



University College Dublin

Guidance for the Review Group Chair/Deputy and Members

(Academic Review)

June 2014

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Note: These Guidelines will be updated annually to reflect good practice and lessons learned from earlier reviews.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide assistance and general information to Review Groups, in carrying out their functional responsibility in assessing the quality of the activities of the unit under review, and making recommendations for improvement, based on a consideration of the self-assessment documentation and the outcome of the site visit.

Review Group members should also be familiar with the *Guidelines for Internal Period Review (Academic Unit)*.

For information, quality reviews of University units are undertaken in accord with Irish Statutory requirements: Universities Act (1997); Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012; the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2007); and the Framework for Quality in Irish Universities (2007).

The Role of the Review Group Chair (and as appropriate, Deputy Chair)

The key functions of the Review Chair are:

- to read the Self-assessment Report prepared by the unit and any other supporting documentation
- in consultation with the UCD Quality Office, to confirm the site visit timetable
- in consultation with the UCD Quality Office, to allocate aspects of the review to each Review Group member
- to ensure preparation of initial discussion points on the advance documentation for circulation to Review Group members prior to the review site visit
- to participate in a review visit to the unit, contribute to and comment on the judgements being made by the reviewers
- to chair meetings of the Review Group (alternating with the Deputy Chair, as appropriate) and ensure the review process is conducted in a spirit of co-operation and constructive dialogue; and insofar as it is possible, to keep all meetings on schedule
- to provide input to the Review Group based on knowledge and experience of the quality assurance processes and structures in the university
- to assist the reviewers with any other information pertinent to the review
- to liaise, as appropriate, with the UCD Quality Office on any relevant matters raised by the Review Group
- under no circumstances should any Review Group member communicate any aspect of the Review Group discussions and/or Review Group Report content to anyone (other than the UCD Quality Office)

staff or UCD Registrar/Deputy President) prior to the final Report being circulated to the unit by the UCD Quality Office

- to oversee the preparation of brief summary feedback (normally delivered by one or both external reviewers, or in certain circumstances by the Review Group Chair) to unit staff on the principal findings of the Review Group at the end of the review visit (commendations and recommendations for improvement)
- to ensure that review members complete a first draft of their section(s) of the Report (including key points for commendation and recommendations for improvement) prior to completion of the site visit. (note: recommendations made should have a reference point in the Report narrative)
- to agree timelines for the receipt of each reviewers draft section of the Report
- to take responsibility, with the assistance of the Deputy Chair, for the co-ordination and initial editing of the Review Group Report, liaising with other members of the Review Group to finalise the Report
- to sign-off the final version of the Review Group Report and forward it to the UCD Quality Office
- to consider, in consultation with the UCD Quality Office, (and if appropriate, a member of the Academic Council Committee on Quality), the Unit's submission under its Quality Improvement Plan

The Role of the Review Group Members

The responsibilities of reviewers include:

- reading and analysing the Self-assessment Report prepared by the Unit and any other documentation sent in advance of a review (it should be noted that the Self-assessment Report is confidential to the Review Group)
- preparing initial points on the advance documentation for circulation to Review Group members prior to the review site visit
- identifying and communicating to the UCD Quality Office any additional requests for information/documentation
- participating in a review visit to the University in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence
- drawing conclusions, making recommendations and judgements on the academic standards achieved, the quality of the learning provision, and management of research performance and activity
- preparation and completion of the allocated draft sections of the Review Group Report and commenting on the overall draft of the Review Group Report, as agreed with the Chair
- respecting University protocols on Confidentiality, and Dignity and Respect

- under no circumstances should any Review Group member communicate any aspect of the Review Group discussions and/or Review Group Report content to anyone (other than the UCD Quality Office staff or UCD Registrar/Deputy President) prior to the final Report being circulated to the unit by the UCD Quality Office
- being available for the whole period of the review site visit and committing to complete all processes of the review once they have embarked on it

Reviewers will evaluate the Self-assessment Report provided by the School, for example:

