Handbook for academic review

Contents

Introduction

Background

1 The mission of the Agency is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. To this end, the Agency carries out academic reviews of the performance of subjects and institutions. This *Handbook* describes the method and procedures for carrying out academic reviews, in respect of both programmes (single subject or inter-disciplinary) and institutions, the quality of learning opportunities provided, the academic standards achieved, and the quality assurance systems operating in higher education (HE) institutions in the UK.

2 The method and procedures comprise an integrated approach focused on the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards. These are matters for which the primary responsibility lies with the HE institution. However, the funding councils have a statutory responsibility to secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education they fund. The Agency acts on behalf of the funding bodies in this respect.

3 The main purposes of this statutory assessment are:

• to secure value from public investment, by ensuring that all education for which funding is provided is of approved quality, and by encouraging speedy rectification of major shortcomings in the quality of education, and to enable judgements to inform funding should the funding council so decide;

• to encourage improvements in the quality of education through the publication of subject review reports and subject overview reports, and through the sharing of best practice;

• to provide, through the publication of reports, effective and accessible public information on the quality of HE.

4 Public confidence in the quality and standards of higher education depends on the availability of public information that is objective and independent. The Agency provides this by addressing three inter-dependent areas:

• reporting on **programme outcome standards** is concerned with the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes set by the subject provider (in relation to relevant subject benchmark statements, qualification levels and the overall aims of the provision), the effectiveness of curricular content and assessment arrangements (in relation to the intended learning outcomes), and the achievements of students;

• reporting on the **quality of learning opportunities** in a subject is concerned with the effectiveness of the teaching, the learning resources and the academic support in promoting student learning and achievement across the various programmes in the subject area;

• reporting on **institutional management of standards and quality** is concerned with the robustness and security of institutional systems relating to the awarding function. This involves, in particular, arrangements for dealing with approval and review of programmes, the management of institutional credit and qualification arrangements, and the management of assessment procedures.

5 The overall process of gathering evidence about standards and quality must be effective and efficient and avoid, as far as possible, duplication of effort. Reports on programme outcome standards and the quality of learning opportunities will be outputs of a single process of review of subjects, which forms the focus of **Part 1** of this *Handbook*. These reports feed information into the process of scrutiny of institutions, thereby providing material for reports on institutional management of standards and quality. This process is dealt with in **Part 2** of this *Handbook*.

6   Conceptually, academic review may be seen as a dynamic engagement with the internal processes of an institution over a six-year cycle. Subject review will update continuously the picture that the Agency has of an institution, and will provide audit trails to inform judgements about overall institutional systems. For review of institutional systems, it should not be necessary to collect significant quantities of additional information, except in relation to the most senior layers of the institutional structure.

7   Institutional review is in this sense a continuous process, with each subject review contributing information to the overall picture. That picture will help determine the intensity of scrutiny needed to report reliably in subsequent subject reviews, and to make the summative judgements on overall institutional systems once in each cycle.

8   For both subjects and institutions, the method of academic review will be centred on self-evaluation documents produced by the institution. Guidance on the preparation of self-evaluation documents is provided in the annexes to this *Handbook*. The first task for academic reviewers is to test, by means of their own observations and analyses, the statements made by institutions in their self-evaluation documents. Secondly, they will make judgements on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the provision, as outlined above.

Code of practice

9   The Agency publishes a *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, with sections addressing good practice in individual areas of academic management. Those sections relating directly to quality and standards provide both institutions and reviewers with a background against which judgements can be made. Reviewers will expect institutional systems to have at least an 'equivalent effect' to the precepts of the *Code*.

10   Academic reviewers should ensure that they are familiar with the *Code*. In particular they should be aware of the precepts in the following sections which deal directly with quality and standards:

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

The precepts in these sections provide criteria against which academic reviewers can make their judgements on both subject provision and institutional management.

Intensity of scrutiny

11   There is a proper expectation that any system of quality assurance will be as efficient as possible and will consume no more overall resource than is necessary. To this end, the method used by the Agency:

- provides transparency of process through the use of qualifications frameworks, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*;

- involves exchange of information between the subject and institutional review processes, thereby reducing duplication to a minimum;

- allows institutions to negotiate the timing and aggregation of subject reviews. This enables external review to be aligned with internal review, re-validation or professional and statutory body timetables, should an institution so wish;

- facilitates alignment of subject review with internal processes by spreading reviews over a period rather than imposing a 'snapshot' style review visit. Thus evidence from internal processes can be made available to reviewers on request, so that the need for the preparation and assembly of large amounts of documentation in advance of a visit is removed;

- ensures that the amount of time taken to conduct a subject review is the minimum necessary to enable reliable judgements to be made.

12   Any process of scrutiny should evolve from one of universal intensity to one in which intervention is in inverse proportion to success. Where the Agency has confidence in an institution's ability to assure quality and standards, a lower intensity of review (a 'lighter touch') may be expected, but where there is no convincing evidence of robust and effective systems, greater intensity may be necessary. However, in the case of subject review, the Agency reserves the right to conduct a limited sample of reviews at a standard intensity, even in those institutions with the best record, as a means of refreshing the evidence base.

The review method

13 Part 1 of this *Handbook* describes the methods used for the review of subject quality and standards. Programmes taught at sub-degree, degree and postgraduate levels are reviewed, including programmes franchised to other UK institutions.

Understanding the process

Subjects and programmes

14 The *Handbook* refers to both subjects and programmes. The Agency reports on academic provision in 42 broad subject areas (listed in **Annex K**). For each subject, benchmark information (see paragraphs 34 to 36) is produced.

15 'Programme' refers to the programmes of study followed by students. Programmes may be offered at different levels (eg HND, honours degree or taught master's degree) within a single subject. A programme may be multi-disciplinary, for example a joint honours degree. The term 'programme' may refer also to the main pathways through a modular scheme, which itself may include several subjects.

16 The unit of review is the subject. Institutions may ask for a group of subjects to be reviewed together, particularly where they are linked by joint programmes or by modular pathways.

Main features of the method

17 This section of the *Handbook* describes the main features of the method used to conduct subject reviews. The features are grouped under the following headings:

- Preparing for review;
- Points of reference for review;
- Conducting the review;
- Judgements and reports.

Preparing for review

Scope and preference surveys

18 The 2000-2006 cycle of subject review is divided into two three-year periods. Approximately one year before the commencement of each period, every institution will be asked to complete a 'scope and preference' information form. This is designed to gather information about the range of subjects offered, the programmes to be included under each subject heading, the estimated numbers of student FTEs for each programme, the institution's preferred timing for the review of each subject and any preferences for subjects to be reviewed together. This advance information provides a basis for further discussions with each institution to plan and agree the scope and timing of academic reviews for the three-year period.

19 As far as possible, the Agency will seek to accommodate the preferences for the timing of reviews expressed by institutions. However, the balance of the Agency's overall workload needs to be maintained across the three years of the review programme, and the overall schedule must take into account the availability of academic reviewers with appropriate expertise. Where 'scope and preference' responses indicate that a preferred timing is to enable a review to coincide with a scheduled internal review, or with an accreditation visit by a professional or statutory body with an interest in the same provision, priority will be given to accommodating such preferences.

Initial profiles

20 The integrated method described in this *Handbook* requires mutual exchange of information between subject and institutional reviews. Reports of institutional reviews will inform the approach to the review of individual subjects by providing an indication of the degree of confidence that can be placed in the effectiveness of institutional quality assurance processes. This will help determine the intensity of scrutiny that is appropriate for subject review. In the early stages of the 2000–2006 review cycle, few institutional reviews will have been conducted with the aim of providing such information. Accordingly, the Agency will use instead specially prepared initial profiles to commence a dialogue with each institution about the overall approach to and intensity of review.

21 The Agency has considerable information about individual institutions, derived from previous quality assessments and quality audits. This information will be used to prepare a profile of each institution, which will be shared with the institution concerned, but not published. Each profile will summarise evidence related to the broad aims of the institution, the appropriateness of the curricula to deliver intended learning outcomes, the quality of curricular delivery and student learning, student support and progression, learning resources and student achievement. Further details are provided in **Annex B**.

22 On the basis of the profile, the Agency will discuss with each institution the approach to subject reviews for the subsequent three-year period. For each subject, the initial profile, previous subject report(s), and other relevant and available information (eg accreditation reports by a professional body) will be used to reach a provisional view on the amount of reviewer activity needed to allow reliable judgements to be made. Subsequently, analysis of the self-evaluation document by the team of academic reviewers will be used to confirm, or vary, the likely intensity of the review. Finally, once the review has commenced, it is open to reviewers to indicate if they believe that the review requires more or less reviewer time than agreed. In that event, the Agency will contact the institution in order to agree any change to the pattern of review activity.

23 Initial profiles and reviews will not be used to band institutions, with differing intensities of scrutiny applying to each band. Higher education institutions are large, complex organisations with balances of strengths and weaknesses. They cannot be differentiated in such a simplistic way. Individual judgements will be made that will take into account also the perceptions of the institution about its own strengths and weaknesses, its effectiveness in identifying and addressing any weaknesses, and any trends identifiable from the overall track record of results of subject reviews.

Self-evaluation documents and programme specifications (Annexes C, D)

24 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 we do it in the way that we do?'. Academic 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.

25 Second, the document provides a framework for a process of academic 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.

26 Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents appear at **Annex C**. These guidelines are intended to ensure that institutions address the relevant issues, and include the material needed by academic reviewers prior to a review in order to obtain an accurate picture of the provision. A document prepared for internal review processes may be able to meet the guidelines, thus removing the need to prepare a separate self-evaluation purely for external review.

27 Institutions may wish to aggregate subjects for the purposes of review. This will be acceptable where the grouping is of cognate subjects, and can be justified by reference to the ways in which combinations of subjects are offered to students, eg through a modular scheme. Subjects proposed for aggregation must be proposed for review in the same year. Self-evaluation documents must cover all provision that is included within any such grouping, either as a single document, or as a coherently related set of documents. If reviewers find that programmes within a grouping, of a particular kind, or at a particular level, are performing significantly differently from the generality of programmes in that grouping, separate judgements will be made and reported on those programmes.

28 Specifications for each of the programmes included must be annexed to the self-evaluation in order to make them readily available for academic reviewers. The specifications should provide the core factual information about the programmes, allowing the self-evaluation itself to provide a reflective analysis of the provision and its development.

29 Programme specifications should make explicit the intended outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, and skills and other attributes. They should help students to understand what is expected of them. They should enable teaching teams to articulate the teaching and learning methods that enable students to achieve the outcomes; the assessment methods that enable achievement to be demonstrated; and the relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework and to any subsequent professional qualification or career path.

