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THEMATIC REVIEW:
Handbook for Review of Institution-wide Learning and Teaching Issues

Version 1

Thematic Review: Handbook for Review of Institution-wide Learning and Teaching Issues

Contents

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEMATIC REVIEW AT HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

This Handbook is designed to provide an introduction to Thematic Review at Heriot-Watt University, and an overview of various stages of the Thematic Review process.

The Handbook is intended to be of use primarily to members of Thematic Review teams, particularly external representatives.

The Handbook has been developed, and is maintained, by the Academic Registry, which is responsible for the management of the Thematic Review process on behalf of the University and its Learning and Teaching Board.

2. The University

Heriot-Watt University has its origins in the Edinburgh School of Arts, which was established in 1821 and subsequently renamed Heriot-Watt College. The institution was awarded University status in 1966. The University has five campuses: Edinburgh, Scottish Borders, Orkney, Dubai and Malaysia.
http://www.hw.ac.uk/

There are, in essence, three key, distinctive features of Heriot-Watt University: the relative scale of its international activity; the range of opportunities it offers for multi-location, multi-mode study; the close alignment between its academic provision and professional careers.

- Heriot-Watt is Scotland's "international university": the University has the largest proportion of the total number of overseas students at Scottish HEI's.
- The University's programmes are offered to a wide range of students through a number of different modes of learning, including studying with academic partners or by independent distance learning, as well as studying on campus, which includes options to transfer between campuses.
- The discipline areas within the University are closely aligned with related professions and prepare students for professional careers. The University's specialisms are in science, engineering, built environment, computer science, business, management, languages, and textiles and design. Most disciplines are accredited by UK Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies.

3. Academic Structure

The University has seven Schools, delivering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (the Edinburgh Business School delivers postgraduate programmes only).   Each School has between one and five academic disciplines.

- School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society (EGIS)
- School of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS)
- School of Life Sciences (SLS)
- School of Management and Languages (SML)
- School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences (MACS)
- School of Textiles and Design (TEX)
- Edinburgh Business School (EBS) *(postgraduate)*

4. Periodic Review Processes

The University has a three-part quality assurance process for the periodic review of its academic programmes and of the support provided for learning and teaching: Academic Review; Internal Audit; Academic-Related Review of Professional Services. These processes are focused on quality and standards, and they are the responsibility of the Quality and Standards Committee of the Senate. Academic Review and Academic-Related Review also have an enhancement purpose, while Internal Audit is exclusively assurance-focused. http://www1.hw.ac.uk/quality/periodic-review.htm

Thematic Review is not part of the University's periodic review processes.

5. Summary of Thematic Review

At Heriot-Watt University, Thematic Review is a topic-led approach to institution-wide review of learning and teaching matters which have been identified as key priorities for the institution. Thematic Reviews are conducted on an individual topic basis. The process is led by the University's Learning and Teaching Board (reporting to the University Executive), and it has an enhancement focus and purpose.

One Thematic Review is conducted per academic year, within a five-year programme. The Learning and Teaching Board is invited to consider annually, at its June meeting, the theme for the year ahead, and has the flexibility to determine whether to continue with the theme specified in the five-year programme, or to specify an alternative theme, based on its identification of emerging priority areas for learning and teaching.

At Heriot-Watt University, Thematic Review is not a replacement for the process of periodically reviewing individual Professional Services which support learning and teaching, whereby a topic related to the student experience is selected and all services which contribute are reviewed as part of the topic. At Heriot-Watt, there continues to be a separate process for reviewing services which support learning and teaching, namely: Academic-Related Review of Professional Services.

6. Rationale for Thematic Review

At its meeting on 10 June 2015, the Learning and Teaching Board agreed to establish a Thematic Review process. An overview of the process was approved by the Board at its meeting on 16 September 2015.

The rationale for Thematic Review emerged from the fact that an analysis of the annual summaries of the outcomes of the University's quality assurance processes had revealed a series of common themes, many of which had been replicated from previous years and were sector-wide issues (as had been demonstrated through the analysis, as conducted by QAA Scotland, of institution-led quality reports).

The Thematic Review process outlined in this Handbook reflects the outcomes of the aforementioned meetings, as well as a review of sector-wide practices on thematic review.

THEMATIC REVIEW: PURPOSE AND PARAMETERS

7. Key Purposes of Thematic Review

Thematic Review is designed to:

- support and enhance the student learning experience;

- facilitate discussion between Schools, Professional Services and students on topics of common concern;

- identify and disseminate good practice, highlighting examples which could be used as case studies or presentations at learning and teaching events;

- identify areas for development and provide a mechanism for addressing such areas;

- clarify or specify matters related to the implementation of academic policy;

- review the operation of existing processes and procedures;

- evaluate alignment with institutional strategic priorities;

- recommend action or support required at institutional level[1].

Thematic Review is, therefore, primarily concerned with the development and enhancement of practice in Schools and Professional Services.

8. Scope of Topics

Topics for Thematic Review will be related to the academic areas within the remit of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching); any topics of a non-academic nature are the responsibility of the Secretary and the Secretary's Board. Topics will be fully inclusive, ie they will incorporate: all Schools and relevant areas within the Professional Services; all campuses and all other modes and locations of study; all students on taught programmes, wherever and however they study[2].