- content of the curriculum and its suitability for achieving the intended learning outcomes
- the assessment processes designed for the pathways and whether they are suitable to assess the intended learning outcomes
- the overall standards of pathways and effectiveness of the procedures used for their monitoring and enhancement
- the management of research and the quality of the research activity
- overall student achievement, including progression to employment; the contributions made to student achievement by the quality of teaching; opportunities for learning; the academic support provision; and learning resources and their deployment (including staffing arrangements)
- the teaching delivered by staff and how it contributes to learning by students and helps achieve the intended learning outcomes
- the admission, induction and progression of students in the pathways and the academic support provided
- the available learning resources and their use in supporting the pathways and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes
- the procedures used for the maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality

Review skills required include the ability to:

- conduct meetings and interviews with staff, students and external stakeholders
- write succinctly and coherently
- meet tight timescales and deadlines
- work effectively as a member of a team
- work courteously and professionally

- maintain confidentiality
- communicate electronically, including emails, attachments and word processed documents and files
- communicate to the Unit the key commendations, recommendations and findings of the Review Group

Arrangements Prior to the Site Visit

The Quality Office will arrange accommodation, travel and flights, where relevant, for individual members of the Review Group. Any additional expenses related to the review should be forwarded to the Quality Office for reimbursement.

Review documentation will be forwarded by the Quality Office to the Review Group members, approximately three/four weeks prior to the site visit. This documentation will include the unit's self-assessment report, appendices, a draft timetable for the review, Guidelines for Review, and any other relevant information.

The Review Group are requested to consider and analyse the self-assessment report, and to identify any additional information required. The draft timetable (see Appendix 1), organised by the Quality Office in consultation with the chair of the Review Group and the chair of the unit's review co-ordinating committee, should be considered in the light of the self-assessment report, and any additional categories of staff and/or students identified to meet with the Review Group. Any requests for additional meetings or documentation from the Review Group should be communicated through the Quality Office.

The Chair of the Review Group will provisionally allocate aspects of the review to each Review Group member (for example, staff and facilities or research activity). Normally the external review members will cover the following aspects:

- Staff and Facilities
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Curriculum Development and Review
- Research Activity

As part of the preparation phase, Review Group members should prepare initial points on the advance documentation, and on those aspects assigned to them (see Appendices 2 and 3). The initial points will be circulated to Group members, approximately one-two weeks prior to the review. These summaries have proved to be very useful in stimulating initial discussions at the pre-visit briefing meeting (see Appendix 2).

Reviewers are asked throughout their engagement with the review process to observe the UCD Quality Review: Reviewer Code of Conduct (see Appendix 4).

The Site Visit

Aim of the Site Visit

The aim of the site visit is to clarify and verify details in the self-assessment report, and for staff, students and other stakeholders to meet with the Review Group. The Review Group have a collective responsibility to gather, verify and test judgements evidenced in the self-assessment report and the site visit meetings. It is a function of the Chair's role to ensure that this objective is achieved. An overview should be provided of the present status of the unit, with a comment on each core aspect of the unit's activities, and how well the aims and objectives of the unit are fulfilled, having regard to available resources. The Review Group should also check the suitability of the working environment, as well as identifying examples of good practice, outlining critical resource limitations, commenting on the unit's plans for improvement, and making recommendations for improvement. The report will also include the extent to which the unit is aligned with the University's strategic objectives and structures. The Review Group report will reflect the collective conclusions of the group.

Preliminary Meeting

The Review Group will meet on the evening of the first day of the site visit to discuss the Self-assessment Report, the structure of the visit, to review the feedback summaries of each reviewer, as previously circulated, and to confirm the agenda for review meetings. While each reviewer will have responsibility for specific aspects of the review, each member may contribute to these aspects and will have an opportunity to comment on preliminary drafts of the Review Group Report. The final draft will reflect, insofar as it is possible, the collective views of the group. Working meals, including those in the hotel, should, for example, be used for an exchange of general views on the findings up to that point, issues still to be clarified, and further information to be reviewed.

