

<b>Subject</b>	Maintaining Quality within the Institution
<b>Module</b>	The Quality Cycle: Evaluating and Improving
<b>Topic</b>	3.3 Review

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**Please note that this is a text-only version. All links and animations are not activated in this version. It is recommended that you view the topic online for an interactive learning experience.**

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## 1. Introduction



Two key aspects of Evaluation may be seen as Review and Monitoring and in this topic, Review is discussed. Review is an entrenched aspect of the academic world and is often referred to as 'peer review'. In research for example, it has been a truism that only experts in the particular research area are capable of having the ability to come to an informed judgment concerning the quality of research, and this is the major way in which the decision is made by a journal with regard to publishing a paper or not. The same notion may be carried over to the review of a whole institution and thus the audit method employed by most national audit agencies is said to be that of peer review. The same can also be said for reviews of faculties, departments, divisions, institutes, centres or disciplines.

This topic describes the review policies, procedures and processes together with the review levels (e.g. Institutional, Faculty and Departmental reviews), activity area or thematic reviews and review frequency.

### **Objectives: Review**

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- identify the purpose of review policies
- describe the review procedure in detail
- identify the relationship between academic review and course review

## 2. Review

The major characteristics of reviews are that they tend to be periodic with a long timeframe (e.g. undertaken every 5 years or so); they are mainly 'backward' looking and summative (how has the area performed over the past 5 years?); partially formative (offering recommendations and advice for improvement); conducted mainly by people external to the organisation and 'expert' in the area being reviewed.

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The periodicity of reviews is perhaps the major aspect of reviews to have changed over the last 15 years or so. In the past, reviews tended to be ad hoc, conceived and with terms of reference geared to a particular situation, often when an area was in some kind of crisis. Nowadays, as described in the AUQA list of 'deficiencies' in Module 2, reviews tend to be scheduled and regular, notwithstanding the tendency of reviews to be delayed for multiple reasons resulting in the 'slippage' of review schedules. The point remains, reviews have moved from being exceptional and have become routine. At the end of this Module, there is a discussion of the effectiveness of Review as a quality mechanism especially given developments in Monitoring, and the possibility of a return to review by exception.

### 3. Review Policy

In the past, many higher education providers, especially universities, had an extensive document providing detail of the review process. Many have now adopted a Policy on Policies that provides for a very short Policy statement and a more extensive statement of Procedures. This is an example of a modern statement of review policy. A review policy may cover the following:

#### a. Purpose

The purpose of review policy is to

- assist the university to assure itself of the quality of its academic organisational units;
- utilise learning from this developmental process in order to effect ongoing quality improvement.

#### b. Scope and Terms of Reference

The scope and terms of reference are:

- all academic organisational units including faculties, schools, departments, centres and non-faculty-based academic organisational units;
- within academic units, the areas of:
  - organisational structure, management, planning, quality assurance and improvement
    - ◆ appropriateness and effectiveness of organisational structure
    - ◆ leadership in maintaining and developing academic standing and reputation
    - ◆ implementation of previous review findings
    - ◆ alignment of objectives with university strategic directions, policy and planning documents, including: University Strategic Plan; Learning and Teaching Plan; Research and Research Training Management Plan; Support Services Plan; International Plan; and alignment with national policies where appropriate
    - ◆ systematic quality assurance and improvement including planning, monitoring, reviewing and using feedback for improvement in all areas
    - ◆ financial management including alignment of planning, budgeting and funding
    - ◆ consulting with staff, students, professional associations and others to gain feedback for planning and improvement

