

Guidance DG(iii)

Notes for Internal Subject Review team members

1. Following agreement to participate in an Internal Subject Review (ISR), all review team members will be provided with Section D of the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook which provides full details of the process. These notes are not intended to repeat that information, rather to highlight important parts of the ISR for review team members. (These notes refer primarily to the main ISR event, separate, specific briefings will be given to review team members involved in ISR visits to collaborating partners in the UK and Overseas by Academic Quality & Standards and review team chairs at the time of visits).

In advance of the ISR event

2. It is important that review team members note the timescale of the event and provide the required inputs to allow proper preparation. In particular, review team members should provide the following, two weeks prior to the ISR event, having read the contextual document and its accompanying documentation:
 - a provisional list of key issues that they wish to discuss with the subject team (this will be collated with issues raised by other review team members and provided to the subject team in advance). This does not in any way preclude raising other matters at a later stage if necessary;
 - any additional documentation that the subject team should provide at the time of the event;
 - proposals for the sample of module boxes that should be available at the time of the event (the requests of all review team members will be collated and approved by the review team chair)
3. It is understood that review team members will wish to reflect their own interests and expertise in providing feedback prior to the event. However, it is hoped that they will also view the advance material as broadly as possible

Specific roles in the ISR event

4. Whilst it is essential that the conclusions of the ISR are agreed by the whole review team, it is understood that individual review team members will not be able, or have the expertise, to scrutinise all of the evidence in detail. In order to make effective use of time, the review team chair will agree with review team members their specific roles and responsibilities. Normally this will be done at the first private meeting of the event so that all review team members take an overview of all of the advance material prior to the event. It is understood that external subject specialists will make different contributions than those of internal non-subject specialists, who may be more familiar with University procedures. External review team members are likely to take the lead on their areas of the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, student work, the student experience, appropriateness of resources etc. Internal review team members may take the lead on compliance with University procedures policies and strategies.

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5. It should be stressed that although there is a range of topics to be covered in an ISR, the agenda for any particular event is set by review team members. ISR is an evidence based procedure. If the evidence is clear there may be no reason for discussion with the subject team. The agenda should focus on matters of concern, areas that need clarification and identification of good practice. Review team members should not feel constrained in any way in proposing agenda items for the consideration of the review team. It is the role of the Chair to collate advance agendas, steer the ISR and manage the process; not to impose an agenda on the review team.

Contributions from the ISR review team

6. All review team members have equal rights to input to the discussions, agendas for meetings and final conclusions which are reached by consensus. It is the role of the Chair, supported by the ISR Clerk (eg. for technical advice) to support the review team in reaching consensus and provide guidance as necessary.

Conduct of Meetings

7. Apart from the student meeting, where a standard agenda is provided for guidance, the agenda for meetings is at the discretion of the review team. Wherever possible the agenda (at least in outline) should be provided for the subject team in advance and also reviewed at the start of each meeting. The review team should decide who should Chair each meeting; it is not required that the ISR chair should chair all meetings, although this may be a practical solution that allows other review team members to concentrate on the dialogue with the meeting participants. Regardless of the person chairing the meeting, individual review team members should take responsibility for the various agenda items for the meetings (decided in advance).
8. At the start of each meeting the Chair should ensure that introductions are made (including roles and responsibilities of all participants). As far as is possible the meetings should be conducted as a dialogue and discussion amongst peers, avoiding questions of fact and an inquisitorial approach wherever possible (although some clarification of fact and procedure may be required in some instances). Although review teams may be satisfied with the evidence they have viewed, it is worth considering asking questions such as “why do you do x that way?” to test the coherence and clarity of purpose of the subject team. Always allow time at the end of the meetings for participants to review the meeting, correct apparent misunderstandings and add items of importance to them.
9. The review team clerk will make notes of all meetings and it should not be necessary for review team members to take their own detailed notes. Immediately after each meeting the review team should review the meeting and record “bullet points”. More generally, review team members should always keep records of important sources of evidence that might contribute to the final report (whether from documentation or meetings). The ISR Clerk will require this information to produce the final evidence based report.

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10. Finally, if the contextual document is self-critical and evaluative, the subject team may have raised issues for discussion with the ISR review team. It is important that these should be addressed during the event.

