Guide to QAA subject review for law teachers

Paul Greatrix

with

Tracey Varnava

UK Centre for
Legal Education

ltsn

Learning and Teaching
Support Network

Guide to QAA subject review for law teachers

Paul Greatrix

with

Tracey Varnava

Contents

1. Introduction

Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended to assist departments/schools of law preparing for the new method of subject review (previously known as Quality Assessment or TQA) by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It draws on the experience of assessment visits under the previous methodology and many comments and observations made by those who have been participants in the process.

Using this guide

This document is intended to be a rough and ready tool for departments/schools preparing for subject review. It should be read in conjunction with the QAA *Handbook for academic review* (from which it quotes extensively). It is important to note however the somewhat prospective nature of some sections of this guide. As yet we do not know for certain how the new subject review method will work in practice, and therefore some of the advice which follows is based solely on the official QAA line on the operation of subject review. Nevertheless, many of the lessons learned from previous reviews will be equally applicable under the new method and these form an important part of this document.

Moreover, the former Secretary of State, David Blunkett, announced on 21 March 2001 proposals for a substantial reduction in direct inspections. Under these proposals departments/schools which had scored 21 or more points out of 24 (provided that no grade was a 1 or a 2) or had achieved an 'excellent' rating, would be exempt from a subject review visit under the new QAA method. There would however be subject review visits to a sample of these departments/schools (possibly at a level as high as 25%). There remains considerable uncertainty about the introduction of the new method, and there are ongoing discussions involving the funding councils, Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the Department for Education and Skills together with the QAA (which has mounted a robust defence of the integrity of its planned methodology).

Whatever the final arrangements are for the new system, it is likely that, at the very least, all departments/schools will be required to produce a self-evaluation document and to comply with the many new components of the framework which are described in the following sections. If a system of sampling is introduced then those who will not have a visit will find that the first half of this guide, which covers the other key features of the method and the preparation of the self-evaluation, is the only part that need concern them. Departments/schools that are to be visited will need to address many more issues in preparing for review and should find something useful in every section.

(Note that although the QAA has tended to describe the new method as 'academic review' rather than subject review, the new term has yet to be widely adopted and therefore 'subject review' is used to refer to this process throughout.)

Additional resources

A copy of this guide has been sent free of charge to each department/school. It has also been made available on the UKCLE website at http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/subjectreview. The electronic version will be updated as the subject review process unfolds and will be linked to a variety of resources that are intended to assist departments/schools as they go through the process of preparing for subject review. Your assistance in contributing to this resource bank is invited (see below). To stimulate discussion and the exchange of experiences of preparing for subject review UKCLE is providing JISCmail services for heads of departments/schools and also for law subject reviewers. General queries about the review process can be submitted to ukcle@warwick.ac.uk. In addition, UKCLE is organising two workshop events on the topic of preparing for subject review, led by Paul Greatrix and based around this guide. Please contact k.v.hinett@warwick.ac.uk for further details.

How you can contribute

The importance and benefit of sharing experiences of preparing for subject review is a clear message of this guide. Aside from easing the amount of effort that would otherwise be required from each individual school/department, a collaborative engagement with the process has the potential to stimulate valuable reflection on the pedagogy of law beyond the local level. To this end, we are asking each department/school to consider:

- submitting additional names/contact details for the law subject reviewers list (see Appendix II)

- posting observations, queries, ideas to the discussion lists provided by UKCLE

- offering expertise that exists in-house for the benefit of others: this may take the form of a workshop; short guide to a particular issue; inclusion on a list of experts willing to offer advice. (The level of involvement will be agreed in advance with each individual and funds to support certain activities are available.)

- sharing aspects of good practice included as part of the self evaluation document

- sending UKCLE feedback on the positive and negative aspects of the subject review process which can be fed back to QAA on behalf of all departments/schools

- contributing documentation/materials prepared as part of the subject review process to the UKCLE resource bank

Note about the authors

Paul Greatrix is Senior Assistant Registrar, with responsibility for quality issues (including assisting departments preparing for subject review), at the University of Warwick. Previously he has worked at the University of East Anglia, where he also worked on quality, and Staffordshire University.

Tracey Varnava is the Centre Co-ordinator of the UK Centre for Legal Education. Previously she was employed as the co-ordinator of the National Centre for Legal Education at the University of Warwick, and as a lecturer in law at the University of Leicester.

Role of UKCLE

UKCLE is a vehicle for enabling exchange of information about subject review through a variety of media. It also seeks to build resources around this topic for the benefit of the whole legal education community. Its primary objectives are to support departments/schools in accordance with their own needs and also to enable and encourage debate about learning and teaching in law. If you have any queries about this guide or the supporting materials, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Our contact details are given at the beginning of this guide. We should also like to hear your suggestions for the provision of further support to help you with the subject review process.

2. Subject review: overview

The new methodology is based on a six year cycle during which subject review is intended "to continuously update the picture that the Agency has of the institution". The QAA argues that the new method will be more efficient and occupy less institutional resource; this is referred to as a 'lighter touch'. The intensity of scrutiny will be variable and, in theory, in inverse proportion to success; that is, where the Agency has confidence in an institution's ability to assure quality and standards, the intensity of scrutiny will be less.

This 'lighter touch' will, it is argued by the QAA, be achieved through the following changes:

● It will be possible for institutions to negotiate the timing and aggregation of subject reviews with the Agency so that subject review can be coordinated with internal review and professional body accreditation timetables.

● Review patterns will no longer be concentrated in four day visits, but spread over a longer period to reduce the amounts of information prepared specifically for review. Thus instead of a base room, departments/schools will provide documents as and when requested (although many feel there may still be a need for a 'shadow' – or perhaps even virtual – base room containing the range of documents which might be called for).

● For each subject review three main factors will determine the intensity of scrutiny: the institutional review report (or the institutional profile), the previous subject report and the self-evaluation document. The evidence from Scotland, where the new method commenced in 2001, is that the quality and self-criticality of the self-evaluation document is a key factor in securing a lighter touch.

Assuming that some form of sampling of subjects is introduced then, although this will obviously represent a lightening of the load, you can expect that there will still be debate about the intensity of scrutiny to ensure the lightest possible touch in each area. It is also possible that the QAA may regard the introduction of sampling as representing a lighter touch in itself and therefore opt for a standard intensity of scrutiny for every department/school visited.

The value of subject review

The process of preparing for subject review represents a valuable opportunity for a rigorous self-appraisal of the quality of the learning experience departments/schools provide for their students and to identify areas where improvements are needed. The preparation of a self-evaluation document and addressing the range of documentary evidence that may be required enables departments/schools to clarify and systematise procedures in a way that will be of long-term benefit.

The process of self-evaluation can bring significant benefits in terms of course development, quality enhancement and improvements in delivery of long term value to staff and students. The subjects nationally that have achieved the highest grades are those where staff have enthusiastically engaged with the opportunity presented by subject review to improve the quality of learning and teaching. This second round of reviews gives departments/schools the opportunity to reflect on progress made since their previous visit and to highlight evidence of success in relation to recommendations made in the published report.

Why you need to achieve the best possible results

You should be aiming for the highest grades for a number of reasons:

An opportunity to shine – high ratings confirm the high quality of education which you <u>know</u> is offered by your department/school. A good result provides external validation of the quality of taught courses, the ability of staff and the support you provide for your students.

Market advantage – in an increasingly competitive market with ever more discerning consumers, the marketing advantage of high gradings becomes more critical (especially in overseas markets). League tables (no matter how critical we are of their methodologies or how distasteful we find them in principle) will continue to appear and command national interest – subject review gradings will continue to form a major component in determining institutional rankings in such tables.

Self-evaluation – the process of self-evaluation prior to a review visit is useful in itself and can bring significant benefits in terms of course development, quality enhancement and improvements in teaching of longer term value to staff and students.

Funding link – it is still possible that more teaching funding will flow to units with high subject review grades. HEFCE's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) currently favours bids from those with high ratings. High grades will continue to be a pre-condition for some types of additional funding.

Subject review reports and subject overview reports are distributed widely. Each subject overview report, for example, is made available in hard copy to some 7500 destinations; these include all secondary schools, sixth form colleges, further education colleges, careers services and main public libraries, as well as all higher education institutions and the press across the UK.

Reports on the law assessment exercise carried out by HEFCE in England and Northern Ireland between May 1993 and December 1994 are available from the QAA website.

The quality assessment reports for law are at:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/subjrev/Law/Law%20Index.htm

The subject overview report for law is at:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/subjrev/All/qo_1_95.htm

Success factors

There are several factors that are significant in contributing towards success in subject review.

Some success factors

- a positive attitude to the process – seeing subject review as an opportunity rather than a threat

- an active, enthusiastic, well-organised and respected subject review coordinator in the department/school

- ownership of the self-evaluation by the whole subject team

- taking fullest advantage of the support and advice provided by staff in your central quality office and subject review veterans from other departments/schools in your institution

- willingness to learn from the experience of previous visits, at your own institution and elsewhere

- maintaining effective liaison with your central services (including the library, careers service, computing/IT services and central counselling)

- having a member of the subject team who has been trained as a subject reviewer by QAA

- being fully aware of students' perceptions of the subject

- detailed checking of materials provided for reviewers (especially samples of student work) and materials available on the Web

- correct operation of your institution's quality assurance procedures

- thorough documentation of departmental level quality assurance procedures

- preparation, preparation, preparation…

Support

The central quality team in your institution should be able to provide a range of materials and events to support departments/schools preparing for, during and after subject review visits. Areas in which you may particularly need assistance might include:

- briefings on the subject review methodology

- arrangements for the timing of the visit

- sessions on preparing the self-evaluation document

- critical external advice on drafting the self-evaluation document

- dealing with benchmark statements on standards, the code of practice, course specifications and the national qualifications framework

- guidance on supporting documentation

- preparing for observation of teaching

Your central team is likely to have considerable experience of preparing for subject review and ought to be a valuable source of assistance. They will also be able to provide you with definitive information on the latest position in terms of the implementation of the new QAA framework.

In addition to this institutional support UKCLE is working to build up resources specifically for law. Check the resource bank at http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/subjectreview/resources.html and assist with the development of resources by contributing materials and expertise yourself.

3. Subject review: key features

The new QAA methodology for quality assurance, which comes into force in England from January 2002, has the following components:

- a revised model of subject review
- programme specifications for each degree course
- a multi-sectioned code of practice
- new statements of benchmark standards for each subject
- a national qualifications framework
- institutional review (which replaces continuation audit)

Uncertainty remains about the precise form subject review will take — whatever the final arrangements are for the new system, it is extremely likely that all departments/schools will be required to produce a self-evaluation document and to comply with the other components of the framework listed above.

The self-evaluation document

The self-evaluation document is the starting point for subject review and fulfils two important functions by:

- encouraging departments/schools to evaluate the quality of learning opportunities and standards achieved
- providing a framework for subject review through the testing of the statements made by the department/school

The self-evaluation document is similar to the self-assessment document used in the current method and should genuinely evaluate the weaknesses as well as the strengths of current provision.

Programme specifications

Programme specifications for each degree course covered by the review are annexed to the self-evaluation document and are intended to provide a reference point for evaluating curriculum design and the methods and strategies used to promote, support and assess learning. Programme specifications are expected to set out:

- the intended learning outcomes of the course
- the teaching and learning methods that enable students to achieve these outcomes and the methods of assessment used
- the relationship of the course to the qualifications framework

Programme specifications should make intended outcomes explicit in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, and other attributes. Note that rather than 'aims and objectives',

programme specifications use the term 'outcomes', as the QAA argues that, as a concept, it is more closely linked to the learning and assessment process.