9. Responsibility

In view of its enhancement purpose, Thematic Review is the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Board and, in practice, is managed by the Learning and Teaching/Enhancement and Student Learning Experience teams within Quality and External Partnerships, Academic Registry[3].

10. Approach

Thematic Review is intended to be holistic, enhancement-focused and forward-looking (rather than being primarily retrospective and driven by problems), reviewing not only approaches within the institution, but also drawing on best practice and emerging initiatives across the sector.

In contrast to the quality assurance review process, there is less focus within Thematic Review on producing and reading reflective accounts prepared specifically for the review, and more on conducting investigations in key areas. There is, however, a significant emphasis on preparatory research and analysis. As a consequence, the methodology for each Thematic Review may vary in accordance with the topic itself and the issues to be considered. The methodology for each review will require approval from the Learning and Teaching Board in advance of the review.

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[1] Not all Thematic Reviews will fulfil all of the specified purposes; the exact purposes will be determined by the nature and scope of the topic and the methodology approved for the review.

[2] Topics may be more restrictive in terms of scope, eg ALP and IDL student learning experience; however, in this instance, the review would be expected to consider the ALP and IDL student learning experience in light of that of campus-based students.

[3] All current forms of periodic review will continue to be the responsibility of the Quality and Standards Committee and managed by the Quality Assurance and External Partnerships teams within Quality and External Partnerships, Academic Registry.

Thematic Review is also intended to provide a means of sharing practice in areas which all Schools are trying to progress (for example, the need to share, and learn from, good practice in independent distance learning had been highlighted as an area for development in the University's QAA ELIR Outcome Report, March 2015).

11. Key Features of Process

In some areas, the format of Thematic Review mirrors that of the University's quality assurance periodic review processes:

- guidance document with details on the Thematic Review process (ie this Handbook);
- preparation events for all those involved in the review;
- a team of reviewers including student and external members (it is anticipated that in the early years, the Thematic Review team will be chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching); thereafter, that role may be undertaken by a School Director of Learning and Teaching);
- meetings (incl. by Skype) with academic staff, professional services staff and students;
- end-of-review report with conclusions, areas of positive practice and areas for development, produced by the review team for consideration and approval by the Learning and Teaching Board. The areas for development (or recommendations) may be academic, but may also cover management, planning and resource matters. Areas for development will be incorporated into an action plan and referred on, as appropriate to the relevant committees or individuals for action.

In other respects, the Thematic Review process is different:

- instead of a reflective analysis, there will be a scoping document, which will
  - outline the rationale for the topic selected;
  - specify the review methodology;
  - provide background research (both within HWU and externally) and analysis;
  - incorporate the views of key contributors to the theme (Schools, Services, students);
  - summarise the key issues for the review;
  - suggest potential topics for the review.
- most of the review activity will be done outwith the review event meetings;
- there will be no overall judgement on effectiveness.

12. Selection of Topics and Programme of Topics

Thematic Review topics will be drawn from a variety of sources, such as: the annual summaries of outcomes of quality assurance processes; the annual summary analysis of student surveys; the annual summary report on the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy; the schedule of activities within Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan; sector-wide priorities and initiatives in learning and teaching; areas for development highlighted by, for example, the Student Union or QAA ELIR and TNE (Transnational Education) Review reports or the University's senior committees.

The University's Strategic Plan and the Learning and Teaching Strategy and its Operational Plan will provide the primary context for Thematic Review.

Thematic Review topics will be managed primarily in the format of a rolling programme of review over a 5-year period (similar to Academic Review). However, there will be flexibility in that programme to enable the Learning and Teaching Board to respond to areas of immediate strategic concern or to issues emerging from, for example, the annual analysis of the summaries of the University's quality assurance processes. See Appendix 1 for Five-Year Schedule.

While there is scope for more than one Thematic Review to be held in a single academic year, it was agreed by the Learning and Teaching Board that a limit on one per year should be retained for the first two years to enable the process to become established and to be evaluated.

13. Thematic Review Documentation

The core information for the Thematic Review will be contained within the Scoping Document (see Appendix 3 for details). The Scoping Document will be specific to the topic being reviewed.

In addition, the Review Team will be provided with:

- The Thematic Review Handbook
- The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and Operational Plan

Additional information may be issued as appropriate

14. Thematic Review Dates

The five-year review schedule of topics is provided in Appendix 1: one Thematic Review is held per academic year. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) will select individual dates for each review event based on the timing of other institutional activities and the availability of key personnel. Review events will typically be held in early Semester 2.

15. Scope of Review Topic

An overview of the topic selected for Thematic Review will be produced by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Clerk to the Learning and Teaching Board for consideration and approval by the Learning and Teaching Board. Typically, this overview proposal will be presented to the Learning and Teaching Board at its first meeting of each session (September).

16. Pre-Review Discussion/Meeting

The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager (see Appendix 4 for role descriptor) will meet with Directors of Learning and Teaching, Directors of relevant Professional Services and representatives from the Student Union to discuss arrangements for the review. This meeting may held as part of a scheduled Learning and Teaching Board or as a separate pre-review meeting.

