Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Degree Scheme Reviews

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 A Degree Scheme Review (DSR) is a developmental periodic review of a programme of study (or set of cognate programmes), undertaken with the aim of enhancing the programme while providing a robust mechanism by which the University can assure itself of and record the quality of the programme.

1.2 The DSR process is a key component of the University's mechanisms for monitoring and review of its programmes. It draws upon the related processes of external examining (QA12), annual monitoring of units and programmes (QA51), input from Staff/Student Liaison Committees (QA48), as well as the views of professional or regulatory accrediting bodies (QA8).

1.3 These procedures apply to all taught programmes of study and professional doctorates leading to an award of the University of Bath. These procedures also apply to programmes involving collaborative provision (QA20).

2. Principles

2.1 The University is committed to the regular evaluation of its programmes in order to:
- assure itself of the continuing quality and validity of the programme;
- facilitate continuous enhancement of provision to reflect developments in the sector, institution and discipline;
- record the quality and standards of its provision;
- assure itself that consideration continues to be given to the needs of a diverse student body.

2.2 A DSR is an opportunity to step back from the day-to-day development and delivery of a programme, drawing upon input from academic peers, professional bodies, employers and students, in order to revisit the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme, examine the existing quality of provision and identify opportunities for ongoing improvement.

2.3 A DSR is an academic process underpinned by peer review/externality and informed student involvement.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (ULTQC) is responsible to Senate for setting a timetable for the Reviews according to a 5-year cycle, after consultation with the Faculty/School/Learning Partnerships Office (LPO). It is normally expected that DSRs will take place one year prior to any external review (e.g. professional accreditation) in order that the internal review process may inform preparations for external review. However,
in appropriate cases, a closer alignment between a DSR and a professional accreditation process may be permitted. In such instances, the approval of the ULTQC for the proposed revised process will be required, which may be granted providing that the underlying objectives of both the DSR and the professional accreditation will still broadly be met.

3.2 Requests for DSR deferral or exemption must be presented to the Faculty/School Committee for approval before consideration by ULTQC, at the very latest, in the year preceding the scheduled review.

3.3 It may be appropriate to conduct a DSR of a programme which is scheduled for withdrawal. Faculties should apply for an exemption from the DSR process, for a programme scheduled to be withdrawn, in the normal manner. Withdrawn programmes will be removed from the schedule when it has been confirmed that there are no students remaining on the programme.

3.4 Where substantial changes are planned to a programme outside the 5-year cycle, for example in order to maintain currency, in response to stakeholder demands, or to better shape Faculty, School and Department portfolios, consideration should be given to making effective use of DSR for this purpose. There may be a case for bringing forward the date of the scheduled DSR, in discussion with the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Office. (Proposals for change would subsequently be followed up under QA4 which covers amendments to programmes of study).

3.5 The Head of Department/School/Learning Partnerships Office (LPO) is responsible for making sure that resources are made available to ensure that a DSR is undertaken in accordance with the schedule established by ULTQC and the expectations set out in this document.

3.6 Where a programme is jointly delivered or where ownership is transferred during the period in which the DSR is being undertaken, responsibility for ensuring adequate resources, input and coordination for timely completion through to the progress report stage lies jointly with both Heads of Department/School/LPO.

3.7 The Assistant Registrar (Faculty/School) or equivalent:
   - acts as a first port of call for queries regarding the process and documentation;
   - is responsible, with the support of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office as required, for briefing the author(s) of the Programme Evaluation Document (PED), the Chair of and the Secretary to the Review Panel on their roles and responsibilities, the purpose of DSRs and the production of a PED;
   - is responsible for establishing a Review Panel in consultation with the relevant Director of Studies.

3.8 The Director of Studies is responsible for ensuring that a PED is prepared within the Department/School/LPO; that supporting evidence is gathered; and for co-ordinating follow-up actions.

3.9 The Chair of the Review Panel is responsible for:
   - agreeing the format of the Review event;
   - ensuring all processes and procedures pertaining to the DSR are followed and potential conflicts of interest by Panel members are recorded;
   - confirming that the department action plan meets the expectations of the panel.