Separate programme specifications are not required for every possible pathway within a modular structure. For joint honours, or similar combined studies programmes, a short statement of the rationale for the combination should accompany the programme specifications for each subject.

Your institution may have adopted a standard template for programme specifications or may permit departments/schools to devise their own. You will need to consult your central institutional quality contact about the policy on programme specifications. Broad guidelines on programme specifications are provided by the QAA:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progspec/contents.htm

Code of practice

The Agency publishes a code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education that addresses individual areas of academic management. Eight sections of the code have been published at the time of writing and at least three more are in preparation. One year after publication institutions are expected to be able to demonstrate that they are meeting all of the requirements set out in each section of the code. All of these sections will therefore apply to those subjects reviewed from spring 2002. The sections published so far are:

- postgraduate research programmes
- collaborative provision*
- students with disabilities
- external examining*
- academic appeals and student complaints
- assessment of students*
- programme approval, monitoring and review*
- career education, information and guidance
- admissions (draft)
- placement learning (draft)

The four sections of the code marked with an asterisk* relate directly to quality and standards, and will be used by reviewers as a background against which to make judgements on subject provision and institutional management. Your approaches to each of these four sections will therefore come under close scrutiny as part of subject review. Work will be required to ensure that departments/schools are conforming to the requirements laid down in the four key sections of the code — it is likely that you will find that the code on assessment is the one for which most work will be required. Documents to assist you in addressing the code on assessment can be found in the resource bank at http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/subjectreview/resources.html. See also Appendix I. The full code can be found at:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/codesofpractice.htm.

Law benchmark statement

The law benchmark statement represents the minimum achievement of a graduate with an honours Bachelors degree in Law or Legal Studies. According to the QAA, benchmark statements are "about the conceptual framework that gives a discipline its coherence and identity; about the intellectual capacity and understanding that should be developed through the study of the discipline to the level in question; the techniques and skills which are associated with developing understanding in the discipline; and the intellectual demand and challenge appropriate to study of the discipline to the level in question". You will be expected be able to demonstrate how the law subject benchmark statement (and any other relevant ones for joint programmes) has been used to inform decisions about intended outcomes of your programmes.

Reviewers will use the law benchmark statement to establish that the design of curricula facilitates:

- acquisition of knowledge and understanding
- acquisition of cognitive skills
- acquisition of subject-specific skills including practical and professional skills
- acquisition of transferable skills
- progression to employment and/or further study

It is unclear how much emphasis will be placed on benchmark statements, which are described by the QAA as 'points of reference' for subject reviewers. However, each department/school will have to be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes for students following its courses are exceeding the threshold standard set out in the law benchmark statement. The benchmark statement for law is available at:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/law.pdf

National qualifications framework

The QAA's line is that its framework of higher education qualifications provides reference points for determining whether the intended outcomes for programmes and actual student achievement on a particular programme are appropriate to the levels of qualification awarded.

The final version of the framework was published in November 2000. Institutions will have to be able to demonstrate that all students commencing courses after the start of the academic year 2003/04 will gain, on successful completion, qualifications that will be awarded in accordance with the framework. Progress in implementing the framework will be examined as part of subject review. The contents of the national qualifications framework can be found at:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/nqf/nqf.htm

4. The process of preparing for subject review

The process of preparing for subject review can be divided into the following stages, all of which are covered in detail in the remainder of this guide. If the former Secretary of State's proposals for reducing the burden of subject review are implemented, for some departments/schools the process will conclude after the submission of the self-evaluation document.

The process of subject review

Planning:

- advance planning and timetable

The self-evaluation:

- commence drafting of self-evaluation
- prepare course specifications
- consider benchmark statement(s)
- audit practice against code of practice
- assess qualifications against national qualifications framework
- finalise self-evaluation
- submit self-evaluation

Documentation:

- document procedures*
- contact graduates and employers of graduates
- collect documentation (including samples of student work)*
- prepare a 'shadow' base room (if required)

The visit:

- appointment of review team
- preparing for the visits (including dry runs and briefing all participants)
- visits by review team
- ongoing remote interactions with reviewers (via subject review facilitator)
- act on report of the review

*Note that, where a visit is to take place, work on these items should commence early in the process, ideally at least 12 months in advance of the inspection.

5. Preparing the self-evaluation document

The self-evaluation will be required approximately one month before commencement of the period (usually the academic year) in which the subject review will take place. If a review period commences later in the academic year, a submission date will be agreed with the institution. For reviews taking place in spring 2002 the likely deadline is 1 December 2001 for submission of the self-evaluation. For reviews taking place in 2002/03 the deadline is likely to be 1 September 2002. (Note though that these dates are subject to agreement between your institution and the QAA and may vary from institution to institution.)

The scale of the task of drafting, re-drafting, editing and polishing the self-evaluation should not be underestimated.

Key points

- ensure you are absolutely clear about the rubric (consult your central quality team if in any doubt)

- share drafts widely:
  - within the department
  - with students
  - with trusted external colleagues
  - with central service providers (for appropriate sections)

- use a single writer/editor, supported by 'critical friends' — some consistency in the style and tone of the text is important

This section of the guide includes paragraphs 24 and 25 and Annex C of the QAA *Handbook for academic review*, which describes in detail the structure and use made of the self-evaluation. Commentary on the QAA text is included in boxes (as here).

Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents for subject review

The self-evaluation document is central to the process of subject review, and fulfils two main functions. First, it is intended to encourage the subject provider to evaluate the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students and the standards achieved by them. It provides an opportunity for the staff of the subject provider to reflect on 'what do we do?', 'why we do it', and 'why do we do it in the way that we do?'. Subject reviewers will expect to see evidence of careful self-analysis. This should involve an evaluation of the perceived strengths of the provision, with reference to the evidence which justifies the statements made, and of weaknesses, where these are recognised. Where weaknesses are acknowledged, the subject provider is encouraged to discuss the issues and the steps being taken to bring about improvements.

Second, the document provides a framework for a process of subject review based on the testing and verification of statements made by subject providers. The document should reflect on current provision in a manner that evaluates both strengths and weaknesses,

indicates the changes that have taken place since earlier external reviews, and considers what may be necessary to change in the future. It is the most important of the small number of documents made available to reviewers in advance of a review.

A self-evaluation document is a statement demonstrating that a subject provider has evaluated the following, in a constructively self-critical manner:

- appropriateness of the academic standards it has set for its programmes

- effectiveness of the curriculum in delivering the intended outcomes of the programmes

- effectiveness of assessment in measuring attainment of the intended outcomes

- extent to which the intended standards and outcomes are achieved by students

- quality of the learning opportunities provided for students

A self-evaluation should discuss both strengths and weaknesses of provision, as perceived by the provider. The document is an opportunity for the provider to demonstrate how the strengths of the provision identified in previous subject reviews or accreditation events have been built upon, and how any weaknesses identified have been addressed. Where weaknesses remain, plans for addressing these should be summarised. Reviewers will give credit for appropriate remedial plans that address effectively any acknowledged weaknesses.

These guidelines have been prepared to help institutions prepare self-evaluation documents. They are neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive. Subject reviewers will use self-evaluation documents in any reasonable form, provided they contain the information that reviewers need to plan and conduct the review.

Subject review involves testing and verifying statements made in self-evaluation documents, thereby arriving at judgements on standards and quality. This process places the self-evaluation document at the centre of the review. A high quality, reflective document that draws upon robust internal review procedures is likely to lead to a review that places a minimum burden on the institution. An inadequate document that is poorly organised and which is descriptive rather than evaluative will leave reviewers needing to gather for themselves a far greater proportion of the evidence they will require to make their judgements, resulting in a review that may prove more burdensome to the institution.

Self-evaluation documents should commence with a short statement of the range of the provision being reviewed. Programme specifications should be appended. Factual material provided in the programme specifications need not be repeated in the document.

A flexible approach should be taken to preparing and presenting self-evaluation documents to accommodate the range and potential complexity of subject provision. For example, some subjects may well contain very large numbers of programmes; some 'programmes' may comprise complex modular schemes; some subjects may be aggregated for review purposes.

Where large numbers of programmes are included under a subject heading, or where a subject category contains more than one discrete discipline, it may be sensible to evaluate discrete programmes or groups of related programmes separately. Where this is done, the broad structure indicated below should still be used, but the self-evaluations should be presented as a coherent package. Thus, in a subject such as engineering, with a number of

discrete sub-disciplines, an institution may wish to present separate self-evaluations of each discipline, introduced by a short overview dealing with the institution's approach to the subject as a whole.

Where subject provision is offered within a wider multi-disciplinary framework, general information about the framework and the main pathways within any modular structure should be included in an annex to the self-evaluation. An institution may choose to nominate a group of subjects to be reviewed together if they are linked through options or pathways available within a modular structure. In this case, an introductory overview of the approach to the provision as a whole may be appropriate.

Self-evaluation documents should be structured to address:

A   Overall aims of the subject provision

B   Evaluation of the subject provision:
  i   learning outcomes
  ii   curricula and assessment
  iii quality of learning opportunities
  iv   maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality

and should have annexed:

C   Factual information about the subject provision:
  i   a programme specification for each programme in the subject(s) under review
  ii   any information about relevant modular structures or collaborative arrangements

When drafting self-evaluation documents institutions may find it helpful to refer to:

● the precepts in those sections of the code of practice relating directly to quality and standards

● the prompts and questions for subject reviewers in the *aide-mémoire* (see Appendix IV)

See page 9 for more information on programme specifications and page 10 for details of the code of practice.

A   Overall aims of the subject provision

There must be a clear statement of the overall aims of the subject provision. This will be used by reviewers to assess whether provision achieves its broad purposes. The statement of aims will be reproduced at the start of the subject review report. Overall aims will reflect the distinctive mission of the institution, and might place study of a discipline in contexts such as:

● enabling students to develop their capacity to learn

● meeting international, national, regional or local needs

● preparing students for employment or for further study

● widening access to higher education

Statements of aims should be succinct but should convey clearly the parameters of the subject provision. They may be presented as narrative statements, bullet points, or as a mixture of the two. They should not exceed 500 words in length.

B   Evaluation of the subject provision

The evaluation should indicate where the supporting evidence may be found, for example within other institutional documentation. Such references will help the reviewers in gathering evidence, and avoid the need for merely descriptive material to be included in an evaluative document.

Bi   Learning outcomes
The first part of the evaluation should address the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes in relation to the overall aims of the provision, relevant subject benchmark statements, and other external reference points. The evaluation should discuss the effectiveness of measures to ensure that staff and students have a clear understanding of the aims and intended outcomes of programmes.

Bii   Curricula and assessment
The evaluation should review the effectiveness of the content and design of the curricula in enabling the intended outcomes of programmes to be achieved. Specific issues that are likely to be pursued by reviewers include:

- academic and intellectual progression within the curriculum

- appropriateness of content in relation to the level of the award

- inclusion of recent developments in the subject

- reflection of best practice in pedagogy

The evaluation should review the effectiveness of student assessment in measuring achievement of the intended outcomes of programmes. Reviewers are likely to be interested in the effectiveness of assessment in:

- enabling students to demonstrate achievement

- discriminating between different categories of performance

- promoting student learning (especially through formative assessment)

Biii   Quality of learning opportunities
The evaluation should review the effectiveness of teaching and learning, in relation to programme aims and curriculum content. Reviewers are likely to be interested in:

- range and appropriateness of teaching methods employed

- ways in which participation by students is encouraged

- quality of learning materials provided

- strategies for staff development to enhance teaching performance

- effectiveness of team teaching

- student workloads

The evaluation should review student progression. The effectiveness of strategies of academic support, and the extent to which they take account of the ability profile of the student intake in relation to the aims of the programmes, should be discussed. Reviewers are likely to be interested in:

- recruitment and induction of students
- identification of and action on any special learning needs
- feedback to students on their progress
- overall academic guidance and supervision
- tutorial support

The evaluation should review the adequacy of learning resources and the effectiveness of their utilisation. In particular, the evaluation should demonstrate a strategic approach to linking resources to intended programme outcomes. Reviewers will be interested not only in physical resources, but also in the effective use of human resources through such things as induction, mentoring and development of staff. Evaluation of action taken to prepare for or build on accreditation as an Investor in People could be relevant.