Reaching Conclusions

11. The format of the conclusions of the ISR are detailed in section D, paragraphs 71-76 of the Academic Quality & Standards Handbook. The Chair and Clerk will guide the review team in reaching appropriate conclusions. Two general points need to be made here:
 - it is often relatively easy to compile a list of recommendations and, perhaps, more difficult to compile a list of good and commendable practices. In this context, commendable practice demonstrates excellence in its context without the implication that it can be transferred, while good practice has the capacity to be disseminated
 - the review team should carefully distinguish between matters that can be addressed to the subject team and other matters that should be addressed to the University

Follow up to the ISR

12. It is easy to feel that the role of the review team member is completed at the end of the event. However, we would ask review team members to read and comment on draft reports of events and agree them. It is the written report that is widely disseminated and used by the subject team in longer term follow-up to the ISR. It is very important that the report fully reflects the consensus views and conclusions of the review team.

Summary of the specific roles of review team members

Role of the review team Chair

13. Prior to the ISR event, the Chair should
 - Meet with the ISR clerk to:
 - a. agree the draft agenda items
 - b. discuss any potential issues that might arise at the event
 - c. agree the module box selection to be provided at the event
14. At the first private meeting of the review team, the Chair should:
 - introduce participants to each other
 - outline the ISR process, including the judgements that can be reached and the possible outcomes
 - describe the scope of the ISR, including any franchised or validated collaborative provision and how this is being dealt with

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- review the outcome of any preliminary reviews of overseas and UK validated provision and highlight any particular issues arising from these visits
- remind the review team of any background information on the provision under consideration, for example PSB accreditation
- consider the provisional agenda for the event as indicated by the items submitted in advance by review team members and highlighted by the subject team in the contextual document
- agree the division of labour amongst review team members for:
 - a. consideration of the documentary evidence in the base room
 - b. attendance at meetings where it is necessary to split the review panel (for example, meetings with postgraduate/undergraduate students)
- after consideration of the evidence, and prior to the meeting with the subject team, agree the agenda items and the review team member who will lead the discussion of each one with the subject team

15. During the event the Chair should:

- review the agenda before each meeting in the light of the documentary evidence considered and discussions held with subject team
- provide an outline of the issues that are to be discussed at the beginning of each meeting
- summarise the outcomes resulting from each meeting (in order for the Clerk to keep a record), identifying any specific areas for further discussion
- ensure that the subject team are aware of the review team's focus of activity during the review of documentary evidence in the base room
- regularly discuss the issues and resolutions emerging from the review of documentary evidence.
- ensure that the evidence informing the final judgements is clearly conveyed to all participants
- together with the review team, agree the judgements to be included in the report
- identify areas of good and commendable practice
- agree 'matters for immediate action' (if necessary), and make forward-looking recommendations. In doing so, the Chair should:
 - a. ensure that none of the conditions/recommendations relate to issues that were not discussed with the subject team during the event
 - b. ensure that all of the recommendations are specific, targeted and achievable
- present an oral summary of the ISR findings to the subject team at the end of the event
- with the subject team, agree the deadline for the submission of the action plan and, if applicable, response to matters for immediate action and the review team members who will approve them
- thank all participants for their contribution to the event

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16. After the event, the Chair should be involved in the follow-up process, including approving the response to matters of serious concern (if applicable), action plan and one year update

Role of review team Clerk

17. The review team clerk should:
- take notes during private review team meetings and all other meetings, for example with the subject team and students
 - work as an equal team member in the base room, reviewing evidence alongside review team members, particularly advising on implementation of University regulations, policies and quality assurance procedures
 - guide the review team through the paperwork
 - act as liaison with the subject team in relation to arrangements for the review and additional requirements as they arise
 - draft the ISR report
 - track the follow up to the report

Role of review team members

18. Before the event review team members should:
- submit key issues that they wish to discuss based on their reading of the contextual document and advance information. These should be sent to AQS at least two weeks prior to the event and will form the basis of the agenda for the first meeting with the subject team
 - identify, in advance, any additional documents/information that they wish to view at the event
 - identify, in advance, the 'module box' sample they wish to see (the review team chair will approve the final sample)
19. At the event, review team members will
- collectively agree agenda items for meetings, key discussion points and conclusions
 - lead on particular topics as agreed in advance with the chair
 - contribute to, and where appropriate, chair the various meetings that take place during the event
20. After the event, review team members should be involved in the follow up process, including approving the response to matters for immediate action (if applicable) and the action plan.