



University of
St Andrews

Handbook: University-led reviews of learning and teaching

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1. Introduction

This handbook aims to provide comprehensive guidance to Schools and Departments preparing for a University-led review of learning and teaching (URLT).

The URLT process outlined in this handbook meets the requirements set out by the following external reference points:

- ▮ [Scottish Funding Council guidance to HEIs on quality](#)
- ▮ [The UK Quality Code](#)
- ▮ [Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European HE area](#)

Feedback and suggestions on this new handbook are welcomed. Please share these with Ros Campbell (Academic Policy Officer [Quality]) via academicmonitoring@st-andrews.ac.uk

2. Purpose and scope of URLTs

URLTs form one of the five elements of Scotland's [Quality Enhancement Framework](#) (QEF). The QEF was developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in conjunction with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Grants from the SFC are conditional on adherence to this framework.

As outlined in the SFC guidance¹, URLTs are designed to:

- a) Provide assurance regarding the quality and standard of the learning and teaching provision.
- b) Encourage and support critical reflection on policy and practice.
- c) Promote dialogue on areas in which quality could be improved, and ensure these are addressed.
- d) Identify good practice for dissemination within the institution and beyond.

The URLT process covers all undergraduate and taught postgraduate (PGT) awards, contributions to programmes offered out-with the School/Department (e.g. the MA in Combined Studies), supervision of research students, provision delivered in collaboration with others, work-based provision and placements, online and distance learning, and provision which provides only small volumes of credit.

3. Frequency and timing of URLTs

All Schools/Departments and student-facing professional services units are reviewed systematically and rigorously on a cycle of six years. A [programme of reviews](#) has been agreed by the Academic Monitoring Group (AMG). The schedule also includes reviews of collaborative programmes under the [University's five-stage review process for collaborative provision](#)

¹ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

Schools/Departments that offer programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are encouraged to explore appropriate ways of aligning PSRB activity with URLTs. This might include the use of common documentation or joint processes which meet the needs of both the URLT and external accreditation.

The Proctor's Office will write to the relevant Head of School and Director of Teaching (DoT) in the academic year prior to that in which the review is scheduled to take place to notify the School/Department of the forthcoming review.

In the spring, the Proctor's Office will liaise with School/Departments to identify a mutually suitable date for reviews scheduled for the forthcoming academic year. Reviews are not normally held at the beginning of Semester one or during Independent Learning Week, spring vacation, revision periods and examination periods. For this reason, the reviews are typically held in October, November, February, March and April when students are available to meet with the review team.

In advance of the review, Head of Schools/Departments and Directors of Teaching from Schools/Departments scheduled for review will be invited to attend a briefing session. The Administrative Officer (Quality) will liaise with the DoT thereafter, and act as the first point of contact for the School/Department.

4. Academic lead for the URLT

Preparations for the review are normally led by the DoT in consultation with the Head of School/Department and with input from the Teaching Committee. For further information on the role, please refer to the DoT checklist (Appendix 2).

5. The review team

The review team will act as 'critical friends' to the School/Department and bring a range of experience and perspectives.

5.1 Team composition

The review team typically comprises:

- i. **Dean of Faculty:** As Chair of the review team, the Dean sets the tone for the review meetings with the team and School/Department, facilitates the welcome and introductions, leads the dialogue and ensures discussion is kept on track. He/she has final sign-off of the review report.
- ii. **External subject experts:** Normally there are two external subject experts for each review, chosen to cover all aspects of the discipline. One external member will be from the Scottish sector and one from elsewhere in the UK. Their role is focused on the curriculum and learning aims and outcomes. They will collaborate to provide a summary of their views on these areas and other aspects of the learning and teaching provision for the evaluative report.