3.10 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office is responsible for:
   - providing advice to Assistant Registrars (Faculty/School) or equivalent officers, on the procedure for DSRs and related documentation;
• providing the ULTQC with an annual evaluative report on the operation of the DSR processes.

3.11 The Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee is responsible for monitoring the timely completion of scheduled DSR processes, and the completion of actions responding to Review Panel recommendations. In the case of the School, responsibility for sign-off of these processes rests with the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee acting on the advice of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee for the School.

3.12 ULTQC is responsible to Senate for the oversight and monitoring of quality assurance of DSR mechanisms and receives a DSR summary report annually. The indicative content of the report is set out in 7.2.

4. Preparing for Degree Scheme Review

4.1 A DSR may be of a single programme of study, or, upon ULTQC's approval of a request from the Faculty/School Learning Teaching and Quality Committee, of a small cognate group of programmes.

4.2 The aim of the DSR is to bring together a variety of perspectives on the quality management of the programme, including student views, and academic views internal and external to the expertise in the Department/School/partner college.

4.3 Where a programme is delivered jointly or includes units from more than one Department, all Departments should be involved with the DSR including preparation and follow-up, in proportion to their input.

4.4 Where a group of programmes is reviewed together, the DSR will differentiate the evidence between programmes where appropriate, to support the final evaluation of each programme in the group.

4.5 Where a programme is delivered by more than one partner, the DSR will evaluate and differentiate the evidence presented as to the quality and standards demonstrated by each partner institution in delivering the programme(s). This will enable focussed attention on appropriate action required following the DSR.

Panel membership

4.6 As a minimum, the constitution of a DSR Panel will be as follows:

• one academic member of staff not associated with the programme from another Department/School being a current or recent member of a Faculty/School/ Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee or a Head of Department or, for the review of programmes overseen by the LPO, normally an HE Coordinator from a partner institution: (Chair);
• one academic member of staff not associated with the programme from another Faculty/School;
• at least one student member from within the home Department/School/partner college;
• at least one member external to the University who is familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme, but not current or previous External Examiners.

Members of staff from the department of the programme being reviewed are not allowed to be members of the Panel. Guidance for members of Review Panels and also specifically for student members is available on the LTEO/ Quality web pages.

4.7 The external member(s) of the Panel should be approved by the Chair of the relevant Board.
of Studies. In determining approval of suitable nominees, the following points for the assurance of independence and objectivity should be taken into account:
- the principles for the appointment of External Examiners (see QA12);
- the detail of the proposed external member(s) CV(s), which should include a section detailing any previous or current association with the University;
- while existing External Examiners may provide valuable advice when reviewing programmes and preparing the PED, for the purposes of impartiality at the panel meeting, other independent external contributors should be made available to comment on the current state of a programme.

**Good Practice**

While bearing in mind the need to maintain a Review Panel of a manageable size, it is worth considering how the following might be appropriate members of Review Panels for particular programmes:
- academic or professional service staff with expertise in a particular area of provision relevant to the programme being reviewed eg e-learning (for reviews of distance learning programmes);
- representatives from partner institutions involved in collaborative provision of a programme as 'internal' members of the Panel;
- representatives of employers and/or relevant professional bodies to serve as 'external' members; such people do not need necessarily to be 'familiar with UK academic standards' provided there is at least one 'external' on the Panel who meets this criterion;
- inviting the relevant (SSLC) student Academic Representative(s) to be a student member;
- inviting more than one student member, in order to ensure that the interests of the full range of the student body (e.g. part-time students, mature students, distance learners, international students, students with a disability) are represented;
- a recent graduate of the course who has progressed on to further study within the University may be a useful way of capturing the student experience of the programme.

**Documentation**

4.8 From the combination of the paperwork made available to the Review Panel (either in hard copy or electronically) and the meetings which comprise the DSR event, it should be possible for the Review Panel to take into account the following:
- staff opinions (including those of servicing Departments/the School or collaborative partners);
- student opinions representative of the diverse student body;
- External Examiners' views;
- the opinion of recent employers of students graduating from the programme of study;
- the opinion of placement providers;
- views expressed by professional and regulatory bodies as a result of an accreditation process, where applicable;
- the opinions of graduates;
- adherence to quality standards;
- adherence to over-arching University policies and other regulatory systems e.g. NFAAR.