The pre-review discussion/meeting will discuss:

- Key areas for review and issues to be addressed;
- Groups of staff (Schools and Professional Services) and students to be involved;
- The need for a review event, and if a review event is agreed, then:
    - Nomination of internal team members
    - Nomination of external team members
    - The agenda for the review event
    - Documentation other than the standard Thematic Review documentation (see section 13)

17. Roles and Responsibilities

A summary of the different roles associated with an Academic Review is provided below. Criteria for appointment and individual roles and responsibilities are detailed in Appendix 4.

Review Team:
- Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (Chair)
- Two internal academic staff members
- Two staff members from relevant Professional Services
- Two Student representatives *(nominated by HWUSU)*
- One or two external reviewers *(one to be an academic)*

Advisors:
- Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (if not already in the role of Chair)
- Thematic Review Manager

Observers:
- Student Union Representative (Observer; to support the student reviewers)

Co-ordinator
- Thematic Review Co-ordinator

18. Thematic Review Briefing Sessions

All HWU members of the review team are required to attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager in advance of a review event taking place. Sessions are focused on the role of a review team and also include an overview of the topic under review. A standard "Thematic Review Information for Participants" document will be provided.

The Student Union provides additional training to student members of a review team.

External reviewers can participate in the briefing session by Skype; alternatively, a pack of briefing materials will be provided, including an overview presentation, which can be followed up through further correspondence.

19. Review Event and Agenda of Meetings

If the Learning and Teaching Board has determined that a review event should be held, then the agenda is discussed initially at the pre-review discussion/meeting (see Section 16). The key areas for review will have been highlighted in the Scoping Document, but the specific lines of enquiry are determined by the Review Team.

Each review event is structured into three areas: meetings with students; meetings with staff; private team meetings. A standard agenda is provided in Appendix 4.

Meetings with students and staff will be chaired by the Review Team Chair and other team members as agreed. Private team meetings will be chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (if not in the role of Chair of the Review Team) or the Thematic Review Manager.

19.1. Meetings with Students
The Team should obtain the views of selection of students across all modes and locations (unless the review is specifically focused at one particular group of students, eg IDL and ALP). Given the University's global presence, it is expected that at least one meeting with students will take place by video-conferencing. Other means may be used to elicit the views of students who are not located on a campus, eg online questionnaire.

The topics for discussion will vary depending on the theme of the review, but will be focused around giving students the opportunity to discuss their own learning experiences.

19.2. Meetings with Staff
Following the meetings with students, the Review Team will meet with relevant staff from Schools and those Professional Services whose remit relates to the topic of review. The selected group should include a range of individuals, and not exclusively those at a management level (eg Directors of Learning and Teaching; Directors of Professional Services). Representatives from Schools are likely to be primarily academic staff members; however, if there are School administrators who have a key role in the area being reviewed, they will be invited to participate.

The meetings with staff will provide an opportunity for the Team to follow up and seek clarification on any issues raised by the students. Other areas for discussion will be as determined by the topic under review.

20. Review Conclusions

In contrast to Academic Review, there are no judgements made at the end of Thematic Review. The outcomes of the review and the Review Team's collective view are expressed in: a series of conclusions; areas of positive practice; areas for development; other points for consideration. See Appendices 6 and 7.

21. Thematic Review Report

Upon completion of the review event, the Review Team will produce a report; all members of the Team have a responsibility to contribute towards the production of the report. The Team will decide how to divide responsibility for the various sections under the overall editorial control of the chair. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and/or Thematic Review Manager will advise the Team on the format of the report; however, the Chair is responsible for ensuring the report is finalised. The Thematic Review Manager and the Thematic Review Co-ordinator are not responsible for producing the Review Team's report.

The report should follow the basic structure, although additional headings or sub-headings may be added as necessary. Guidance for the basic structure and a report template are provided in Appendices 6 and 7 respectively.

The completed draft report is sent by the Thematic Review Co-ordinator to relevant key individuals for checking matters related to factual accuracy. Once any modifications have been made and agreed by the Review Team, the report will be regarded as finalised.

22. Thematic Review Action Plan

The finalised report will be used by the Thematic Review Manager to produce an accompanying Action Plan, which will address the areas for development and the other points for consideration.

23. Learning and Teaching Board Approval and Circulation

The final report and action plan will be submitted to the Learning and Teaching Board. The Board will be invited to:

i.   Confirm that the Review was carried out according to the specified process (as per this Handbook);
ii. Consider and approve the conclusions of the Review Team;
iii. Consider and approve the actions proposed in the Action Plan to address the areas for development and other points for consideration

If the Learning and Teaching Board is unable to confirm satisfaction with the review conclusions and proposed actions, there will be further discussions to resolve the issue; a report on the outcomes will be provided at the next meeting of the Board.

The Senate and the University Executive will receive the Reports and Action Plans for information.

24. Progress Report and Completion of Review Process

One year after the date of the finalisation of the review report and action plan, the Thematic Review Manager will submit to the Learning and Teaching Board a progress report to confirm that action has been taken. Once the Board has approved the progress report, it will report to the Senate and the University Executive that the review process is complete.

It is likely that a number of areas within the Action Plan may not be resolved within one year and may require a longer period of time to complete. In such cases, an annual update should be provided to the Learning and Teaching Board until such time as all review actions have been addressed.