- iii. **Internal staff member:** A senior role holder from a cognate discipline in the University will share experience and learn from the School/Department under review. He/she will contribute their view in the evaluative report.
- iv. **Director of Education (DoEd):** The elected sabbatical officer will represent undergraduate and PGT students at the review. He/she will have an awareness of current issues and good practice, and will incorporate discussion of these during the review. He/she will contribute their view in the evaluative report.
- v. **Postgraduate research (PGR) representative:** A PGR student from a cognate discipline will represent research students at the review. He/she will have an awareness of current student issues and will incorporate discussion of these during the review. He/she will contribute their view in the evaluative report.
- vi. **Head of Education Policy & Quality or Academic Policy Officer (Quality):** As Coordinator for the review team, he/she will facilitate the review from set up to action plan and follow-up. The Coordinator will also attend the review, take notes and draft the evaluative report drawing on the review team's views.

5.2 Appointment process: Externals

The School/Department will be asked to nominate external subject specialists for selection by the Chair. Such members may come from across the UK, from industry, professional practice or may have wider international experience. They should be well-respected colleagues in their discipline and active in teaching.

The School/Department will suggest external subject specialists for consideration by the Chair. Supporting background information must be provided for each person, particularly in relation to their relevant, current experience in learning and teaching.

This information should be submitted to the Proctor's Office via the School/Department specific channel in Microsoft (MS) Teams in the following format:

- i. The names of three externals (in order of preference) from a Scottish institution, links to their biographies and the School/Department's rationale for each nomination.
- ii. The names of three externals (in order of preference) who work elsewhere in UK, links to their biographies and the School/Department's rationale for each nomination.

A statement should also be included indicating whether or not the person has had any previous involvement with the School/Department. Previous involvement will not normally exclude a person from acting as an external member. Exceptions to this are where the suggested person has been a member of staff, a student or an External Examiner of the University in the three years prior to the review. In addition, externals will not be appointed if they are research partners or close friends of colleagues in the School/Department.

Schools/Departments typically nominate externals from Higher Education Institutions. However it may be most appropriate in some reviews for the second external member to be from a PSRB or from industry. The SFC does not expect review teams to routinely include members from outside the UK although institutions are encouraged to actively consider the scope for this option. The option to request an international reviewer has been paused for 2020-21.

Once the relevant Dean has selected their preferred externals, the Proctor's Office will issue a formal invitation and update the School/Department on the review team composition.

The externals' fees, accommodation, travel costs and expenses are met by Proctor's Office budget. Overnight accommodation arrangements for the external members of the review team are made by the Proctor's Office. This will normally be for the night before the review but can be extended to the night of the first day where appropriate.

Members of staff at the University of St Andrews are encouraged to act as external subject specialists for other institutions.

5.3 Appointment process: Internal staff member

The School/Department will be asked to nominate internal staff members from cognate disciplines for selection by the Chair. These should be academics who have a key role in overseeing learning and teaching provision in their own Schools/Departments, and have a strong understanding of the institution's learning and teaching priorities and agenda.

Schools/Departments should provide the names of three internals (in order of preference) and the School/Department's rationale for each nomination. The Chair will make a selection from this list or appoint an alternative staff member.

5.4 Appointment process: PGR representative

The Proctor's Office will appoint a PGR student from a cognate discipline who is currently undertaking (or has recently completed) the HEA-accredited 'Introduction to teaching' modules offered by the Centre for Educational Enhancement and Development (CEED). The inclusion of a PGR student member on the team will encourage a greater focus on the PGR student experience.

The PGR representative will have the option to meet with the Coordinator upon receipt and review of the School/Department's documentation to discuss the review process.

6. Summary of the review process

For a summary of the key stages involved in the review process, please refer to Appendix 1.

7. Documentation to be submitted in advance of the review

The key document to be produced by the School/Department is the Reflective Analysis. This will be accompanied by an Advance Information Set (AIS).

The Reflective Analysis and AIS should be submitted to Microsoft (MS) Teams six weeks in advance of the review day. The Proctor's Office will arrange access to the appropriate channel in MS Teams well in advance of the deadline. For guidance on how to upload the documentation, please refer to Appendix 7.

The School President is responsible for producing a 'Student view' and submitting this directly to the Proctor's Office. If the School President gives permission for this feedback to be shared with the School/Department, it will be shared by the Proctor's Office via MS Teams.

7.1 Reflective Analysis

The Reflective Analysis is normally prepared by the DoT in consultation with the Head of School/Department and with input from colleagues. Where possible, students should also be consulted, and the School President should be given an opportunity to comment on the Reflective Analysis prior to submission.