30 To be most effective, programme specifications should become part of an institution's curricular planning, approval and review processes. Preparation of them is an opportunity for teaching teams to reflect on the purposes and intended outcomes of their provision. Programme specifications will be the starting point for academic reviewers as they seek to understand the intended outcomes and the assessment methods for the programmes under review. The Agency has provided information to assist in the preparation of these documents (**Annex D**).

31 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 (for example, to coincide with an internal review), a submission date will be agreed with the institution.

Points of reference for review of standards

Qualifications framework

32 The framework of higher education qualifications provides reference points to be used to determine whether the intended outcomes for programmes, and actual student achievement are appropriate to the level of the qualification awarded. The framework helps provide public assurance that qualifications bearing similar titles represent similar levels of achievement. There are two qualifications frameworks, one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and one for Scotland. There are points of alignment between the two frameworks, particularly at postgraduate level. This *Handbook* refers to the qualifications framework in the singular. This is to avoid confusion as, in general, only one framework will apply to any one HE institution.

33   Implementation of the framework will take place over the first six-year cycle of academic review. In making judgements about the provision under review, academic reviewers will recognise that institutions may need time to ensure that all of their provision is aligned with the framework.

Subject benchmark statements

34   Subject benchmarks are statements which represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in a particular subject area. Benchmarking is not about listing specific knowledge; that is a matter for institutions in designing individual programmes. It is about the conceptual framework that gives a discipline its coherence and identity; about the intellectual capability 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.

35   Reviewers will use relevant benchmark statements as a means of determining whether the intended learning outcomes of individual programmes are appropriate. Institutions should be able to demonstrate how subject benchmark statements have been used to inform decisions about the intended outcomes of programmes, and in calibrating the overall demands of the assessment framework. The Agency recognises that institutions have their own cycles of programme review, and that it is through these that any changes, to reflect benchmark statements, will come. Reviewers will be sensitive to the challenges that institutions will face in working with benchmark statements for the first time. Nevertheless, benchmark statements provide an immediate starting point for discussion and reflection within teaching teams, and between teaching teams and academic reviewers, about the appropriateness of the outcomes of their programmes. Over time, benchmark statements will be revised in the light of feedback from subject communities.

36   For some programmes more than one benchmark statement may be relevant, while in some specialist, innovative or inter-disciplinary fields there may not be any statement that is of direct relevance. In such cases, the level descriptors of the overall qualifications framework, and the guidance in the *Code of practice* section on programme approval, monitoring and review, will assist institutions in ensuring that their provision meets generally accepted standards for a given level of award. In all cases the institution remains responsible for identifying and assuring the standards of its awards and for ensuring that they reflect appropriate external indicators.

Conducting the review

Peer review

37   Peer review enables judgements to be made by those who understand the subject under scrutiny and who are familiar with teaching and learning processes. It enables judgements to be credible to, and to command the respect of, subject providers. For a peer review process to have credibility with external stakeholders, such as employers and potential students, judgements must be made in a transparent manner, and reported publicly.

38   Subject review is carried out by a team of subject specialists, whose main responsibility is to read, analyse and test the self-evaluation produced by the institution, and to gather whatever further evidence they need to make the judgements described later in this *Handbook*. Subject specialist reviewers are drawn mainly from the higher education sector, although nominations and applications from industry, commerce and the professions are actively sought by the Agency. Subject specialists are trained and briefed by the Agency before taking part in reviews. Further details of their function may be found in **Annex A**. For a note on the composition of teams, see **Annex G**.

39 Management of each review and liaison with the institution is the responsibility of a review coordinator. Coordinators are not specialists in the subject under scrutiny, but individuals with extensive experience of HE and quality assurance. Each is provided with training specific to their coordinating function and each attends at least one specialist reviewer training course. Further details of their function are given in **Annex A**.

Review against the broad aims of the provider

40 Subject providers should be able to set out clearly the broad aims of their programmes. Such statements should indicate, in general terms, what the subject provider is seeking to achieve, how these aims relate to external indicators (such as subject benchmark statements, professional body requirements, or employer expectations), and the general attributes of its graduates. These broad aims will provide the context in which the review takes place. Accordingly, the Agency will expect the aims of the provision to be stated at the beginning of any self-evaluation and will publish the aims in the subject review report. The statement must be sufficiently clear to allow intended learning outcomes to be set which ensure that the aims are achieved, and to provide a sound basis for the subject review to be planned and carried out.

Review over an extended period

41 Spreading the available reviewer days over a period should allow reviewers to gain a better understanding of the subject provision than is possible in a concentrated, 'snapshot' use of the same number of days. It reduces the need to prepare large amounts of documentation in preparation for a single visit. Spreading review activity over a period will enable academic reviewers to observe, when appropriate and by arrangement with the subject provider, internal quality assurance 'events', such as programme committee meetings, programme approval events, and examination and assessment boards, and thus to use documentation already prepared for internal quality assurance purposes.

42 In addition, academic reviewers will be able to:

- visit the subject provider at mutually convenient times over a period;

- attend relevant internal events as observers by invitation;

- carry out off-site desk-based analyses of information and data;

- vary the pattern of visiting according to the confidence placed in the quality assurance systems operated by the subject provider.

Judgements and reports

Judgements on academic standards

43 Judgements are made on the academic standards in each subject under scrutiny. Where a group of subjects is aggregated so as to be reviewed together, a separate judgement is made on each to enable strengths and weaknesses in individual subjects to be identified. These judgements focus on whether intended learning outcomes are appropriate and whether the outcomes achieved are consistent with the intentions. The judgements are not graded; either the intended outcomes are appropriate and are achieved, or they are not. Reviewers will make their judgement accordingly, that there can be confidence, or not, in the standards of the provision. If standards are being achieved, but reviewers have concerns about the ability of the institution to maintain them into the future, a judgement of **'limited confidence'** may be made. If a failure to achieve standards has occurred in programmes at one level only, and there is confidence in standards at other levels, the failing level will be identified separately. The issues which academic reviewers must address in order to make these judgements are described in greater detail in later sections of this *Handbook* and in the *aide-mémoire* for academic review (**Annex E**).

44 Where an expression of **'limited confidence'** in academic standards is made, academic reviewers must identify areas where improvement is needed. The subject provider may then be asked to prepare an improvement strategy, implementation of which is monitored by the Agency. If a judgement is made that standards are not being achieved, there will be a further, formal review by the Agency within one calendar year. If standards continue not to be achieved, funding is potentially at risk.

Judgements on quality of learning opportunities

45 For each subject, and through the same process of scrutiny, the quality of the provision is reviewed. Judgements are made about the extent to which the three aspects of provision outlined below contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes in the subject area under review:

- teaching and learning;
- student progression;
- effective utilisation of learning resources.

This part of the academic review process focuses on the learning opportunities that enable students to achieve the academic standards established by the subject provider.

Judgements on groups of programmes and individual programmes

46 Each review of a subject will usually cover a number of programmes, sometimes at different levels. Subjects may also be aggregated for the purposes of review. In most cases, a judgement on standards or quality may be made with confidence for all programmes in that subject area, or grouping. However, if a particular programme, subject or level is performing significantly better or worse than the generality of provision within the unit of review, it will be commented on separately in the review report. This is designed to ensure that there is no averaging of overall performance that could conceal good practice deserving praise or shortcomings that require attention.

Subject review reports

47 At the end of each subject review, a report of approximately 4,000 words is published which describes the findings of the team of reviewers. It is the main documented outcome of the review process and provides the main feedback to the institution and its subject provider. The report will include:

- a brief description of the review method;
- the overall aims of the subject provider;
- an evaluation of the quality of the learning opportunities provided and the academic standards achieved;
- the conclusions reached and the judgements made;
- a one-page summary of the main conclusions.

48 Reporting on the quality of learning opportunities takes the form of a narrative commentary on each of the three aspects of provision. The commentaries will identify particular strengths and weaknesses and will place each aspect into one of three categories: **'failing'**, **'approved'** or **'commendable'**. Within the **'commendable'** category, exemplary features may also be identified. Further details of the categories and the criteria for judgements are given in paragraphs 88 to 94 of this *Handbook*.

49 Reporting on standards takes the form of a narrative commentary which addresses strengths and weaknesses by reference (where appropriate) to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements, and the qualifications framework, and leads to the

overall judgement. The narrative may identify matters for particular commendation or matters of concern, including the ability of the institution to maintain standards into the future. While a point of concern need not mean that standards are not being achieved, several points of concern may mean that there is limited confidence in the ability of the subject provider to maintain standards. Where weaknesses exist which, if uncorrected, could imperil standards, it is important that there is a mechanism to ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken.

50 Potential students, employers and other members of the public require clear and concise information about the provision within a subject that allows them to distinguish between different providers of similar programmes. For this purpose, each subject report will contain a one-page summary of the findings and judgements made on both quality and standards.

51 Draft reports are sent to the institution for comment on matters of factual accuracy. Feedback on the review is provided to the institution through the draft report. As the review may take place over a period, and include both off-site consideration of written material and on-site observation and meetings, there is not a formal concluding session at which oral feedback is given to the institution. The Agency aims to publish reports, on its web site, within 20 weeks from the end of a review.

52 On completion of the schedule of the reviews in a particular subject area, a subject overview report is published. In the light of this report the subject community will be invited to consider any adjustment to the subject benchmark statement as may be necessary. The overview reports are designed to record the findings of the review teams and to promote best practice.

How the process works

Preparation for subject review

Liaison between the institution and the review team

53 Institutions may nominate a subject review facilitator for each review to facilitate liaison between the team of reviewers and the institution, and to ensure that the team obtains accurate and comprehensive information about the subject provision and its institutional context. Institutions may find it convenient to nominate the same facilitator for a number of reviews. The Agency offers briefing sessions for facilitators.

Further details of the role of a subject review facilitator are given in **Annex F**.

Advance planning and preparatory meetings

54 Advance planning begins with the return by institutions of replies to the 'scope and preference' enquiry made before the start of the first or second half of the review cycle. If the Agency is able to agree the proposed distribution of subjects for review across the three year period, the institution will be notified of this. If there are operational reasons why the preferred pattern cannot be accommodated, the matter will be discussed with the institution, with a view to reaching agreement on a revised pattern. In the absence of agreement, the Agency will notify the institution of the distribution of subjects that will be adopted over the period.

55 Some six months before the start of each academic year, the Agency will initiate a discussion with each institution about the pattern of review that appears appropriate for each subject due to be reviewed in that year. These discussions will take as a starting point the initial profile, based on historical evidence about the institution as a whole; evidence about performance in the subject(s) in question, from the previous subject review(s); and any available accreditation reports by professional or statutory bodies. The institution will be invited to suggest the most appropriate pattern of review activity, having regard for the timing of any relevant internal

events or accreditation visits. The Agency will then seek to reach agreement with the institution on the pattern, timing and intensity of review activity for each subject, or group of subjects. In the absence of agreement, the decision of the Agency will be final.

