Annual Course Review Handbook

September 2024

Annual Course Review

Contents

Template forms

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Abbreviations in this handbook

AEE	Annual Enhancement Event
ACR	Annual Course Review
AQP	Academic Quality & Partnerships (formerly ADQE)
BoS	Board of Study
CAO	Curriculum and Assessment Officer
DTL	Director of Teaching and Learning
EE	External Examiner
GOS	Graduate Outcomes Survey (formerly DLHE)
NSS	National Student Survey
ODL	Online Distance Learning
OfS	Office for Students
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
SEC	School Education Committee
SD&R	Student Data and Records (formerly SSRO)
UEC	University Education Committee

Annual Course Review(ACR)

Introduction

1.   This handbook describes the Annual Course Review process for all undergraduate courses and all postgraduate taught courses including Online Distance Learning (ODL) provision. It includes:

- A definition of Annual Course Review (ACR)
- The aims of Annual Course Review
- Responsibilities in the ACR process
- The use of evidence and data in the ACR
- Stages in the process
- Reporting arrangements.

2.   This handbook should be of particular relevance to:

- Directors of Teaching and Learning (DTLs)
- Curriculum and Assessment Officers (CAOs)
- Heads of Department
- Course Convenors
- Module Convenors
- Members of School Education Committees (SEC)
- Professional Services staff who support teaching and learning
- Academic Developers

Definitions

3.   The Annual Course Review (ACR) process is a key element of the University's quality assurance and enhancement framework. It provides an opportunity for review, reflection, and evaluation of the delivery of courses in achieving their stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the learning outcomes. ACR is based on the use of qualitative and quantitative evidence and is critical to identifying issues, risks and actions for improvement and enhancement. It also provides an opportunity for identifying and celebrating success, promoting best practice, and learning from each other.

4.   The ACR process applies to all undergraduate courses and all postgraduate taught courses including Online Distance Learning (ODL) provision delivered by the University of Sussex. Courses delivered by partner institutions are subject to a separate Annual Monitoring process (contact AQP for further details).

5.   Due to changes in the emphasis of oversight by the Office for Students (OfS) to assure continued compliance with the ongoing conditions of registration, the University Education Committee (UEC) agreed at its June 2022 meeting that the ACR would be conducted **at course level**. A course is defined as a set of modules leading to an award or part of an award (full, major, joint, or minor). A single ACR can be prepared for a course offered as a single honours, with professional placement, industrial placement, research placement or Foundation Year or similar aggregation of courses. Where the UG course has an accompanying integrated masters course(s), this can be considered as part of the UG ACR.

6.   The outcomes of ACR are reported to University Education Committee (UEC) and form part of the evidence base considered by Senate to provide assurance to

Council that the University remains compliant with the Office for Students' (OfS) conditions of registration that relate to academic quality and standards.

The Aims of Annual Course Review

7.   The broad aims of ACR are to:

- Evaluate the student learning experience and, wherever possible, identify strategies to enhance it;
- Identify any problems in the content or delivery of a course and to take timely action to remedy those problems;
- Encourage reflection on student performance and to seek improvements to courses in the light of that reflection;
- Take account of the views of students with regard to the quality of the student experience;
- Ensure that issues raised by external examiners are considered and acted upon as appropriate;
- Identify and disseminate innovation and good practice and to capture opportunities for enhancement;
- Draw to the attention of the University generic quality issues that can only be considered above the level of individual courses or Schools;
- Contribute to strategic, academic and resource planning;
- Allow the University to fulfil its responsibilities for maintaining the standards of its awards.

Responsibilities in the ACR process

8.   Senate has overall responsibility for academic quality and standards. Senate delegates to University Education Committee (UEC) the responsibility for the development, maintenance and implementation of the monitoring procedures and any policies related to those procedures.

9.   The Board of Study is responsible for the review of all courses in its remit and for producing the course level documentation for the ACR and for the ongoing oversight of the subject-level Student Experience and Outcomes Plan throughout the academic year.

10.   School Education Committees (SECs) are responsible for the local implementation of those procedures. As part of this responsibility, the SEC will confirm that the process of ACR has been conducted appropriately within the School.

11.   Educational Enhancement are responsible for the publication of templates and guidance notes for completion.

12.   Academic Services are responsible for preparing an overview report for University Education Committee summarising the outcomes of all monitoring activity for the preceding year.