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- ♦ identifying, considering and taking appropriate action with regard to problems raised by staff, students and other stakeholders
- ♦ induction and mentoring of new staff; staff training and development
- ♦ performance management
- ♦ realisation of equity objectives
- ♦ developing promotional activities and materials
- human and physical resources, support services, information technology:
  - ♦ academic, administrative, professional and technical staffing profile in relation to objectives and plans
  - ♦ provision and utilisation of appropriate teaching, research and administrative accommodation and equipment
  - ♦ appropriate provision and utilisation of support services
  - ♦ appropriate provision and utilisation of information technology
- course and subject profiles:
  - ♦ the range and scope of courses (including majors) and subjects
  - ♦ alignment of courses and units with faculty, school/department, course, program and university objectives
  - ♦ course structures and relationship of courses and units with other faculty or university offerings
  - ♦ currency and relevance of units and courses with regard to industry and professional needs
  - ♦ development of flexible entry, exit and pathway opportunities
  - ♦ processes and procedures for introducing, resourcing, revising and rationalising courses and units to ensure effective use of resources
  - ♦ appropriateness and equivalence of courses of the same academic value offered in different contexts (e.g. interdisciplinary, joint, partnership, multi-campus, offshore)
  - ♦ effectiveness of course advising
- student profile, teaching, learning and assessment:
  - ♦ understanding of the student profile including changes and trends
  - ♦ student progress and achievement
  - ♦ university graduate attributes
  - ♦ student-centred and flexible approaches to learning and teaching
  - ♦ appropriate educational use of technology
  - ♦ internationalisation of the curriculum and learning opportunities
  - ♦ cross- and inter-disciplinary opportunities
  - ♦ the scope, purpose, range of assessment tasks and alignment with learning objectives and outcomes
  - ♦ the regular provision of feedback to students
  - ♦ student learning and other support services
  - ♦ academic excellence in teaching, learning and assessment
- research and research training:
  - ♦ excellence in research and research training
  - ♦ the range and scope of research activity
  - ♦ alignment of research with faculty and university plans
  - ♦ implementation of university Research Policy
  - ♦ interrelationships and mutual support between teaching and research

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- ♦ collaborative research with other university units, and externally with other institutions and with industry and professional organisations
- ♦ academic freedom with regard to research
- ♦ intellectual property provisions
- ♦ research supervision
- ♦ induction, training and opportunities for interaction among postgraduate students
- ♦ induction and support for staff new to research
- professional and community activities:
  - ♦ professional and community access to expertise and resources
  - ♦ links with professional associations, employer groups, public and private sectors, the local community
  - ♦ staff participation in local, national and international professional societies and activities
  - ♦ public awareness of the contribution to society made by the unit
  - ♦ contact with alumni
- other areas as determined.

### **c. Policy Statement**

The policy statement may consist of:

- reviews will adhere to institutional quality values and principles outlined elsewhere;
- the strategic directions of the university are of central importance for all reviews;
- benchmarking leading to improvement and input from stakeholders is strongly encouraged;
- academic reviews consider the effectiveness of processes and procedures, particularly as they are demonstrated through outcomes. Effective processes are best demonstrated by successful outcomes and reviews encourage a focus on outcomes;
- the importance and relevance of external professional and accreditation reviews is acknowledged;
- quality assurance and improvement are core responsibilities and budgeting for review is therefore part of the normal planning and budgeting process of academic units;
- each academic unit will be reviewed at least every 5 years.

### **d. Responsibility**

The responsibility of:

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic);
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training).

### **e. Approval Body**

The Approval Body may be:

- Academic Board

### **f. Endorsement Body:**

The Endorsement Body may be:

- Vice-Chancellor's Committee.

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## 4. Review Procedures

We have looked into the review policy. Click the tabbed presentation to view some examples of procedures for reviews.

### Examples of Review Procedures

#### Introduction

Each faculty and academic unit must publicise on its website the schedule of reviews planned during the 5-year review cycle and provide these to the central coordinating agency. Assistance in briefing staff on reviews is made available. Reviews may also include other areas or issues not covered in the standard terms of reference (an important point to ensure flexibility).

#### Preparation of Self-Review document

Self-review is the first phase of the review process. It presents an opportunity for the academic unit under review to consider its directions, progress, achievements and strengths, as well as areas for development and improvement and the means of achieving these.

