therefore be included in the annual report submitted to the University Court and the SFC.

Professional Service reviews will be undertaken over a 5-year cycle and will supplement other activities, including any internal annual reporting (mirroring the annual monitoring and review of Schools), external reviews by financial auditors or the Health and Safety Executive (mirroring accreditation reviews by Professional Institutions), annual performance reviews etc.

Professional Services undergoing a review of services in support of academic-related activities will include:

Registry Services Directorate:
- Academic Registry
- Careers Service
- Student Support & Accommodation
- Student Union

Information Services Directorate:
- Information Technology
- Library

Human Resources & Development Directorate
- Academic Enhancement

The 5 year schedule of activities, which is approved by the Secretary’s Board, is provided at Appendix 1. There may be some changes to this schedule due to changing priorities such

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1 Entitlement to review HWUSU has yet to be confirmed
as restructuring and other Professional Services may be added to the schedule at a later date, as required.

2. Review Objectives

The QAA ELIR guidance indicates that the review process “should allow the institution to reflect on the contribution of support services to the 'quality culture' within the institution, the ways in which the services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services, and the ways in which the academic-related services promote high quality learning and continuous quality enhancement”. With this in mind, the specific objectives of the Professional Services Review are:

i. To review the academic-related services provided by the Professional Service and to compare these services with the needs of the University and students to ensure that the scale and scope of the services are appropriate.

ii. To review the quality of the services and to explore opportunities for improvement.

iii. To review the links between the reviewed Service and other service providers (including those provided in Schools) to ensure that University services are properly structured.

iv. To review the cohesiveness of the Service with a view to ensuring that it is able to deliver efficient and effective services.

v. To ensure that the future development plans are likely to meet the aspirations and strategic objectives of the University.

Enhancement is described in the QAA ELIR handbook as “taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students”. The effectiveness of the institution’s approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning includes the general and academic services. Central to this definition is the expectation that this enhancement will be deliberate, planned and resourced. If there are to be meaningful discussions about enhancement, it is essential that there is a plan against which progress can be judged.

3. Scope of the Review

The review will include all aspects of the service provided by the Professional Service as follows:

- Student-facing services and processes  *(to include data management)*
- Back-room services and processes  *(to include data management)*
- Infrastructure and facilities
- Links to other services and schools/partnerships
- Strategic objectives (in relation to academic-related activities)

The review will include student feedback on the Professional Services.

4. Review documentation

The review is intended to take the form of an informed debate rather than an audit-style checking exercise and will therefore be semi-formal and non-confrontational.

In order to provide background information for team members and to provide a record of the review, staff within the reviewed Service will prepare a self-assessment reflective analysis document.

The reviewed Professional Service should submit to the Clerk to the Quality and Standards Committee, no later than six weeks before the review event:

- hard (bound) copies of the reflective analysis document for each member of the review team  *(numbers will be confirmed by Academic Registry)*;
- hard (bound) copies of other review documentation (as agreed between the Head of Service and the Deputy Principal Learning & Teaching);
- an electronic copy of the reflective analysis document.

### 4.1 Structure of the Self-Assessment Reflective Analysis Document

The reflective analysis should follow the basic structure shown below; the more detailed structure under each of the sections will be agreed between the Head of Service and the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching). The Head of Service will have overall responsibility for producing the documentation and although a number of different members of staff may contribute towards the production of the reflective analysis, one cohesive document should be submitted.

#### Section 1: Introduction to the Professional Service

A brief introduction to the services that the Professional Service provides, including:

- the Service’s main purpose and a summary of academic-related services provided;
- an outline of the Service’s strategic plan to demonstrate its contribution to the University’s strategy and values and the overall Professional Services’ Strategy (in relation to academic-related services);
- a brief outline on the self-assessment review process (ie processes followed and staff involved in undertaking the analysis and producing the reflective analysis document).

#### Section 2: Reflective Review of Academic-Related Services Provided

Information under this section should include information on student-facing and back-room services and processes.

- Factual information on the services provided along with a reflection (ie strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement). Services are dependent upon the reviewed Service but could typically include, for example, services provided to:
  - students (studying at all locations through all modes of study)
  - Schools
  - University Officers
  - support specific University projects in pursuit of achieving the University’s strategic objectives
  - external partners
  - other external stakeholders
- A summary and analysis of feedback submitted by students (along with the methods for collecting feedback).

