



University College Dublin

Guidance for the Review Group Chair/Deputy and Members

(Support Service)

**UCD Quality Office
February 2018 v. 5.0**

Contents

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction | 3 |
| The Role of the Review Group Chair | 3 |
| The Role of Review Group Members | 4 |
| Arrangements Prior to the Site Visit | 6 |
| The Site Visit | 7 |
| The Review Group Report | 8 |
| Appendix 1 – Typical Timetable for Review Visit to a Support Service Unit | 10 |
| Appendix 2 – Template for Preliminary Comments | 13 |
| Appendix 3 – Preliminary Comments on the Self-assessment Report | 14 |
| Appendix 4 – UCD Quality Review – Reviewer Code of Conduct | 15 |
| Appendix 5 – Procedure to address issues of concern that may arise during Review Group Site Visits | 16 |
| Appendix 6 – Indicative Structure of the Review Group Report | 17 |
| Appendix 7 – Draft Review Group Report Production Schedule | 18 |

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

1. 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 Unit)* and the *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)*. The UCD Quality Office will provide copies of these documents.

The UCD Quality Guidelines have been informed by a number of documents, including: *Universities Act (1997)*; *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012*; *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016)*; the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)*; *QQI Policy on QA Guidelines (2016)*; *Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions (2016)*; and *QQI Sector Specific Statutory QA Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (2016)*.

2. 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 meet with the University Management Team to discuss the Review Group Report
- 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

3. The Role of the Review Group Members

3.1 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

3.2 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 – is it aligned with the University Strategy?
- identifying factors which inhibit/enable the delivery of the service(s)
- assessing the performance of the unit against its own planning objectives
- the unit's strategic alignment with the University Strategy
- 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?
- general adherence to relevant university policies and procedures, such as: Human Resources; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?
- what is the user perspective on service provision?
- how does the unit develop and involve its staff in achieving improvements in service provision?

3.3 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

4. 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).

5. The Site Visit

5.1 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, the unit's adherence to University policies and procedures generally, such as gender equality, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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).

5.2 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.

6. The Review Group Report

6.1 Report Structure

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. The UCD Quality Office will, however, retain editorial responsibility for the final report to promote consistency. As appropriate, a similar consultation process involving the relevant Head of Unit will also apply to draft Unit responses to Review Group Reports. If a unit does not agree with the content and/or recommendations in a report, a response may be outlined in the Quality Improvement Plan under the headings outlined under section 15 of the *UCD Guidelines for Internal Periodic Review*.

6.2 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, confirming that this is the agreed Review Group Report. See draft Report Production Schedule at Appendix 7.

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 the preparation of a response to the report. A copy of the final report will then be circulated to the UMT, UCD Governing Authority, the Registrar, relevant Vice-President or University Officer, Head of unit, unit staff, and the members of the Review Group. The Review Group Chair will meet with the University Management Team when the Review Group Report is considered. The report will be published on the UCD Quality Office website, following acceptance by the UCD Governing Authority.

6.3 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.

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. Further guidance will be provided on the preparation of the QIP.

Appendix 1



Indicative Timetable for a Review Visit to a Support Service Unit

[Name of Unit – Dates of visit]

Please note:

- (i) Organisation of the draft site visit timetable is the responsibility of the unit under review and should be developed **in consultation with the UCD Quality Office**.
- (ii) This timetable may be amended to reflect the specific requirements of the unit under review and/or the Review Group.
- (iii) There should be a break of **at least 10-15 minutes** between each meeting to facilitate ingress/egress of staff and to allow the reviewers time to prepare for the next meeting.
- (iv) The final site visit timetable will be confirmed by the UCD Quality Office in consultation with the Review Group Chair.