A self-review team is appointed by the dean of the faculty to lead the self-review and produce a self-review document. The self-review document forms the basis for the review that will follow. The self-review document is normally 10,000 to 12,000 words (with up to 20 additional pages of appendices) and is structured to reflect the terms of reference.

In developing the self-review document, the following information and data are required for a faculty, school or department. Data relating to students may not be appropriate for some research centre and other unit reviews:

- mission statement and plan
- organisational structure or chart
- performance indicators, stakeholder consultation, survey results (such as current student survey) and graduate information
- information on units and courses
- unit evaluation data
- research performance data (e.g. publications, grants, higher degrees by research student load and completions)
- professional and community engagement information
- budget data including income sources, reserves and financial viability of operations and courses
- space, equipment, information technology and library resources
- student data including enrolment, progression and achievement
- staffing profile (including age, level, gender, qualifications and workload)
- staffing ratios (e.g. staff/student; academic/administrative)
- staff training and development activities
- examples of promotional materials

The review panel will also require copies of support documentation such as:

- University Vision, Strategic and Operational Plans
- University Academic /Education/Teaching and Learning Plan
- Education and Research Policies
- Faculty Operational Plan
- School, department, Centre or Unit Plan (as appropriate)
- Faculty, school or departmental annual reports (since the last review)

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- Previous review report

### **Selection of Review Panel**

Review panels for faculty-based academic units are selected by the dean of the faculty (in consultation with the head of unit to be reviewed, as appropriate). Review panels for non-faculty-based units are selected by the head of the academic unit to be reviewed. Review panels of both types are approved by (for example) the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) (this being an important mechanism to check in the impartiality of the review process in order to avoid the temptation of 'cronyism').

Selection of panel members is based on their experience and expertise with regard to the terms of reference. Panels normally include the following (it is recognised that in special circumstances the normal composition of a review panel may need to be varied to meet the particular circumstance):

- Two senior academics from relevant areas but external to the university (an international perspective is encouraged);
- A senior University academic external to the unit and usually external to the faculty;
- Member of an appropriate professional association or society;
- An appropriate industry or employer group member;
- A senior student or recent graduate.

The dean nominates the chair of the review panel and additional members as appropriate. The secretary to the committee may be the senior faculty administrator, his or her internal nominee, or an externally appointed person.

### **Publicise review and call for submissions**

The review must be publicised widely throughout the university, together with a call for submissions to be directed to the secretary to the panel. The deadline for submissions is set by the secretary in consultation with the dean of the faculty and head of unit.

### **Review Process**

The secretary to the panel provides the review panel members with all relevant Plans, Policies and other information. The secretary to the panel convenes the review visit in consultation with the dean (for faculty-based academic units), the head of the academic unit and panel members. During the visit the panel will meet with interested parties, tour facilities, receive submissions and requests for interviews, and at the end of the visit, present preliminary findings. A typical calendar of events is made available. During the visit the panel meets with interested parties, tours facilities, receives submissions and requests for interviews, and at the end of the visit, presents preliminary findings.

### **Review Report**

The chair of the review panel working closely with the secretary drafts the review report which must be submitted to the dean (for faculty-based academic units) or head of unit (for faculty-based academic units) within two months of the review visit.

The review report is usually between 8,000 –10,000 words with up to 10 pages of appendices. There is an executive summary of no more than 3 pages. Major headings normally follow the terms of reference and self-review document, with one or two paragraphs for each finding. A standard format for the report should be made available.

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### **Review Implementation Plan**

On receiving the review report, the dean, in consultation with the head of unit, or in the case of a faculty review, in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research):

- Decides priorities, develops an implementation plan (and if necessary modifies the Faculty Operational Plan) As well as prioritising actions, the implementation plan assigns responsibilities, assesses resource implications and provides a time scale for implementation;
- Reports major issues or findings to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research);
- Reports major issues or findings to relevant university and faculty committees;
- Has ongoing consultation with the relevant head of unit, or in the case of a faculty review, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), concerning progress of the implementation plan;
- Reports to the Vice-Chancellor on the status of reviews and progress on major issues, normally within the context of the annual performance review.