Biv   Maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality
There should be an evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures taken to maintain and enhance the quality and standards of provision. Reviewers will be particularly interested in the effectiveness of evaluation and use of quantitative data and qualitative feedback in a strategy of enhancement and continuous improvement.

Quantitative data might include:

- statistics on student achievement in all forms of summative assessment
- degree classifications
- entry qualifications
- progression and completion rates
- first employment destinations

Qualitative feedback might include:

- student feedback
- staff feedback
- external examiners' reports
- employers' views on graduates they have recruited
- accreditation and monitoring reports by professional or statutory bodies
- previous subject reviews
- comments from internal re-validation

The evaluation of the subject provision should not exceed 6000 words in length.

Annexes

A programme specification for each programme covered by the review should be annexed. Separate programme specifications are not required for every possible pathway within a modular structure. For joint honours, or similar combined studies programmes, a short statement of the rationale for the combination should accompany the programme specifications for each subject.

Where appropriate, brief factual explanations may also be provided of:

- curricular structures, options and pathways provided in the subject(s) being reviewed, including details of any applicable modular scheme

- any relationship with a collaborating institution, for example if a programme is provided jointly, or is franchised

Each explanation should not exceed 500 words in length.

QAA has also offered the following comments about the importance of the self-evaluation:

> "It is worth re-iterating the crucial importance of the self-evaluation document to the subject review process. This is particularly important because it is already clear that the quality of the self-evaluation documents produced by Scottish institutions for 2000-1 is variable. Self-evaluation, by concentrating on the strengths of the provision as perceived by the institution and by reviewers in previous subject review(s), and on how weaknesses perceived by the institution and reviewers have been addressed, can have a considerable effect on the intensity of review. A robust, transparent and well-written self-evaluation will ensure that reviewers pursue only those matters that are central to quality and standards, leading to the reality of a 'light touch' review. A poorly written self-evaluation, or one which obfuscates and attempts to cover up weaknesses, may well cause reviewers to pursue a range of matters over a greater period of time in order to arrive at their judgements. This in turn will lead to greater intensity of review." (letter to institutions from Peter Milton, November 2000)

Self-evaluations MUST:

- include clear aims

- follow the structure set out by QAA

- be supported by evidence

- give a clear description and evaluation of courses designed to meet the subject aims and the learning outcomes set out in programme specifications

- discuss both strengths and weaknesses

- cover steps being taken to remedy weaknesses

- be genuinely self-critical

Key points

- although there is some flexibility on length, the self-evaluation should not exceed the maximum word and page limits (see page 23) — if it does, QAA may return it for editing

- aims must be clearly expressed — again, the self-evaluation may be returned for re-drafting if QAA has doubts about the clarity of aims

- the self-evaluation guides all preparations for the visit and is the starting point for the review team's enquiries — it is vital therefore to ensure that a high quality document is submitted

- it is extremely important to ensure that the aims are right — it is essential that these are accurate, clearly expressed and supported by evidence

Use of the self-evaluation

Remember, subject review teams will:

- test the rigour of the self-evaluation and use this as a guide to whether a lighter touch can be applied

- check the accuracy of the description of the provision

- report on the rigour and openness of the self-evaluation

- expect a clear identification of the range of subject provision (including all taught provision)

Comments on the self-evaluation

Some thoughts on the contents

- section Bii should evaluate how learning outcomes are being achieved through the curriculum

- in section Bii, think how assessment methods are linked to learning outcomes

- with regard to student achievement, you might consider including a quote from a student or an employer

- what are the rules for progression, are they clear and are students aware of them?

- how do you support students, especially weaker ones, to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes set?

- the self-evaluation should evaluate how well your system for student support and guidance works in the department/school and explain the procedures in place to identify students with academic problems and to follow these up

- questions to address in relation to learning resources: to what extent do resources contribute to delivery of aims? are they fit for purpose? do students use them? do they use them effectively? what are the resource problems? how are you tackling them (where feasible)?

- do the procedures for the maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality <u>work</u>? are there problems with the procedures that prevent you from meeting your aims? how do you seek student feedback/opinion and how responsive is the department/school to student opinion?

- identify clearly the department/school's quality assurance procedures and the forum in which quality issues are discussed

- section Biv signals the extent to which staff are open to new ideas, self-evaluative etc

Some other tips

- annexes – QAA may be more flexible on word limits for annexes <u>if</u> it seems to be justified (for example by inclusion of particularly helpful tables/charts), but note that this flexibility has yet to be tested under the new method

- the word limit may be rigorously applied by the QAA. Main headings are not counted although sub-headings and sub-paragraph numbers are.

- programme specifications should, as far as is possible, be completed and to hand as a reference, <u>prior</u> to the drafting of the self-evaluation

- write in clear, plain English, avoiding jargon and cliché

- take some time to ensure the layout of the document is clear and comprehensible

Quantitative data

The quantitative data submitted with the self-evaluation document are often provided by your central academic registry. Experience has shown that difficulties may arise where the subject team does not completely understand or 'own' these statistics. It is vital therefore that these are checked and double checked by the subject team in discussion with your central staff to ensure that the data matches the department/school's records, the reason for any variance is known and responses to anticipated queries can be prepared. The data will be referred to by departments/schools in the text of the self-evaluation, for example in relation to student progression and wastage rates. Note also that where claims are made in aims about providing opportunities for students from a wide range of backgrounds or enabling such students to fulfil their potential, departments/schools must be able to highlight relevant data to evidence the achievement of these.

The structure of the self-evaluation: summary

The structure of the self-evaluation	
section	*word limits*
Aims	
Aims should be succinct but convey clearly the parameters of the subject. Can be presented as narrative statements, bullet points, or as a mixture of the two.	500 words maximum
Evaluation of the subject provision	
Learning outcomes	
Covers:	
● appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes in relation to the overall aims of the provision, relevant subject benchmark statements, and other external reference points	
● effectiveness of measures to ensure that staff and students have a clear understanding of the aims and intended outcomes of programmes	
Curricula and assessment	
Covers:	
● effectiveness of the **content and design of the curricula** in enabling the intended outcomes of courses to be achieved	
● effectiveness of **student assessment** in measuring achievement of the intended outcomes of courses	
Quality of learning opportunities	
Covers:	
● effectiveness of **teaching and learning**, in relation to course aims and curriculum content	
● **student progression** – effectiveness of strategies of academic support, and the extent to which they take account of the ability profile of the student intake in relation to the aims of courses	
● **learning resources** and the effectiveness of their utilisation	
Maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality	
Covers:	
● effectiveness of the measures taken to maintain and enhance the quality and standards of provision	
● **quantitative data** including statistics on student achievement in all forms of summative assessment, degree classifications, entry qualifications, progression and completion rates, first employment destinations	
● **qualitative feedback** including student feedback, external examiners' reports, employers' views on graduates they have recruited, accreditation reports by professional or statutory bodies, previous subject reviews, comments from internal annual and periodic review	
Total for evaluation section	6000 words maximum
Annexes	
A course specification for each programme covered by the review should be annexed.	as required
Brief factual explanations may also be provided of:	500 words maximum
● curricular structures, options and pathways provided in the subject being reviewed 500 words maximum A brief factual explanation may be provided of:	
● any relationship with a collaborating institution, for example if a course is provided jointly, or is franchised	
List of additional documentation available	unspecified

Self-evaluations: essential tips

You should:

- ensure you are analytical, self-critical and evaluative rather than descriptive

- follow the format recommended for aims

- check if every description has an evaluation attached: they must have — either immediately afterwards or in a concluding paragraph

- reduce detailed descriptions of provision where possible — bear in mind that details of courses and facilities etc can be provided in depth in supplementary information, which can be sent to subject reviewers during the process of review — also, much in the way of course details will appear in programme specifications

- try to think, in considering the level of detail needed in descriptions, what is the minimum needed to give the reader an understanding of the provision

- ensure that every claim is grounded in evidence and use examples

- use explicit references back from text to your aims (number the aims to make this easier and use fewer words) and to the learning outcomes of courses

- seek to ensure that, insofar as it is possible, you submit subject aims that are in line with your institution's strategic aims (or at least are not contradictory)

- ensure that statements and claims in the main text match aims and learning outcomes as set out in programme specifications

- ensure that the aims and learning outcomes are reflected in other departmental/school documentation including student handbooks

- identify the strengths of the department/school and offer clear evidence that supports your claims

- be honest about the department/school's weaknesses and state the strategies you have put in place to deal with them

- show the impact on teaching and learning of particular strengths (for example say how high quality research informs teaching)

- try to think of how each area relates to your students' educational experience — imagine things from the student viewpoint

- be aware that if a weakness has been identified and not yet addressed, there is still time — something introduced just before the subject review visit will be regarded sceptically by reviewers but is still better than nothing

- ensure that claims such as "the department/school regularly discusses..." are evidenced in minutes/notes of meetings

- show that the department is committed to a self-critical approach and to improvement

- consider a single selective quotation from a student feedback form or an external examiner or an employer of your graduates. These can be highly effective in the right place — especially where it provides evidence in support of a claim.

- circulate drafts widely — you might even want to put a version on the Web

- get a group of students to read a draft

- let central service providers see drafts of relevant sections (for example on library or IT provision)

- seek to make the self-evaluation interesting — it should have fizz and a spark about it, reflecting the enthusiasm of the providers for their subject

You shouldn't:

- forget that the self-evaluation will govern the conduct of your review and may influence whether or not you benefit from a lighter touch

- try to hide problems — better to identify them and show how they are being tackled (indicates self-evaluative subject team too). Reviewers will want to be assured you are dealing with the key issues; perhaps think of issues from students' viewpoint — what might you appear not to be delivering and for what reasons?

- be untruthful — inconsistencies, weaknesses or dishonesty will be spotted

- use '"we are proud" type of statements or over-hype yourselves

- include 'hostages to fortune'

- forget to state the obvious

- feel that each area of provision has to receive equal coverage

- underestimate the time required to draft the document

6. Preparation for the visit

For those departments/schools that are to be visited (either because of an insufficiently high rating in a previous review or because of inclusion in a sample) much of the additional preparation for the review following the submission of the self-evaluation is concerned with the collation of necessary documentation. In addition, steps need to be taken to ensure that all those involved in the review process are properly briefed and prepared for the visit.

Collecting the evidence

Subject review judgements are based on evidence — it is your responsibility as the subject team to provide evidence that your aims and learning outcomes are being achieved, and supports your analysis of provision made in the self-evaluation.

The time and effort required to assemble the documentation for subject review should not be underestimated. You need to have started yesterday. At the outset the department/school subject review coordinator should outline a plan for the collection of documents. For example, module/course leaders must be asked to provide the full range of information on modules/courses, including handouts, samples of student work, details of content, student questionnaires and teaching and learning strategies. Note also that subject teams will need to ensure that sufficient secretarial/clerical resource is available to organise documentation as it is gathered together.

