4   SUBJECT AREA REVIEW AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE REVIEW

Introduction

4.1   Subject area reviews and service reviews form one element within the university's quality framework. These operate in conjunction with other elements to provide assurance to the university and to external stakeholders of the standards of awards and of the quality of the student learning experience provided within the university. The primary processes for assurance of academic standards are programme approval / reapproval and annual monitoring.

4.2   The purpose of subject area / service review is to provide periodic in-depth reflection on, and analysis of, the ways in which the quality of students' learning experiences is being managed and enhanced throughout the subject area or service provision and its supporting structures.

4.3   The reviews will make evidence-based judgements on how effective the academic management processes, teaching and learner support across the subject area / service area, and the extent to which they sustain a culture of ongoing reflection and enhancement. The panel will explore with subject area / service teams how issues and initiatives already identified through other quality monitoring and approval processes are being progressed. The panel may make recommendations on how the subject area / service might further develop or be supported and will identify areas of good practice for sharing within the university.

4.4   The review process will refer to the expectations and core and common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and other external reference points.

4.5   The subject area / service review process and outcomes are subject to scrutiny by QAA through Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). The ELIR team will examine how the university uses the review process effectively to manage and enhance the quality of provision, and to what extent the process meets sector-wide expectations. This includes how subject area / service reviews link to other quality processes, such as annual monitoring, approval and reapproval. Particular attention will be given to how the university addresses and monitors the outcomes of reviews, and what actions are taken as a result. The university will draw on evidence of subject area / service reviews in producing its self-evaluation for ELIR.

Scope of subject area review

4.6   The scope of a subject area review will include all taught higher education provision within an agreed subject area, including postgraduate awards, HN programmes, continuing professional development (CPD), collaborative and trans-national education (TNE) provision, online and distance learning and provision which provides only small amounts of credit.

4.7   The review will also examine areas that have specific relevance to the university, such as the delivery of SQA programmes, articulation arrangements, and the management of the student learning experience for dispersed groups of students. It will look at the ways in which quality is enhanced, identify practice that others might learn from and how this might be

disseminated more widely. It will also support reflection on the strategic development of the subject area.

Scope of student support service review

4.8 The scope of each student support service review will include all activities within that service which are student-facing and/or intended to enhance the student learning experience. The scope will cover the relevant service across all academic partners, however it is provided and resourced, recognising that such services will support both HE and FE students.

Frequency of subject area / service review

4.9 Subject area reviews will normally be conducted on a six-year cycle, with the schedule of activity determined by Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC).

4.10 Service area reviews will normally take place on a biennial basis, with the focus of review determined by QAEC based on analysis of institutional enhancement priorities. Where appropriate, one or more student support services may be reviewed jointly.

Relationship to other quality processes

4.11 Subject area and service reviews form one element within the university's quality framework. They are intended to draw on the outcomes of other quality processes, such as annual monitoring and programme (re)approval, as well as to feed into them.

Principles of subject area / service review

4.12 The subject area / service review process is based on the following principles:
   o the review will be based on a self-evaluation undertaken by the subject area / service, making appropriate use of performance indicators, student feedback and student data
   o the review will draw on and inform other quality processes
   o the review panel will include external representatives and a student member
   o the review will be open and based on a process of peer review
   o the process of review will engage staff and students from the subject area / service
   o the review will be flexible in scope to accommodate the characteristics of the subject area / service
   o the review will be conducted so as to be enhancement-focussed, for the subject area / service, and the university as a whole.

Preparation for reviews

4.13 Planning and preparation for subject area / service review will begin the year before the review takes place. The review will take into account the characteristics of the subject area / service, and staff may identify any particular topics for exploration during the review. There will also be consultation on preferences for the composition of the review panel and the timing of the review within the academic session.

4.14 It is the responsibility of the subject area lead / nominated service review co-ordinator to co-ordinate the writing of the self-evaluation document and to lead the preparations for review. Support in preparing for the review will be provided by Academic Standards and Enhancement.

4.15 Staff from every academic partner offering provision within the subject area will be required to contribute to the preparations for subject area review and the self-evaluation document.

4.16 Staff from every academic partner will be required to contribute to the preparations for service review and the self-evaluation document.