### **Reach**

As discussed in other contexts, the 'reach' of review policies and procedures is important. For instance, while the Academic Review examples above (oriented to Academic Units) can be adapted for research Institutes and Centres, there will be some differences in Support Service orientated review policy and procedures. Space limits discussion of these other review areas but examples are available of, e.g., University Support Service Review processes, through University websites. Reach may therefore include:

- Institutional review (mostly the institutional self-review prior to a quality agency audit);
- Academic level: faculty and/or department reviews;
- Course or discipline reviews;
- Research and research training unit reviews;
- Support services unit reviews;
- Campus reviews;
- Trans-national unit reviews;
- Theme reviews (which cross administrative units) such as Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Research, Research Training, Occupational Health and Safety, Equity, Workforce Planning etc.

In terms of academic review, it should be noted that the unit of review discussed has been that of organisational units of the institution and that all aspects of the unit's operation are reviewed (e.g. teaching and learning, research and research training, support services, organisation and leadership etc). Some universities, in particular in the past, concentrated on Course (Programme) or Discipline Reviews. The trend has been away from these and to organisational unit reviews, although some institutions still undertake the former and some undertake both. The subsequent section provides more information about course reviews.

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## 5. Course Reviews

Where Course (or Programme) Reviews remain, much of the Policy and Procedures for such reviews replicates that for Academic Review outlined above. However, it is interesting to note the following in the examples below of common characteristics of Course Reviews, in particular the:

- Importance, centrality and holistic nature of the student experience;
- Relationship between Course Review and Academic Review;
- Relationship between Course Review and Professional Accreditation.

Let's take a look at some of the features of course review:

### a. Purpose

The purpose of course review is to assist faculties and the university to assure the quality of academic courses and to learn from this essentially developmental process in order to effect improvement.

### b. Scope of Course Review

Course review is an important part of the comprehensive review process by which the university systematically evaluates its activities and operations. The integrated nature of the student experience means that all aspects of a course are best considered at the same time. Course reviews therefore include an entire academic program (degree, diploma or certificate) in the context of its regulations, overall structure and management, the units, major and minor sequences and clinical experiences, practicums, projects and work experience that make up the course. The major focus of a course review is the manner in which the range of units, sequences and other activities offered (often by many schools and departments from more than one faculty and at a variety of locations) contribute to the course. The student experience of the course is central to course review.

### c. Relationship between Academic Review and Course Review

Academic Review has the operational unit of the faculty, school or department as its focus. Academic review considers teaching and learning, research, professional and community activities and internal organisation, management, quality assurance and improvement of the operational unit. Course review is a more limited activity having as its focus a particular course or program. Course Reviews feed into and inform academic reviews. Depending on organisational arrangements within particular faculties, some courses may be more appropriate for review at faculty level and some at school or departmental level.

### d. Terms of Reference

Typical terms of reference for Course Reviews generally cover the quality and adequacy of:

- Course rationale and structure:
  - Course philosophy and overall aims
  - Alignment of course with faculty and university strategic directions and plans
  - Course objectives and the appropriateness of teaching and assessment methods to meet objectives
  - Flexibility including modes of entry, instruction and assessment
  - Adequacy, relevance and appropriateness of course regulations
  - Overall coherence of course structure
  - Alignment of course with market demand
- Course management including planning and quality assurance and improvement:



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- Processes and procedures for ensuring effective course co-ordination and monitoring across contributing faculties, schools and departments
- Processes for identifying, reviewing and remedying problems
- Appropriateness and effectiveness of course delivery including use of flexible learning methods
- Processes and procedures for ensuring a sound business plan and appropriate strategic cost management
- Processes and procedures for liaising with library, IT and learning support staff
- Processes and procedures for monitoring the continued relevance of the course to students, professional bodies, employers and other interested parties
- Mechanisms for incorporating feedback from students, graduates, professional bodies, employers and other interested parties into course structure, design and delivery
- Processes and structures for ensuring equitable delivery across campuses or modes
- Equity objectives
- Staff training and development as appropriate
- Appropriateness and effectiveness of promotional material
- Units and major and minor sequences:
  - Appropriateness of the range and scope of units offered
  - Relevance of subjects to industry and professional needs
  - The appropriateness and range of major and minor sequences
  - Processes and procedures for ensuring that major and minor sequences and individual units accurately reflect the objectives of the course
  - Processes and procedures for introducing, revising, resourcing and rationalising units and sequences which contribute to the course, in order to ensure effective and efficient use of resources
  - Outcomes from regular unit reviews
  - Processes and procedures for ensuring consistency across campuses and across different teaching modes
  - Processes and procedures for ensuring that students acquire the institution's values and graduate attributes during their course
- Student profile:
  - Effectiveness of processes for recruiting students to the course
  - Processes for ensuring a range of students is recruited to the course including local, international and equity group students
- Teaching, learning and assessment:
  - Mechanisms for encouraging students to develop intellectual independence and life-long learning skills
  - Mechanisms for monitoring and sustaining excellence in teaching , learning and assessment in the course
  - Processes and procedures for encouraging and supporting innovative teaching and assessment methods in the course
  - Appropriate use of different teaching and learning approaches including use of technology
  - Processes and procedures for ensuring effective monitoring of student progress and achievement
  - Processes and procedures for providing students with regular and effective feedback
  - Provision of appropriate learning support for students
  - appropriateness and effectiveness of course advising

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- Processes and procedures for ensuring comparable experiences and resources for students on different campuses and in different delivery modes
- Human, physical, IT resources, health and safety issues:
  - Adequacy of academic, administrative, professional and technical staffing profile in relation to course objectives, teaching methods and desired learning outcomes
  - Appropriate provision of teaching and laboratory accommodation and equipment
  - Appropriate provision of library services
  - Appropriate provision of IT services
  - Appropriate provision and utilisation of support services
  - Processes and procedures for addressing health and safety
- Professional and community relations:
  - Appropriate input to the course from professional and community sources
  - Student participation in appropriate community and professional activities

Finally, if a course has external professional accreditation, faculties may choose to extend the external accreditation to include all the above terms of reference, or to incorporate results from external accreditation as part of their course review process.

## 6. Discussion

### Discussion: Review

Consider the following key questions regarding Review at your own (or choose one) institution:

- How adequate is the policy and procedure for Review including: what elements will be reviewed, how, on what timescale?
- Is there an easily accessible schedule for reviews to be undertaken; is there an easily accessible repository for Review Reports?
- Who has the ultimate line-management responsibility for ensuring that Review policy and procedure is followed? What Committee(s) have responsibility for Reviews?
- Having now studied review processes in some detail, what improvements would you recommend to your own (or choose an) institution?

## 7. Summary

### This topic covered the following main points:

- The purposes of review policy are, for example, to:
  - assist the university to assure itself of the quality of its academic organisational units;
  - utilise learning from this developmental process in order to effect ongoing quality improvement.
- An example of review procedures include preparation of self-review document, selection of review panel, publicise review and call for submission.
- Academic Review has the operational unit of the faculty, school or department as its focus. Academic review considers teaching and learning, research, professional and community activities and internal organisation, management, quality assurance and improvement of the operational unit. Course review is a more limited activity having as its focus a particular course or program. Course Reviews feed into and inform academic reviews.

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Depending on organisational arrangements within particular faculties, some courses may be more appropriate for review at faculty level and some at school or departmental level.