Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

Preparing for programme review – a step-by-step guide for collaborative partners

Note that you can find more detailed guidance and all templates here: https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/resources-for-validation-and-review/

Step 1: Agree a date for the review event. You will need to give yourselves plenty of time. We recommend that teams start the process a full year before the event, if possible.

The date should be agreed in consultation with the Collaborative Academic Lead (ALP) and Governance and Quality Enhancement (GQE). Obviously it has to be a date on which you can get most of your staff team to attend. The review panel will want to meet current students, so make it a time when students will be around.

Step 2: Establish a review team. There is a lot of work involved in reviewing a programme rigorously. It is best to have a small group of people to share out the tasks.

Step 3: Gather evidence. You need information about how the programme has run over the last five years, what the issues have been, what changes have been made, what has gone well and what hasn't been so successful. You should look at:

- External examiner reports (and the team's responses)
- Annual monitoring reports
- Programme committee / team meeting minutes
- Staff student committee minutes
- Joint Board of Studies minutes
- Student feedback (for example, module evaluations, student surveys)
- Report from previous validation and the team's response to conditions

It is advisable to compile the following information if you can:

- Statistics on student numbers and progression
- Statistics on graduate employment
- Feedback from graduates on how they found the course as a whole and how useful it has been to them

- Feedback from employers on how well the course prepares graduates for employment (if applicable)

You may find it useful to hold a focus group with students to explore their experience of the programme in more depth.

Step 4: Review the evidence. What does it tell you? Some of the things you might look out for are:

- What are the best features of the programme that you should keep?
- What are the least successful features of the programme that should maybe be changed?
- Are you confident that the programme is meeting students' needs?
- Have there been any recurring issues that haven't been fully resolved?
- Have external examiners made any suggestions which can be incorporated?
- Have there been any staffing or resource issues?
- Have there been any issues with communication or programme management?
- Has anything changed in the external context (or indeed in your organisation or QMU) that means the programme has to adapt?

Step 5: As a team, discuss the information emerging from the review. What actions can you take to improve the course or how it is run? How could the student experience be improved? Agree any recommendations that arise from the review and any changes you might want to make to either the structure, content or management of the programme.

You should also discuss any proposed changes with the Collaborative Academic Lead and the external examiner.

Note that if you are delivering a franchised programme, much of the detail around modules and content will be fixed and can't be changed. Your Collaborative Academic Lead will be able to advise what is and isn't possible. Even in a franchised programme you can make changes to improve the way the course is run at your institution. For example, you might adjust the order of modules, or improve induction and bridging programmes.

Step 6: Write all this up in a Review Document. It should be obvious to anyone reading the document how your proposed changes follow from the evidence about the operation of the programme since it was last reviewed.

Step 7: Draft a new Validation Document setting out how you want the programme to look for the next few years. This should incorporate any recommended changes coming out from the review. If you are proposing changes to modules, or the introduction of new modules, it is normal for individual module co-ordinators to write their own module descriptors.

Step 8: If you have proposed any changes to the programme, consider what transition arrangements you will need for students who have started under the previous version of the programme but haven't finished yet. Can existing students be transferred over to the new programme? The answer to that may depend on how radically the programme structure is changing.

Step 9: Get ready for the event. The CAL will help to identify a suitable external panellist. GQE will send a draft agenda. It is up to you to make sure staff know the date, time and location of the event. It is also up to you to contact students, graduates or employer representatives as required to meet with the panel.

Step 10: Prepare and collate all the other documents you will need:

- programme specification
- updated student handbook to reflect the new programme
- staff CVs

Remember to send draft documents to the CAL with enough time for them to review the documents and provide feedback. You should agree deadlines with the CAL for submission of drafts of the different documents and the timescales for them to provide feedback to you.

Step 11: Send everything to GQE four weeks before the event. GQE will distribute all the documents to the panel. You will need to make sure the staff team have copies of the new programme document and are fully briefed.

Step 12: It may be helpful to hold a 'mock' review event. If you can find someone to read the documents and pose questions to the team it will help them to practise their answers. Another way of preparing is to go through the Review Checklist and see for yourself whether you have addressed all the points.

Step 13: GQE will appoint a secretary to the event who will contact you regarding logistical arrangements. This includes accommodation for the panel, catering, name plates and sometimes a tour of facilities.

Step 14: A day or two before the event the secretary will send you the 'consolidated checklist'. This contains all the comments made by panellists after their first reading of the documentation. It gives you advance warning of the areas they are likely to ask about on the day.

Step 15: After the event, the secretary will provide you with a summary report. This sets out the conditions (which must be met) and the recommendations (which are advisory but not mandatory). The panel may also make commendations. It will normally take between 3 and 4 weeks for the full report to be sent to you. You have the right to correct anything which is factually inaccurate. You may also contact the secretary if you are unclear as to what is required under any of the conditions.

Step 16: A deadline will be negotiated for the response to conditions. You will need to allow a few weeks to compile the response (depending on how many conditions there are).

Step 17: Submit the response to conditions to the secretary. This will be circulated to the panel who will need some time to consider whether the conditions have all been met. Once final approval has been granted the secretary will contact you.

Step 18: No programme may start until the conditions have been met.