56 The Agency will consider the intensity of scrutiny likely to be necessary to enable valid and reliable judgements to be made. On the one hand, it will seek to verify continuity of a record of good practice, which might indicate that a relatively low intensity is needed. On the other hand, where there has been less good or unsatisfactory practice, a relatively higher intensity is likely to be needed, to enable the reviewers to establish whether improvements have been made. Statements from academic audit and institutional review reports about the level of confidence that may be placed in institutional management of quality and standards will be taken into account.

57 Indicators of good practice, drawn from institutional and subject review reports, might include:

- positive commendations;

- few negative statements;

- few recommendations for attention;

- no 'essential' recommendations from institutional review reports;

- evidence of management of quality and standards in line with the expectations of good practice expressed in the *Code of practice*;

- no suggestions of differential performance by level or mode.

58 Indicators of a need for improvement, drawn from institutional and subject review reports might include:

- recommendations for action;

- issues highlighted for attention;

- grade(s) 2 or below (or equivalent) in subject review graded profile(s);

- 'essential' recommendations from institutional review reports;

- evidence that the management of quality and standards is not in line with the expectations of good practice expressed in the *Code of practice*;

- suggestions of differential performance between levels and modes.

Academic review teams

59 The number of academic reviewers in each team will reflect the size, range and complexity of the education provided. As far as possible, within the resources available, the Agency will match the expertise of the team of reviewers with the broad specialisms of the subject provision under scrutiny. The criteria for team composition are in **Annex G**. The role of reviewers is set out in **Annex A**.

60 A register of reviewers is published by the Agency.

61 The proposed composition of a review team will be notified to the institution. Any concerns about the composition of a team, for example because of a conflict of interest of which the Agency is unaware, must be notified to the Agency within four weeks. If a review is to be combined with accreditation by a professional or statutory body, composition of the team will be discussed with that body.

Analysis of the self-evaluation

62 The review team will use the self-evaluation prepared by the institution to help to set priorities for and to plan the review. Reviewers will consider whether the broad aims of the provision are

clear; and whether the intended learning outcomes allow the aims to be achieved. The reviewers will consider whether:

- the aims are an adequate expression of the broad educational purposes of the provision;

- the aims reflect appropriately any relevant subject benchmarks;

- there is a clear relationship between the broad aims and the intended learning outcomes.

If the aims, or their relationship with the intended learning outcomes, are unclear, the provider will be asked for clarification before the review proceeds.

63 Each section of the self-evaluation will be assessed to ensure that it is evaluative, rather than merely descriptive. An institution may be asked to revise a document if it fails to provide a suitable basis for the review.

Conducting the review

General approach

64 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.

65 At its first meeting, the review team will consider the:

- self-evaluation and any other documentation supplied by the institution 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 subject provider.

66 The review team will then hold an initial meeting with the subject provider. The provider 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 the:

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

- nature of relevant documentation held by the institution 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 subject provider) by reviewers;

- timing of any related visits by professional or statutory bodies;

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

- other practical arrangements for the review.

67 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. **Annex H** summarises the range of documentation to which reviewers expect to have access and also provides guidance on the student work to be made available. 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

68 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 **Annexes C** and **E**, the self-evaluation is written to this framework and the *aide-mémoire* for subject review is structured similarly.

69 Assessment of the quality of subject provision and of academic standards achieved is through a combination of direct observation and scrutiny of documentary evidence. Documentary evidence 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.

70 Academic reviewers may not need to make direct observations of teaching where a subject provider 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; or
- there are indications that the learning opportunities for students are less than satisfactory.

A note on observation of teaching is at **Annex I**.

71 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.

72 The views of students are important, but should be treated as one source of evidence among several. Meetings with students enable reviewers to establish the students':

- understanding of the overall aims and intended learning outcomes;
- responses to the teaching;

- learning experiences;

- views on academic support and the resources available;

- feedback and representation arrangements.

The facilitator does not attend these meetings but may be consulted about the issues raised by the students. Arrangements for meetings with students are set out in **Annex J**.

The reviewers may also seek the views of former students, their employers, and representatives from relevant industries or professions.

73 All reviewers are expected to identify, share, consider and evaluate evidence related to the programmes under scrutiny. Reviewers should keep notes of all meetings with staff and students, of their observations, and of comments on the quality of students' work and its assessment. Notes should be analytical rather than merely descriptive, and should refer to sources of information as well as to direct observations. Strengths and weaknesses should be summarised. Circulation of notes within the review team, and collation by the review coordinator, will assist in developing a collective evidence base on which judgements can be made.

74 Team meetings are used to review the evidence gathered, form preliminary judgements, and determine which issues require further exploration. Reviewers are expected to evaluate how the evidence gathered compares with the self-evaluation prepared by the subject provider and to test the strength of the evidence adduced to support the judgements. Discussion of the emerging judgements must involve the whole review team.

Making judgements

Evidence

75 The subject review *aide-mémoire* at **Annex E** provides guidance on the questions likely to lead to the evidence necessary to make judgements about academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

76 The collective judgements of the review team should be informed by the totality of evidence accumulated. Accordingly, all team members are expected to share information they have gathered which appears relevant to any matter on which judgement is to be made.

77 Judgements about academic standards will be made on the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes set by the subject provider in relation to subject benchmark statements, qualification levels and the overall aims of the provision; on the effectiveness of curricular content and assessment arrangements in relation to the intended learning outcomes; and on actual student achievement.

78 Judgements about the quality of learning opportunities will be made on the effectiveness of teaching and the learning opportunities provided; on the effectiveness of the use of learning resources (including human resources); and on the effectiveness of the support provided to students to enable them to progress within the programme.

79 Reviewers will seek to establish that:

- intended learning outcomes are clearly expressed, and reflect appropriately relevant subject benchmark statements and the overall aims of the programme;

- curricular content supports the intended outcomes, and that assessments measure appropriately their achievement;

- there is effective communication to staff and students, so that learners and teachers know what is expected of them.

80 Reviewers will seek to establish, by reference to subject benchmark statements where appropriate, that the design of the curriculum 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.

Judgements on academic standards

81 A single, threshold judgement is made about academic standards. Having regard to all the matters listed below, reviewers will decide whether they have confidence in the academic standards of the provision under review. A '**confidence**' judgement will be made if reviewers are satisfied both with current standards, and with the prospect of those standards being maintained into the future. If standards are being achieved, but there is doubt about the ability of the institution to maintain them into the future, reviewers will make a judgement of '**limited confidence**'. If, in relation to any of the matters listed below, reviewers feel that arrangements are inadequate to enable standards to be achieved or demonstrated, then their overall judgement will be that they do not have confidence in the academic standards of the provision under review.

82 Reviewers will assess, for each programme, whether there are clear learning outcomes which appropriately reflect applicable subject benchmark statements and the level of the award. Subject benchmark statements represent general expectations about standards in an academic discipline, particularly in relation to intellectual demand and challenge. The qualifications framework sets expectations for awards at a given level more generally. Reference points are thereby provided to assist reviewers in determining whether provision is meeting the standards expected by the academic community generally, for awards of a particular type and level. If the intended learning outcomes are found not to match those expectations, it would be unlikely that reviewers could have confidence in the standards of the provision. An example of potential failure would be if a postgraduate programme has learning outcomes set at an undergraduate level only.

83 Reviewers will assess whether the content and design of the curriculum are effective in achieving the intended programme outcomes. It is the curriculum that ensures that students are able to meet the intended outcomes of the programme. Providers should be able to demonstrate how each outcome is supported by the curriculum. 'Curriculum' for this purpose includes both the content necessary to develop understanding and the acquisition of knowledge, and the opportunities to develop practical skills and abilities where these are stated as intended outcomes. If significant intended learning outcomes are found to be unsupported by the curriculum, it would be unlikely that reviewers could have confidence in the standards of the provision.

84 Reviewers will assess whether the curriculum content is appropriate to each stage of the programme, and to the level of the award. Providers should be able to demonstrate how the design of the curriculum secures academic and intellectual progression by imposing increasing demands on the learner, over time, in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the capacity for conceptualisation, and increasing autonomy in learning. Reviewers will have regard to the guidance on programme design in the section of the *Code of practice* on programme approval, monitoring and review.

85 Reviewers will assess whether assessment is designed appropriately to measure achievement of the intended outcomes. Providers should be able to demonstrate that achievement of intended outcomes is assessed, and that, in each case, the assessment method selected is appropriate to

the nature of the intended outcome. There must also be confidence in the security and integrity of the assessment process, with appropriate involvement of external examiners. An assessment strategy should also have a formative function, providing students with prompt feedback, and assisting them in the development of their intellectual skills. There should be clear and appropriate criteria for different classes of performance, and these criteria should be communicated effectively to students. If significant intended learning outcomes appear not to be assessed, or if there are serious doubts about the integrity of the assessment procedures, it would be unlikely that reviewers could have confidence in the standards of the provision. Reviewers will have regard to the section of the *Code of practice* on assessment of students.

86   Reviewers will assess whether student achievement matches the intended outcomes and level of the award. Reviewers will consider external examiners' reports from the three years prior to the review, and will themselves sample student work. The balance between reliance upon the reports of external examiners and direct sampling of student work will depend on the confidence that reviewers have in the external examining arrangements of the institution. Regard will be had to the section of the *Code of practice* on external examining.

87   Where a review covers a number of subjects, separate judgements on standards will be made in respect of each subject. Where programmes are offered at more than one level, separate judgements will be made in respect of each level, if there are significant differences between them. In all cases, reports will contain a narrative commentary on strengths and weaknesses in relation to each aspect of the standards judgement.

Judgements on quality of learning opportunities

88   Judgements about the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students will be made against the broad aims of the provision and the intended learning outcomes of the programmes. Judgements will normally cover all provision within the scope of the review. However, if performance is significantly different in a subject area, or at a particular level, separate judgements will be made.

89   Reviewers will assess the effectiveness of **teaching and learning**, in relation to curriculum content and programme aims. They will consider large and small group teaching, practical sessions, directed individual learning, the integration of skills within curricula, and distance learning. Reviewers will evaluate the breadth, depth, pace and challenge of teaching; whether there is a suitable variety of teaching methods; the effectiveness of the teaching of subject knowledge; and subject-specific, transferable and practical skills.

90   Reviewers will evaluate **student progression** by considering recruitment, academic support, and progression within the programme. They will assess whether there is appropriate matching of the abilities of students recruited to the demands of programmes; and whether there are appropriate arrangements for induction and identification of any special learning needs. They will assess the effectiveness of academic support to individuals, including tutorial arrangements and feedback on progress. They will consider general progression within programmes, as well as non-completion rates.