THEMATIC REVIEW: APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix 1   Thematic Review Five-Year Schedule 2015/16 to 2019/20
Appendix 2   Key Stages and Timeline for Thematic Review
Appendix 3   Format of the Scoping Document
Appendix 4   Thematic Review Team: Roles and Responsibilities
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Appendix 7   Template for the Thematic Review Report
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Appendix 9   Information for Staff and Students meeting with Thematic Review Teams

Five-Year Thematic Review Schedule, 2015/16 to 2019/20

The topics for the first of the five-year programmes of Thematic Review are as follows[4]:

Academic Year	Topic for Thematic Review
2015/16	Technology-enhanced learning and teaching
2016/17	Assessment
2017/18	ALP and IDL student learning experience AND PGT student learning experience
2018/19	Induction, Transition and Retention
2019/20	Employability and Graduate Attributes

There may be modifications to the above topic list due to emerging priorities in learning and teaching, both within HWU and across the HE sector.

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[4] The 5-year programme of topics was approved by the Learning and Teaching Board at its meeting on 16 September 2015.

Key Stages and Timeline for Thematic Review

The main stages of the entire Thematic Review process, with typical timings, are summarised below.

	Key Stages	Timings
1.	**Thematic Review Manager** The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) appoints, in consultation with the relevant line manager(s), a Thematic Review Manager and Thematic Review Co-ordinator for the process.	- 9 months
2.	**Thematic Review Date**	
	The Thematic Review liaises with key individuals and groups to agree a review date (within schedule period approved by the Learning and Teaching Board).	- 9 months
3.	**Pre-review Meeting** The key individuals involved in the topic area selected for review will attend a discussion/pre-review meeting with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager.	- 9 months
4.	**Review Team Members** Individuals key to the review topic are invited to suggest potential external review team members; the final selection, together with internal review team members, is approved by the Learning and Teaching Board. The Thematic Review Co-ordinator invites selected members to participate on the team.	- 9 months
5.	**Scoping Document**	
	The Thematic Review Manager submits the Scoping Document for approval to the Learning and Teaching Board; the approved document is then distributed to the review team.	- 6 weeks
6.	**Thematic Review Briefing Session** The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager will deliver a briefing session to review team members (external members will be invited to participate by Skype).	- 4 weeks
7.	**Programme of Meetings** The programme of meetings will be drafted by the Thematic Review Manager in liaison with the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), and will be approved by the Learning and Teaching Board.	- 3 weeks
8.	**Thematic Review Event** The Thematic Review event takes place. At the end of the review event, the team will provide a brief high level summary of its findings.	0
9. i. ii. iii. iv. v.	**Thematic Review Report** Team members will submit sections for the draft report The Chair will circulate the collated report for comment The report is submitted to relevant individuals for verification of factual accuracy only The report is finalised and relevant individuals are invited to submit a response The Thematic Review Manager produces an action plan	+ 2 weeks + 3 weeks + 5 weeks + 6 weeks + 8 weeks
10.	**Learning and Teaching Board Approval** The review report and action plan are submitted to Learning and Teaching Board for approval, along with an executive summary which will be submitted to the Senate and University Executive for information.	*as per meeting dates*
11.	**Progress Report and Completion of Review Process** The Thematic Review Manager submits an annual progress report to Learning and Teaching Board for approval. LTB concludes the completion of the review process and the Senate and the University Executive are informed.	+ 1 year

The above Key Stages and Timeline are indicative only; the review methodology may be adapted depending on the nature of, and issues related to, the topic area under review. The review methodology will be proposed in the Scoping Document (see Appendix 4) and will be subject to approval by the Learning and Teaching Board.

Format of the Scoping Document

1. Overview of the Scoping Document

In the Academic Review process, there is a Reflective Analysis document, which is produced by the School or Professional Service being reviewed and which follows a set structure in terms of designated areas for reflection and review.

In Thematic Review, the key information used to inform the review (including the meetings during the review event) is contained within a Scoping Document, which will

- outline the rationale for the topic selected;
- specify the review methodology;
- provide background research (both within HWU and externally) and analysis;
- incorporate the views of key contributors to the theme (Schools, Services, students);
- summarise the key issues for the review;
- suggest potential themes for the review.

There are no prescribed areas for review; these are determined by the Thematic Review topic itself.

The Scoping Document will intentionally be evaluative, with factual information being kept brief.

2. Responsibility for Producing the Scoping Document

The Thematic Review Manager is responsible for co-ordinating the production of the Scoping Document and for conducting the majority of tasks associated with its production (as specified in section 1), eg background research, analysis and identification of potential review themes.

As part of this process, key contributors (Schools, relevant Professional Services and students) to the topic under review will be invited to provide information to ensure that all relevant HWU issues are highlighted and considered.

3. Structure of the Scoping Document

The Scoping Document should follow the core structure set out in section 1, although there is flexibility to include additional sections as the review itself dictates or as is required by, for example, the Learning and Teaching Board. An overview of each of the core sections is provided below.

1) Rationale for the Review Topic
A short introduction, outlining the reasons why the topic was selected for Thematic Review and highlighting information such as: key dates; individuals and groups consulted; expectations from the review process.

The introduction should also include a summary of the key issues which prompted and informed the review.