Use of evidence to support ACR

13.   The ACR process depends on the consideration of a collection of evidence that confirms the effectiveness of the provision. A standardised data set for both UG and PGT courses that is largely based on the B3 student outcomes data will be provided for each aggregated course group along with a school summary. This data will be

benchmarked. The course team will review the data pack supplied by Planning and other relevant evidence that will include (but is not limited to:

Evidence	Detail
Feedback from students	Board of Study minutes Mid and End of Module Evaluations National Student Survey results (NSS) Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey results (PTES)
External feedback	UG/PG External Examiner reports UG/PG EE reports – UEC summaries Reports from Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) Feedback from employers and placement providers Feedback from graduates
Internal feedback	Subject-level action plans The reflections of the teaching team Recommendations from validation, accreditation or periodic review events (where taken place in the year under review).

Evidence to inform the ACR

Online Distance Learning courses and Transnational Education courses should refer to the FAQs on the ACR webpage for further information on the most relevant data sources for those courses.

Stages in the ACR

14. The following are the key stages in the ACR process:

- Schools to confirm course level arrangements for ACR.
- On-going collection of evidence, record of issues and action taken (all year activity).
- Education Enhancement publish report templates and guidance notes for completion.
- Course level ACR reports completed.
- Boards of Study consider the ACR and Subject Student Experience and Outcomes Action Plans.
- Reports completed and submitted to School.
- Reports considered by the School Education Committee (SEC).
- ACR Annual Enhancement event or equivalent
- Directors of Teaching and Learning prepare School level summary report of key issues emerging from ACR and SEC discussions.
- Summary reports submitted to Educational Enhancement.
- Preparation of an annual overview report for UEC by Academic Services.
- UEC reports to Senate

Completing the ACR

15. The ACR template can be found at Appendix 1. A Word version is available on the Educational Enhancement site.

16. Authors should complete all sections of the ACR template. This includes:

- A list of all the courses considered within the report;
- (For 24/25 only) A reflection on the progress of the actions contained in the previous year's report and relevant to the course(s) under review;
- A commentary on the performance of the course during the last academic year, drawing on the available data and evidence (see paragraph12 above);
- An analysis of the key themes and issues emerging from student feedback
- The identification of any issues or risks
- The identification of areas of good or effective practice or enhancements
- Any issues or recommendations to the SEC or UEC about issues that should be followed up at either School level or institutional level (e.g. in areas related to academic policy or procedures, regulations or staff development).

17.   If the ACR generates new actions, these should be fed into the subject-level Student Experience and Outcomes plan. If these involve modifications to either courses or their constituent modules, these will require formal approval by the FEC/SEC, in line with the University's published processes for curriculum development. Teams proposing modifications should be aware that there are strict time limits in which modifications can be made (to ensure compliance with consumer law) that might mean that changes cannot be implemented immediately.

Role of the Board of Study (BoS)

18.   Prior to submission to the School Education Committee, ACR reports should be considered and approved by the relevant Board of Study.

19.   Following initial approval, the subject-level Student Experience and Outcomes plan should be a standing item on the BoS agenda, with the requirement that the Board of Study monitors the progress of the action plan throughout the year. BoS may put in place remedial action where progress of any action is problematic, or report issues to the SEC where there are actions that the BoS is unable to progress.

20.   The minutes of the BoS should include any discussion of the ACR and the subject-level Student Experience and Outcomes plan and serve as a source of evidence to update on progress.

Role of the School Education Committee

21.   ACRs are submitted to the School Education Committee (SEC) for consideration.

22.   Following consideration by the relevant SEC, completed reports, together with the minutes of the SEC, should be submitted to Educational Enhancement.   The minutes should record any issues that the SEC wishes to bring to the attention of UEC including:

- Any issues or risks that require resolution at the School level
- Any recurrent or systemic issues that require notification to UEC or other University committees.

The ACR Annual Enhancement Event

23.   The purpose of the Annual Enhancement Event (AEE) is to:

- Confirm that the ACR process has been completed satisfactorily in each School
- Identify good or effective practice that can be shared

- Identify common themes or systemic issues, including issues and risks that may require resolution at University level.

24. Participants at the AEE will include:

- PVC (Education and Students)
- Director for the Student Experience
- Deputy Director, Academic Services
- Student representatives
- Directors of Learning and Teaching
- Head of Educational Enhancement & representative from the team
- Head of Academic Quality & Partnerships

25. The AEE will receive:

- All completed templates for taught courses
- All School-level summary reports

26. Arrangements for the half day event (to be held in April 2025) will be circulated nearer to the event.

School Level Oversight

27. The School level summary report template can be found at Appendix 2. A Word version is available on the Educational Enhancement site.