91   In making judgements about **learning resources**, reviewers will assess whether the minimum resource necessary to deliver each programme is available, and will then consider how effectively resources are utilised in support of the intended learning outcomes of the programmes under review. Consideration will be given to the use of equipment (including IT), accommodation (including laboratories), and the library (including electronic resources). Reviewers will look for a strategic approach to the linkage of resources to programme objectives. Effective utilisation of academic, technical and administrative staff will be considered, as will the matching of the qualifications, experience and expertise of teaching staff to the requirements of the programmes.

92 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'**.

93 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; and

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

- make a significant contribution to the success of the provision being assessed. Incidental or marginal features do not qualify for designation.

The characteristics of exemplary features will, by their nature, vary between institutions and programmes. The criteria listed above will ensure that features identified as **'exemplary'** will be broadly comparable in weight and significance.

94 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.

Maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality

95 Institution-wide systems for the management and enhancement of standards and quality are addressed through institutional review. Subject reviewers will gather evidence, not least from their discussions with staff and students and their scrutiny of external examiners' reports, on the operation of institutional systems in each subject area. The final section of the subject report will express their confidence, or otherwise, in the ability of the institution to maintain and enhance quality and standards in the particular subject. These views will inform the subsequent institutional review.

96 Part 2 of the *Handbook* describes the method used for the review of institutional management of academic standards and quality.

The purpose of and approach to institutional review

97 Institutional review addresses the ultimate responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with the institution as a whole. It is concerned particularly with the way an institution exercises its powers as a body able to grant degrees and/or other awards. It results in reports on the degree of confidence that may reasonably be placed in an institution's effectiveness in managing the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes.

98 The process of whole institution review is a continuous and dynamic engagement with the institution and its internal processes over the six years of the review cycle. Much of this engagement is through the sequence of subject reviews during the cycle, which will generate considerable evidence about the way in which institutional systems are working in practice. Nevertheless, there remains a 'senior layer' in the institutional structure where the overall responsibility for quality and standards resides, and which provides the focus for an overall, 'capstone' review of the effectiveness of management of that responsibility.

99 Specifically, institutional review addresses the robustness and security of the systems supporting an institution's awarding function. In most cases, these will relate to the exercise of the institution's own powers. Where an institution does not have direct awarding powers, the review will consider the exercise of any powers delegated under a validation or other collaborative agreement. Review will be concerned with:

• procedures for approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes;

• procedures for acting on the findings of external examiners, subject reviews, and other external scrutinies;

• overall management of assessment processes;

• overall management of any credit systems;

• management of collaborative arrangements with other institutions.

The *Code of practice* and the qualifications framework

100 Important points of reference for institutional review are provided by sections of the *Code of practice* (see Part 1, paragraphs 9 and 10) and the qualifications framework (see Part 1, paragraphs 32 and 33).

101 Institutions should have in place the means of meeting the expectations contained in the precepts of all sections of the *Code*. Institutional review will focus on those sections which deal directly with institutional responsibilities for quality and standards of academic provision, namely:

• programme approval, monitoring and review;

• assessment of students;

• external examining;

• collaborative provision.

102 In the course of review, enquiries may be made about other sections of the *Code*. This is most likely to occur if there is information, from subject review or otherwise, which suggests that there may be difficulties or inadequacies in these areas.

103 In reviewing institutions' adherence to the precepts of the *Code of practice,* it is the intended effect of the precept which is important, not any particular means of achieving it. In certain cases, teams may wish to discuss why an institution has decided not to follow the guidance

contained in a section of the *Code*, but they will not criticise an institution for this if the intended effect of the *Code* is being achieved by other means.

The institutional profile

104 The Agency will maintain a dynamic profile of each institution. This will contain the conclusions from the Agency's most recent review of each subject, from the last institutional review, and from any separate reviews of collaborative provision. This profile will provide much of the primary evidence required for institutional review.

105 The profile, and the reports on which it is based, will provide institutional review teams with:

- examples of implementation of institutional quality assurance procedures;
- examples of adherence to the precepts of the *Code of practice;*
- trends in quality assurance practices;
- possible problem areas for particular scrutiny at institutional level;
- examples of good innovative quality assurance practices.

106 Institutional review will provide a summation and renewal of the institutional profile. Reporting on the degree of confidence that may be placed in an institution's management of its standards and quality will be a major factor in determining the intensity of scrutiny that is appropriate for subject reviews.

107 Until an institution has had an institutional review, using the method described in this *Handbook*, the Agency will use an initial profile (see Part 1, paragraphs 20 to 23, and **Annex B**) for discussions with institutions about intensity of scrutiny.

Review events

i Main review

108 Once in every six-year cycle a review team will visit each institution. The purpose of the review visit is to gain insight and understanding into the ways in which an institution is managing its quality of provision and the academic standards of its awards. It will last no longer than necessary for the review team to gather sufficient reliable evidence on which to base a report. In deciding the duration of the visit, regard will be had to the institutional profile and the institution's self-evaluation. Typically a visit will last two or three days, but in exceptional circumstances (eg in the case of a particularly large or complex organisation, or one which has not presented itself very effectively in its self-evaluation) it might be longer. Equally, for a small institution with a well-presented self-evaluation and limited range of provision, it might not be necessary to visit for longer than one day.

109 During the visit, the team will:

- test and verify (so far as possible) the judgements in the self-evaluation;
- review with the institution any specific concerns arising from reviews of subjects or collaborative provision;
- gather any further evidence necessary to enable it to form a view on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for the overall management of quality and standards, and of its awarding function.

ii Interim appraisal

110 Every year, the Agency will discuss with each institution the pattern of review for subjects due for review in the following year (see Part 1, paragraph 55). Three years after the last full institutional review, this discussion will be extended to take stock more widely of the institution's

performance in the maintenance, development and enhancement of its standards and quality of provision.

111 The purpose of this discussion will be to carry out an interim appraisal of the institutional profile generally, in the light of conclusions of subject reviews and any reviews of collaborative provision that have taken place in the last three years. Particular attention will be given to action taken in response to the findings of subject reviews and to action points from the previous institutional review.

112 The interim appraisal is an opportunity to:

- review progress in addressing action points from the previous institutional review, and consider whether action taken by the institution now warrants a different degree of confidence being placed in its systems;

- consider whether there are any recurring problems arising from subject reviews that require particular attention in future subject reviews;

- consider the general trends of subject reviews, action taken to follow up issues identified in them, and the impact such matters should have on future intensity of scrutiny.

113 The interim appraisal will normally be conducted by the member of the Agency's staff who is also conducting the discussion with the institution about the pattern of subject review for the following year. It will take the form of a structured discussion, on the day of the discussion about future subject review, with one or two of the senior staff of the institution responsible for quality and standards. The event will not normally involve the preparation of a self-evaluation or other special documentation. There will be no published report, but an agreed note will be kept of the matters discussed.

114 If subject reviews have disclosed a pattern of difficulties, the interim appraisal may be used in a more formal way to address these. In this event, the discussion may involve one or more academic reviewers as well as a member of the Agency's staff. The institution may be invited to provide a written commentary on the action it has taken to address the difficulties. In the light of the appraisal, the Agency may propose a further review of action to address the matter, or may bring forward the date of the main institutional review.

iii Collaborative activity

115 Collaborative activity is defined as a collaborative or partnership arrangement, with another institution or organisation, involving the provision of programmes of study and the granting of awards and qualifications. Arrangements which involve the implicit or explicit endorsement by the institution of third party services are also included in the definition, whether or not use of such services is a condition of registration for the institution's programme or award.

116 The purpose of the review of collaborative activity is to establish the extent to which an institution is:

- assuring the quality of programmes offered by, or in association with, a partner organisation for the institution's own awards;

- ensuring that the academic standards of its awards gained through study with partner organisations are the same as those applied within the institution itself.

117 An institution's management of its collaborative activity is included among the topics to be covered by the main review. Where the activity can be reviewed effectively through the main review alone, this will be done. There are two circumstances in which some or all of an institution's collaborative provision may be reviewed separately.

118 First, the provision may be too substantial in volume, varied in type, or involve too many partners, for the main review to do justice to it. In these circumstances the Agency may propose a separate review to enable a reliable judgement to be made.

119 Second, for reasons of cost effectiveness, the Agency conducts reviews of overseas collaborative arrangements on a country by country basis. The Agency may propose to include some or all of an institution's collaborative provision in a particular country in such reviews. Separate guidance on the conduct of reviews of overseas provision is available from the Agency.

Self-evaluation document

120 The starting point for the main review will be a self-evaluation document. This will contain the institution's analysis of how effectively it manages the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards, and how it meets the expectations of relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. Guidance on preparing a self-evaluation document is at **Annex L**.

Reports

121 Institutional review will result in a published report once in each six-year cycle, following the main review, on the effectiveness of an institution's systems for managing the quality of its provision, the standards of its awards and the security of its awarding function. The report will be narrative in style, and will identify both good practice and matters where the Agency believes that improvement action should be taken.

122 Action points will be categorised as **'essential'**, **'advisable'** or **'desirable'** on the following basis:

- **essential** – matters that are currently putting academic standards and/or quality at risk, and which require urgent corrective action;

- **advisable** – matters that have the potential to put academic standards and/or quality at risk, and which require either preventive, or less urgent corrective action;

- **desirable** – matters that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure academic standards.

In the case of any action point rated as 'essential', the Agency will normally seek from the institution an account of action taken to address the matter, 12 months after publication of the report.

123 Reports will also contain a statement of the degree of confidence that the Agency considers may reasonably be placed in the continuing effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance arrangements. Normally, such statements will relate to the overall arrangements that an institution has in place. A separate statement may be made in respect of an institution's overall collaborative arrangements, as a result of a separate review of that collaborative provision. A confidence statement on overseas collaborative provision generally will not normally be made as a result of a review of partnerships in one country only, if an institution has such partnerships in more than one country.

124 A statement that confidence cannot be placed in institutional arrangements for the management of quality and standards should be a rare occurrence. Such a statement would be likely to result from a number of matters requiring 'essential' action, the combined effect of which is to render ineffective the quality assurance arrangements as a whole.

125 A statement that limited confidence can be placed in institutional arrangements for the management of quality and standards will normally be made if there is one, or a small number of matters requiring 'essential' action, and it is clear that the failings could readily be put right. Such a statement might also result if there were no 'essential' action points, but a large number

of matters where action is 'advisable'. The judgement will depend on the nature and weight of the 'advisable' action points.

126 In all other cases a statement will be made that overall confidence can be placed in institutional quality assurance systems. The term '**overall confidence**' does not necessarily mean that there are no matters where improvement could be made; but minor weaknesses only should not place an institution in a lower category. The narrative of the report will discuss strengths and weaknesses, and will also identify exemplary features of the arrangements.

127 To be deemed '**exemplary**', a feature must:

• represent sector-leading best practice; and

• be worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by, other institutions with comparable missions; and

• make a significant contribution to the success of overall institutional arrangements for assuring quality and standards.

The characteristics of exemplary features will, by their nature, vary between institutions, but such features will be broadly comparable in weight and significance.