Historically, many institutions (especially those not from the CNAA tradition) have relied heavily on informal interactions between staff and with students for addressing issues relating to teaching and learning. However, in order to ensure that you have evidence to provide for subject reviewers you need to begin to document those procedures for which paperwork might not currently exist. This will include:

- formally minuting key meetings, for example departmental/school committees, staff:student liaison meetings
- recording student attendance
- full recording of any annual course reviews
- responding in writing to external examiners' comments and reports
- reporting to relevant committees the outcomes of action taken on the basis of student evaluations/comments/complaints (closing the loop)
- the development of files containing module/course outlines/handbooks, schedules of classes, handouts, assessment and examination details, student feedback and other evaluation of the module/course (if such files do not already exist, the department/school subject review coordinator will need to establish a template to aid collation)

Although evidence can be provided in other forms, including via discussion with subject reviewers, as much as possible should be documented.

Documentation for subject review

The following section is an amended extract from the QAA *Handbook for academic review.*

Apart from the self-evaluation, subject reviewers will not normally expect documents to be prepared especially for review. Departments/schools should direct reviewers, in the self-evaluation and by means of a separate list, to the availability and relevance of documents that might assist them to test and verify the statements made in the self-evaluation or which are relevant to the judgements they will make.

The following documents will be required in advance of the review:

- the self-evaluation, with the course specifications annexed
- relevant prospectuses
- a location map

The availability and relevance of further documentation will be discussed at the initial meeting with the department. As the review progresses, reviewers may ask for further documentation. The following documents will be relevant to the review:

- department/school or course handbooks
- curricular documents such as module/course guides
- annual course monitoring or review reports, together with reports from external sources such as professional and/or statutory bodies, if these are available
- student questionnaire data
- external examiners' reports for the previous three years
- student intake and progression data for the previous three years

The following documents may also be relevant, but this list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive:

- minutes of relevant meetings, including examination boards
- equipment lists
- practical or placement handbooks
- course approval/validation and periodic course review documents
- further study and employment statistics (student destinations)
- academic staffing list and short profiles (indicating main teaching and research interests and any administrative responsibilities)

Reviewers will not necessarily ask for copies of documents. They may prefer to read the documents during the course of a visit. Documents can be provided in electronic form by mutual agreement between the subject provider and the review team.

According to the QAA there is no requirement or expectation that documents will be assembled in a 'base room' for the use of reviewers. If reviewers wish to see a document, they will ask for it. Because review takes place over an extended period, immediate availability of every document that might be requested is not necessary. Nevertheless, you will wish be confident that you can easily locate and be certain of the validity of every document which reviewers might request.

Note that all material provided to reviewers should normally be passed via the subject review facilitator unless it is specifically agreed otherwise.

Student work

Reviewers will expect to see a sample of student work. The range and nature of student work to be made available to the reviewers will be discussed at the initial meeting. Reviewers will look at student work to evaluate whether:

- student achievement matches the intended outcomes of the courses
- assessment is designed appropriately to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes
- the assessment instruments provide an adequate basis for discriminating between different categories of attainment
- the actual outcomes of programmes meet the minimum expectations for the award

Reviewers will not duplicate or 'second-guess' the work of external examiners. As such, reviewers will not normally expect to see work that is currently under consideration by external examiners.

Subject reviewers will need to see a broad sample of student work that demonstrates use of the full range of assessment instruments deployed in both formative and summative assessments. To enable them to gain a full understanding of the assessment strategy, reviewers will need to see marking guides or other assessment criteria, and any guidance on providing feedback to students through assessment. They will use external examiners' reports to triangulate with their own observations of work from each level/year of study, samples of work from core modules and specialist options and from a representative range of attainment. Samples of work may include, for example:

- coursework of various types
- projects and/or dissertations
- examination scripts

Departments/schools will need to consider well in advance of the review how best to collect and retain the necessary samples of student work, and should work on the basis of selecting three items in each class (ie first, upper second, lower second, third) for each piece of formative work, assessed work and each examination.

Marking and feedback sheets, and assessment criteria, should accompany the samples. **Where oral feedback has been given to students in addition to any written feedback then this should be clearly indicated**. It is the responsibility of departments/schools to check thoroughly the accuracy of marking and the consistency and quality of the feedback provided on the sample of work. This is a crucial task.

See also Appendix V for details of the issues which reviewers consider when reviewing student work.

Other items to include in the document list annex

Additional evidence to exemplify and support statements made in the self-evaluation might include:

Institution-level documents or central service information such as:

- the institution's strategic plan
- your learning and teaching strategy
- the report of your most recent QAA institutional audit
- course regulations
- library information
- careers service information
- computing/IT services information
- students' union information

to give just a few examples.

Department/school items:

- details of student first destinations obtained from your careers service (including what happened to dropouts and their reasons for leaving). As a rough guide, details of at least the last three cohorts of graduates should be provided together with information on any particularly high achieving graduates from any era.
- lists (and profiles) of alumni who have done exceptionally well for themselves will add weight to claims about student achievement
- complete files of work done by a small sample of students, say four or five of differing abilities, during their entire academic career — this helps to illustrate progression
- list of publications by academic staff
- details of management and decision-making structures
- a list of addresses of relevant departmental/school websites
- employer testimonials
- charts showing the linkage between research output and relevant teaching, or which highlight key strengths of the subject
- charts offering a visual representation of course structures can be helpful for reviewers

Your central quality team should be able to provide more detailed guidance on the document list as it is being prepared.

Aside from collecting the necessary documentation, there are further activities that should be undertaken including:

● briefing support staff
● informing students about the visit and selecting and briefing those who will meet the reviewers
● contacting alumni and employers who are to be invited to meet the reviewers
● meetings and discussions with providers of central services (especially the careers service, the library and computing/IT services)
● a 'dry run' — see below.

It is vital that everyone who may come into contact with the reviewers is briefed about the purpose of the subject review visit – the information provided to students is particularly important.

It is also important that departments/schools gain full benefit from previous experiences at their institution, especially the most recent visits and you should make direct contact with colleagues in subjects that have recently been reviewed.

The 'dry run'

A 'dry run' can be an extremely valuable preparatory activity for subject review and can include:

● simulation of questioning by colleagues external to the department/school

● discussion of the self-evaluation, highlighting likely lines of enquiry and areas for further preparation

● feedback and action points

● exploration of issues likely to arise under each of areas covered in the self-evaluation document

You will wish to involve colleagues external to the department/school and with experience of subject review in any dry run in order to make the exercise as valuable as possible.

Observation of teaching

Departments/schools are strongly advised to take the opportunity presented by subject review to develop a peer observation scheme if one does not already operate in the department. Of all the activities which can be undertaken in preparing for subject review, peer observation may prove to be the most valuable in contributing to the long term enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. Moreover, it makes it much less likely that the subject review itself will involve any observation of teaching, thereby offering the immediate prospect of a genuinely lighter touch.

In the event that observation of teaching does occur, a set of protocols (see Appendix VI) will be operated.

Other preparatory activities

Beyond dry runs and document gathering there are some other preparations for the visit which need to be made (although some of these may not be feasible until after the initial meeting with the reviewers):

● finalising the timetable for meetings with key individuals within the department/school and relevant central services personnel (noting that the review may be over an extended period)

● ensuring that the teaching environment and common areas are well-presented and look cared for (for example check all noticeboards for old and tatty posters)

● making any necessary domestic arrangements, for example booking lunches for student meeting, ensuring visiting alumni have accommodation booked if needed

● final briefing of all staff

● dispatch of additional documentation to the subject review team

7.   The subject review visit

Who reviews?

Subject reviews are carried out by a team of subject specialist reviewers led by a review coordinator (who will not be a subject specialist). According to the QAA it is the subject specialist reviewers' main responsibility "to gather evidence and to make judgements on the quality of education provided". Subject specialist reviewers are drawn primarily from within higher education and are trained by the QAA before their first review visit.

The number of subject reviewers in each team reflects the size, range and complexity of the education provided. As far as possible, the Agency matches the collective expertise of the team with the broad law specialisms of the department/school. Using its register of reviewers and the criteria for composing teams outlined below, the Agency will propose a subject review team to an institution before the review starts. Account is taken of conflicts of interest declared by subject reviewers. If a review is combined with activity of a professional or statutory body, the requirements of that body will also be considered.

Institutions are invited to comment on the composition of teams and to confirm their agreement in writing to the Agency within four weeks of notification. Any concerns about the suitability of reviewers should be discussed with Agency officers as soon as possible after notification and, if not resolved satisfactorily, put in writing to the Agency.

Experience to date has shown that it is exceptionally helpful to be able to call on the experience of a subject specialist reviewer when preparing for subject review. Participation as a reviewer on subject review visits to other institutions provides a range of useful insights into both the operation of the methodology and others' ingredients for success.

A list of subject reviewers for Law together with details of JISCmail services to enable discussion between departments/schools and subject reviewers can be found at Appendix II.

The review coordinator

The Agency expects the review coordinator for each review to work closely with the subject review facilitator and/or the department/school review coordinator within an institution. The review coordinator will also make initial contact with the subject specialist reviewers, will liaise with both the Agency and the institution about the arrangements for the first visit of the review team to the institution, will prepare for the initial team meeting and allocate reviewer responsibilities, and will be responsible for channeling all requests for documentation from reviewers to the department/school. You should therefore look upon the review coordinator as the main point of contact for the review.

The review coordinator is also responsible for keeping the QAA and the department/school informed about the progress of any particular review. For its part, an institution will want to receive information about the likely pattern of the review and will want to arrange specific times when reviewers will visit. In order to facilitate this, the QAA is expecting review coordinators to agree a tentative schedule with subject specialist reviewers before or at the initial team meeting and to convey this to the department/school. The Agency will also ask

teams to agree a tentative date for completion of each review and will expect this to be communicated to the institution as a matter of priority.

The subject review facilitator

Your institution will have several trained subject review facilitators, one of whom should be assigned to work closely with the department/school prior to and throughout the period of the review and will attend most of the meetings which take place during the review. The purpose of the role is to provide effective liaison between the team of reviewers and department/school staff and to ensure that the team obtains accurate and comprehensive information about the educational provision and its institutional context. Facilitators are briefed for their role by the Agency.

The formal responsibilities of the facilitator are set out in Appendix VII.

Team function for subject review

Subject specialist reviewers focus their attention on the subject and only address institutional matters when they have a direct bearing on the student learning process. It is, however, important that review co-ordinators ensure that matters related to institutional function which come to their team's attention are reported, thereby making them available to the reviewers who carry out institutional review. Subject specialist reviewers assume a collective responsibility for gathering and verifying evidence in relation to academic standards, but may concentrate individually on specific matters in relation to the quality of learning opportunities. All judgements are, however, made collectively.

General approach

Reviews are intended to be conducted in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation between the institutions, their subject staff, and the review teams. Reviewers must be able to gather sufficient evidence on the subject provision to allow them to test statements made in the self-evaluation, and to form robust judgements on the quality and standards of the provision.

At its first meeting, the review team will consider:

● self-evaluation and any other documentation supplied by the department/school prior to the review

● scope and nature of the provision

● main matters for review and judgement

● role of the facilitator in relation to the conduct of the review

● allocation of individual responsibilities amongst the members of the team

● programme activities, both on- and off-site, required for the review

● pattern and timing of visits to the department/school

The review team will then hold an initial meeting with the department/school. The department/school may wish to make a brief presentation to introduce the provision to be reviewed, and to describe any developments since the self-evaluation was prepared.