Self-evaluation document and supporting documentation

4.17 The main document required for subject area / service review will be the self-evaluation document (SED): a single SED will be produced for each subject area / service undergoing review. The SED forms the basis of the review, and the review panel will explore the statements made in dialogue with staff, students and other stakeholder groups. The SED should demonstrate a process of reflection and analysis, identifying areas of strength and good practice, as well as areas for development, and any activities in place to address these Guidance on producing the SED and supporting documentation will be provided to teams.

4.18 The subject area SED should demonstrate that the subject area has evaluated:
   o its own strategic priorities and objectives, and the extent to which these align with institutional strategic plans, policies and objectives
   o its approach to enhancement of the student learning experience
   o its approach to enhancement of learning and teaching, including staffing and staff development, quality of learning resources
   o its approach to managing quality and academic standards, including the extent of alignment with external reference points and other benchmarks, and the effectiveness and outcomes of other quality processes.

4.19 The service SED should demonstrate that the service has documented and evaluated:
   o the provision and structure of the service
   o the service's routine or annual monitoring processes
   o notable recent developments and achievements
   o the extent of alignment with external reference points and other benchmarks
   o the engagement with students and other stakeholders
   o the service's impact on the student learning experience
   o the professional development of staff contributing to the service
   o the quality of resources (for staff contributing to the service and for students).

Review panels

4.20 Subject area review panel composition will take account of the range and volume of provision within the subject area. The review panel will normally include:
   a. a senior member of university staff, who will chair the review
   b. at least one external member with a relevant subject background, from another UK university or college
   c. one or two academic staff, such as associate dean or programme leader from another subject area
   d. a senior manager from an academic partner eg curriculum manager from an unrelated subject area, quality manager
   e. a student member, from another subject area
   f. an administrative officer.

4.21 Service review panel composition will take account of the scope and characteristics of the student support service. The review panel will normally include:

a. a senior member of university staff, who will chair the review

b. up to two external members: senior service managers with relevant experience from another UK university or college

c. two internal members of staff: staff with management-level expertise in any student-facing service (other than the service under review), including managers with a mixed remit

d. a student member

e. an administrative officer.

4.22 Where a review is particularly large or complex, the chair may decide that additional academic or specialist expertise is required on the panel.

Review process

4.23 The review will be conducted through:

a. analysis of the SED and supporting evidence as referenced in the SED. Review teams may request access to additional documentation

b. discussion with subject area / service staff and relevant senior managers to explore issues arising from the documentary evidence, and issues that they wish to raise

c. discussion with students, normally including a range of students enrolled at different academic partners and enrolled on different programmes

d. discussion with employers, professional bodies and / or graduates.

4.24 It is not expected that staff from every academic partner will necessarily meet with the review panel, however, there should be a sufficient mix of participants to represent the range of curriculum provision or student support activities, and the contexts in which they are delivered.

4.25 The review process will normally be conducted wholly online, to enable engagement by a wide range of participants and remove geographical or other barriers to participation.

4.26 The reviews will be organised and supported by Academic Standards and Enhancement and overseen by QAEC.

Outcomes and follow up

4.27 The review panel is likely to make a number of enhancement-focused recommendations on how the subject area / service might further develop or be supported, and will identify areas of good practice for sharing within the university. The panel may also identify requirements, which must be actioned accordingly. Recommendations and requirements may be either for the subject area / service team itself, or with wider applicability across the institution, which will be referred to QAEC for consideration in the first instance. Initial outcomes will be drafted within one week of the event.

4.28 The review report will be drafted within eight weeks of the event and the subject area / service team invited to check the report for factual accuracy prior to publication. The report will be presented to QAEC and published internally.

4.29 Within three months of the review, an initial action plan will be drafted by the subject area lead and Dean of Faculty or the service review co-ordinator, addressing all requirements and recommendations identified in the report, which will be presented to QAEC for discussion. Where institution-level recommendations are identified, QAEC will refer the

issue to the appropriate accountable lead or committee, and will be responsible for monitoring progress.

4.30 The subject area lead / service review co-ordinator will be required to submit a follow-up report one year after the review event setting out how recommendations and any requirements have been addressed. This will be discussed at a formal meeting between the chair of the review panel, the chair of QAEC, the Dean of Faculty and the subject area lead / service review co-ordinator. The follow-up report will be presented to QAEC for discussion and approval, although QAEC may require further assurances or actions prior to approval.