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 site visit – **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 1: Date

Venue: Room/Building

- 09.00-09.30 Private meeting of Review Group (RG)
- 09.30-10.00 RG meet Vice-President with responsibility for the Unit and UCD Bursar
- 10.15-11.00 RG meet with Head of Unit (optional: other members of senior staff/section heads nominated by the Head of Unit may attend)
- 11.15-11.30 RG tea/coffee break
- 11.30-13.00 A series of meetings will take place with unit staff including managerial/administrative/technical and other support staff, as appropriate. This may be broken down by sub-sections, if applicable.
- 13.00-14.00 Lunch – RG only

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 14.00-17.00 | Meetings with representative user groups/stakeholders, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Academic Staff • Professional Staff e.g. HR Partner, Finance Partner, representatives of other University units (if appropriate) • Representatives from relevant University committees e.g. Academic Council committees • External stakeholders e.g. employers/providers/suppliers (if appropriate) |
| 17.00-17.30 | Visit to core facilities of the Unit |
| 17.30-18.00 | Meeting of Review Group to identify any remaining aspects to be clarified and to finalise tasks for the following day |
| 18.00 | RG depart |
| 18.30 | Working dinner for RG at hotel (<i>organised by UCDQO</i>) |

Day 2: Date

Venue: Room/Building

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 09.00-09.30 | Review Group Meet |
| 09.30-10.15 | Meeting with individual staff – 10 minute sessions (by request) |
| 10.30-11.00 | (Optional) Further meetings with University and/or Unit staff as required and/or RG begin work on first draft of Review Group Report |
| 11.00-11.15 | Break |
| 11.15-12.45 | Preparation of draft Report and exit presentation continues |
| 12.45-13.30 | Working lunch for Review Group (including brief discussion with Director of Quality, if required) |
| 13.30-16.15 | Preparation of first draft of Review Group Report |
| 15.15-15.30 | RG meet with relevant Vice-President to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations |
| 15.30-15.45 | Break |
| 15.45-16.00 | RG meet with Head of Unit to feedback initial outline commendations and recommendations |
| 16.00-16.15 | Break |
| 16.30-17.00 | Exit presentation to all available staff of the Unit – 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 |

17.00

RG depart

Day 3: Date

Venue: Room/Building

An extra morning or full day may be required if the unit under review is large or particularly complex, or if further time is needed to finalise the draft RG Report.

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 the unit's engagement with University policies, such as: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Athena SWAN Charter on Gender Equality?
- 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

University College Dublin

Review Group Report Production Schedule

Review Group Report

The structure of the review report is set out in the UCD Guidance for Review Group members. Each member of the Review Group will have responsibility for drafting individual chapter(s) of the report, contributing to the overall draft Report, with the final Report reflecting the collective views of the Group. The full report is published following approval by the UCD Governing Authority. It is essential that deadlines for production of the RG report are adhered to, to ensure that the Unit receives the report in a timely manner following the review.

| Week | Action | Lead |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Final day of site visit | Timeline dates agreed by RG and UCD QO. | RG |
| | First draft of report circulated by RG Chair among RG members with cc to QO representative. <u>Deadline of two weeks</u> for receipt of draft sections, feedback and commentary. | RG Chair |
| Week 3 By Fri, ... | Feedback on draft one and RG members sections updated/re-edited (Comments, Commendations, Recommendations), submitted to RG Chair. | RG members |
| | Amendments made by Chair and 2 nd draft of RG report circulated to members by RG Chair. <u>Deadline of 2 weeks</u> for receipt of comments and amendments. | RG Chair and input from UCD QO |
| Week 5 By Fri, ... | Amendments submitted to RG Chair | RG members |
| Week 6 By Fri, ... | Comments and amendments made to report by RG Chair, final clarifications, if any, made with QO representative. | RG Chair and input from UCD QO |
| Week 7 By Fri, ... | Final version of report circulated to RG for sign off | RG Chair and UCD QO |
| Week 8 By Fri, ... | Chair forwards final report to QO representative | RG Chair |
| Week 9 By Fri, ... | QO representative reviews final draft, amends known factual errors/liaises with RG Chair on any required clarifications. | QO representative |

| | | |
|------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Week 9 By Fri, ... | Report circulated to Unit for factual error and response – 2 week deadline | QO representative |
| Week 11 By Fri, ... | Unit Response to Report added to RG Report | UCD QO |
| Week 12 By Fri, ... | Final RG Report sent to Unit and UMT | UCD QO |