128 Further information on reports is at **Annex M**.

Academic reviewers

Introduction

1   The Agency operates an equal opportunities policy. All applicants will be considered on the basis of their ability to meet the specifications outlined below. The Agency evaluates the performance of all reviewers, using feedback from review visits.

2   There are three types of academic reviewer used by the Agency:

- **subject specialist reviewers**, with current teaching experience in the discipline concerned, or experience of relevant professional or occupational practice;

- **review coordinators**, who lead subject review teams, and have extensive experience of quality assurance and programme approval in higher education, usually gained by working with such procedures in more than one discipline;

- **institutional reviewers**, who hold, or have recently held, senior management positions in higher education institutions.

Qualities required in all reviewers

3   Effective reviewers will possess the following qualities:

- demonstrable commitment to the principles of quality assurance in HE;

- an enquiring and sceptical disposition;

- powers of analysis and sound judgement;

- personal authority and presence coupled with the ability to act as an effective team member;

- good time management skills including experience of chairing meetings;

- the ability to make appropriate judgements in the context of complex institutions different from their own;

- experience of organisation and management, particularly in relation to teaching and learning matters;

- high standard of oral and written communication, preferably with experience of writing formal reports to published deadlines.

4   In addition, reviewers are expected to have a clear knowledge and understanding of the Agency's whole review process, a reasonable acquaintance with all published sections of the *Code of practice*, and a detailed working knowledge of those sections of the *Code* that are the subject of regular consideration in reviews.

Recruitment, training and role of subject specialist reviewers

5   Subject specialist reviewers are recruited by the Agency from individuals nominated by institutions or other organisations and from individuals who reply to advertisements. The Agency prefers to recruit reviewers who are available for the entire review period, but will also consider shorter involvement under some circumstances. Reviewers are recruited and trained to ensure that they are capable of carrying out their duties effectively. In particular, subject specialist reviewers who undertake reviews should:

- possess the knowledge and skills set out in detail below;

- have completed successfully the Agency's training programme;

- ensure that they are available for the whole period of a review for which they have been selected;

- normally be available for up to three reviews per year.

6   Training of reviewers is carried out on behalf of the Agency by means of two-day residential courses. The Agency will pay all travel and subsistence expenses incurred by reviewers, in line with its published travel and subsistence arrangements. It will not pay fees to reviewers for attendance at training courses.

7   The Agency publishes a register of subject specialist reviewers and makes this available to all institutions. The primary purpose of the register is to show, for each reviewer, the main areas of teaching and learning that s/he is qualified to review. For this purpose, the Agency uses the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS), established by HESA and UCAS for use by both organisations from 2002. As far as possible, the Agency ensures that the combined experience and expertise of the reviewers on its register reflects the range of the provision on offer across the HE sector.

8   The key purpose of acting as a subject specialist reviewer is to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of standards in higher education by reporting to the Agency on the standards and quality of the academic programmes scrutinised during subject reviews. Subject specialist reviewers are expected to agree individual timetables of activity with the review coordinator, with a view to making the most effective contribution to the review. The responsibilities of reviewers include:

- reading and analysing the self-evaluation prepared by the institution and any other documentation sent in advance of a review;

- participating in visits to the subject provider in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence;

- making judgements on the academic standards achieved and the quality of the learning opportunities provided;

- contributing to and commenting on the compilation of the report of the review.

The Agency not only tries to ensure that the particular experience of individual reviewers is relevant to the reviews they undertake, but that, over time, each reviewer works in a variety of teams scrutinising a range of institutions.

9   Subject specialists review and evaluate the self-evaluation provided for the subject, with particular emphasis on curricular contents and their suitability for achieving the programme outcomes.

10   Subject specialists review and evaluate the assessment processes designed for the programmes and determine whether they are suitable to assess programme outcomes as stated in the programme specifications.

11   Subject specialists judge the overall standards for subjects and the procedures associated with their maintenance and enhancement.

12   Subject specialists review and evaluate overall student achievement, including progression to employment; the contribution made to student achievement by the quality of teaching; opportunities for learning; academic support intended to ensure effective progression of students; and learning resources and their deployment (including staffing).

13 Finally, subject specialists contribute to the compilation of a report to the Agency. Each subject specialist will be expected to prepare material for the various sections of the report and may be expected to contribute to the writing.

Knowledge and skills required of subject specialist reviewers

14 To carry out the role outlined above, for each review subject specialists will need to demonstrate:

Experience, knowledge and understanding of HE

- at least five years' experience of providing teaching and learning in higher education or, in the case of industrially- or professionally-based reviewers, familiarity with higher education teaching and learning;

- familiarity with academic support strategies and the functions of academic tutorials;

- experience of examining (and preferably external examining);

- knowledge of the quality assurance processes employed by institutions providing higher education;

Knowledge and understanding within the subject area

- knowledge of the subject benchmark information produced for programmes within the relevant subject area;

- familiarity with the subject matter of the self-evaluation and the programme specifications written for the subject area;

- familiarity with comparable programmes and standards of awards in other institutions;

- understanding of external examiners' reports and internal documentation;

- understanding of programme entry requirements and ability to interpret progression statistics for each stage of the programmes, including withdrawal, transfer and failure rates;

- understanding of programme learning objectives;

- familiarity with destinations data and employment statistics;

Skills

- ability to conduct meetings and interviews with staff;
- ability to conduct meetings with a range of current and former groups of students;
- ability to write succinctly and coherently;
- ability to meet exacting timescales and deadlines;
- ability to work effectively as a member of a team.

Recruitment, training and role of review coordinators

15 Review coordinators are also recruited from individuals nominated by institutions or other organisations, and from individuals who reply to advertisements. They may be seconded from institutions or independent consultancies. All must possess extensive experience of HE and of the assurance of standards and quality. They will be expected to perform a number of duties, of which managing reviews and writing reports are the major responsibilities. Opportunities to contribute to other activities such as editing reports, training subject specialist reviewers and producing subject overview reports may also be available.

16 Because of the relative complexity of the review coordinator role, the individuals recruited will undergo a longer induction and training process than that provided for subject specialist reviewers. Induction into the review method will include attendance at, and participation in, at least one subject specialist reviewer training course, as well as attendance at workshops and conferences arranged by the Agency. The Agency will pay all travel and subsistence expenses incurred by review coordinators during induction and training, in line with the Agency's published arrangements. Fees will also be paid for review coordinator induction and training.

17 Review coordinators should normally be available to manage up to eight reviews per year. Reviews take place throughout the academic year and are variable in length. Review coordinators will need to organise their time, and to reach agreement with their teams of reviewers, about the pattern of review activities in such a way as to ensure effective use of the time available.

18 All subject reviews consist of four main activities:
- preparation for subject review;
- visits to the subject provider;
- analysis of documentary evidence;
- report writing.

The review coordinator is responsible for maintaining an overview of the range and balance of these activities, and for helping the subject specialist reviewers to apportion their time effectively. The achievement of an appropriate balance between the various activities requires planning in advance of, and coordination throughout, the review; above all, it must enable the team to develop a robust evidence base on which to make judgements.

Knowledge and skills required of review coordinators

19 In order to carry out their role, review coordinators will need to demonstrate:

Knowledge and understanding of HE
- recent knowledge and understanding of current issues;
- awareness of current teaching methods and curricula;
- knowledge and understanding of the assurance of standards and quality;
- experience of liaison with senior management and staff at other levels;

Skills
- ability to manage small teams (with experience either in HE or in industry);
- ability to work within tight timescales and to strict deadlines;
- ability to lead a team of experts;
- ability to communicate effectively in face-to-face interaction;
- ability to produce clear and succinct reports to time;
- experience of word processing.

20 The essential qualities outlined above might be reinforced by experience of a wide range of teaching in HE and by experience of programme accreditation by professional or statutory bodies, programme approval or validation events, quality audits, quality assessment/subject review or educational inspection.

Recruitment, training and role of institutional reviewers

21 Institutional reviewers are selected both from applicants nominated by institutions and from self-nominees.

22 Reviewers are appointed for a period of three years, and may be invited to continue for a further period. During the period of appointment, reviewers may be asked to undertake up to nine review activities. No reviewer will be expected to undertake more than three activities in any year, but the Agency cannot guarantee to offer a particular number of reviews during a three-year appointment.

23 A training programme is provided by the Agency, which includes an opportunity to observe part of a review in progress. The Agency will pay all travel and subsistence expenses incurred by reviewers, in line with its published travel and subsistence arrangements. It will not pay fees to reviewers for attendance at training programmes.

24 The responsibilities of reviewers include:
- reading and analysing self-evaluations prepared by institutions and any other documentation sent in advance of reviews;
- participating in briefing meetings;
- participating in visits to institutions in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence;
- making judgements on institutions' management of academic standards and quality;
- contributing to and commenting on compilation of the review report;
- attending reviewers' briefing and training meetings.

Knowledge and skills required of institutional reviewers

25 Selection is undertaken by the Agency with the intention of ensuring that reviewers:
- are knowledgeable about HE institutions;
- have wide experience of academic management and quality assurance;
- can readily assimilate a large amount of disparate information;
- can analyse and make reliable judgements about complex arrangements;
- can hold discussions at a high level about strategic and operational approaches;
- have personal credibility with senior managers and heads of HE institutions.

Institutional review secretaries

26 Some reviews will require particular administrative support, which may be provided by a review secretary. A typical review secretary is an institutional administrator with at least three years' experience of academic administration, including committee support. Nominations of persons willing to act as review secretaries are invited, from time to time, from heads of administration in higher education institutions. Supporting a review activity as secretary is often seen as a valuable staff development opportunity.

Initial profiles

Constructing a profile

1 The institutional review element of academic review, together with the cumulative results of subject review, will supply the information about institutional systems of quality assurance needed to discuss, and to secure agreements about, appropriate intensity of scrutiny of subject review. Where there has not yet been an institutional review within the integrated method, the Agency will use existing information to construct initial profiles for use as a starting point in discussions with institutions.

2 The Agency will prepare a 2,000-word profile of each HE institution, based on an analysis of information contained in academic audit reports, collaborative audit reports and subject review/teaching quality assessment reports. In the case of institutions, such as FE institutions, for which quality audit reports are not available, profiles will not be produced, and discussions about intensity of scrutiny will be based primarily on the previous subject review/teaching quality assessment report.

3 To construct a profile, the Agency will:

- review audit and collaborative audit reports (if available) for an institution to prepare an introduction to the profile summarising institutional background, general features and mission. Particular attention will be paid to the listings of strengths and weaknesses that have been a feature of the concluding sections of audit reports published since 1995. A summary of up to **500 words**, in which general features and mission are described, will be prepared;

- review quality assessment and subject review summary data in order to identify particular features, obvious strengths and weaknesses, and overall trends across as wide a variety of subjects as possible. A summary of up to **250 words** will identify particular institutional features and summarise overall results;

- review subject reports from 1995 on, in order to identify strengths and weaknesses reported by subject specialist reviewers. A summary of up to **1,250 words** will evaluate evidence related to:

  a the curricula, their design and content;

  b student learning, assessment and student achievement, including progression to further study and to employment;

  c teaching and learning;

  d student progression, including academic support;

  e learning resources, including staffing.