The Reflective Analysis should be an honest, analytical, self-reflective, and evidence based account of the learning and teaching provision. It should not be overly descriptive, and should summarise the School/Department's current vision, ambitions, strengths and challenges. The page limit for the Reflective Analysis is 15 pages.

Schools/Departments are strongly encouraged to begin drafting the Reflective Analysis at least three months prior to the submission date, and share an early draft with the Proctor's Office.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for guidance on the content and structure of the Reflective Analysis.

7.2 Advance information set

The School/Department is required to submit an AIS alongside the reflective analysis. The AIS will comprise pre-existing documentation, and will help the review team to identify specific areas for exploration during the review. Please refer to Appendix 3 for further information on the contents and structure of the AIS.

7.3 Student view

The School President will be asked to produce a short document summarising the student view of the School/Department. This provides an opportunity for students to bring to the attention of the review team areas that are working well and aspects that could be improved. Feedback should be gathered from a wide range of students in the School/Department from all levels of study.

The School President is encouraged to consult with his/her Class Representatives and PGR rep (if applicable), and gather this feedback via a survey or focus groups.

The School President will upload the student view to a general 'Student view' Team in MS Teams. With the permission of the School President, this feedback will be shared with the DoT via the School/Department specific channel in MS Teams.

Please refer to Appendix 8 for further information on the student view.

8. Review of the documentation

The review team will be given access to the documentation in MS Teams four weeks in advance of the review day. The team will be asked to review the documentation and submit examples of good practice and areas of interest to explore during the review day. These will be collated and discussed during a planning meeting, which will be held one week in advance of the review via MS Teams.

8.1 Key themes

The review team will be asked to provide the following reflections based on their analysis of the Reflective Analysis, AIS and student view:

- i. Examples of good practice worthy of commendation and dissemination across the University.
- ii. Areas of interest to explore on the review day. (One for each meeting outlined in the programme).

This feedback will be collated by the Proctor's Office and a summary will be shared with the review team and the School/Department.

8.2 Planning meeting

The review team will attend a planning meeting in MS Teams 7-10 days prior to the review day to discuss topics for exploration on the review day. This is an integral part of the review process and attendance by all review team members is required. The Coordinator will circulate the collated key themes to the team in advance to inform the meeting.

The review team will agree on the topics to be covered during the review meetings and a final version will be circulated to the team for reference on the day.

8.3 Requests for additional information

The review team may request additional information from the School/Department no later than ten days prior to the review day.

9. The review day

Reviews are normally held over one day (typically 0845-1730) and will be held in the School/Department where possible. Reviews held in Semester 1, 2020-21 will be held online via MS Teams. Practical arrangements for virtual and campus-based reviews are outlined in Appendix 12. Guidance on virtual reviews is available in Appendix 6.

Aspects evidenced as routinely going well may not be discussed during the review day but may feature in the evaluative report. The review team will focus on innovative activities and areas of interest identified in the key themes document. Other discussion topics may emerge during the course of the day.

9.1 Structure of the review day

The review day normally includes:

- i. An overview meeting with the Head of School and/or DoT
- ii. A tour of teaching facilities
- iii. A meeting with administrative and technical staff who support learning and teaching
- iv. Meetings with undergraduate, PGT and PGR students
- v. A meeting on recruitment, admissions, advising and exchanges
- vi. A meeting on curriculum and assessment
- vii. A meeting with recently appointed staff
- viii. A meeting on the management of taught postgraduate programmes
- ix. A brief meeting with the Head of School and DoT
- x. A meeting for the review team to identify commendations and recommendations for inclusion in the evaluative report.

Where appropriate, the format of the review may be modified in consultation with the Proctor's Office.

9.2 Production of the programme

The School/Department is responsible for inviting relevant colleagues to the staff meetings and recruiting students for the sub-Honours, Honours, PGT and PGR meetings. A reserve list of staff and students should be in place in case of health issues. Efforts should be made to ensure that the students are representative of as many different sections of the student body as possible. For example, those with experience of articulation and other widening access entry routes, international and home students, and students with experience of studying on a joint degree programme and on a collaborative programme.