#### Section 3: Links to Other Services

If applicable, this section should include information on relationships with other stakeholders (not covered in section 2) including a reflection of the relationships (ie strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement).

#### Section 4: Development Opportunities and Enhancement Plans

This section should include information about longer-term development and enhancement opportunities and plans, as well as any challenges that the Service may be facing now or in the future. Cross-referencing to the Service’s strategic plan outlined in section 1 will be necessary.
Section 5: Action Plan

The report should end with an action plan of activities identified by the self-assessment review process, including responsible individuals or groups and timescales for completion. Additional actions are likely to be added after completion of the review.

5. Academic Review Process

5.1 Overview and Committee Approval/Circulation

The review process for Professional Services is summarised briefly below, and further information is provided in the following sections.

i. Each Service will prepare a self-assessment reflective analysis document which will be considered by a review team.

ii. The team will hold a series of meetings with staff and students to discuss key issues during a review event which will last between one and two days (depending on the size and complexity of the Service).

iii. The review team will prepare a report for the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) detailing a summary of discussions and recommendations.

iv. The reviewed Service will prepare an action plan in response to the review team’s findings. This will be considered by QSC, along with the review team’s report.

v. QSC will determine:
   • whether the review was carried out correctly;
   • whether the actions proposed (and the management processes to implement the actions) are sufficient to achieve the objectives;

vi. The Secretary’s Board will receive a copy of the report and action plan, and where appropriate, QSC may present the Board with recommendations for approval.

vii. The University Executive and Senate will receive the report and action plan for information. The report may be sent to other Boards or Committees if appropriate.

viii. One year after the review date, QSC will review progress on any action that was to be undertaken and will report the outcomes of the review process to the Secretary’s Board and Senate.

5.2 Academic Review Date

A draft schedule of review activities is provided at Appendix 1. The reviewed Service will be invited to identify a suitable time of year based on the timing of other activities and the availability of key personnel. Early identification of a review date is important to ensure that the Service can organise a planning schedule and the University can recruit review team members.

5.3 Pre-review Meeting

A pre-meeting between the Head of the reviewed Service and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) will take place to discuss:

i. Activities to be reviewed.

ii. The schedule for the review event and in particular any specific themes on which to focus.

iii. Documentation to be provided.

iv. Groups of staff to be involved (including lead person).

v. Nomination of external team members.

vi. Selection and appointment of team members.

5.4 Briefing Session
There shall be a combined briefing session for team members and staff from within the reviewed Service to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the review’s purpose and objectives.

5.5 Review Team Membership

The composition of the review team is detailed in the table below. Further details on individual roles can be found at Appendix 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review Team Members</th>
<th>Points to Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two internal members of staff</td>
<td>• One of whom will be Chair and will normally be the Head of another Professional Service Unit (to be approved by QSC on behalf of Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One of whom will be a senior academic member of staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two students (nominated by HWUSU)</td>
<td>• Student members are paid an individual fee of £250 (a total fee of £500 split between the students).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two external specialists (from industry or another university)</td>
<td>• External reviewers should not have had any involvement with the University during the previous five years.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• External members are paid a total fee of £500.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observers</td>
<td>• Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Member of staff from HWUSU to support the students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>• Provided by Academic Registry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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5.6 Role of Review Team Members

All team members will have an equal status and all will be expected to review all activities. However, different members may have responsibility for drafting different sections of the team report.

In advance of the event all team members should read the review documentation and submit comments to the Chair in order to identify key issues for further exploration with Service staff during the event.

Further details of the review team membership and associated responsibilities are detailed at Appendix 2.

5.7 Review Event and Review Schedule

The review event schedule is initially discussed at the pre-review meeting between the Head of Service and the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). The broad structure for the event will be determined by the Deputy Principal but the specific lines of enquiry will be determined by the chair and fellow review team members on the day.