Using a profile

4 'Scope and preference' surveys will be used to determine the range and the complexity of subjects offered by individual institutions. When these have been completed, the Agency will initiate discussions with institutions in order to agree the intensity of scrutiny likely to be required for each subject review.

5 Initial profiles will be shared with the institution concerned but will not be published more widely. The information on which they are based will be of differing age; this will be borne in mind when constructing the profiles and entering discussions with institutions about intensity of review.

6 Each subject review will be considered separately for the purposes of determining the intensity of scrutiny. Regard will be had both to specific information about the subject provision and to the overall record of management of quality and standards by the institution. Strengths and weaknesses of the subject provision will be identified in order to guide review teams towards those matters on which they might concentrate during review. Reviewers will be able to use previous subject reports to help them in this respect but must take into account the currency of the information available and the perception of an institution about its own strengths and weaknesses. In the absence of agreement on the intensity of review that is appropriate, the decision of the Agency will be final.

7 Discussions about intensity of scrutiny will provide an opportunity for institutions to draw attention to changes which have taken place since the last review of a subject and, in particular, steps which may have been taken to address any shortcomings identified. The outcome of the discussions should be agreement on areas that should receive particular attention during the course of reviews, and areas where it appears that greater reliance could be placed on indirect evidence.

8 The initial agreement reached will be reviewed after analysis of the self-evaluation by reviewers and again, if necessary, during the review itself. If a team of reviewers considers that it requires more or less time than agreed, the matter will be referred to the Agency and discussed with the institution.

Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents for subject review

Introduction

1   A self-evaluation document is a statement which demonstrates 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; and

- quality of the learning opportunities provided for students.

2   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.

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

4   Academic 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.

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

6   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.

7   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.

8 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.

9 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; and
     ii any information about relevant modular structures or collaborative arrangements.

10 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; and
- the prompts and questions for academic reviewers in the *aide-mémoire* in **Annex E**.

Overall aims of the subject provision

11 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.

12 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.

Evaluation of the subject provision

13 The evaluation should indicate where the supporting evidence may be found, eg 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.

Learning outcomes

14 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.

Curricula and assessment

15 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.

16 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).

Quality of learning opportunities

17 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.

18 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.

19 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.

Maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality

20 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.

21 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.

22 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.

23 The evaluation of the subject provision should not exceed **6,000 words** in length.

Annexes

24 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.

25 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.

ANNEX D Programme specifications

What are programme specifications?

1 In a programme specification a teaching team sets out clearly and concisely:

- the intended learning outcomes of the programme;

- the teaching and learning methods that enable learners to achieve these outcomes and the assessment methods used to demonstrate their achievement;

- the relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework.

2 Programme specifications provide information to a range of stakeholders, including students, prospective students and employers. They also promote a professional dialogue within teaching teams and subject communities about how these outcomes are represented in academic standards and how teaching and assessment strategies enable outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated.

3 Programme specifications use the term 'outcomes' to explain learning intentions rather than the more traditional use of 'aims and objectives' because the concept of an outcome is more closely linked to the learning and assessment process.

Outcomes-based learning

4 Reduced to its simplest form, an outcomes-based approach to learning has three components:

- an explicit **statement of learning intent** expressed as outcomes that reflect aims and values;

- the **process** to enable the outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated (curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and support methods);

- the **criteria for judging achievement** of the intended outcomes.

5 Programme specifications encourage academic staff to identify the outcomes from their programmes and present these as concise statements of what a *typical learner* will have learnt if s/he has satisfied the requirements for an award. The process of creating a programme specification also encourages academic staff to think critically about the way the outcomes are achieved. This requires careful and systematic analysis of the curriculum, teaching and assessment methods.

6 Programme specifications cannot by themselves explain the standards (of achievement or performance) that students will reach collectively or individually at different stages of a programme. Some of the ways in which performance or attainment can be conveyed include:

- **level descriptors** that describe the characteristics of learning expected at each stage of programme;

- **general and specific assessment criteria** that discriminate between differing achievement when student work is assessed;

- **examples of assessed student work** that embody the standards of learning being sought;

- **transcripts** that provide a summary record of learning and achievement;

- **personal learning records** created and maintained by students and providing evidence of, and commentary on, their own learning and achievement.

What do programme specifications describe?

7   In constructing programme specifications an assumption is made that a set of outcomes can be identified for any curriculum or learning experience. The more opportunities there are for choice within the curriculum the more difficult it may be to define the knowledge-based outcomes. However, other types of outcome are likely to be generic to a subject field regardless of what is actually studied.

8   Where a programme has been designed to integrate two or more subjects, with intended outcomes that reflect the integrated nature of study, a separate specification of the integrated programme is appropriate. Where subject elements are combined, as in a joint honours programme, a separate full programme specification may not be needed; but there should be a short statement of the rationale for the combination.

Information content and format

9   All programme specifications should include a set of core information that makes explicit the intended outcomes, in terms of knowledge and understanding, skills, and other attributes. Programme specifications may include further information about, for example, learning support.

10 Institutions can create programme specifications in either template or open text format. A series of templates to aid construction is available on the Agency's web site.

Determining the outcomes

11 Determining the outcomes for a programme is an important institutional responsibility, but there are a number of sources of information that curriculum designers should refer to when developing outcome statements, such as:

- institutional policies on, for example, the general skills of communication, literacy, numeracy, the use of information technology, team working, career management skills or personal development planning;

- subject benchmark statements that represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in a subject;

- information provided by professional and statutory regulatory bodies on knowledge and skills that must be possessed by those wishing to proceed to a professional qualification;

- information about occupational standards in fields where this is relevant;

- institutional or national level descriptors.

12 Programme specifications should indicate the reference points that have been used in the development of a programme outcome statement.

13 Reviewers will wish to understand how any relevant subject benchmark statements have been used to inform the specification of programmes. However, outcomes for a programme should be determined through a deliberative process by the institution, they should not simply be copied from a subject benchmark statement. Rather, the benchmark statement should act as a point of reference against which the institution's own outcomes and processes can be reviewed and justified. Benchmark statements should promote professional dialogue about the educational outcomes of programmes between those responsible for designing, delivering, assessing and assuring programmes.

14 Ultimately it is the responsibility of institutions and teaching teams to decide and justify which outcomes will be fostered and to determine how such outcomes will be realised and

assessed. The purpose of the programme specification is to make clear these decisions in a publicly accessible way. In areas where there is no relevant subject benchmark statement, other reference points, such as level descriptors for the qualifications framework, and the *Code of practice* on programme approval, monitoring and review, may be found helpful.

Programme specifications and the subject review process

15 Programme specifications should be annexed to an institution's self-evaluation document. In the context of the review process they provide a reference point for evaluation of curriculum design, the methods and strategies used to promote and support learning, and the relationship of programmes and their component units to the national qualifications framework.

16 Programme specifications should provide a concise overview of the programme. They will be underpinned by more detailed information that will be found in curriculum documents, module/unit specifications, staff and student handbooks, and course guides.

17 In time, programme specifications should become embedded in an institution's own curriculum planning, review and validation processes. Institutional documents relating to these processes will provide a good source of information on the deliberative processes that underpin the programme specification.

18 The Agency publishes guidelines on programme specifications, which include examples.

Aide-mémoire **for subject review**

Introduction

1 This *aide-mémoire* consists of questions and prompts to assist academic 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 The *aide-mémoire* should be read in conjunction with paragraphs 68 to 95 of the *Handbook*.

Subject review of standards and quality

5 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.

6 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.

7 The *aide-mémoire* is divided into seven sections (i-vii) 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

8   *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.

9   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

10   *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.

11   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

12 *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

13 *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.

14 *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

15 *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.

16 *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

17 *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

18 *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; and*
- *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

19 *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

20 *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.

21 *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.

Subject review facilitator

Introduction

1 Each institution may nominate a member or members of staff (normally no more than three) to take on the role of facilitator, although there is no requirement to do so. The purpose of this is to provide effective liaison between the team of reviewers and the subject staff and to ensure that the team obtains accurate and comprehensive information about the educational provision and its institutional context. In due course, the experience gained by the facilitators in dealing with reviews in several departments should enable them to help subject providers prepare for review, disseminate good practice within the institution, and highlight areas for improvement identified by each review. Facilitators will be briefed for their role by the Agency.

2 Institutional staff who wish to act as facilitators should possess:

- thorough knowledge of the structure, policies, priorities, procedures and practices of their institution;

- extensive knowledge and experience of working in HE at a senior level;

- extensive experience of quality assurance procedures;

- knowledge and understanding of the Agency's review method;

- qualifications and experience in a subject area other than that being reviewed;

- an ability to maintain confidentiality.

It is also preferable that facilitators have either direct experience of teaching in HE or experience as a senior administrator in an HE institution.

3 If no facilitator is nominated by the institution, the liaison functions described in this annex will normally be taken on by a designated member of staff from the academic department under review.

Role of the facilitator

General matters

4 Organisation and management of the review is the responsibility of the 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 subject provider. 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 subject provider is aware of issues being addressed by the teams and the evidence needed to clarify them. It would be helpful if HE institutions could supply review coordinators with brief outlines of facilitators' previous experience and current institutional roles.

5 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.

6 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 preceding reviews

7 Institutions may find it helpful to involve facilitators fully in preparation for a subject review, including the initial meeting with the Agency to discuss the intensity of review. The facilitator with responsibility for a review should receive copies of all correspondence between the Agency and the institution, and should either attend the initial team meeting or be briefed about it by the review coordinator.

Activities during reviews

8 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 academic reviewers. If it appears that there is a departure from the agreed pattern, the matter should be discussed immediately with the review coordinator.

9 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.

10 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

11 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.

Subject review teams

Team composition

1 Each review team reflects the nature and scope of the provision in the subject to be reviewed, with regard to the nature of the institution. The number of academic 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 specialisms of the subject provision. 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 academic reviewers. If a review is combined with activity of a professional or statutory body, the requirements of that body will also be considered.

2 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.

3 The main criterion used by the Agency for determining the number of reviewers required for a particular team is the size of the provision described in the 'scope and preference' returns provided by institutions. Accordingly, as an approximate guide, review teams will comprise:

- three subject specialists and a review coordinator for all provision of between 30 and 250 FTE students;

- four subject specialists and a review coordinator for 250-500 FTE students;

- five subject specialists and a review coordinator for 500-1,000 FTE students;

- six subject specialists and a review coordinator for 1,000+ FTE students.