2) Review Methodology
The approach to be adopted throughout the Thematic Review, including whether or not a full review event will be held (ie with a team of internal/external reviewers and a series of meetings with HWU staff and students).

If it is has been agreed (and approved by Learning and Teaching Board) that a full review event is not necessary for the topic under review, then the review methodology should comprise desk-based research of internal and external practices, together with contributions from key individuals and groups.

3) Background Research and Analysis
An overview of prior and current HWU issues related to the topic under review, including a summary of actions to date and their impact.

This section will include an analysis of external developments and practices, with a particular focus on aspects of relevance to HWU (eg practices in a multi-mode, multi-location HE environment).

The analysis should be succinct, targeted and informative; it is not designed to be an exhaustive literature search.

4) Views of Key Contributors
This section should begin with a list of the groups and individuals who informed the production of the Scoping Document.

The topic under review will, to a large extent, determine the specific individuals and groups who need to be consulted as part of the Scoping Document preparations. However, the views of the following must be sought in all Thematic Reviews:

   a) Schools, particularly Directors of Learning and Teaching and Directors of Academic Quality;
   b) Relevant Professional Services, ie those which contribute to the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy;
   c) Students.

In each of the above cases, the views of contributors across all modes and locations must be sought. In particular, students must include undergraduate and postgraduate; independent distance learners; Approved Learning Partner students; students at all campuses.

If a full review event with a team (incl. external members) and meetings is not being held, then the key contributors should also include external specialists in the area under review. In this way, the review is informed by a wider perspective than HWU staff and students.

5) Key Issues for Review
Based on an analysis of the preceding sections, an overview and an evaluation should be provided of the key issues to be considered as part of the review.

In addition to the issues identified through background research and analysis, views of contributors, etc, this section should include relevant information from the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and its Operational Plan.

6) Proposed Themes for Review
The key issues outlined in section 5 should be grouped into a series of major themes for review (c.6 themes).

These themes will thereafter require approval from the Learning and Teaching Board and will then be disseminated to all review participants.

Thematic Review Team: Roles and Responsibilities

Thematic Review teams will normally comprise six members and others may be in attendance as advisors or observers.

All team members have equal status and will be expected to review all activities. However, different members may have a different focus; for example, students will be particularly interested in the student learning experience.

A review team will comprise at least one of: two internal academic staff members; one or two internal Professional Services staff members; one or two external members; two student members; review advisor(s). The Chair will be the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)[5].

The process and criteria for appointing review team members is outlined below.

1. **Chair**

   The Chair of the review team will be the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), or a senior academic staff member (see footnote 5), with knowledge of the University's Strategic Plan and the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

   The specific responsibilities of the Chair are to:

   i. attend a discussion/briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager;
   ii. review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
   iii. identify key issues (including collecting comments from other team members) for discussion during the first review meeting;
   iv. Chair the meetings with HWU staff and students (or arrange for other team members to chair the meetings) ensuring that the University's objectives are achieved;
   v. coordinate the writing of the report commentaries and edit the final version;
   vi. present the report to Learning and Teaching Board and, where necessary, to the University Executive and the Senate.

2. **Internal Academics**

   Directors of Learning and Teaching will be invited to nominate internal academic staff members, on the basis of that their specific knowledge and experience will strengthen the expertise of the review team. Two internal academic staff members will be selected and approved by the Learning and Teaching Board.

   The responsibilities of the internal academic staff members are to:
   i. attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager;
   ii. review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
   iii. provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for further discussion in the review event meetings;
   iv. actively participate in the review;
   v. produce commentaries for the team's report as agreed with the Chair;
   vi. comment on the draft report and contribute towards its completion.

3. **Internal Professional Services Staff**

   The topic selected for Thematic Review will determine the range of Professional Services to be involved in the review. The Directors of the relevant Professional Services will be invited to nominate staff members, on the basis that their specific knowledge and experience will strengthen the expertise

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[5] In 2015/16 and 2016/17, the Chair will be the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching). Thereafter, if the process is progressing as envisaged, there will be an opportunity to appoint a senior academic staff member (such as a School Director of Learning and Teaching) as Chair.

of the review team. Two members of the Professional Services will be selected and approved by the Learning and Teaching Board.

The responsibilities of the internal Professional Services staff members are to:
  i.   attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager;
  ii. review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
  iii. provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for further discussion in the review event meetings;
  iv. actively participate in the review;
  v.   produce commentaries for the team's report as agreed with the Chair;
  vi. comment on the draft report and contribute towards its completion.

4. **Student Members**

The Student Union will appoint two students to participate as members of a review team. The topic under review may determine whether the students are undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research. The Student Union will provide support and guidance to help students meet their responsibilities which are to:
  i.   attend a briefing session delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager;
  ii. review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
  iii. provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for further discussion in the review event meetings;
  iv. actively participate in the review;
  v.   produce commentaries for the team's report as agreed with the Chair;
  vi. comment on the draft report and contribute towards its completion.

5. **External Members**

Schools and relevant Professional Services will be invited to submit nominations for suitable external reviewers from whom one or two will be selected and approved by the Learning and Teaching Board. The criteria for nominating and selecting external reviewers are as follows:

- At least one external should have current teaching and learning experience.
- Where possible, review teams will have at least one external member who has an understanding of international good practice and is able to comment on how HWU compares with, and could benefit from, similar practice in other countries.
- External reviewers should not have had any involvement with the University during the previous five years.