28. This report is completed by the DTL and should normally:

- List all the courses considered as part of the ACR, and any reports not received or found to be unsatisfactory;
- Summarise the key findings of the reports considered (for example as they relate to curricular issues, teaching and learning, student achievement, resources etc.);
- Comment on any trends apparent from the school level data;
- Identify common themes, including issues and risks that may require resolution at the School level;
- (For 24/25 only) Comment on the extent to which action plans from the previous year have been met;
- Note any areas of good practice that can be shared;
- Identify recurrent or systemic issues that require notification to UEC or other University committees.

29. Upon completion, the School level report from the DTL, together with the minutes of the SEC where the reports were considered, are submitted to Educational Enhancement

30. Each School will make available to Educational Enhancement the individual course level reports (this could be via Box or other means).

Institutional Oversight

31. Academic Services will prepare a summary report, on the basis of the School level reports and the minutes of the SEC, that will be submitted to the spring

meeting of the UEC. The report should normally:

- Confirm the compliance of each School with the ACR process;
- Summarise the key findings from the reports;
- Comment on any trends apparent from the consideration of the data
- Note any areas of good practice and innovation;
- Identify issues for UEC's consideration emerging from the reports.

Timeline for Completion

32. Individual course level ACR reports will be required to be completed at course level for all UG and PGT provision (including ODL) and considered by Boards of Study and School Education Committees.

33. Annual ACR Enhancement event, organised by Educational Enhancement will be held in April 2025 to coincide with the preparation of School level reports.

34. School level summary reports based on consideration of the individual reports should be considered by the School Education Committee and submitted to Educational Enhancement by **Wednesday 16 April 2025**. Schools should set SEC meetings dates to meet this deadline

35. An overarching report will be prepared by Academic Services for consideration by UEC at its meeting on **Wednesday 14th May 2025**.

Office for Students – Conditions of Registration

36. All providers registered with the Office for Students are subject to ongoing conditions of registration that relate to quality and standards (these are known collectively as the 'B conditions'. They are:

B1 The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high-quality academic experience. This includes that each HE course is up to date, provides educational challenge, is coherent, is effectively delivered and as appropriate to the subject matter requires students to develop relevant skills.

B2 This requires that providers take all reasonable steps to ensure:
   a) Each cohort of students registered on an HE course receive resources and support to ensure:
      i. a high-quality academic experience for those students; and
      ii. those students succeed in and beyond HE; and
   b) Effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:
      i. a high-quality academic experience for those students; and
      ii. those students succeed in and beyond HE;
      iii.

B3 The provider must deliver positive outcomes for students on its higher education courses.

B4 The provider must ensure that:
   a) Students are assessed effectively
   b) Each assessment is valid and reliable
   c) Academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are

credible

  d) That for each HE course, academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the HE course

  e) Relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted when compared to those granted previously

B5 The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a HE course provided by, or on behalf of the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body):

  a) Any standards are set appropriately to reflect any applicable sector recognised standards

  b) Awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any sector recognised standards.

37. The Annual Course Review process is one of the key mechanisms through which the University can draw on evidence to show ongoing compliance of a number of these conditions (specifically B1, B3 and B4) and through consideration via UEC and Senate, provide assurance to Council that these conditions continue to be met.

Annual Course Review template for Taught and Online Distance Learning courses

Course/aggregated course title(s):	
Author:	
Department:	
School:	
Academic year under consideration:	
ACR approved by:	

1.	**How have the actions identified in the previous year's ACR report been taken forward. Comment on each action and identify progress and successes.**

See last year's ACR reports: https://sussex.app.box.com/folder/247272561262

When responding to this question you are asked to consider each of the actions identified in last year's report identifying for each:
- *Those actions that are complete – include a short description that reflects the relative progress or success of the action taken*
- *Those actions that are incomplete – please identify whether these continue to be 'live' actions and feed into the subject level Student Experience and Outcomes plan.*

2.	**Provide a commentary on your course level data, specifically commenting on any areas where performance is below threshold. Where this is the case, there should be a corresponding action included in the action log.**

This section provides an opportunity for critical reflection on the performance of the course(s) during the academic year that has just concluded. Drawing on the evidence base – both qualitative and quantitative – comment on the performance of the course(s) under review.

- *What has gone well, and why?*
- *What has gone less well, and why?*
- *Key themes emerging from student feedback.*
- *What particular factors have impacted on the course(s), student performance or the student learning experience?*
- *The ongoing effectiveness of resources (human, physical, IT/digital) to support the provision.*
- *The effectiveness of course related academic support (i.e. on for example module selection, feedback on assessment etc.)*

It may be helpful to use these headings to structure your commentary:

- *Recruitment*
- *Continuation and Completion rates*
- *Attainment/Student Outcomes, including awarding gaps for different student demographics*
- *Progression to Employment*
- *Teaching and Learning*
- *Assessment*
- *Student Feedback (NSS, PTES, or internally collected feedback)*
- *Resources*
- *PSRB*

See attached guidance on illustrative issues to consider when completing this section.