4 Teams will not normally have fewer than three specialist reviewers. Very large and/or complex reviews may require more reviewers than shown above.

Team function for subject review

General matters

5 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 coordinators 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. For example, subject reviewers might collect information relevant to institutional practices on external examining when considering assessment practices in relation to a subject.

6 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. For the benefit of other team members, subject specialists may be asked by the review coordinator to produce brief written commentaries based on the self-evaluation and the evidence gathered during the review. These commentaries should make full reference to the aims of the subject provider and identify matters for which additional evidence is required. They will inform the team's priorities, the balance of activities undertaken and the collective judgements made.

Team meetings

7 At the first meeting of the team consideration will be given to the:

- self-evaluation and any other documentation supplied by the institution prior to the review;

- scope and nature of the provision and identification of the main matters for review and judgement;

- role of the facilitator from the institution in relation to conduct of the review;

- allocation of individual responsibilities among members of the team;

- likely activities, both on- and off-site, required for the review;

- likely pattern of visits to the subject provider.

8 The initial team meeting can take place either at the institution or elsewhere, but it should be followed as soon as feasible by a meeting with the subject provider, at which the team discusses the intended pattern of review with the staff of the institution. The team and the subject provider can then discuss the likely arrangements for visits to the institution and identify any internal quality assurance 'events' which might usefully be observed. The meeting also allows an opportunity for the institutional representatives, if they wish, to make a brief presentation on the provision to be reviewed, and to inform the team of any developments since the self-evaluation was written. If appropriate, student representatives may participate in this meeting.

Team visits

9 The review coordinator must also confirm the intended pattern of the review with the Agency, so that the Agency can monitor whether it complies with the indication already given to the institution about the intensity of scrutiny required to review its provision. If a team of reviewers decides that it needs more or less time for a review than that broadly agreed between the Agency and the institution, the reasons for this must be discussed with the Agency.

10 Reviewers may visit the institution at any time during the academic year of the review, but always by mutual agreement with the subject provider and within the overall number of reviewer days allocated by the Agency. This may involve the team visiting together, as for the initial meeting with the subject provider, or it may involve two or more reviewers visiting for specific observations or meetings. Review teams should not, however, arrange for individual subject specialist reviewers to visit subject providers alone.

11 Each review will include a number of meetings between members of the institution and reviewers to consider the various aspects of provision related to standards and quality. The review coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the team considers the accumulating evidence and comes to conclusions.

12 Telephone or email contacts between the team and the institution may be used to request information or to give notice of issues which the reviewers might wish to explore.

13 All reviewers will be expected to identify, share, consider and evaluate evidence related to the programmes under scrutiny. Reviewers should keep notes of all meetings with staff and students, their observations, and comments on students' work and its assessment. Circulation of these notes within the team will help develop a collective evidence base on which the judgements can be made. 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. Discussion of the emerging judgements must involve the whole review team.

14 Draft summaries written by reviewers during the course of a review will focus on the evaluation of evidence related to their particular responsibilities, as agreed by the team at the commencement of the review. Summaries should be analytical rather than descriptive and should refer to sources of information as well as to direct observations. Any written evaluation should summarise the relevant strengths and weaknesses of the provision and, overall, should underpin the judgements made. 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.

Reports

15 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 academic 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. As the reports provide the main feedback about reviews to institutions, it is particularly important that teams check their accuracy carefully.

16 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. Reports should be characterised by succinct, accurate writing and a clear, consistent style. The evidence base must be sound, and must be recorded accurately by reviewers.

Practical arrangements for subject reviewers

17 Practical arrangements made by the Agency for reviewers include:

- hotel accommodation, where this is required;
- travel and subsistence reimbursement;
- administrative support.

18 Reviewers will need to have access to computer facilities suitable for word processing. Reviewers with personal computers that are compatible with the Agency's equipment may compile and transfer written summaries electronically. Reviewers must conform to procedures described in the IT guidelines supplied to them by the Agency, as these are designed to protect against damage and computer viruses.

Documentation (including student work) for subject review

Institutional documents

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

2   The following documents will be required in advance of the review:
- the self-evaluation, with the programme specifications annexed;
- relevant prospectuses;
- a location map.

3   The availability and relevance of further documentation will discussed at the initial meeting with the subject provider. As the review progresses, reviewers may ask for further documentation. The following documents will be relevant to the review:
- subject or programme handbooks;
- curricular documents, module or unit guides;
- subject or programme monitoring reports, including those 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;
- programme approval, validation and re-validation 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.

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.

Student work

4   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 programme(s);

- 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 which is currently under consideration by external examiners.

5   Academic 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;
- practical, laboratory or workshop notebooks;
- projects and/or dissertations;
- examination scripts.

6   Reviewers should record the evidence derived from such scrutiny of student work using the standard *Student work and assessment pro forma* provided by the Agency for this purpose.

Observation of teaching

General arrangements

1   Arrangements for the review of the teaching carried out by subject providers 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 paragraph 70 of the *Handbook*. Academic reviewers may not need to make direct observations of teaching where a subject provider 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.

2   However effectively a subject provider 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, academic reviewers should attempt to evaluate the breadth, depth, pace and challenge of curricular delivery. They should 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 in subjects where they are relevant. If sufficient evidence is not available to allow a reliable evaluation to be made, reviewers should use direct observation, carried out according to the protocol below.

Protocol for direct observation of teaching

3   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 institution may also make arrangements for the observation of placements and other off-site activities.

4   Whenever academic 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.

5   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

6   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.

Introduction

1   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.

2   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.

3   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.

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?

Schedule for subject review 2000-2006

Subject	Period during which subject will be reviewed
Librarianship & Information Management*	2000-2003
Economics*	2000-2003
Politics & International Relations*	2000-2003
Classics & Ancient History*	2000-2003
Archaeology*	2000-2003
Philosophy*	2000-2003
Theology & Religious Studies*	2000-2003
Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism*	2000-2003
Business & Management Studies*	2000-2003
Education Studies*	2000-2003
Social Policy & Administration & Social Work	2000-2003
Sociology & Anthropology	2000-2003
English	2000-2003
Engineering	2000-2003
Geography	2000-2003
Earth, Environmental Sciences & Environmental Studies	2000-2003
Architecture, Architectural Technology & Landscape Architecture	2000-2003
Computing	2000-2003
Law	2000-2003
Accountancy	2000-2003
History	2000-2003
Medicine	2003-2006
Dentistry	2003-2006
Veterinary Medicine	2003-2006
Biosciences	2003-2006
Subjects Allied to Medicine**	2003-2006
Nursing & Midwifery**	2003-2006
Physics & Astronomy	2003-2006
Chemistry	2003-2006
Psychology	2003-2006
Agriculture, Forestry, Agricultural & Food Sciences	2003-2006
Materials	2003-2006
Building & Surveying	2003-2006
Town & Country Planning	2003-2006
Mathematics, Statistics & Operational Research	2003-2006
Linguistics	2003-2006
Area Studies	2003-2006
Languages & Related Studies	2003-2006
Communications, Media, Film & Television Studies	2003-2006
Art & Design	2003-2006
Dance, Drama & Performance Arts	2003-2006
Music	2003-2006

* To be reviewed in England and Northern Ireland during 2000-2001 using the former subject review method.

** Schedule subject to agreement with the NHS and other funding bodies. These subjects may be reviewed earlier in England.

Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents for institutional review

Introduction

1 An institution's self-evaluation is the principal reference document considered by an academic review team undertaking an institutional review. It will be produced once every six years, in preparation for the six-year review. It will not be required for the interim appraisal meeting. The document describes briefly, analyses in some depth, and comments upon, the effectiveness of the way the institution discharges its responsibility for academic standards and quality. The document should refer to the findings of subject reviews and any implications of these for the effectiveness of the institution's overall management of quality and standards. The self-evaluation should also indicate how the institution has responded to the expectations of the precepts contained in the Agency's *Code of practice on the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. Preparation of the self-evaluation should be undertaken in the light of the objectives, outcomes and scope of institutional review, which are summarised in the following three sections.

Purpose of the self-evaluation

2 The Agency's review asks each institution:

i to demonstrate that it is discharging effectively its responsibility for the standard of all awards granted in its name, and for the quality of the education provided by it to enable students to achieve that standard;

ii to confirm and demonstrate that the ways in which it assures academic standards and quality reflect the expectations contained in the precepts of the Agency's *Code of practice*.

3 The self-evaluation provides the main opportunity for the institution to set out its considered answers to these questions, and it is largely upon this document that a view of its effectiveness as an awarding body will be based in the first instance. Because of this the institution should ensure that the self-evaluation is an accurate and verifiable statement of the true state of affairs and is not used as an opportunity to make exaggerated claims that will cause the review team to doubt the reliability of the institution's view of itself.

4 Where an institution is in the process of making changes to aspects of its systems or procedures at the time of the review, evidence may not yet be available to illustrate the effectiveness of the new procedures. Where this is the case, the institution is encouraged to address in its self-evaluation the way in which it is managing the process of change.

Nature of the self-evaluation

5 At the heart of the review team's enquiries is the way in which the institution acts as an awarding body. The self-evaluation will need to reflect this. The 'awarding body function' is not simply a question of the soundness of the administrative procedures the institution follows when awarding degrees and other qualifications (although it does include this). It is a wider matter that reflects the institution's role as a member of the UK's higher education community, charged with a public responsibility for granting nationally (and internationally) recognised academic awards in a coherent and consistent manner. How policies and procedures are decided, how they meet the expectations of the higher education sector as a whole (through, for example, use of the qualifications framework, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*), their specific contribution to securing academic standards and quality, and their effectiveness in achieving their objectives, provide a major focus for institutional review. The extent to which these matters are dealt with cogently and candidly in the institution's self-evaluation will be an important contributory factor in the review team's ability to judge how far the Agency can have confidence in the institution as an effective awarding body.

6 The self-evaluation should include reflections on the outcomes of subject reviews. These reports provide valuable audit trails to test the efficacy of the application of institutional policies within departments and other units. The self-evaluation should analyse the effectiveness of, rather than merely describe, an institution's quality assurance policies and processes, although some description will be necessary to enable the review team to understand the context in which policies are enacted. If the document does not contain careful and accurate analysis, the review team may ask for a longer visit, so that it can undertake its own fuller enquiries. Where an institution expresses a view that it is satisfied with the effectiveness of its processes, the evidence upon which this view is based should be made clear in the self-evaluation.

7 Some institutions - those without the necessary powers – do not have the responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies. Nonetheless, they have similar obligations to meet the requirements of the institution for whose awards their students are registered and may, in addition, award their own certificates and diplomas. As effective partners in collaborative activities they will be committed to ensuring that the academic standards and quality of provision of their students' awards and programmes are safeguarded as much by their own actions as through the formal responsibilities of the awarding institution. The self-evaluation will provide an opportunity for these institutions to show that they are aware of their informal as well as formal responsibilities and can demonstrate their commitment to ensuring academic standards and quality.