Site visit meetings

During the site visit, the Review Group usually meets with the co-ordinating committee, the head of unit, members of staff, past and present students, users of the unit, and external stakeholders, as appropriate. Staff from the unit under review, may be anxious about the review exercise, and efforts should be made to ensure that (within reason) they are made to feel as comfortable as possible when meeting with the Review Group. The Review Group will also visit the facilities that support the activities of the unit. Any requests for additional visits or revisits should be communicated through the Quality Office.

Site visit meetings are used to evaluate the evidence gathered; to form preliminary judgements; to identify aspects of provision that are considered commendable and to identify areas for improvement. The working dinners will also provide opportunity for the Review Group to discuss, review and confirm findings.

Experience has shown that sometimes it is beneficial for the Review Group to meet with individual members of the unit, where this is requested.

Meetings with students are confidential between those attending and the Review Group. No unit staff member should attend these meetings.

In line with University policy, members of all committees and groups should adhere to the University policy on Dignity and Respect in all transactions associated with the review process. Any issues that arise during the site visit, may be subject to existing University policy or procedures, and should be reported, in the first instance, to the Quality Office (see also Appendix 5).

Exit Presentation

Normally one (sometimes two) of the extern Review Group members will make the exit presentation to the unit. This will simply be a presentation of the preliminary findings (for example, bullet point headlines on points of commendation and improvement) of the Review Group and will not involve discussion with the Unit. It should be made clear to the unit that these findings may be modified, by the Review Group, in the light of subsequent reflection and discussion.

The Review Group Report

In keeping with the formative nature of the process, Review Groups are requested to express their recommendations in a positive, constructive manner that encourages quality enhancement, and the ongoing development of the unit under review.

The structure of the Review Group Report should broadly reflect that of the unit's self-assessment report (see Appendix 6). Comment (in short paragraphs) should be analytical rather than descriptive and refer to either source documentation or direct observations. No comments should be attributed to individuals. **Please note that recommendations should have a reference point in the Report narrative.** This is important, in order to give the recommendations that may be made, some context. For example, if there is a recommendation that 'institutional procedures should be followed", in the Report narrative, there should also be an indication of the specific instance where this has not happened and reference made to the named procedures, in question. Examples of UCD Review Group Reports may be found at www.ucd.ie/quality. Hard copy examples of RG Reports will also be available during the site visit.

The Review Group Report is an independent document prepared by the Review Group members. Rarely is there any requirement to undertake any editing other than, for example, reformatting or correction of factual errors. These minor edits are undertaken in consultation with the Review Group Chair. In exceptional circumstances, however, there may be a need for more considered reflection regarding a phrase or a small section of the Review Group Report, in order to ensure, for example, the judicious use of language and/or appropriate alignment with presentational and drafting guidelines. In these exceptional instances, the UCD Quality Office will, in consultation with the Review Group Chair, discuss alternative presentation/phrasing options. As appropriate, a similar consultation process involving the relevant Head of School will also apply to draft School responses to Review Group Reports. In the event that agreement cannot be reached on alternative presentation/phrasing, the issue(s) will be referred to a panel of former Review Group Chairs/Deputy Chairs, who will adjudicate. A final appeal may be made, via the UCD Quality Office, to the Academic Council Committee on Quality (excluding UCD Quality Office staff) which will make a final determination on the issue(s). In the event where a unit does not agree with the content and/or recommendations in the report, the appropriate right to reply should be addressed in the Quality Improvement Plan under the various headings outlined under section 15 of the *UCD Guidelines for Internal Periodic Review*.

Report Completion

At the end of the site visit, the Review Chair should ensure that the Review Group has prepared a reasonable first draft. An agreed timeline for finalising the report and sign-off by the Review Group should be set and communicated to the Quality Office. Typically, a final report should be completed no later than **8 weeks** after the site visit, and should be sent to the Quality Office, with letters/emails from all Review Group members, confirming that this is the agreed report.