Issues or risks identified here should feed into the subject level Student Experience and Outcomes plan.

3.	**Describe any good or effective practice that has had a demonstrable difference to the student experience or performance. This should include a short description and a link to any relevant evidence. This is designed to enable the identification of and onward sharing of good practice.**

This section is the opportunity to reflect on those aspects of the delivery of the provision or the student experience that have been particularly positive or successful during the last twelve months. This might be new or innovative practice, things that students have responded to particularly well, or the consequences of actions you have taken to deal with a particular problem or issue that have been particularly effective.

It is anticipated that others could learn from or adapt for their own use positive features identified in this section of the report. If you have undertaken formal evaluation of these positive aspects, please include references. However, it is not a requirement that there has been extensive formal evaluation of the things identified in this section. If you do have any evidence of some form of evaluation i.e. peer review or student feedback, whether formal or informal, please cite.

4.	**Identify any in-year improvements that have been identified and actioned during the course of the year under review. Indicate what these were, how they came about and what you did.**

If there is still work to complete, please feed into the subject level Student Experience and Outcomes plan.

5.	**Identify any consistent trends or significant issues found in student feedback and comment on how these were/will be addressed via the subject level Student Experience and Outcomes plan.**

6.	How is the course(s) responding to the subject level Student Experience and Outcomes Plan?

7.	Other issues
Please use this section to identify any issues relating to the course that the course team would like to bring to the attention of FEC or UEC.	

Commentary on the performance of the provision under review - Guidance

This section provides an opportunity for the course team to critically reflect on the performance of the course during the academic year that has just concluded.

- What has gone well, and why?
- What has gone less well, and why?
- What factors have impacted on the course, student performance or the student learning experience?

The following is **not** a checklist – but you may wish to consider the following as prompts to guide your thinking:

Student Recruitment	Assessment
- The achievement/challenge of meeting recruitment targets - Tariff score for UG provision - Effectiveness of welcome and induction	- Balance and variety of assessment methods used - The reliability of assessing learning outcomes - Turnaround times - The effectiveness of systems for internal moderation - The effectiveness of the arrangements for making sure students receive feedback and feed-forward on summative and formative assessment - The views of external examiners
Learning & Teaching	**Student outcomes**
- The effectiveness of learning and teaching methods - The fitness for purpose of on-line materials - Measures to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive.	- Progression rates from year to year - Resit rates - Performance of students in different types of assessment - Proportion of good honours degrees/merits/distinctions awarded. - Effectiveness of measures to reduce the attainment gap. - Commentary on the most recent GOS (graduate employment) results
Resources	**Student Survey results**
- Change in the resource base for the course (including the departure of key staff and new arrivals) - Staff development issues and priorities - Adequacy of an access to learning resources (teaching accommodation including specialist accommodation, hardware, software, library resources, specialist equipment) - Access to placements (where relevant) - Staff achievements (FHEA/PhD etc,)	- An analysis of the NSS results for 2023 and how they compare with previous years. - An analysis of PTES 2023 and how they compare with 2021 - An indication of whether actions taken in the past have had a bearing on the most recent results. - What have Module Evaluation Questionnaires told you about the student experience, what action have you taken?
Quality Assurance	**Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)**
Update on action plans from periodic review where appropriate	Any new or anticipatory changes from relevant PSRB

	• Continued compliance with the expectations of PSRBs

Annual Course Review School level report template

Academic session:	
Name of School:	
Author:	
Have the ACR processes for the School been satisfactorily completed?	*Please list those course ACRs considered in the compilation of this report in Annex A. Please also list those courses for which an ACR was not received.*
ACR School level report approved by:	

Effective practice
Please identify areas of effective practice that have made a demonstrable difference to the performance of students or their experience. Please include their source of origin and an indication of how these will be disseminated further within the School.
Review of key themes/issues or risks from the previous year's Annual Course Review summary
Risks and Issues
Please identify any specific risks or issues highlighted in individual ACRs that the School will take action on:
Please identify any specific risks or issues highlighted in individual ACRs that the University should be aware of:
Commentary on School level data

Any additional comments or feedback
Please provide any general comments or feedback from the review of ACRs that is not covered elsewhere.

Referring to the list of courses provided, please list the names of course for which an ACR was considered in the compilation of this report.

Please list the names of courses where an ACR has not been completed