Scope of the self-evaluation

8 Review at institutional level relates to all educational provision for which the institution has responsibility, including undergraduate, postgraduate (taught and research), full-time, part-time, collaborative, overseas, distance and internet learning. The self-evaluation should reflect all of an institution's activities covered by these areas. Collaborative activities need not be included if it has been agreed that these will be subject to a separate review. In all other cases, the self-evaluation should consider the ways in which the institution addresses the precepts of the section of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision.

Structure, content and length of the self-evaluation

9 Institutions are invited to write their self-evaluations bearing in mind that review teams will produce a report that focuses on the questions contained in paragraph 2 above.

In preparing its self-evaluation, an institution should:

  i describe and analyse any developments since the last HEQC/QAA quality audit/institutional review (including the interim appraisal meeting);

 ii describe and analyse its responses to individual subject reviews undertaken since the last interim appraisal meeting and the ways in which lessons learnt from these have been taken into account in the enhancement of institutional practice;

iii describe briefly the key features of its processes for assuring the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes focusing on the two main areas of scrutiny contained in paragraph 2 above;

 iv identify any precepts in the *Code of practice* to which it is not adhering, explaining what alternative approaches have been taken to ensure an effect equivalent to that intended by the precept;

  v provide a view on the perceived strengths and limitations of its current institutional quality assurance arrangements; and

 vi describe and discuss its intended strategy for the next three years to further enhance practice and remedy any shortcomings it has identified.

10 In preparing their self-evaluations, institutions may find it helpful to bear in mind, as prompts, the criteria applied to institutions seeking powers to award degrees or designation as universities. These include (among others) the requirement that:

- they have clear and consistently applied mechanisms for establishing their academic objectives and outcomes;

- they seek to ensure that their programmes of study consistently meet stated objectives and outcomes;

- programme performance is carefully and regularly monitored;

- the effectiveness of their learning and teaching infrastructure is carefully monitored;

- the academic and related support requirements of students studying away from the campus are taken into account;

- the standards of students' achievements are maintained at a recognised level, and there is a strategy for developing the quality of academic provision;

- effective action is taken to address weaknesses, promote strengths, and demonstrate accountability;

- their administrative systems are sufficient to manage their operations now and in the foreseeable future;

- the qualities and competencies of staff are appropriate for an institution with degree-awarding powers;

- staff are actively engaged with the pedagogic development of their discipline;

- staff maintain high professional standards and willingly accept the professional responsibilities associated with operating in a university environment.

11 Self-evaluations may typically be 30 to 40 pages in length, although there will be no penalty for shorter or longer submissions. A successful self-evaluation will minimise the need for further clarification by the review team, and provide a reliable starting point for the review visit, so keeping to a minimum the amount of time the team needs to spend collecting additional evidence.

Documentation linked to the self-evaluation

12 So far as possible, the self-evaluation should be a self-standing document. It should not need to be accompanied by numerous other papers. However, institutions may, if they wish, supplement their self-evaluation with any other documents they believe will help review teams to a fuller understanding of the institution and its structure and function. Following its briefing meeting, the team may ask for some key documents to be circulated to its members in advance of the visit, but the quantity of papers requested for such advance circulation will be kept to an absolute minimum.

13 The self-evaluation should also include a list of all collaborative partnerships in which the institution has a responsibility for an award and/or for the quality of provision. This list should include partnerships with institutions and other bodies, both in the UK and in other countries, and should include all validations; franchises; consortia; articulation and accreditation agreements; and distance learning partnerships, including those involving facilitating agents.

Confidentiality

14 The self-evaluation remains confidential to the Agency, but it will be available to the Agency's academic reviewers undertaking subject reviews. It is likely that the report will refer to and include quotations from the self-evaluation.

Guidance on producing the institutional review report

Introduction

1 This Annex offers guidance on preparing and drafting reports of institutional reviews. It should be read in conjunction with relevant sections of the *Handbook*, in particular paragraphs 121 to 128.

2 Each institutional review report will contain sections as follows:

- brief contextual introduction;
- picture of the institution as provided by the self-evaluation;
- overall approach to quality assurance as observed by the review team;
- commentary on the awarding body function;
- *Code of practice*: adherence;
- summary;
- action points, and any exemplary features.

There will also be two appendices:

- a tabular presentation of key numerical data relating to the time of the review;
- a list of collaborative provision and awards.

3 These sections may be further sub-divided depending on the matters addressed in each review.

4 Each section will be drafted by a member of the review team. Allocation of responsibility for drafting sections will be agreed at the briefing meeting. Sections will be constructed in the form:

Description / Analysis / Judgement

Sections of the report

5 The sections of the report will be constructed as follows:

Section i Brief contextual introduction

This section will provide a thumbnail sketch of the institution and its main characteristics, as well as an outline of the review process. It will summarise the general outcomes of subject and programme reviews and will identify the main topics identified for the review and the reasons they have been chosen. It will also provide information about collaborative activity and how this has been dealt with in the report.

[Target: 1,000 words]

Section ii Picture of the institution as provided by the self-evaluation

This section will describe and analyse the self-evaluation and the picture of the institution that it paints. It will compare this picture with that derived from the Agency's initial or institutional profile and the record of achievement demonstrated by subject and programme review reports. It will identify any apparent major discrepancies for later discussion in the report. It will also highlight the strengths and limitations that the institution has recognised for itself. By the end of this section the reader should be clear about those matters addressed in the self-evaluation with which the review team is satisfied, and those targeted by the review team for particular consideration during the review.

[Target: 1,500 words]

Section iii **Overall approach to quality assurance as observed by the review team**

This section will contain a view of the effectiveness of the institution's strategic approach to quality management as evidenced by a reading of the self-evaluation, subject review reports, other relevant documents, and discussions during the review visit. It will report on the adequacy of the approach as a basis for present and future security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its provision, including provision offered in collaboration with partners or at a distance. It will describe in outline the key features of the institution's general arrangements for managing quality and standards; relevant recent and proposed further developments; and the extent to which the totality of available evidence demonstrates both the institution's capacity for critical self-evaluation and its willingness to act upon that self-evaluation.

If major changes in the institution's academic or management structures are being, or have recently been, introduced, this section may include a discussion of the way in which these changes have been managed.

[Target: 1,500 words]

Section iv **Commentary on the awarding body function**

This section will provide a commentary about the way the institution manages the 'awarding body function'. It will cover a number of topics, including the soundness of the administrative procedures the institution follows when awarding degrees and other qualifications. It will also comment on the institution's role as a member of the UK's higher education community, charged with responsibility for granting nationally (and internationally) recognised academic awards in a coherent and consistent manner. In doing this it will analyse how policies and procedures relating to academic standards meet the expectations of the higher education sector as a whole (through, for example, implementation of the qualifications framework, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*), as well as those of the institution itself, and will provide a view on its effectiveness in achieving these objectives. The extent to which these matters are dealt with cogently and candidly in the institution's self-evaluation, drawing where appropriate on subject level review reports, will be an important contributory factor in the review team's ability to judge how far the Agency can have confidence in the institution as an effective awarding body.

In this section the report will look particularly at internal procedures for:

- definition and maintenance of academic standards;
- student assessment and classification of awards, including the role and use made of external examiners;
- assurance of internal and external comparability of academic standards;
- evaluation and improvement, and development, of its procedures for the management of academic standards.

[Target: 1,500 words]

Section v *Code of practice:* **adherence**

This section will report specifically on the way the institution is tackling the expectations of the Agency's *Code of practice*. In its self-evaluation the institution will have stated that it is adhering to all of the precepts of the *Code*, or will have indicated where development is still taking place, or will have explained where an alternative approach is being taken. This statement will, so far as possible, be published verbatim in the report. The report will then discuss in detail any major areas of non-adherence that have been examined in the course of the review. In all cases, it will include discussion of the institution's responses to the sections of the *Code* dealing with:

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

This section will indicate whether the Agency considers that any non-adherence is sufficiently material for it to wish to qualify the level of confidence it has in the institution's capacity and effectiveness to function as an awarding body or responsible higher education institution.

[Target: 1,000 words]

Section vi **Summary**

This section will contain a summary of the findings of the review. It will be written for a broad lay audience and will be readable as a stand-alone document. The summary will reflect accurately the contents of the full report, and it will not be necessary to read the main body of the report in order to understand the recommendations.

The summary will begin with a general comment on the extent to which the institution's strategy for assuring the quality of its academic provision, and the measures it has promoted to give effect to that strategy, enable it, now and in the future, to manage effectively its responsibilities for quality and standards. In doing so it will highlight any factors that are influencing, or are likely in future to influence, the institution's capacity to act more (or less) capably in this area, together with any other special circumstances of which the reader may need to be aware. It will also offer a judgement on the reliability of the institution's self-evaluation and how far this accurately reflects the institution's level of self-knowledge and ability to reflect critically on its academic responsibilities.

The second part will offer a judgement on the institution as an awarding body. It will comment on the extent to which the institution is fully aware of its responsibilities for maintaining its academic standards and is adequately in control of the academic standards of all of its awards, including those delivered through collaborative partnerships. Regard will be had to evidence from subject reviews of the way in which the institution uses the reference points provided by subject benchmark statements and the qualifications framework. A view will be expressed on the security of the institution's internal regulatory system and procedures for its awards.

The third part will provide a brief summary commentary on the institution's adherence to the *Code of practice*, highlighting any major causes for concern or areas where more detailed review would be advisable.

The final part will provide a brief overall summing-up of the report. It will include a statement of the general level of confidence that the Agency has in the institution as an effective organisation able to discharge its academic obligations as a responsible higher education institution and qualifications awarding body. This statement may include references to instances of exemplary practice or to particular areas where there is not (or cannot be, because of the absence of adequate evidence) confidence in the institution's policies and practices. More information about the nature of this statement is contained in Part 2, paragraphs 123 to 126.

[Target: 1,000 words]

Section vii **Action points and exemplary features**

This section will include a list of points which the review team considers require further attention by the institution. These will be categorised according to their importance and urgency into three groups:

- **essential** – matters which the team believes are currently putting academic standards and/or quality at risk, and which require urgent corrective action;

- **advisable** – matters which the team believes have the potential to put academic standards and/or quality at risk and which require either preventive, or less urgent corrective, action;

- **desirable** – matters which the team believes have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure academic standards.

This section will also include reference to any exemplary features noted by the review team (see Part 2, paragraph 127).

[No target, but unlikely to be more than 300 words]

Appendices

In addition to the eight sections of the report, there will be two appendices:

Appendix 1: a tabular presentation of key numerical data relating to the time of the audit (data to be provided by the institution);

Appendix 2: a list of collaborative partnerships, provision and awards (to be provided by the institution).