4.9 To support this, the Department/School/LPO will prepare a Programme Evaluation Document (PED), which will draw upon wide-ranging consultation within the Department(s) concerned with the programme(s)/School/partner college. The aim of the PED(c. fifteen pages in length, although this may vary according to the complexity of the programme(s) being reviewed), is to provide the Review Panel with a reflective and self-evaluative, as opposed to descriptive analysis of the programme. It may be helpful to think in terms of developing a SWOT analysis - identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and
Threats for the programme. Where a group of cognate programmes is being reviewed, a separate PED should normally be produced for each programme.

4.10 A PED template with associated guidance (QA13 Form 2) is available from the Quality Management website to support academic staff in producing a PED. It is expected that a PED will cover the following areas:

- programme(s) details (name(s), award(s), mode(s) of study);
- educational aims and context;
- learning outcomes;
- curriculum and assessment;
- learning opportunities: including learning and teaching strategies, student support and progression, learning resources, study year abroad/student exchange opportunities;
- key issues and areas of good practice relating to placements;
- quality and standards, including compliance with the QAA subject benchmark statement (where available), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, programme level descriptors or any other applicable part of the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education.

4.11 The PED should be supported by an evidence base. This should, where possible, draw upon existing data, and avoid unnecessary duplication. The evidence base will usually include:

- programme specifications;
- previous annual monitoring reports;
- trend analysis of statistical data on progression and assessment;
- destination data;
- a copy of the relevant QAA subject benchmark statement (if appropriate);
- a copy of the relevant QAA level descriptor;
- reports from professional or regulatory accrediting bodies;
- External Examiners' reports;
- student survey data including National Student Survey where relevant;
- feedback from students representative of the diversity of the student body;
- feedback from employer engagement, particularly in relation to placements;
- any prior review reports;
- unit descriptions (where appropriate);
- information made available to students, such as programme handbooks.

4.12 The aim is to provide evidence sufficient to illustrate the points made in the PED and to provide the Review Panel with a rounded view of the programme from a variety of perspectives. Within faculties, the departmental Learning Teaching and Quality Committee will normally sign off each final PED on behalf of the Department responsible, before its presentation to a DSR panel.

**Good Practice**

One Department invited a group of current students for a focus group meeting to gather informal but insightful feedback on broader aspects of their programme and its future development.

Several Departments put all their collated data in a restricted area of the website for access by staff and panel members, which was considered effective and efficient.

The proceedings of bodies with representation from employers and professional bodies, such as Industrial Advisory Boards, can be a useful source of additional inputs for the PED and the evidence base.
**Event preparation**

4.13 The format of the DSR event will be arranged in consultation between the Secretary to the Review Panel, the Chair of the Review Panel and the Department/School. Normally, as a minimum, the event will include the following elements:

- a private meeting of the DSR Panel to identify key issues arising from the PED (30 mins);
- a meeting of the DSR Panel with the Director of Studies and other members of the programme team to explore the issues raised by the PED (up to 2 hours);
- a private meeting of the DSR Panel to determine summative outcomes (30 minutes);
- initial feedback of summative outcomes to Director of Studies and programme team (15 minutes).

4.14 Where feasible, an opportunity should also be provided for the DSR Panel to meet with a group of current students and/or alumni.

4.15 Whilst it is normally expected that the external member(s) of the Panel will attend the DSR event, where this is not possible then, subject to the approval of the Chair of the Panel, a written submission to the Panel may be received instead.

4.16 The details of the format of the event, the PED and evidence base should be made available to members of the Review Panel at least 3 weeks in advance of the date of the meeting of the Panel.

5. **The Review Event**

5.1 The Review Panel will take a developmental and strategic view of the whole programme or group of programmes. It will consider the cumulative impact of changes to the programme since the last review (or since the programme’s approval). The Review will concentrate upon the development of the programme over the period since the previous DSR rather than its historical evolution, and will consider its potential future enhancement.