The review coordinator will remind both the team and the institutional representatives of the method and protocols of review. Reviewers will agree an outline programme for the review and will establish:

● range of student work which can be made available for scrutiny, and the extent to which this constitutes a representative sample of student achievement

● nature of relevant documentation held by the department/school and its availability for scrutiny by reviewers

● range and timing of internal quality assurance 'events', such as programme committees, faculty boards (or equivalent) or examination boards, which might provide documentary evidence and/or be attended (by agreement with the department/school) by reviewers

● timing of any related visits by the professional body

● probable agenda and timing of meetings with academic staff, students and former students

● other practical arrangements for the review

The review team will not normally ask for specially prepared documentation, other than the self-evaluation. It will endeavour to make use of existing documentation used for internal processes related to quality and standards. The pattern of review activity over a period will enable material to be requested well in advance of any visit to the institution. In most cases, subject providers will be able to identify appropriate samples from work completed by students in the current academic year or from materials kept routinely for examination purposes.

Testing the self-evaluation and gathering evidence

The review method provides a structure for the self-evaluation, and for the visits, judgements and reports made by reviewers. It involves addressing:

● subject provision and aims

● learning outcomes

● curricula and assessment

● quality of learning opportunities

● student achievement

● maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards

As may be seen in section 5 and Appendix IV the self-evaluation and *aide-mémoire* for subject review are written to this framework.

Documentary evidence

This includes internal reports from committees, boards and individual staff with relevant responsibilities, and external reports from examiners, employers, validating and accrediting bodies. Emerging judgements are refined and tested against as wide a range of evidence as possible; for example, the views expressed in meetings by staff or by students are tested against the documentation provided. See also section 6.

Whenever and however points of concern or requests for clarification are raised by the reviewers, it is <u>vital</u> that you seek to provide a response and, wherever possible, documentary evidence to ensure that:

● reviewers do not retain a misapprehension about the nature of the provision

● reviewers are able to consider additional evidence which will prevent them from reaching a negative conclusion in relation to one or more aspects of provision

Your subject review facilitator is expected to play an important role in pointing reviewers to documents they might have not taken fully into account but **the prime responsibility lies with the department/school to provide the evidence to confirm that aims are being met.**

Some further notes on documentation:

● where informal interactions among a small group of staff have been identified as important in your self-evaluation document, the reviewers will look for evidence of the effectiveness of such informal arrangements and will expect to see some references to such occasions in formal documentation

● communications between the department/school's subject review co-ordinator and central services providers will need to be well developed prior to the review and maintained (at least via e-mail) over the period of the visit in order that additional documentation can easily be obtained from them if necessary

● every piece of assessed work which reviewers will see <u>must</u> *either* include clear feedback to the student *or* have attached a brief statement about how the feedback was provided to the student(s)

● reports of the annual monitoring or review of courses will have to be included in material provided for reviewers and it is vital that these documents confirm that the department/school has, at the very least, followed whatever the institutional requirements are

● reviewers will wish to see formal responses to external examiners' reports; it is crucial that, in addition to responding to the issues raised in external examiners' reports, departments/schools routinely <u>respond directly to their externals</u> (in writing and in good time) advising them of the actions which have been taken in response to the comments made in reports. This is now a general expectation articulated in the QAA code of practice.

Observation of teaching

Subject reviewers may not need to make direct observations of teaching where a department/school can provide evidence of good quality delivery. Such evidence is likely to come from internal peer review, from student questionnaires and other arrangements for gathering feedback, from the deployment of learning resources, and from student performance in assessments. Direct observation of teaching will be required if:

there are issues that reviewers feel would be best addressed by such observation
observation might help confirm a judgement about exemplary provision
there is insufficient other evidence that effective delivery is being achieved
there are indications that the learning opportunities for students are less than satisfactory

A note on observation of teaching is at Appendix VI.

Meetings with students, former students and employers

Meetings with students enable reviewers to establish student views on the issues being considered. These meetings provide an opportunity not only to hear the direct views of those present, but also to establish more generally whether there are effective arrangements for student feedback and representation. The agenda for the meeting with students is attached at Appendix VIII.

The meeting is normally chaired by the review coordinator, who will introduce the subject specialist reviewers and provide a brief summary of the review method. S/he will outline the purpose of the meeting and will emphasise the importance of transparency of the review process. The dialogue with students will normally start with a question to establish on what basis the students were selected to attend the meeting.

The subject review facilitator should not attend this meeting. Throughout the meeting, students should be given opportunities to raise points not covered by the agenda.

The review team may also wish to meet recent former students who are able to give either an informed overview of the provision or of the quality of the graduates, and employers or other representatives from the profession.

As a general rule, departments/schools should aim to involve students as much as possible in the preparations for the visit, from the drafting of the self-evaluation onwards. The *aide-mémoire* at Appendix IV can be used as an agenda for a preliminary meeting with the student group which is to meet with the reviewers. At least one such meeting should be organised well in advance of the visit. Note that the students should be a representative sample from across courses and years, and that reviewers will expect to be provided with a list of the students' names and courses.

It is also important to note that the arrangements for staff:student liaison and provision of feedback to students on assessed work will be of significant interest to the reviewers. It is therefore essential that whatever your institution's staff:student liaison procedures are, they are in place and well documented and that means exist of advising the student body of action taken (or not, as the case may be) as a result of discussions at staff:student liaison meetings. Reviewers will expect to see evidence of consistent and timely feedback on assessed work and they will be keen to check the perceptions of students in this respect.

Of course this is not just about the effective operation of systems, important though that is. You need to be able to demonstrate a genuine awareness of the concerns of students in the department/school. If you do not know what the broad opinions of the student body are then you can certainly expect to be surprised by what reviewers will discover when they meet the students.

Note that arrangements for induction, the admissions process and students' views on open days and publicity material may also be sought.

Learning resources

Reviewers also gather evidence through direct examination of the student learning resources. Reviewers normally visit the facilities made available to the department/school, and may observe students and staff using specialist IT or other equipment in the course of

normal teaching and learning activities. In looking at library provision, reviewers may undertake catalogue searches or request access to online facilities. In evaluating the quality of learning resources, reviewers' direct observations of facilities are considered alongside evidence from student work, written documentation, meetings with relevant staff, and meetings with students. The emphasis is on access and use of facilities by law students. The review of learning resources may inform judgements in relation to other aspects that are affected by the quality of available resources.

Reviewing the evidence

Each review includes a number of meetings between members of the institution and reviewers to consider the various aspects of provision related to quality and standards. The review coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the review team meets sufficiently often to consider the accumulating evidence and the team's findings. If such meetings take place at the institution, the team may find it helpful to include the facilitator, who can provide factual information relevant to the team's discussions. However, the facilitator may not attend team meetings or parts of meetings at which direct discussion of judgements takes place.

Telephone or e-mail contacts between the team and the department/school may be used to request information or to give notice of issues that the reviewers might wish to explore.

All reviewers will be expected to identify, share, consider and evaluate evidence related to the programmes under scrutiny. Reviewers will be expected to evaluate how the accumulating evidence compares with the evidence provided by the subject provider in the self-evaluation, and to test the strength of the evidence adduced to support the judgements.

A final meeting of the reviewers will be used to review any additional evidence, to agree the particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to both standards and quality, to finalise the judgements, and to determine precisely what is to be reported.

Final observations on the subject review visit

- remember that it is vital to ensure that everyone in the department/school is available to meet reviewers at relevant times during the various visits which will take place

- this is a formal process with a distinctive, specified purpose, and the reviewers will need to maintain a professional distance, albeit coupled with a cordial atmosphere. Do not expect, for example, that they will wish to have any form of social interaction with the department/school.

- ensure that there are no indiscretions on the part of department/school staff — comments about other staff or other parts of the institution help no one and can disrupt the visit

- attitude is everything — a positive, confident, assertive, and open approach to the visit makes the task of the reviewers easier and offers the best prospect of a successful result

8. Subject review judgements and reports

Judgements on academic standards

The judgement on standards is a single, threshold judgement, of confidence or otherwise in standards, made after considering each of the following components:

- appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes
- effectiveness of curriculum content and design, including effectiveness in securing academic and intellectual progression
- appropriateness of assessment in measuring the intended outcomes; security and integrity of the assessment process
- actual student achievement in relation to the intended outcomes and the level of the award

Other points about the standards judgement:

- judgements are not graded — according to the QAA either intended learning outcomes are achieved or they are not
- if standards are being achieved but reviewers are concerned that they may not be maintained, a judgement of 'limited confidence' may be made
- if failure/success in achieving standards has occurred in programmes at one level only, the failing/succeeding level will be identified separately
- where a judgement of 'limited confidence' in academic standards is made, subject reviewers must identify areas where improvement is needed
- the department/school may then be asked to prepare an improvement strategy
- if a judgement is made that standards are not being achieved there will be a further formal review within one calendar year

It is not anticipated that many judgements of 'limited confidence' in academic standards will be reported.

Judgements on quality of learning opportunities

Judgements are made about the extent to which the following three aspects of provision contribute to the achievement of intended learning outcomes:

Teaching and learning

Effectiveness of delivery, in relation to curriculum content and programme aims, through:

- large and small group teaching
- practical sessions
- directed individual learning
- integration of skills within curricula
- distance learning

Student progression

● recruitment, including matching intake to programme requirements

● academic support, including tutorial arrangements and feedback to students

● progression within the programme and wastage

Learning resources

Effective utilisation of:

● equipment, including IT

● accommodation

● library, including electronic resources

● staff, including academic, administrative and technical

Reporting on the quality of learning opportunities will place each of the three aspects of provision into one of three categories, 'failing', 'approved' or 'commendable', and will be made on the following basis:

● provision makes a less than adequate contribution to the achievement of the intended outcomes. Significant improvement is required urgently if the provision is to become at least adequate. In the summary report, this judgement will be referred to as 'failing'.

● provision enables the intended outcomes to be achieved, but improvement is needed to overcome weaknesses. In the summary report, this judgement will be referred to as 'approved'. The summary will normally include a statement containing the phrase 'approved, but...', which will set out the areas where improvement is needed.

● provision contributes substantially to the achievement of the intended outcomes, with most elements demonstrating good practice. In the summary report, this judgement will be referred to as 'commendable'.

Within the 'commendable' category, reviewers will identify any specific features of the aspect of provision that are exemplary. To be deemed 'exemplary', a feature must:

● represent sector-leading best practice

● be worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by, other providers of comparable programmes

● make a significant contribution to the success of the provision being assessed

Incidental or marginal features do not qualify for designation.

If provision is found to be failing in any aspect of quality, or if reviewers have no confidence in the standards achieved, the provision will be regarded, overall, as 'failing'. It follows that all provision that is not failing is 'approved'. The report of the review will state whether or not provision is approved.

At the end of each subject review a 4000 word report is published comprising a brief description of the review method, the overall aims of the subject provider, an evaluation of the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards achieved, the conclusions reached and judgements made and a one page summary of conclusions.

Subject reviewers will gather evidence through discussions with staff and students and scrutiny of examiners' reports on how institutional systems operate in each subject area. The final section of the subject report will express their level of confidence in the institution's ability to maintain quality and standards and these views will inform the institutional review.

The 'exemplary' rating

QAA has recently issued the following additional information on the 'exemplary' descriptor (more information is provided in Appendix IX):

Exemplary features will not be common. They relate to a specific feature of an aspect of provision. 'Exemplary' is not a fourth category of judgement, above the 'commendable' category. To be deemed 'exemplary' a feature must satisfy all three of the criteria listed below. The feature must:

● represent sector-leading best practice

● be worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by, other providers of comparable programmes

● make a significant contribution to the provision being assessed

'Exemplary' signifies not just excellence, but excellence that is generalisable and transferable.