To facilitate discussion with the students, the meetings will normally be conducted via parallel sessions. The review team will split in two; one half of the team will meet with the sub-honours students and taught postgraduate students, and one half will meet with the honours students and research postgraduate students.

The briefing note for students participating in the review (Appendix 9) provides an explanation of the purpose and format of the review process, and can be used when the School/Department recruit students via email. The School/Department is encouraged to tailor the briefing note (with the dates and times of the student meetings) and circulate this to the students who have confirmed their participation in the review day.

Template programmes for online and campus-based reviews are available in Appendix 5. The School/Department will be asked to submit a draft programme to the Proctor's Office eight weeks in advance of the review. This provides an opportunity for the Chair and Coordinator to provide initial feedback prior to the submission of the Reflective Analysis and AIS.

A final version of the programme should be submitted to the Proctor's Office two weeks in advance of the review for consideration at the review team planning meeting. The Proctor's Office will produce an updated digital version with a link in each meeting for the relevant staff and students to follow in order to join the meeting in Teams. Only those invited to the meeting will be able to join. The School/Department is responsible for ensuring the staff and students receive the link to their meeting.

9.3 Guidance for colleagues in the School/Department under review

The review is intended to be a positive and valuable process for the School/Department. It aims to:

- i. Support the School/Department in the enhancement of their provision and the learning experience of its students.
- ii. Recognise and commend good practice.

Further to the School/Department's submission of a Reflective Analysis and AIS, the team will produce key themes comprising areas of good practice and areas of interest for discussion on the review day. This will be shared with the DoT one week prior to the review day for circulation within the School/ Department. Some areas of good practice may not be explored on the day and will instead receive commendation in the evaluative report. To maximise the value of the review day, the team will explore key challenges and discuss potential solutions.

Colleagues will be encouraged to discuss the operation of their School/Department, reflect on issues and challenges, and highlight examples of good practice worthy of dissemination across the University. Colleagues are warmly encouraged to contribute as fully and openly as possible in meetings.

9.4 Guidance for the review team

The review team should be mindful that colleagues in the School/Department may feel apprehensive about the review. Efforts should be made to ensure that those meeting with the team are made to feel as comfortable as possible. The Chair should ensure the meetings are conversational and that all colleagues are given an opportunity to share their views.

The team is encouraged to note examples of good practice and areas for development throughout the course of the day for easy retrieval at the final meeting of the day. The final meeting will be an opportunity for the review team to reflect on commendations and recommendations. These will be captured by the Coordinator, and will form the basis of the evaluative report.

10. Evaluative report

The evaluative report will be written to the same headings as the Reflective Analysis and will conclude with a series of commendations and recommendations for action, as well as a confidence statement ('confidence', 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence'). Please refer to Appendix 4 for further information on the format of the report.

10.1 Production of the report

The Coordinator is responsible for collating the team's views and producing the report. However all members of the review team will be asked to contribute to the report. Further information of the production of the report is available in Appendix 4.

Recommendations that pertain to other areas of the University will be forwarded to the appropriate colleague/committee/professional services unit. An initial written response and a year on update will be requested for consideration by the AMG.

10.2 Sharing report outcomes with staff and students

The DoT is asked to share the review outcomes with staff and students as follows:

- i. Meet with the School President to discuss the evaluative report.
- ii. Prepare a summary for SSCC comprising: the commendations and recommendations arising from the review; the outcome of the review (confidence statement); the School/Department's proposed actions in response to the recommendations; and a formal note of thanks to those who participated in the process. The DoT may wish to provide SSCC with a progress update at a future meeting.
- iii. Circulate the summary prepared for SSCC to all students in the School/ Department.

The School/Department is also encouraged to share the review outcomes in marketing materials and on the School/Department website.

10.3 Consideration of the report by AMG

The evaluative report is considered by the AMG. The group will request the production of an action plan in response to the recommendations. Please refer to Appendix 10 for a template and a link to an exemplar action plan.

11. Action plan

The action plan should outline intended actions and timescales as a consequence of the review team's recommendations.