The external members' responsibilities are to:
  i.   review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
  ii. provide comments on the review documentation to identify key issues for discussion in the review event meetings;
  iii. actively participate in the review;
  iv. produce commentaries for the team's report as agreed with the Chair;
  v.   comment on the draft report and contribute towards its completion.

6. **Thematic Review Manager and Advisors to the Review Team**

The Thematic Review Manager will attend as an advisor and will be responsible for guiding the team on policy matters and overseeing the process in order to ensure consistency of reporting. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), when not acting as Chair of a review, will likewise attend as an advisor. They will also be responsible for chairing the private team meetings. Their specific responsibilities as advisors are to:

  i.   deliver briefing sessions in advance of the review;
  ii. present proposals related to the review to the Learning and Teaching Board;
  iii. producing the Scoping Document for consideration by the Learning and Teaching Board;
  iv. produce a schedule of meetings for the review event;
  v.   review the Scoping Document and other Review documentation in advance of the event;
  vi. participate in the review meetings;

vii. chair private team meetings of the review team;
viii. promote objectivity and consistency in approach to Thematic Reviews across the University;
ix. provide guidance and direction to the review team, particularly in order to maintain an appropriate focus on the key areas under review;
x. guide the Thematic Review team on matters pertaining to the Thematic Review, such as conduct of meetings, and the production of the report;
xi. facilitate the identification, progression and evaluation of key themes;
xii. provide guidance for writing the review team report;
xiii. produce the Action Plan based on the Review Report.

7. <u>Observers</u>

A member of staff from the Student Union will attend as an observer, to support the student reviewers. Other individuals may be invited as observers for all or part of the review, subject to approval by the Chair of the Review Team.

8. <u>Thematic Review Co-ordinator</u>

The Thematic Review Co-ordinator is responsible for co-ordinating all activities required for the conduct of a Thematic Review. Their specific responsibilities as co-ordinators are to:

i. be responsible for co-ordinating all activities required for the conduct of a Thematic Review;
ii. liaise with the Thematic Review Manager in order to ensure the efficient and effective conduct of Thematic Reviews in accordance with the process specified in this Handbook;
iii. liaise with relevant individuals regarding the nomination of external representatives, the production of review material, schedule of meetings and for logistical and administrative arrangements;
iv. act as the main contact for the review and to provide advice and guidance as required;
v. organise briefing sessions for Thematic Review teams, to be delivered by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Thematic Review Manager;
vi. draft review schedules (in liaison with the Chair of the Review Team, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), Thematic Review Manager and relevant individuals within the area being reviewed);
vii. co-ordinate the production of the review report, organise its approval, distribute to the appropriate committees and organise follow-up progress reports.

Thematic Review Event: Agenda of Meetings

Below is an example of an agenda for a Thematic Review event. As much of the review activity is around preparatory research and analysis, only one day is focused on actual meetings.

Changes to the agenda may be required to accommodate specific aspects of the topic under review.

Start time	End time	Activity
DAY 1		
0900	1000	Private Team meeting, incl. short presentation by Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and Thematic Review Manager on relevant aspects of University strategies and on key issues
1000	1030	Meeting with senior individual staff members *20 minute presentation on relevant aspects of University strategies and on key issues* *10 minute discussion*
1030	1045	Private Team meeting
1045	1130	Meeting 1: Skype meeting with Students at other campuses (*team may split in two to cover different campuses*)
1130	1145	Private Team meeting
1145	1245	Meeting 2: Students
1245	1345	Lunch and Private Team meeting
1345	1445	Meeting 3: Academic staff
1500	1515	Private Team meeting
1515	1615	Meeting 4: Professional Services staff
1615	1700	Private Team meeting: discuss key emerging themes; agendas for Day 2
DAY 2		
0900	0930	Private Team meeting
0930	1015	Meeting 5: Skype meeting with Academic and Professional Services staff at other campuses (*team may split in two to cover different campuses*)
1015	1215	Private Team meeting to discuss conclusions and agree areas of positive practice and areas for development
1215	1330	Lunch
1330	1500	Private Team meeting: time to write report

Note: Day 2 can be extended to include additional meetings, as required.

Basic Structure of a Thematic Review Report

The review team's report should follow a basic structure (as guided below) although additional headings or sub-headings may be added as necessary. A report template is provided in Appendix 8.

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1. Introduction
    This section will be completed by the Thematic Review Coordinator; it will include: the date of the event; the membership of the team; the scope of the topic under review, ie key themes being considered.

2. Thematic Review Conclusions
    This section will record the team's conclusions, as agreed at the end of the review event.

3. Areas of Positive Practice
    The review team should identify any areas of positive practice, particularly those which could be shared across the University. This section may also be used to report any positive feedback to the University.

    To aid the dissemination of good practice across the University, contextual information for each of the points should be provided under 'Review Team's Commentary'.

4. Areas for Development
    Formal recommendations for action, which must be carried out, are recorded under this section. An explanation as to why each of the recommendations has been made should be provided under 'Review Team's Commentary'. The areas for development may be institution-wide or specific to a particular School, Service or campus.