Judgements on standards and quality: additional details

Subsequent to the publication of the *Handbook for academic review* the QAA has (November 2000) issued further advice on judgements, which is reproduced here:

With respect, first of all, to academic standards, it is clear that the normal expectation will be to make a judgement on the overall standards prevailing for the subject under scrutiny. There may, however, be situations where the standards achieved by, for example, honours degree students are high but for sub-degree work or postgraduate work they are not. Here it may be necessary to differentiate between programmes at different levels in the narrative section of the subject review report on standards, and possibly in the judgements.

In view of the fact that the overall judgements are being made at the level of the subject (and not the programme), it is at this point that the reviewers must decide whether the extent of the provision in which they do not have confidence is sufficient to warrant an overall 'no confidence' judgement. On the other hand, it may be appropriate to express confidence in the overall standards but to draw attention in the narrative of the report to a minority of programmes in which the academic standards achieved are lower than they should be. In some cases, it may thus be necessary to make judgements of confidence in the standards for some programmes but not for others. In reality, such cases are likely to be rare, but reviewers must be prepared to differentiate where they believe that an overall judgement would obscure important issues.

Secondly, as far as aspects of quality are concerned, the situation is potentially even more complicated because of the possibility of aggregation of subjects. Again, judgements will normally cover all provision within the scope of the review, but if performance is significantly different in a subject area, or at a particular level within a subject, separate judgements will have to be made. Reviewers will have to decide whether the extent of the weaknesses observed is sufficient to lower the overall judgement of the aspects of provision to 'approved but' or 'failing'. It is highly unlikely that an overall judgement of 'commendable' could be made in circumstancces where one subject of those aggregated shows weakness, but it is just conceivable that otherwise commendable provision could show small weakness at one level within a subject.

The final grading for each aspect thus remains very much a matter for reviewer judgement, taking the full extent of the provision and the weakness identified into consideration. Even if the overall final judgement is 'commendable', the QAA would expect all weaknesses to be clearly identified within the report narrative on the aspects of provision in question.
(QAA letter to institutions from Peter Milton, November 2000)

Further guidance on making judgements is provided to reviewers as part of their training by the QAA. A copy of this guidance is attached at Appendix IX.

Reports

The review coordinator produces the first draft of the report immediately after completion of the review, drawing on the self-evaluation and on the summaries prepared by subject reviewers. This draft is then checked by reviewers for factual accuracy and affords an opportunity for further comment before the report is despatched to the institution. The published reports are the main documented outcomes of the subject review process. Publication should take place within 20 weeks from the end of a review. The QAA expects that reports will be characterised by succinct, accurate writing and a clear, consistent style. The evidence base must be sound, and must be recorded accurately by reviewers.

9. After the visit

The report

Six to eight weeks after the visit you should receive a draft report. You are given an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the report and on any misconceptions or misrepresentations it contains.

Follow-up

The following points should be borne in mind:

● the points identified by reviewers in the report will need to be addressed via annual monitoring/review and periodic re-validation/programme review

● it would be a great waste of effort and time if the procedures, knowledge, practices and indeed the enthusiasm for teaching and learning issues generated by a subject review were to be lost in a few months. Maintaining the momentum will ensure that the department/school will not only retain the capacity to respond to external scrutiny but it will also ensure that staff and students will derive considerable educational benefit.

● you should ensure continuing review of the subject/departmental aims, objectives, curriculum etc (all the things covered by the review methodology)

● the currency of the documentary evidence gathered for subject review should be maintained and someone should be given the responsibility to ensure this happens

● staff and students should be kept aware of their roles in quality procedures

● any new or improved links established with central services should be sustained

Subject review <u>will</u> continue in one form or another. Maintaining the impetus developed before and during the visit will not only make future reviews considerably easier to prepare for — it will positively contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of provision in your department/school.

And finally...

Subject review matters. It offers a genuine opportunity for departments/schools to achieve deserved recognition for the quality of their activities and the chance to reflect on and enhance the student learning experience. You will naturally wish to achieve the high grades that reflect the high quality of teaching and learning you offer. Good luck!

Preparing for subject review can be very time consuming, costly and burdensome — it is hoped that this guide has helped to ease the burden a little.

Appendix I

Resources

UKCLE is working with departments/schools to develop Web and other resources around the topic of subject review. We are grateful to those who have already contributed material and other information. Please continue to share your experiences of subject review both through our discussion lists and by contributing to the resource bank at http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/subjectreview/resources.html.

Discussion lists

To stimulate discussion and the exchange of experiences of preparing for subject review UKCLE is providing:

● a discussion list for law subject reviewers

● a discussion list for heads of law schools/departments

General queries about the subject review process can be submitted to ukcle@warwick.ac.uk. Where appropriate these will be forwarded to the above lists.

Subject review resource bank

The following materials are currently available in the resource bank:

The nuts and bolts of QAA subject review by Norman Jackson, LTSN Generic Centre. Provides an overview of the subject review process and suggests the kinds of questions that subject reviewers should be asking.

Subject benchmark information: implications for curriculum design and assessing student learning by Norman Jackson, LTSN Generic Centre. Looks at subject benchmarking as part of the QAA process, and at some of the issues that need to be addressed if benchmarking is to contribute to the enhancement of student learning.

Assessment issues arising from subject benchmarking statements by Mantz Yorke, Centre for Higher Education Development, Liverpool John Moores University. Looks at the implications of benchmark statements for assessment practice.

Meeting the QAA code of practice for assessment: some suggestions. This document has been contributed by Alison Bone, and is included with the kind permission of the University of Brighton.

Ensuring successful assessment by Alison Bone, University of Brighton. Guidance note published by the National Centre for Legal Education in 1999, which will aid departments/schools as they review their assessment practices.

Other Web resources

The QAA *Handbook for academic review*, which provides full details of the new methodology, can be found at the following address:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/acrevhbook/subjectreview.htm

QAA national qualifications framework:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/nqf/nqf.htm

QAA code of practice:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/codesofpractice.htm

Benchmark statements:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/benchmarking.htm

QAA information on course/programme specifications:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progspec/contents.htm

Appendix II

Subject reviewers for Law

The following people have notified UKCLE that they have been, or are about to be, trained as law subject reviewers:

Anu Arora
Professor of Law
Liverpool Law School
University of Liverpool
Liverpool L69 3BX
Tel: 0151-794 2811
E-mail: arora@liverpool.ac.uk

Phil Harris
Professor of Law
School of Social Sciences and Law
Sheffield Hallam University
Collegiate Crescent Campus
Sheffield
S10 2BP
Tel: 0114 225 2503
E-mail: p.j.harris@shu.ac.uk

Jennifer James
Head of Department of Law
Old Whiteknights House
The University
Reading
RG6 6AH
Fax: 0118 975 3280
E-mail: j.james@rdg.ac.uk

Brian Mitchell
Associate Dean
School of Legal Studies
University of Wolverhampton
Molineux Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1SB
Tel: 01902 321511
E-mail: ls1905@wlv.ac.uk

Chris Vallely
Principal Lecturer
School of Legal Studies
University of Wolverhampton
Molineux Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 1SB
Tel: 01902 321568
E-mail: c.vallely@wlv.ac.uk

Max Young
Head of Department of Law
University of Luton
Vicarage Street
Luton
LU1 3JU
Tel: 01582 743124
E-mail: max.young@luton.ac.uk

If you are a law subject reviewer and are willing to add your contact details to this list, please contact the UKCLE at ukcle@warwick.ac.uk. The list is being published and updated on the UKCLE website as part of the resources supporting this guide.

To enable dissemination of experiences of engaging in the subject review process, UKCLE has also set up:

● a closed JISCmail list for law subject reviewers.

● a closed JISCmail list for Heads of Law Schools/Departments

General enquiries about the subject review process can be sent to ukcle@warwick.ac.uk for forwarding to the law subject reviewers list.

Appendix III

Preparatory activities for subject review

There is a broad range of activities that you may wish to consider in preparing for, during and after subject review visits, including:

- briefings on the QAA subject review methodology

- sessions on preparing the self-evaluation (focusing on for example aims and learning outcomes, addressing standards, dealing with the different aspects of quality of learning opportunities)

- provision of briefing documentation including key QAA documents

- advice sessions from current QAA subject reviewers

- critical analysis of draft self-evaluation (by colleagues external to the department/school)

- sessions on dealing with benchmark statements on standards, the code of practice, course specifications and the national qualifications framework

- liaison with central service providers

- 'dry runs'

- preparing for observation of teaching

Appendix IV

Aide-mémoire for subject review

(This appendix is taken from Annex E of the QAA *Handbook for academic review*)

This *aide-mémoire* consists of questions and prompts to assist subject reviewers. It may be used in:

- analysis of the self-evaluation prior to the review

- collection of evidence during the review

- preparation and compilation of the report of the review

The *aide-mémoire* covers the main features of the review process, but it is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. The provider's self-evaluation, the statement of aims, and the intended outcomes of programmes may all raise issues peculiar to the provision under scrutiny.

Specific prompts for reviewers are set out under a series of headings. The process of review focuses on the setting of academic standards by the subject provider, their achievement by students, and the quality of the learning opportunities offered. Neither 'standards' nor 'quality' can be reviewed in isolation. They are inter-related and must be reviewed as such. The *aide-mémoire* provides questions and prompts about:

- aims and outcomes

- curricula

- assessment

- enhancement

- teaching and learning

- student progression

- learning resources

The *aide-mémoire* should be read in conjunction with the *Handbook for academic review*.

Subject review of standards and quality

The subject review process:

- accommodates a wide diversity of institutional mission and approaches to subjects

- reflects the core academic processes of design, delivery, support, assessment and review of programmes of study

- articulates with an institution's internal processes for the regulation of academic quality and standards

Key points of reference for reviewers will include the relevant sections of the code of practice, the qualifications framework, relevant subject benchmark statements, and the overall aims of the subject provider. Regard should also be had to the requirements of professional and statutory bodies in respect of programmes that they accredit.

The *aide-mémoire* is divided into seven sections that help to set the parameters for the review as a whole. Each section comprises:

- a set of questions, to gather information
- the key issues for evaluation
- an indication of likely sources of information
- an indication of the types of activity likely to be undertaken during a review
- the judgements that should be made

Section i Aims and outcomes

Evaluation of the intended learning outcomes in relation to external reference points and to the broad aims of the provision.

Reviewers should ask:

- *what are the intended learning outcomes for a programme?*
- *how do they relate to external reference points including relevant subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework and any professional body requirements?*
- *how do they relate to the overall aims of the provision as stated by the subject provider?*
- *are they appropriate to the aims?*

They should then evaluate the intended learning outcomes against relevant external reference points and against the aims of the provision as described in the self-evaluation.

Potential sources of information will include the self-evaluation (and its appended programme specifications), curricular documents, subject benchmark statements, and details of professional body requirements.

Review activities may include an analysis of programme content and benchmark statements, discussions with members of the teaching staff, and discussions with external examiners.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to judge:

- whether the intended learning outcomes are clearly stated
- whether they reflect appropriately relevant benchmark statements, other external references and the overall aims of the provision
- the means by which the subject provider designs curricula that permit achievement of the intended outcomes

Reviewers should ask:

- *how does the provider ensure that curriculum content enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?*
- *how does the provider ensure that the design and organisation of the curriculum is effective in promoting student learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes?*

They should then evaluate the effectiveness of the way in which the subject provider plans, designs and approves the curricula.