It is also important that the Review Group should not contact the unit with regard to any matter relating to the review. Any request should be communicated through the Quality Office.

The Quality Office will circulate the report to the unit's co-ordinating committee, for correction of factual error and a response. A copy of the final report will then be circulated to UMT, UCD Governing Authority, the President, the Registrar, College Principal, Head of unit, unit staff, and the members of the Review Group. The report will be published on the UCD Quality Office website, following acceptance by the UCD Governing Authority. The relevant College Principal/Vice President will also make a brief presentation to the UCD University Management Team, when the Review Group Report is considered.

Quality Improvement and Implementation of the Review Group Report Recommendations

Follow-up is an integral part of the quality review process. The decisions on improvement, which are made in the follow-up to self-assessment and review, provides a framework within which each unit can continue to work towards the goal of developing and fostering a quality culture in the University.

Each Unit is required to prepare a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which addresses all recommendations made by the Review Group. This Plan and progress on its implementation is monitored by the University via College, UMT and the Quality Office.

Appendix 1



Indicative Review Visit Timetable

[Name of School – Dates of visit]

DAY 1: DATE

Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit

- 17.00-19.00 RG meet at hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days – **RG and UCD Quality Office only**
- 19.30 Dinner hosted for the RG by the Registrar and Deputy President or nominee – **RG, UCD Deputy President and UCD Quality Office only**

DAY 2: DATE

Venue: Room/Building

- 09.00-09.30 Private meeting of Review Group (RG)
- 09.30 – 10.15 RG meet with **College Principal**
- 10.15-10.30 Break
- 10.30 –11.15 RG meet with **Head of School**

Name

-
-
-
-

Position/Role

-
-
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-

- 11.15 – 11.30 Tea/coffee break

11.30 – 12.15 RG meet with **SAR Coordinating Committee**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

12.15-12.45 Break – RG review key observations and prepare for lunch time meeting

12.45-13.45 **Working lunch (buffet)** – meeting with employers (and/or other external stakeholders)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

13.45-14.15 RG review key observations

14.15-15.30 RG meet with **representative group of academic staff** – primary focus on Teaching and Learning, and Curriculum issues.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

15.30-15.45 RG tea/coffee break

15.45-16.30 RG meet with **support staff representatives** (e.g. administrative / technical etc)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

16.30-16.35 Break

16.35-17.05 RG meet **UCD Programme Dean(s)**

17.05-17.15 Break

17.15-18.15 **Tour of facilities**

18.15 RG depart

DAY 3: DATE

Venue: Room/Building

- 08.45-09.15 Private meeting of the RG
- 09.15-09.55 RG meet e.g. **Head of Academic Services, UCD Library**
- 09.55-10.10 Break
- 10.10-11.00 RG meet with a representative group of **postgraduate students** (taught and research) **and recent graduates** (PG and UG) – these may be organised as parallel meetings

<u>Name</u>	<u>Year/Programme</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

- 11.00-11.15 RG tea/coffee break
- 11.15-12.15 RG meet with the **School Research Committee** (and other staff members nominated by the HoS)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

- 12.15-12.30 Break - RG review key observations
- 12.30-13.15 Lunch – Review Group only
- 13.15-14.00 RG meet with **representative group of undergraduate students**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Year/Programme</u>
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

- 14.00-14.15 RG private meeting - review key observations
- 14.15-15.00 RG meet with **College Finance Manager** and **Head of School** to outline School's financial situation
- 15.00-15.15 Break

15.15-16.15	RG meet with recently appointed members of staff										
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<u>Name</u>	<u>Position/Role</u>										
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16.15-17.15	RG available for private individual meetings with staff										
17.15-18.00	RG private meeting – review key observations/findings										
18.00	RG depart										

