



University College Dublin

Guidance for the Review Group Chair/Deputy and Members

(Support Service)

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 (Support Services)*.

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) 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 as 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 School 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 service quality and standards achieved
- 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 Unit, for example, by:

- assessing the coherency of the unit's strategy for the future
- identifying factors which inhibit/enable the delivery of the service(s)
- assessing the performance of the unit against its own planning objectives
- could the organisation of the unit be improved?
- are resources and facilities adequate/optimal?
- is there a process of continuous improvement in service delivery? Is it effective?
- what is the user perspective on service provision?
- how does the unit develop and involve its staff in achieving improvements in service provision?

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

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 requests for additional information. 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 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, planning, organisation and management of resources). Normally the external review members will cover the following aspects:

- Planning, Organisation and Management
- Functions, Activities and Processes
- Management of Resources

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, users of the unit, students, 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 (Tel: 01 716 1036).

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.

If there are meetings with students, these will be confidential between those attending and the Review Group. No unit staff member should attend this meeting.

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 representative/Director of Quality (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 maybe 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 Unit will also apply to draft Unit 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 (see Appendix 7 for example of outline completion timeline). 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 clerical/factual error and initial response (if any). A copy of the final report will then be circulated to the UCD Governing Authority, the President, the Registrar, relevant Vice-President or University Officer, 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 Vice-President/College Principal will also make a brief presentation to the UCD University Management Team when it considers the Review Group Report.

Quality Improvement Plan

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.

The Head of the unit, on receipt of the Review Group Report, will establish a Quality Improvement Committee or similar body, which is broadly representative of staff from the unit. The Quality Improvement Committee will arrange to have a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) drafted within twelve weeks, based on the unit's Self-assessment Report and the Review Group Report findings.

Upon completion, the QIP will be considered by the relevant University officer or Vice-President as appropriate. If satisfied that each recommendation is being addressed appropriately, and that there is sufficient detail in the response, the QIP, with the relevant University officer's or Vice-President's endorsement should be sent to the UCD Quality Office.

Upon receipt of the QIP, the UCD Quality Office will consult the Chair/Deputy Chair of the Review Group, to determine whether the action taken or planned is appropriate in order to address each of the Review Group Report recommendations, and as appropriate will (i) accept the QIP or (ii) seek further information from the unit.

Approximately twelve months after the acceptance of the QIP, each unit will be asked to prepare a progress report on the implementation of the QIP.

Upon receipt of the updated QIP/Progress Report, the UCD Quality Office will convene a progress review meeting, which will normally include the Registrar and/or Chair of the ACCQ (who will act as chair); the Chair/Deputy Chair of the Review Group; the UCD Director of Quality (or Deputy); and as appropriate, a member of the ACCQ.

Appendix 1



Typical Timetable for a Review Visit to a Support Service Unit

[Name of Unit – Dates of visit]

Please note that this timetable may be amended to reflect the specific requirements of the unit under review and/or the Review Group.

Day 1

Pre-Visit Briefing Prior to Site Visit – venue off-campus

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 17.30-19.00 | Review Group and UCD Quality Office only meet at hotel to review preliminary issues and to confirm work schedule and assignment of tasks for the following two days |
| 19.30 | Review Group and UCD Quality Office only - Dinner hosted by senior UCD Officer |

Day 2

Venue on-campus

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 08.45-09.30 | Private meeting of Review Group |
| 09.30-10.15 | Review Group meet with member of UCD University Management Team with responsibility for unit |
| 10.15-10.30 | Coffee Break |
| 10.30-11.30 | Review Group meet with Head of Unit |
| 11.30-11.40 | Break |
| 11.40-12.40 | Meeting with Self-assessment Report Co-ordinating Committee |
| 12.40-13.30 | Working lunch for Review Group |
| 14.00-17.00 | Meetings with representative selection of stakeholder groups (including academic staff; students; central unit support staff; external stakeholders) |

17.00-17.30 Review Group meeting to review findings to date

17.30 Review Group departs

Day 3

Venue on-campus

08.30-09.00 Private meeting of Review Group

09.00-10.30 Tour of key facilities

10.30- 10.45 Coffee Break

10.45-13.15 Meetings with **functional groups from within unit**

13.00-14.00 Working lunch for Review Group

14.00-15.15 Meeting with **individual staff** – by request to the Quality Office (10 minute sessions)

15.15-15.30 Coffee Break

15.30-16.30 Meetings with **key staff from UCD central support services**

16.30-17.30 Review Group meeting to review findings to date

17.30 Review Group departs

Day 4

Venue on-campus

08.45-09.15 Review Group private meeting

09.15-09.45 Review Group meet with **Head of Unit** to clarify any issues

09.45-10.45 Review Group prepare first draft of Review Group Report and extract key provisional points of commendation and recommendations for improvement for exit presentation

10.15-10.30 Coffee Break

10.30-13.00 Review Group continue to prepare first draft of Review Group Report

13.00-13.45 Lunch

13.45-15.00	Review Group finalise first draft of Review Group Report and exit presentation. Exit presentation made by extern(s) members (or other member of Review Group, as agreed) – and confirm arrangements for Report completion and deadline.
15.00-15.15	Break
15.15-15.30	Review Group appraise Head of Unit to feedback initial outline commendations and findings
15.30-16.00	Exit presentation to all available staff of the Unit
16.00	Review Group departs

Appendix 2

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 3

Preliminary Comments on the Self-assessment Report

Reviewers are asked to identify comments, queries and concerns arising from their first impressions of the Self-assessment Report (SAR) and begin the process of individually and then collectively identifying general themes, issues and areas for further investigation or clarification. 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?
- were a 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 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 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
- avoid anything that could be construed as impropriety or a form of bribery
- 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

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:

- **Context for Review**
- **Introduction/overview of the unit**
- **Planning, Organisation and Management**
- **Functions, Activities and Processes**
- **Management of Resources**
- **Unit Specific Section(s) as appropriate**
- **Overall Analysis and Commendations/Recommendations**

Appendix 7

Typical Outline Timeline for Completion of the RG Report

1. Friday X Review Site Visit concludes and date is set for the initial draft sections.
2. + 1 week Draft Report sections returned to Review Chair (or designated reviewer) to compile and undertake initial edit. UCD Quality Office will format and number paragraphs.
3. + 2 weeks Next version of the Report is circulated to Review Group members (cc UCD Quality Office) for further editing. This step is repeated as necessary.
4. + 4 weeks When Review Group members are prepared to 'sign-off' on the Report, it is forwarded, via the Chair, to the UCD Quality Office. The UCD Quality Office will ask the unit under review to correct factual errors.
5. + 8 weeks Upon receipt of unit feedback, the UCD Quality Office will correct factual errors. If no outstanding issues remain, an updated Report is sent to the Chair for final sign off and copies sent to Review Group members. The Report is then final.