Sources of information will include institutional curricular documents and curricular review and validation reports. Reviewers should seek to extract information about levels and modes of study, breadth and depth of study, inter- and multi-disciplinarity, coherence, flexibility and student choice, as well as the role of professional and/or statutory bodies where relevant.

Review activities will include discussions with members of the teaching teams, support staff and administrative staff, and discussions with students.

The section of the code of practice dealing with programme approval, monitoring and review will provide an important point of reference.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to judge the adequacy of procedures for ensuring that programmes are designed to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes

The means by which the intended outcomes are communicated to students, staff and external examiners

Reviewers should ask:

- *how are the intended outcomes of a programme and its constituent parts communicated to staff, students and external examiners?*
- *do the students know what is expected of them?*

They should then evaluate the way in which subject providers convey their expectations to staff, students and external examiners.

Sources of information will include programme or subject handbooks and curricular documents such as module or unit guides.

Review activities will include discussions with teaching teams, students and external examiners.

The main outcomes should be judgements on the adequacy of arrangements within the subject for communicating intended learning outcomes.

Section ii Curricula

Evaluation of the means by which the subject provider creates the conditions for achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Reviewers should ask:

- *do the design and content of the curricula encourage achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, subject specific skills (including practical/professional skills), transferable skills, progression to employment and/or further study, and personal development?*

They should then evaluate the design and content of the curriculum for each programme in relation to its potential for enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Sources of information will include subject or programme handbooks and curricular documents, such as module or unit guides, practical or placement handbooks, and further study and employment statistics.

Review activities will include evaluation of curricular documents and discussions with staff and students.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to judge whether the intended learning outcomes are adequately supported by the curricula.

Reviewers should ask:

- *is there evidence that curricular content and design is informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements?*

They should then evaluate whether the curriculum is adequately informed by such developments.

Sources of information will include subject or programme handbooks, validation or re-validation documents, and professional and/or statutory body accreditation reports.

Review activities will include discussions with staff and external examiners, discussions with professional and/or statutory bodies, and discussions with employers (where relevant and possible).

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to assess the currency of the curricula.

Section iii Assessment

Evaluation of the assessment process and the standard it demonstrates.

Reviewers should ask:
- *does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes?*
- *are there criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement?*
- *can there be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?*
- *does the assessment strategy have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities?*

They should then evaluate whether the overall assessment process and the particular assessment instruments chosen are appropriate and effective.

Sources of information will include assessment criteria and guidance to markers, external examiners' reports and procedures for monitoring and recording achievement.

Review activities will include discussions with teaching teams, students and external examiners and the analysis of the methods for recording progress and achievement.

The sections of the code of practice dealing with assessment of students and external examining will be important points of reference.

As a result of these activities, reviewers should be able to judge whether assessment processes can adequately measure achievement of the intended programme outcomes.

Reviewers should ask:
- *what evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmarks and the qualifications framework?*

They should then evaluate whether student achievement meets such expectations.

Sources of information will include external examiners' reports, examination board minutes, and samples of student work.

Review activities will include discussions with teaching teams and external examiners, and observation of examination boards where possible.

Relevant subject benchmark statements and the level descriptors of the qualifications framework will be important points of reference.

As a result of these activities, reviewers should be able to judge whether appropriate standards are being achieved.

Section iv Enhancement

Evaluation of the institution's approaches to reviewing and improving the standards achieved.

Reviewers should ask:

- *how does the subject provider review and seek to enhance standards?*

They should then evaluate the adequacy of the processes used.

Sources of information will include internal and external review documents, external examiners' reports, professional and/or statutory body accreditation reports, and examination board minutes.

Review activities will include analyses of information, practices and procedures, discussions with teaching teams and discussions with external examiners.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to assess the capacity of the subject provider to review and calibrate their standards, and to promote enhancement.

Section v Teaching and learning

Evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities offered by the subject provider: the teaching delivered by staff and how it leads to learning by students.

Reviewers should ask:

- *how effective is teaching in relation to curriculum content and programme aims?*
- *how effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching?*
- *how good are the materials provided to support learning?*
- *is there effective engagement with and participation by students?*
- *is the quality of teaching maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, peer review of teaching, integration of part-time and visiting staff, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new staff?*
- *how effectively is learning facilitated in terms of student workloads?*

They should then evaluate the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning activities; in particular:

- *the breadth, depth, pace and challenge of teaching*
- *whether there is suitable variety of teaching methods*
- *the effectiveness of the teaching of subject knowledge*
- *the effectiveness of the teaching of subject specific, transferable and practical skills*

Sources of information will include student questionnaires, internal review documents, staff development documents, subject or programme handbooks, and academic staff appointment documents.

Review activities will include direct observation of teaching (where judged to be necessary by reviewers), discussions with staff, and discussions with students.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to make an overall judgement of the extent to which teaching and learning contributes to the achievement of the intended outcomes.

Section vi Student progression

Evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities offered by the subject provider: student progression and academic support.

Reviewers should ask:
- *is there an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the provision?*
- *are there effective arrangements for admission and induction which are generally understood by staff and applicants?*
- *how effectively is learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?*
- *are the arrangements for academic tutorial support clear and generally understood by staff and students?*

They should then evaluate whether the arrangements in place are effective in facilitating student progression towards successful completion of their programmes.

Sources of information will include subject or programme handbooks, student questionnaires, internal review documents, recruitment data, and progression data.

Review activities will include discussions with admissions staff, discussions with teaching staff and discussions with students.

As a result of these activities, reviewers should be able to judge the effectiveness of the recruitment arrangements, the strategy for student support and the progression of students.

Section vii Learning resources

Evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities offered by the subject provider: learning resources and their deployment.

Reviewers should ask:

- *is the collective expertise of the academic staff suitable and available for effective delivery of the curricula, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy, and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?*

- *are appropriate staff development opportunities available?*

- *is appropriate technical and administrative support available?*

They should then evaluate the effectiveness of the deployment of academic and support staff in support of the intended learning outcomes.

Sources of information will include staff CVs, internal review documents, external examiners' reports, and staff development documents.

Review activities may include direct observation of teaching (where carried out), discussions with teaching teams, and discussions with students.

As a result of these activities reviewers should be able to judge whether there are appropriately qualified staff who are contributing effectively to achievement of the intended outcomes.

Reviewers should ask:

- *is there an overall strategy for the deployment of learning resources?*

- *how effectively is learning facilitated in terms of the provision of resources?*

- *is suitable teaching and learning accommodation available?*

- *are the subject book and periodical stocks appropriate and accessible?*

- *are suitable equipment and appropriate IT facilities available to learners?*

They should then evaluate the appropriateness of the learning resources available, and the effectiveness of their deployment.

Sources of information will include equipment lists, library stocks, and internal review documents.

Review activities will include direct observation of accommodation and equipment, discussions with staff, and discussions with students.

As a result of these activities, reviewers should be able to judge how effectively the learning resources are deployed in support of the intended outcomes.

Appendix V

Reviewing student work

(This information is based on the student work and assessment pro forma used in the methodology to the end of 2001 – it is likely however that the pro forma used in the new method will cover similar areas.)

The student work and assessment note reflects the emphasis in the process on student work. In preparing for the visit the department/school will wish to ensure that the samples of student work to be provided will enable reviewers to make meaningful (and positive) comments in the areas covered by the note – these are described below.

The student work and assessment note invites reviewers to comment on strengths and weaknesses of students' achievements in relation to the intended learning outcomes in the following areas:

● evidence of student preparation

● knowledge and understanding

● cognitive skills

● key skills (for example communication, numeracy, IT)

● subject-specific skills (including practical and professional skills)

● values, motivation and attitudes

Reviewers are further asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of assessment in relation to the intended learning objectives in the following areas:

● clarity of assessment task

● match of assessment method to learning outcomes

● appropriateness to level

● match to student profile

● appropriateness and clarity of assessment criteria

● consistency of application of marking criteria

● consistency of marking

● quality of feedback provided to students

● evidence of internal moderation

In addition, reviewers will also note the overall quality of students' work, assessment employed and any relevant contributions by external examiners.

Note that when providing examples of student work departments/schools should ensure that marking and feedback sheets, and assessment criteria, accompany the samples. Where oral feedback has been given to students in addition to any written feedback then this should be clearly indicated. It is the responsibility of departments/schools to check thoroughly the accuracy of marking and the consistency and quality of the feedback provided on the sample of work.

Appendix VI

Observation of teaching and learning

(This appendix is taken from Annex I of the QAA *Handbook for academic review*.)

General arrangements

Arrangements for the review of the teaching carried out by the department/school will vary to reflect the nature and scope of the provision. The circumstances in which direct observation of teaching is likely to be appropriate are set out in the *Handbook for academic review*. Subject reviewers may not need to make direct observations of teaching where the department/school can demonstrate that it has evidence of good quality delivery, and where observations of student work indicate student achievement in line with the intended learning outcomes.

However effectively the department/school might define the intended learning outcomes for students and the curricular content suitable for their delivery, if the teaching is poor or if there are restricted learning opportunities, the overall student experience will be poor. Using evidence related to curricular content and indirect evidence related to teaching, such as student feedback and internal peer review, subject reviewers will attempt to evaluate the breadth, depth, pace and challenge of curricular delivery. They will ascertain whether there is a suitable variety of teaching methods, whether intellectual knowledge and skills are transmitted effectively, and whether practical knowledge and skills are imparted. If sufficient evidence is not available to allow a reliable evaluation to be made, reviewers will use direct observation, carried out according to the protocol below.

Protocol for direct observation of teaching

When direct observation of teaching takes place, the reviewer will meet the member of staff responsible for the teaching session before it commences in order to introduce her/himself, to discuss the overall objectives for the session, and to determine how students are intended to benefit from it. Understanding the precise purpose of a teaching session is essential. For example, a lecture delivered for the express purpose of transmitting information will be structured differently from one designed to elicit student participation or stimulate extensive further reading. Reviewers should not make comments during a lecture, seminar or tutorial, and should not be intrusive or engage directly in the activity. For sessions lasting more than one hour, a suitable period of observation may be agreed beforehand. The department/school may also make arrangements for the observation of placements and other off-site activities.

Whenever subject reviewers observe teaching, a standard teaching observation note should be completed. These are supplied by the Agency. In making judgements about individual teaching sessions, reviewers must provide oral feedback to members of staff, even if this requires a later appointment to be made. Oral feedback is confidential to the member of staff and should be given privately. Its purpose is to offer constructive comment rather than to prescribe preferred practice. Reviewers must also preserve the anonymity of the staff observed teaching in all written reports and in discussions with other staff of the institution.

On occasion, students engaged in learning activities in practical sessions or during independent learning sessions may be asked by reviewers to talk about their learning experiences and how the activity being observed fits into their wider programme of study. As with other observations, reviewers should endeavour to meet with the relevant member of staff to ascertain the intended learning outcomes of the session and should provide feedback wherever possible. It is also important that reviewers seek agreement from the member of staff in relation to their discussions with students.

Judgements

All judgements by reviewers about the quality of teaching and learning opportunities offered to students should be made against the broad aims of the subject provider and the intended learning outcomes set to bring about achievement of those aims.

A standard observation note is completed for each teaching/learning session observed. in making their judgements about an individual session, reviewers evaluate whether the teaching and learning approaches and the materials used are effective in achieving the intended learning outcomes. This includes consideration of any relevant written or computer-based guidance for students and samples of student work where these are available.