DAY 4: DATE

Venue: Room/Building

09.00-09.30	Private meeting of RG
09.30-10.30	(Optional) RG meet with Head of School and/or specified University staff to clarify any outstanding issues <u>or</u> begin preparing draft RG Report
10.30-10.45	Break
10.45-12.30	RG continue preparing draft RG Report
12.30-13.15	Lunch
13.15-15.30	RG finalise first draft of RG Report and feedback commendations/recommendations
15.30-15.45	Break
15.45-16.00	RG meet with Head of School to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations
16.15	Exit presentation to <u>all available staff of the unit</u> – usually made by an extern member of the Review Group (or other member of the Group, as agreed) summarising the principal commendations/recommendations of the Review Group
16.45	Review Group depart

Appendix 2

Preliminary Comments on the Self-assessment Report

Reviewers are asked to comment on their impression of the Self-assessment Report (SAR) as part of the process of individually and then collectively identifying general themes, issues and areas for further investigation or clarification. A template will be provided by the Quality Office for completion by reviewers prior to the visit. This process should result in a shared list of issues that will form the basis of discussions at the initial planning meeting of the Review Group.

The range of questions asked by reviewers when reading the SAR for the first time might include:

- who was on the Co-ordinating Committee?
- what evidence is provided on the range of staff, students and stakeholders consulted?
- what timeline was it prepared on?
- is it overly descriptive?
- does it provide a degree of genuine self-criticism and self-reflection?
- does it provide evidence of any shortcomings or issues of concern in relation to the area under review?
- does it provide evidence of any shortcomings or issues of concern in the University's management of quality assurance and enhancement?
- does it provide evidence on how it benchmarks itself against institutional, national and international reference points?
- does it provide evidence of a commitment to quality assurance and to ongoing quality enhancement?
- does it explicitly identify any issues that the University would welcome the Review Group exploring?
- Are there examples of good practice?

Appendix 3

University College Dublin

Template for Preliminary Comments

Quality Review of _____

Reviewer: _____

Review Aspect: _____

1. Positive/Good Practice Aspects

-

2. Apparent weaknesses and/or areas of concern

-

3. General Observations

-

4. Issues which need exploration during discussion

-

5. Additional data required

-

6. Opportunities/recommendations which the unit has identified for future work

Appendix 4

UCD Quality Review: Reviewer Code of Conduct

Reviewers are asked throughout their engagement with the review process to observe the following code of conduct:

Personal Conduct throughout the UCD Review Process

- be open, honest and transparent throughout the process, operating with impartiality and integrity
- be tolerant, courteous and constructive
- work co-operatively with your fellow reviewers under the direction of the Chair
- do not disclose any personal, confidential or commercially sensitive information regarding the University or the unit under review, outside the context of the Review process
- keep clear and accurate notes throughout the review process to ensure the report findings are based on gathered, accountable evidence
- identify and declare any conflicts of interest that might arise at any point of the review process to the Chair or the UCD Quality Office
- keep all electronic and hard copy documents and information secure and confidential. Shred, delete or return any unwanted documents at the end of the process to the UCD Quality Office for safe disposal
- adhere to the University's Policies & Procedures as addressed by the Chair/Quality Office representative

Continuity of Conduct – Post Review

- contribute to the production of the final report in a timely and constructive manner to ensure delivery of the report by the Chair to the UCD Quality Office within 8 weeks of the Main Review Visit
- avoid disclosing any unpublished information regarding the University or the review process in public, orally or in writing, without the written permission of UCD
- the review reports are written jointly by the Review Group but the intellectual property rights are retained by UCD. Only the UCD President or other designated staff members or Chair are authorised to make any public comment or statement on the outcomes of the process, if requested. Any approach from the press should be directed to the University

Appendix 5

Procedure to address issues of concern that may arise at Review Group Site Visits

Good practice suggests that an appropriate mechanism be in place to ensure that any issues of concern that may arise for a Review Group member, during the conduct of the business of the Group, can be addressed.