5.2 The agenda for the Panel’s principal meeting with the Director of Studies and programme team should normally focus on those areas of particular concern to Panel members arising from their consideration of the PED and evidence base, and in relation to the identification of good practice. Therefore the agenda may cover any combination of aspects of the following:

- educational aims and context;
- learning outcomes;
- curriculum and assessment;
- learning opportunities;
- quality and standards.

5.3 In the course of the DSR the Review Panel will:

a) reach a summative judgement as to whether EACH programme should continue, be amended or be withdrawn;  
   and (where a judgement is reached that the programme should continue in an amended or un-amended form)
b) record explicitly in the minutes its satisfaction that the programme continues to be aligned to the appropriate level in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and remains appropriately engaged with any relevant subject benchmark statements;
c) determine a proposed action list;
d) identify areas of good practice that should be shared more widely.

Where a group of cognate programmes has been reviewed together, the Review Panel will reach a summative judgement in respect of each programme in the group.
6. **Reporting and Follow-up**

6.1 **The official record** of the DSR shall comprise the PED and the minutes of the DSR Event, the latter incorporating the summative judgement, the proposed action list and identification of areas of good practice. A template is available for DSR Minutes.

6.2 The official record of the DSR must be presented to the departmental Learning Teaching and Quality Committee (or equivalent) prior to consideration by the Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

6.3 The Department/School/ LPO must produce an **action plan** in response to the action list with a timeline and clearly attributed responsibilities (approved by the Head of Department/School/LPO) prior to its consideration at Faculty/School level. A suitable template for the action plan is available. Prior to submission to Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee the Chair of the Panel should be invited to comment on the action plan and confirm that it meets the Panel's expectations.

6.4 The Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, and subsequently the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee in the case of the School, will receive a copy of the PED, the minutes of the DSR Event and the departmental action plan with a view to:

- satisfying itself that due process has taken place;
- approving the departmental action plan;
- determining how implementation of the action plan will be monitored;
- identifying any Faculty/School/LPO issues that may require action;
- determining how good practice identified through the DSR process should be shared across the Faculty/School/LPO and partner colleges identifying any issues for referral to ULTQC;
- identifying any instances of good practice to highlight to ULTQC.

In the case of the School of Management the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee will also receive the minutes of the School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee relating to the DSR.

6.4 Faculty/School Learning Teaching and Quality Committees, and in the case of the School the Programme Approvals and Partnerships Committee, have the discretion to customise action plan monitoring mechanisms to the particular outcomes of each DSR. For example, where a DSR has been very successful with a limited action list, the Committee may take the view that an update within the next Programme Annual Monitoring Report will suffice. Alternatively, in other instances, the Committee may wish to receive a six monthly (or earlier) progress report. LTQCs should request further updates until they are satisfied that all actions have been completed.

6.5 A representative for the programme, usually the author of the PED, will be invited to attend the Faculty/School meeting at which the report is being considered, in order to receive feedback and offer clarification where required.

6.6 The Director of Studies is responsible for ensuring that:

- there is compliance in progressing and monitoring the action plan in line with the mechanism determined by the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee/ Programme Approvals and Partnerships Committee;
- feedback is provided to students and other key stakeholders on the enhancements to the programme that are occurring as a result of their input.
7. **Monitoring and Review**

7.1 The Faculty/School Learning Teaching and Quality Committee will provide a copy of the PED, minutes of the DSR Panel event and the action plan to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, together with the relevant minute of the Committee.

7.2 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office will produce an annual overview report for ULTQC which will include:

- a list of all programmes reviewed;
- confirmation that departmental responses to action lists have been approved;
- identification of any issues/common themes/good practice of institutional significance;
- analysis of compliance with University periodic review process requirements as set out in this Code of Practice;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the DSR process;
- recommendations for further action.

Copies of DSR reports will be made available to the Committee alongside the annual report.
## Statement Details

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### Related Documentation:

**External:**

- QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education:
  - Chapter A3: Securing academic standards and an outcomes-based approach to academic awards
  - Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

**Internal**

- QA51 annual monitoring of units and programmes
- QA48 Student Engagement with Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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