5. Other Points for Consideration
    These will include points which the team would like the University to consider, but action is not essential. However, the University will be required to make reference to these points in the response/action plan. An explanation as to why each of the points has been made should be provided under 'Review Team's Commentary'.

6. Review Team's Commentary
    The team should provide brief commentaries of approximately one or two paragraphs under key themes identified for consideration during the review. Sub-section headings may be added to provide a clearer structure to the report.

    The commentaries under this section should justify any decisions reached but should not repeat information already provided in the Scoping Document. As a minimum, the following should be included:

    - A brief paragraph to summarise the overall outcomes under each of the main "Key Themes of Review" headings.
    - Contextual information to provide clarification on each of the individual: Areas of Positive Practice; Areas for Development; Other Points for Consideration.

Template for the Thematic Review Report

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF THE THEMATIC REVIEW TEAM

THEMATIC REVIEW OF:

DATE:

LOCATION:

[Refer to Appendix 7, for further guidance on producing the report.]

1. **INTRODUCTION**

   A Thematic Review of [insert topic name] at Heriot-Watt University took place on [date] by a team comprising:

   - *[Team membership]*

   The Key Themes considered during the Thematic Review were:

   - *[Key Themes]*

2. **REVIEW TEAM CONCLUSIONS**

   At the end of the review, the Team reached the following conclusions:

   [There is no set format for conclusions of Thematic Reviews; rather, each Team has the flexibility to determine the most appropriate means of summing up its findings and views]

3. **AREAS OF POSITIVE PRACTICE**
   [This section must be completed. Contextual information should be provided under section 6]

   3.1.

   3.2.

   3.3.

4. **AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT**
   [This section should only be completed if the Team has recommendations that <u>must</u> be undertaken. The Team should make it clear if the Areas for Development are institution-wide or specific to School(s) or Professional Service(s). Contextual information should be provided under section 6]

   4.1.

   4.2.

   4.3.

5. OTHER POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION
[This section should include recommendations for consideration only, but which are not mandatory to address in terms of the review conclusions. Contextual information should be provided under section 6 below]

6. REVIEW TEAM'S COMMENTARY

6.1. Key Theme 1: [insert theme name]
[This section should include:
   - *a brief paragraph to summarise the overall outcomes*
   - *contextual information to provide clarification areas of positive practice, areas for development and other points of consideration]*

6.2. Key Theme 2: [insert theme name]
[This section should include:
   - *a brief paragraph to summarise the overall outcomes*
   - *contextual information to provide clarification areas of positive practice, areas for development and other points of consideration]*

6.3. Key Theme 3: [insert theme name]
[This section should include:
   - *a brief paragraph to summarise the overall outcomes*
   - *contextual information to provide clarification areas of positive practice, areas for development and other points of consideration]*

6.4. Key Theme 3: [insert theme name]
[This section should include:
   - *a brief paragraph to summarise the overall outcomes*
   - *contextual information to provide clarification areas of positive practice, areas for development and other points of consideration]*

[Additional sub-sections to be added to reflect the number of Key Themes identified for consideration as part of the Thematic Review.]

Briefing Paper for Thematic Review Teams

PREPARING FOR THE MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS AND STAFF

➢ The first meeting of the day should be used to identify key themes for discussion throughout the day, bearing in mind that these may change as the meetings progress:
  - Start with issues relating to the student learning experience, as these will be discussed with students at the start of the day.
  - If there is time, then move on to themes relevant to the meetings with staff.

➢ Under each of the themes:
  - lines of questioning should be agreed *(approximately 6-8 per hour)*
  - the team member to ask the questions should be agreed (giving all team members an opportunity to ask a question)

MEETINGS WITH STUDENTS AND STAFF

➢ For all meetings, commence with:
  - Brief introductions
  - A brief explanation of the purpose of the meeting
  - A brief overview of the topics that will be discussed
  - An explanation that all discussions are confidential and that no individual will be quoted

➢ For meetings with staff always start the meetings on a positive note, rather than informing that there were a number of issues raised by the students that the team would like to discuss further. Experience has shown that this is the best way to elicit information. For example:
  - "We have met with students who provided some excellent feedback on their learning experiences in relation to [insert subject]. A number of topics were discussed which we would like to discuss further with you"

➢ Create a dialogue with students and staff, using the agreed questions as a basis for the discussions. The structure and tone of questioning is important for creating an open and honest dialogue, in a non-confrontational manner. For example:

  - If students indicated that they do not receive assessment feedback, asking the staff directly about the reasons will probably cause them to respond defensively. Instead, ask the staff to explain their policy and practice for providing assessment feedback; you will probably find that the staff will mention any problems or issues that have arisen. If not, you could ask if they have experienced any problems with implementing the policy. You may still need to ask the question directly, however, by then the team will have gained a better understanding of the process and the staff will feel more at ease.
  - Be careful not to ask leading questions. For example:
    - "Do you find that use of the VLE by staff is good, or does it vary from lecturer to lecturer?"
    - "Do you find that your workload gets in the way of you being innovative in learning and teaching?
  - Be careful not to ask closed questions, unless seeking confirmation of factual accuracy.
  - Do not ask for bad feedback as this assumes that there is some. For example, "So, tell us what your worst experiences as an IDL student have been so far". This question could be replaced with "Do you have any suggestions as to how your experiences so far could have been improved".