A problem will always be best resolved by, and with those, closest to the problem. In this context the following steps apply:

1. A Review Group member with a concern relating to the operation of the Group should in the first instance speak with the chairperson of the Group explaining the matter of concern and seeking a resolution, where that is practicable.
2. Should an appropriate resolution not result from this communication, or if the concern relates to the role of the chairperson, the RG member should then raise the matter with the relevant member of the UCD Quality Office staff, or if unavailable, the Director of Quality.
3. The UCD Registrar and Deputy President shall have the final adjudicating role should resolution not be obtained at earlier stages.

Appendix 6

Indicative Structure of the Review Group Report

Typically, the Review Group Report should broadly discuss the following (not an exhaustive list):

- **Context for Review**

- Membership of Review Group
- Terms of reference
 - The Review Group is required to form an opinion on the 'health' of the unit under review, based primarily on the unit's self-assessment report and site visit meetings. This should be achieved through discussion of the quality of the educational process, its research activity, the needs of students, society and relevant employers.
 - To make suggestions on quality enhancement
- A brief outline of the review method. This should include a comment on the Unit's Self-Assessment Report. Is the report sufficiently critical and analytical? Are the aims clearly articulated and operationalised? Does the Self-assessment Report convey a clear picture of the unit and its activities?

- **Organisation and Management**

Review Group should consider:

- How does the unit organise its activities? Are these structures effective?
- Are the goals and aims clearly articulated in the unit's strategic plan with agreed implementation goals?
- Is the current committee structure satisfactory? Are all staff adequately involved in the formal decision-making process?
- Are current budgetary systems robust and reflect current good practice?

- **Staff and Facilities**

Review Group should consider:

- Is the level of academic staff sufficient to cover all curricular areas? Is the student/staff ratio satisfactory?
- Is the balance between research and teaching activities responsibilities satisfactory?

- Is the level of non-academic staff sufficient?
- Are staff development programmes satisfactory?
- Are student teaching and laboratory facilities adequate?
- Are support facilities available to staff and students adequate?

- **Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

Review Group should consider:

- Are the learning outcomes for each programme clearly stated? Is the curriculum well-balanced? Do students know what is expected of them? Are student workloads appropriate?
- Are the goals and aims articulated in the unit's strategic plan translated in the curriculum?
- Do the teaching methods reflect the content of the curriculum? Are they effective?
- Are the assessment mechanisms used appropriate?
- How effectively do staff use their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?
- Do exams reflect the content of the programme and courses? Is the level of examination satisfactory?
- Is the graduate sufficiently equipped for the labour market?

- **Curriculum Development and Review**

Review Group should consider:

- What mechanisms does the unit use to review its curriculum? Are these adequate?
- Is there evidence that curriculum design and content is informed by recent developments in teaching and learning, and research and scholarship?

- **Research Activity**

Review Group should consider:

- Are the research outcomes clearly articulated?
- Are adequate research facilities in place to support the research activity?
- What are the links between research and teaching?

- How does existing research activities relate to the overall aims of the School and University?
- How is current research activity benchmarked against external reference points?
- How effective is the unit's overall plan for graduate student recruitment?
- Does the rate of research publications reflect the research activity of academic staff?

- **Management of Quality and Enhancement**

Review Group should consider:

- How does the unit review and seek to enhance its activities?
- What evidence is there to indicate the unit has responded to feedback/reflection?
- Does the unit have an effective evaluation system?
- Are students represented on committees within their unit?

- **Support Services**

Review Group should consider:

- Are there sufficient structures in place to support the unit's activities?
- Are there sufficient structures in place to support students?
- What liaison committees exist? Are they effective?

- **External Relations**

Review Group should consider:

- Does the unit participate in exchange programmes?
- Is the unit involved with internationalisation? How effective is it?
- How effective are the unit's links with industry, professional bodies, graduate employers, other academic institutions nationally and internationally and the community?

- **Review Group should Comment on the Unit's Overall Analysis and Recommendations for Improvement**

- **Summary of the Review Groups conclusions**

- **Review Group points for Commendation and Recommendations for Improvement**