Guidelines for External Participation in Learning and Teaching Review

Introduction

1. The University is responsible for the quality and standards of all academic awards made in its name. The function of external review team members in Learning and Teaching Review (LTR) is to assist the University in discharging its responsibility by providing assurance that the standards of provision at Newcastle are at least comparable to those in similar subjects in other universities in the UK and with relevant external referents.

2. This document has been produced to encourage consistent practice across all three Faculties and cross-Faculty programmes relating to the involvement of external reviewers in LTR.

3. This document sets out: (1) the principles of the University’s use of external reviewers in LTR; (2) the purpose and role of external reviewers; (3) criteria for selection; (4) procedures for the nomination and appointment of reviewers; and (5) duties of reviewers.

Principles of the University’s use of external advisers

4. The University regards external participation as an essential component of the periodic review of degree programmes. Review is undertaken by academic staff and a student representative, excluding those Newcastle staff and students from the host academic unit so as to avoid conflict of interest. In addition, and in order to provide subject specialist expertise and an external perspective, at least one LTR panel member should be a subject specialist from another university. Peer review is against institution-wide criteria and subject and national benchmarks.

5. In order to ensure the quality of the education it provides, maintain the standards of its awards, and provide opportunities for the enhancement of programmes and dissemination of good practice, the University places significant reliance on the role of external reviewers in LTR by:
   a. Requiring them to act as a ‘critical friend’ by providing informed, independent and impartial judgements and advice to the University;
   b. Drawing upon their professional advice and expertise and giving serious and active consideration to their comments.

Purpose and role of external reviewers

6. A minimum of one external reviewer will be appointed to the review team for each LTR. Depending on the scope of the provision under review, more than one external review may be appointed.

7. The University requires external reviewers:
   a. To advise the University on the appropriateness of the standards of its awards, by reference to published national subject benchmarks, the Framework for HE Qualifications, programme specifications, and other relevant information;
   b. To assist the University in the comparison of academic standards with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions;
   c. To provide authoritative advice relating to the academic content and delivery of provision in a given subject area.
Criteria for selection

8. For each LTR, the academic unit under review is responsible for nominating an external reviewer (or reviewers) with relevant subject expertise. In making nominations, the academic unit should, in consultation with colleagues, seek to identify a prospective reviewer:
   a. Who possesses appropriate and substantial levels of teaching and research experience, in the subject area, in UK higher education;
   b. Who commands authority in their field and the respect of colleagues;
   c. Who has not been a member of University staff or served as external examiner to the unit undergoing review within the previous three years. Individuals involved in other significant academic collaboration with staff delivering the provision should, where possible, also be excluded.

Procedures for nomination and appointment

9. Approximately six-nine months in advance of the LTR, after liaising with the LTR Secretary, the subject area identifies an external reviewer or reviewers and informally approaches the external(s) to determine availability on potential review dates. Each nominee’s CV is then sent to the relevant Chair of Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (FLTSEC) for approval, along with a brief rationale for recommending the reviewer. The Learning and Development Teaching Service (LTDS) should be copied into this communication (LTR@ncl.ac.uk). Following this approval LTDS will write to the external with a formal letter of invitation and to explain the review process. The external’s fee of £400.00 for a one day visit or £800.00 for a two day visit, plus expenses is payable by ULTSEC on behalf of the University. This payment is administered by Deborah Marshall (Deborah.marshall@ncl.ac.uk). Expenses are tax-deductible. External reviewers should refer to the Fees and Expenses claim form that will be provided to them for further information. If the circumstances of an external reviewer change after they have been appointed and contacted by LTDS in such a way that a conflict of interest might arise (e.g. a change of job), they should notify LTDS of this change. LTDS will then liaise with FLTSEC with regard to the nomination of an alternative.

Documentation and duties of the external reviewer

10. Following appointment, LTDS will provide the external reviewer with the appropriate documentation (as detailed in the Policy and Procedure for Learning and Teaching Review) so that the nominee can carry out the role effectively. Once the documentary evidence is complete, and at least one month before the review visit, the external review will also be sent:
   a. The SWOT analysis produced by the subject area
   b. A Quality Assurance (QA) summary, completed by the LTR Secretary, and an indexed series of QA documents (including programme handbooks, external examiners’ reports, Board of Studies minutes, etc.)
   c. A Quality Enhancement and Technology-Enhanced Learning (QE & TEL) summary
   d. Access to selected Blackboard modules/communities within the subject area

11. The external reviewer will be a full member of the review team. She/he is likely to be the sole subject specialist on the team and may therefore be asked by the review team Chair to lead on aspects of the review dealing with curricula, standards, and subject-specific issues related to teaching and learning. This does not, of course, preclude the reviewer having input into other aspects of the review. However, all views and recommendations reached by the review team are the combined responsibility of the full team.
12. The duties of the external reviewer are:

a. To attend (where possible) the initial team briefing (held approximately two weeks before the visit) for explanation of the process and to identify emerging lines of enquiry;
b. To participate fully in the review visit;
c. To comment on the draft review report;
d. To comment on any factual corrections to the report requested by the relevant academic unit;
e. To advise the University (if applicable) of any issues of concern or particular examples of good practice arising from the review and the follow-up process.