➢ Maintain confidentiality:
  - All discussions should be treated as confidential.
  - Be careful to maintain anonymity. This is sometimes difficult if there are small numbers. For example:
    - If an issue applies only to one particular School, represented by one or two students, be careful not to quote the specific issue to staff.
    - If issues raised by staff could easily be attributed back to an individual or small group, be careful not to quote specific issues to senior management or other staff.
  - A similar approach should be taken when writing the report.

➢ Concentrate on key issues. Time is short, so do not digress and engage in detailed discussions about

topics that are not a concern, despite how interesting they might be.

➢ Probe on areas of concern, even if the issues were not initially identified and agreed upon as key themes. However, do not deviate from agreed questions without the Chair's permission.

➢ Do not prolong discussions unnecessarily. Once sufficient information has been received, move on. If a particular issue has been identified, but the Team is clear about the position, and further discussion would not change the position, move on, and make a note that there is an issue which needs addressing. The Team can make a specific recommendation.

➢ Do not ask questions when the answers can be found within the Review documentation, unless further clarification is required.

➢ Allow at least five minutes at the end of each meeting for the staff/students being reviewed to raise anything relevant or ask questions.

➢ Thanks and finish on time

HINTS AND TIPS FOR MEETINGS

- Write out your questions *(and possible follow up)*
- Try out your questions on your neighbour
- Listen to the answer and write down the response while the next question is being asked
- Keep brief notes, eg things you consider to be areas of positive practice, areas for development or require further discussion *(this will help you when contributing towards the writing of the report)*
- Cover all the topics
- Don't get fixated on one issue

WRITING THE REPORT

➢ The team is responsible for writing the report. Equal contribution will be made by each team member.
➢ The arrangements for writing the report will be agreed on the day, in terms of the sections to be written and by whom.
➢ Each team member's contribution should comprise of appropriately structured sentences, suitable for inclusion in a report; bullet point notes are not sufficient.
➢ If time permits, the report may be drafted collaboratively at the end of the day, however, this may not be possible.

Information for Staff and Students meeting with Thematic Review Teams

A separate leaflet on *Thematic Review: A Guide for Staff and Students Meeting with Review Teams* has been produced and will be distributed to staff and students. The key information is summarised below.

1. **Introduction to the Thematic Review Process**

   At Heriot-Watt University, Thematic Review is a topic-led approach to institution-wide review of learning and teaching matters which have been identified as key priorities for the institution. Thematic Reviews are conducted on an individual topic basis. The process is led by the University's Learning and Teaching Board (reporting to the University Executive), and it has an enhancement focus and purpose. One Thematic Review is conducted per academic year, within a five-year programme.

   Thematic Review is designed to:

   - support and enhance the student learning experience;
   - facilitate discussion between Schools, Professional Services and students on topics of common concern;
   - identify and disseminate good practice, highlighting examples which could be used as case studies or presentations at learning and teaching events;
   - identify areas for development and provide a mechanism for addressing such areas;
   - clarify or specify matters related to the implementation of academic policy;
   - review the operation of existing processes and procedures;
   - evaluate alignment with institutional strategic priorities;
   - recommend action or support required at institutional level.

2. **Composition of Review Teams**

   All review teams comprise of the following members:

   - Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (Chair)
   - Two internal academic staff members
   - Two staff members from relevant Professional Services
   - Two Student representatives *(nominated by HWUSU)*
   - One or two external reviewers *(one to be an academic)*

   The composition of the review team aims at achieving a balance of attributes including: learning and teaching expertise; knowledge of the University's structure, regulations, policies and procedures; a knowledge of the international environment; an understanding of the student learning experience and student expectations.

   It should be noted that in addition to the six team members, three members of internal staff will also be attending the meetings as advisors and/or observers:

   - Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (Advisor) (if not already in the role of Chair)
   - Thematic Review Manager (Advisor)
   - Student Union Representative (Observer; to support the student reviewers)

3. **Meeting with the Review Team**

   In advance of the review taking place, the Thematic Review Manager produces, on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Board, a Scoping Document for consideration by the review team. The review team then meets with a selection of students and staff (both academic and Professional Services). The purpose of the meetings is to further explore the topic under review, and to clarify any points discussed or raised within the Scoping Document.

   The format of these meetings is semi-formal. The review team will direct questions to staff/students with the intention of creating a comfortable, free-flowing dialogue. The tone of the meetings should be friendly and non-confrontational, and the review team will not ask any 'trick' questions. Staff and students are encouraged to be as open and honest as possible, as the process is designed to explore

opportunities for improvement and development. Information shared with the review team will be treated as confidential; only summary findings will be shared with the University and individuals will never be quoted.

4. **Final Outcome**

The review team will reach conclusions about the topic under review. The Team will highlight areas of positive practice and may identify areas for development (mandatory action required) and/or other points for consideration (not requiring mandatory action, but to be considered). A report will be produced by the team upon conclusion of the review and an action plan will be produced by the Thematic Review. The report and the action plan will be submitted to the Learning and Teaching Board for consideration and approval.