The observation note

(This information is based on the observation pro forma used in the methodology to the end of 2001 – it is likely however that the pro forma used in the new method will cover similar areas.)

The observation note requires reviewers to report on the specific learning objectives planned for the session and to comment on strengths and weaknesses in relation to the learning outcomes in the following areas:

● clarity of intended learning outcomes

● planning and organisation

● methods/approach

● delivery and pace

● content (currency, accuracy, relevance, use of examples, level, match to student needs) student participation

● use of accommodation and learning resources

In addition, reviewers are asked to summarise the session's overall quality in relation to the learning outcomes.

Appendix VII

Role of the facilitator

(This appendix is taken from Annex F of the QAA *Handbook for academic review*.)

Organisation and management of the review is the responsibility of the QAA review coordinator. Responsibility for ensuring that the review team is provided with appropriate evidence to allow it to reach its judgements lies primarily with the department/school. The facilitator's role is to ensure that the channels of communication between the two work effectively. Discussions between the facilitator and review coordinator should ensure that the department/school is aware of issues being addressed by the teams and the evidence needed to clarify them.

Throughout the course of a review, the facilitator helps the reviewers to come to a clear and accurate understanding of the structures, policies, priorities and procedures of the institution, and the nature of the provision under scrutiny. S/he may wish to bring additional information to the attention of the team and may seek to correct factual inaccuracy. It is for the reviewers however to decide how best to use the information provided. The facilitator is not a member of the team and will not make judgements about the provision.

The role requires the facilitator to observe objectively, to communicate clearly with the team and the subject provider, to respect the protocols on confidentiality outlined below, and to establish effective relationships with the review coordinator and the team, as well as with the subject staff. Facilitators should refrain from acting as advocates for the subject provision under review. However, they may legitimately:

- assist the institution in understanding issues of concern to reviewers
- respond to requests for information and comment
- draw the review team's attention to matters that may have been overlooked
- identify the location of evidence
- provide advice on institutional matters

Activities during reviews

The extended pattern of review requires facilitators to fulfil three main functions in addition to the general liaison role outlined above. First, they should monitor the pattern of visits by subject reviewers. If it appears that there is a departure from the agreed pattern, the matter should be discussed immediately with the review coordinator.

Second, the facilitator should maintain regular telephone and/or email contact with the review coordinator to ensure that reviewers are receiving the information or documentation that they need, particularly for off-site analysis.

Third, facilitators may attend all the following:

- team meetings, except those in which judgements are being discussed by the team of reviewers
- formal meetings held between the reviewers and the institution to investigate matters specific to standards and quality, except those with current and former students
- 'progress' meetings held between the review coordinator and subject staff

Confidentiality

Facilitators will observe the same conventions of confidentiality as subject specialist reviewers. In particular, no information gained during a review shall be used in a manner that allows individuals to be identified. Facilitators must exercise care when reporting back to subject staff to maintain the confidentiality of written material produced by reviewers for the initial team meeting, or at other times during the review. However, facilitators may make their own notes on team discussions in order to help subject staff understand the issues being addressed by reviewers. This can improve the effectiveness of a review, and contribute to the enhancement of standards and quality within the institution.

Appendix VIII

Agenda for meeting with students

(This appendix is taken from Annex J of the QAA *Handbook for academic review*.)

General matters in relation to quality and standards
- how are student views sought?
- are students represented on committees? if so, what is their role?
- are student views influential? can they provide examples?
- did students make a contribution to the self-evaluation?

The curriculum and intended learning outcomes
- are students made aware of the intended learning outcomes by programme specifications or other means?
- what is the match between the expectations of students, the intended learning outcomes and the curricular content?
- does the curricular content encourage the development of knowledge and skills?
- what is its relevance to further study and prospective employment?
- are timetables and workloads appropriate?
- what opportunities are there for practical and vocational experience?

Assessment and achievement
- do students understand the criteria for assessment and the methods employed?
- is assessment formative as well as summative?
- what feedback is there? is it prompt and effective?
- in their experience, have the intended learning outcomes been achieved?
- do academic staff discuss student achievement with students?
- are further study and career aspirations likely to be satisfied?

Teaching and learning
- is the range of teaching and learning methods appropriate for delivering the curriculum?
- how do students perceive the quality of the teaching?
- is there effective support and guidance for independent study?

Student progression and support
- what admission and induction procedures are in operation?
- what are the arrangements for academic support?
- do these arrangements extend to work experience, placements, study abroad and other off-site experiences?
- what skills are acquired? do they enhance employability?
- do students receive effective support?

Learning resources and their deployment
- how good are the library services in terms of opening hours, access, user support, availability of books and journals?
- what IT support is there? are opening hours, access, user support and availability of work stations and software appropriate?
- are there suitable programme-specific materials?
- are the accommodation and equipment adequate?

Appendix IX

Making judgements in subject review

Guidance provided to reviewers during training

This note has been prepared for use in reviewer training sessions. It gives guidance on making judgements, and should be read in conjunction with the *Handbook for academic review*. Judgements should be made in a way that will:

- be informative to students, employers, and institutions
- help providers identify readily any matters requiring remedial action, or strengths to be built upon
- provide a focus for any follow up that the Agency may have to carry out

This means, in particular, that where there are weaknesses or failures, these should be identified clearly. Judgements should not be made by averaging out strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes, that will mean that separate and additional judgements have to be made on certain programmes within the subject area that is being reviewed.

The standards judgement

This is a single, threshold judgement, of confidence or otherwise in standards, made after considering each of the following components:

- appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes (*Handbook*, para 82)
- effectiveness of curriculum content and design, (*Handbook*, para 83), including effectiveness in securing academic and intellectual progression (*Handbook*, para 84)
- appropriateness of assessment in measuring the intended outcomes; security and integrity of the assessment process (*Handbook*, para 85)
- actual student achievement in relation to the intended outcomes and the level of the award (*Handbook*, para 86)

Unit of judgement

The largest unit of provision in respect of which a standards judgement may be made is the subject category, ie law. If there are significant weaknesses present in some programmes, but not others, then separate, additional judgements should be made on those programmes that give rise to concern. For example, reviewers may have confidence in the standards of honours degree programmes, but not in those of a taught masters programme. Similarly, reviewers may have confidence in the standards of a major part of the subject category, but not in another, for example confidence in Social Policy and Administration, but not in Social Work. See *Handbook*, para 87.

Identifying separately those programmes in which reviewers do not have confidence, or have only limited confidence, provides a sharp focus for remedial action by the provider, and follow-up action by the Agency.

Limited confidence

This is a judgement that is likely to be made rarely. It is not a half way house between 'confidence' and 'no confidence'. Before this judgement can be made, reviewers must have concluded that they have confidence in standards at present. It should only be made if there is an identifiable risk to standards in future. It might be appropriate if a major change to

curriculum or assessment was planned, and reviewers had serious doubts about the effectiveness of the new arrangements. Remember that the 'confidence' judgement can be made only if reviewers are satisfied both with current standards, and the prospect of those standards being maintained into the future. A 'limited confidence' judgement would be appropriate if the first condition was satisfied, but not the second. See *Handbook*, para 81.

No confidence

Reviewers must be satisfied with all of the matters listed in the bullet points above, if they are to make a 'confidence' judgement. The first three deal with the design of the programmes, the fourth with the actual achievement of students. Reviewers cannot have confidence in the standards of provision if they are satisfied on only three out of the four matters. If they are not satisfied with one, then that will result in a judgement of 'no confidence'. The nature of the failure should be identified in the narrative, to assist remedial action and follow up. As noted above, if a failure is in respect of a single programme, or programmes at one level only, the 'no confidence' judgement may be restricted to the failing programmes, and a separate judgement made on the others.

The quality judgements

A series of judgements is made, on each of:
● teaching and learning (*Handbook*, para 89)
● student progression (*Handbook*, para 90)
● learning resources (*Handbook*, para 91)

Unit of judgement

For each of the three aspects listed above, a single judgement may be made covering all of the provision under review. If more than one subject category is included in the review, it is still possible to make a single judgement. Where subject categories have been aggregated by the provider, it is likely to be because of the way in which provision is offered to students, for example through a multi-disciplinary modular scheme. If the students experience a consistent quality of provision across all components of their study, it is reasonable for a single judgement to be made about the quality of the learning opportunities provided. However, if weaknesses affect a single subject, or a particular level, or a separately identifiable group of programmes, then separate and additional judgements should be made.

The judgements

Most judgements will require reviewers to consider whether provision should be placed in the 'commendable' or the 'approved, but...' category. (See *Handbook*, para 92.) The 'approved, but...' category should be used when there is identifiable weakness that should be addressed. The narrative of the report should identify clearly the nature of that weakness. The 'commendable' category is likely to be appropriate in the majority of cases. The provision, in the aspect concerned, should be contributing "substantially to the achievement of the intended outcomes, with most elements demonstrating good practice". This does not mean that it should be perfect, but neither should it have significant weaknesses. If provision is less than adequate, it should be judged to be 'failing'.

Exemplary features

Exemplary features will not be common. They relate to a specific feature of an aspect of provision. 'Exemplary' is <u>not</u> a fourth category of judgement, above the 'commendable' category. To be deemed 'exemplary' a feature must satisfy all three of the criteria listed in the *Handbook*, para 93. The feature must:

- represent sector-leading best practice; and
- be worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by, other providers of comparable programmes; and
- make a significant contribution to the provision being assessed.

Excellence alone does not make a feature exemplary. For example, a unique programme might be of excellent quality, but its features would not be exemplary if no other programme existed that could emulate them. 'Exemplariness' is about innovation that can be used to promote enhancement elsewhere, it is not solely an accolade for the provider.

Review teams will need to draw upon their collective experience to judge whether a feature represents sector leading best practice. It will be a matter of both fact and judgement as to whether a feature makes a 'significant contribution' to the success of the provision, but incidental or marginal features should not be considered.

The critical test will be whether the feature is worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by other providers. Reviewers will wish to consider the practicality of a feature being emulated elsewhere. An exemplar is "a model for imitation" (*Oxford shorter English dictionary*). 'Exemplary' signifies not just excellence, but excellence that is generalisable and transferable.

Overall judgements of failure

A failing judgement in any aspect of quality, or a finding of no confidence in standards, will lead to the provision being regarded, overall, as failing. If the failing or no confidence judgement has been expressed in respect of the whole of the provision under review, then the whole of that provision fails, and the whole of it will be subject to further review within a year.

If the failing or no confidence judgement relates to a programme or group of programmes only, then it is those programmes that fail overall, and which will be subject to further review. In this case the narrative of the report will need to make clear precisely which parts of the provision are approved, and which parts are regarded as failing.

Maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality

Reviewers should not overlook the significance of the comments that they are asked to make by the *Handbook*, para 95. This does not call for a formalised judgement, of the sort made in relation to standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Nevertheless, this is the part of the report in which reviewers are invited to express their confidence, or otherwise, in the overall ability of the provider to maintain and enhance quality and standards in the subject(s) under review. In expressing their views, reviewers should bear in mind the matters that will be addressed in the institutional review component of subject review. (See *Handbook*, Part 2.) Comments about the degree of confidence that reviewers have in institutional arrangements, in the light of their findings at subject level, are of particular value if they address issues concerning:

- programme approval, monitoring and review
- assessment of students
- external examining
- collaborative provision

If reviewers have doubts about the ability of the provider to maintain and enhance quality and standards, the cause of the doubt should be clearly articulated, so that it may be followed up in a subsequent institutional review. Similarly, strengths should be identified, as these may have a bearing on the intensity of scrutiny that may be required at institutional level.