The action plan should be discussed with the School/Department's Learning & Teaching Committee and Student Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC) prior to submission, and actions should be clearly understood by students. The action plan should include a statement on the steps taken by the School/Department to feedback to staff and students on the outcomes of the review and on the actions taken.

AMG will review the action plans to ensure that the recommendations have been adequately addressed, and that staff and students received feedback on the outcomes of the review and were consulted on the production of the action plan.

The group may request further follow-up reports in certain circumstances, for example where a School/Department has indicated plans to set up a working group or pilot an initiative.

Following AMG's approval, the Reflective Analysis, evaluative report and action plan will be uploaded to the 'URLT documentation' web page:

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/teaching/monitoring/irlt/documentation/

12. Year-on update

The School/Department will be asked to provide a progress update on the action plan one year from the submission of the action plan. This will require the School/Department to revisit the action plan and provide a short update in red for each proposed action in response to the recommendations. The year-on update will be considered by the AMG. The committee will either approve the plan or request additional information in order to complete the URLT process. The year-on update will be uploaded to the 'URLT documentation' web page.

13. Annual overview of URLTs

The University reflects on strategic issues arising from URLTs and other quality processes, and makes use of this information as part of its strategic approach to quality enhancement.

The Proctor's Office produces an annual summary of themes and feedback from some of the University's quality monitoring processes (Annual Academic Monitoring, URLTs and External Examiner reports). This report highlights common themes arising from URLTs for consideration at institutional level by the AMG and the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). To further share and embed good practice across the University, examples identified via URLTs are shared via a 'good practice slot' at LTC.

14. Access to URLT documentation

The Reflective Analysis, evaluative report, action plan, and year-on update will be made available to University staff only via the academic monitoring web pages.

The documentation is also shared with the QAA to inform the annual discussion meetings (held between the Proctor's Office and a QAA Officer) and [Enhancement-led institutional review](#).

The Proctor's Office submits an annual report to the SFC each September. This will include a summary of URLT outcomes in the previous academic year and provide assurance that the University is effectively managing quality assurance and delivering on enhancement.

15. Student engagement

Student engagement is a vital and valuable component of the URLT process. Students will have an opportunity to provide individual as well as collective feedback on their experience of learning and teaching in the School/Department. Students will be asked to engage prior to the review, during the review and following the review.

A student briefing note (Appendix 9) explains the purpose of the review and how students can contribute to each stage of the process.

15.1 Student engagement prior to the review

The School/Department should notify students about the review at an early stage, for example the first SSCC meeting in the academic session in which the review will be held.

The Reflective Analysis should be evidenced-based and include reflection on student feedback obtained via routine quality mechanisms such as SSCCs, module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) and external national surveys.

As noted in Section 7.3, the School President will gather feedback from students from all levels of study to produce a 'Student view'. This will summarise what is working well and areas for development for exploration on the review day.

15.2 Student engagement during the review

During the review day, the team will hold four student meetings to gather feedback at sub-Honours, Honours, PGT and PGR level.

The DoT and School President will be responsible for identifying a cross-section of students to meet the review team. They should be representative of the cohort and include (but not be limited to) class reps. The School President will be expected to take part in the meeting with Honours students.

The review team will ask about students about their experiences, for example in relation to assessment and feedback; the availability and quality of learning resources and study

space; and support services such as the Library and Careers. Students will be able to raise and discuss other topics. Students are encouraged to share with the team any difficulties or shortcomings they have encountered. Notes will be made during all discussions held during the review but no comments will be attributed to any individuals. No members of staff from the School/ Department are present during the student meetings.

Students are also represented on the review team by way of the DoEd and a PGR representative from a cognate discipline.

15.3 Student engagement after the review

The review team will produce an evaluative report which will include a series of commendations and recommendations. Students should be informed of the review outcomes via a SSCC or other mechanisms as appropriate.

Comments should be invited on proposed actions to be taken in response to the team's recommendations prior to the School/Department's submission of an action plan.

The School/Department should continue to engage students on progress with the recommendations via SSCCs or other mechanisms as appropriate. The action plan and year-on update will require input and approval from the Teaching Committee.