There will be a number of meetings to allow for discussion around the key areas identified in the objectives. Depending on the size and complexity of the Service, the review could last between one and two days (normally no more than one and a half days). Typical timetables are summarised below.
a. One and a half day review (example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overview of the Service by the Service Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including strategic objectives and priorities in relation to academic-related activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student-facing services and processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Back-room services and processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Infrastructure and facilities</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links to other Support Services and Schools/partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development and enhancement opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. One day review (example)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
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<td>Morning</td>
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<td>• Development and enhancement opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8 Administrative Arrangements

The Facilitator will be responsible for inviting team members to undertake the review.

The reviewed Service will be responsible for making all logistical arrangements such as catering, room bookings, etc. The reviewed Service will be invited to nominate an administrator with whom the Facilitator will liaise on logistical arrangements.

All costs associated with the review (fees, travel costs, catering, etc.) shall be paid from the reviewed Professional Services budget. There should be no additional resources required to conduct a review.

5.9 Review Judgement

In making its final judgement, the review team will be required to confirm that the Service Unit has met the review objectives detailed in section 2. The judgement will be made up of two components.

1. The team’s current and future confidence in the Service’s ability to provide an academic service that effectively contributes towards a high quality student learning experience.

2. The team’s current and future confidence in the management of development plans and the likelihood that they will achieve academic-related objectives as set out in the Service’s strategic plan.

6. Review Report

Upon completion of the review event a report will be produced. The report will comprise a number of sections and the team will decide how to divide responsibility for the various
sections under the overall editorial control of the Chair. Below is a basic structure for the report, however, the Facilitator will provide the review team with a more detailed report template that should be used.

**Section 1: Introduction**
This section will be completed by the Facilitator; it will include the date of the event and the membership of the team.

**Section 2: Summary of the points raised during the discussions**
This section will follow the same structure as the reflective analysis document.

**Section 3: Good practice**
The review team should identify any areas of good practice that might be shared across the University. Although the practice need not be outstanding or even best practice it should be something that one service does particularly well, not just different.

**Section 4: Formal recommendations for action**
Any formal recommendations should be discussed further in the main report.
APPENDIX 1 - THE REVIEW SCHEDULE

The Professional Services Review schedule is available on the web:
https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/professional-services-reviews.htm
APPENDIX 2 - ROLE OF REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS

Below are details of the review team membership and associated responsibilities.

1. **Chair (internal member)**

   The Head of another Professional Services Unit who has overall knowledge of the University and the University Strategy.

   Responsibilities:
   a. Attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching).
   b. Finalise the review timetable and agree staff attending (in conjunction with DP).
   c. Identify key issues (including collecting comments from other team members) for discussion during the first review meeting.
   d. Chair the review event and ensure that the review objectives are achieved.
   e. Chair meetings (or arrange for other team members to chair meetings).
   f. Coordinate the writing of the report commentaries and edit the final version.
   g. Where necessary, present the report to the Quality and Standards Committee.

2. **Internal member**

   A senior member of academic staff with wide knowledge of the University.

   Responsibilities:
   a. Attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching).
   b. Provide comment on the review documentation to identify key issues for further discussion.
   c. Actively participate in the review.
   d. Produce commentaries for the team's report as agreed with the chair.

3. **Student members**

   Two students will be nominated by the Student Union.

   The Student Union will provide support and guidance to assist students meet the following responsibilities:
   a. Attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning & Teaching).
   b. Provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for further discussion.
   c. Actively participate in the review.
   d. Produce commentaries for the team’s report as agreed with the chair.

   A member of staff from the Heriot Watt University Student Union will support the student reviewers before, during and after the review as follows:
   a. Brief and guide students on preparation for the review;
   b. May attend the review as an observer to guide and support the students;
   c. Help students write their commentaries for the team report;
   d. Ensure that the Student Union is fully informed about the review process to assist with student training for subsequent reviews.

4. **External members**

   Two external specialists will be nominated by the Service and selected by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Where reasonably possible, at least one external member should have experience of working in or with an institution of a similar profile,
for example, delivery of programmes within a multi location and/or multi mode environment and institutions with a large international student body.

Responsibilities:
   a. Provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for discussion;
   b. Actively participate in the review;
   c. Produce commentaries for the team’s report as agreed with the chair.

Note: details on the role of the Facilitator will be added in due course.