



# **Annual Course Review Handbook**

**September 2022**

## Annual Course Review

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### Abbreviations in this handbook

ACR	Annual Course Review
AQP	Academic Quality & Partnerships (formerly ADQE)
CAO	Curriculum and Assessment Officer
DTL	Director of Teaching and Learning
GOS	Graduate Outcomes Survey (formerly DLHE)
ODL	Online Distance Learning
OfS	Office for Students
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 procedures for all undergraduate courses and all postgraduate taught including online distance learning 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 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 the 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 to assure continued compliance with the ongoing conditions of registration, the University Education Committee (UEC) agreed at its June 2022 meeting that ACR for 2021-22 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. 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 the University Education Committee (UEC) and forms 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 the 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.
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. Education Enhancement (formerly TEL) are responsible for the publication of templates and guidance notes for completion.
12. Academic Services are responsible for preparing an overview report for the 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. Evidence is collected from a variety of sources but may include:

Evidence	Detail	Source	Date avail.
Data	Applications Enrolments Progression/Withdrawals Degree Outcomes Employment outcomes (GOS) (2018/19)  Academic Appeals	Admissions Student Data & Records Cognos 10 report <sup>1</sup> SSRO <a href="#">Sussex Direct</a> <a href="#">UEC/59/02</a>	October 2022 December 2022 End of Oct 2022 End of Oct 2021
Feedback from students	Boards of Study End of Terms Evaluation Questionnaires Mid-term feedback where gathered National Student Survey (NSS)	Schools Qualitrix  Schools Planning	July 2022
External feedback	UG External Examiner reports UG EE reports – summary to UEC PG External Examiner reports PG EE reports – summary to UEC Reports from professional bodies (PSRBs) Feedback from employers and placement providers	AQP/Schools AQP AQP /Schools AQP Schools  Schools	September 2022 October 2022 December 2022 January 2023
Internal feedback	The reflections of Sussex staff Recommendations from validations, accreditations or periodic review (where these have taken place in the year under review) Peer observations		

## 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 (formerly TEL) publish report templates and guidance notes for completion;
- Course level ACR reports completed;
- Boards of Study consider the ACR;
- Reports completed and submitted to School (via the CAO);
- Reports considered by the School Education Committee (SEC);
- 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 overview report for UEC by Academic Services

<sup>1</sup> Sussex Direct>Admin tab>BIS log on page>Login to Cognos reports>IBM Cognos reports>Public Folders>General Resources>Annual Monitoring

## 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;
  - 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 12 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 practice or enhancements
  - A summary action plan to include a summary of any planned curriculum changes to be implemented as a result of the review
  - 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 contains actions that involve modifications to either courses or their constituent modules, these will require formal approval by the 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.

## School Level Oversight

18. The School level summary report template can be found at Appendix 2. A Word version is available on the Educational Enhancement site.
19. 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 data;
  - Identify common themes, including issues and risks that may require resolution at the School level
  - 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.
20. Upon completion, the School level report from the DTL, together with the minutes of the SEC where the reports were considered, are submitted to ADQE.
21. Each School will make available to Educational Enhancement the individual course level reports (this could be via Box or other means).

## Institutional Oversight

22. 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

23. 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.
24. 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 **Monday 16 January 2023**. Schools should set SEC meetings dates to meet this deadline
25. An overarching report will be prepared by Academic Services for consideration by UEC at its meeting on **Wednesday 8 February 2023**.

## Office for Students – Conditions of Registration

26. 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;
- 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.
27. 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 On-line Distance Learning courses

<b>Course title(s):</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	
<b>Department:</b>	
<b>School:</b>	
<b>Academic year under consideration:</b>	
<b>ACR approved by:</b>	

<b>1.</b>	<b>How have the actions identified in last year's Annual Course Review report, relevant to this course(s), been taken forward?</b>
<p><i>When responding to this question you are asked to consider each of the actions identified in last year's report identifying for each:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Those actions that are complete – include a short description that reflects the relative progress or success of the action taken</i></li> <li><i>Those actions that are incomplete – please identify whether these continue to be 'live' actions – if so please ensure that they are included in the new action plan at section 5.</i></li> </ul>	

<b>2.</b>	<b>Commentary on the performance of the course(s) during the last academic year</b>
<p><i>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. You may wish to think about:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What has gone well, and why</i></li> <li><i>What has gone less well, and why</i></li> <li><i>Key themes emerging from student feedback</i></li> <li><i>What particular factors have impacted on the course(s), student performance or the student learning experience</i></li> <li><i>The ongoing effectiveness of resources (human, physical, IT/digital) to support the provision</i></li> <li><i>The effectiveness of course related academic support (i.e. on for example module selection, feedback on assessment etc.)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>See attached guidance on illustrative issues to consider when completing this section.</i></p>	

Issues or risks identified here should be addressed in the action plan (see section 5)

**3. Comment on the effectiveness of methods to engage students as partners in their academic experience.**

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**4. Areas 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.*

<b>5. Action Plan</b> <i>(This should be a summary of any issues and risks identified elsewhere in the report)</i>				
<b>Title of Issue or Risk</b>	<b>Short summary description</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Who will lead on the action</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>

*If this action plan contains actions that involve modifications to either courses or their constituent modules, these will require formal approval by the 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.*

## 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:

<p><b>Student Recruitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The achievement/challenge of meeting recruitment targets</li> <li>• Tariff score for UG provision</li> <li>• Effectiveness of welcome and induction</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance and variety of assessment methods used</li> <li>• The reliability of assessing learning outcomes</li> <li>• Turnaround times</li> <li>• The effectiveness of systems for internal moderation</li> <li>• The effectiveness of the arrangements for making sure students receive feedback and feed-forward on summative and formative assessment</li> <li>• The views of external examiners</li> </ul>
<p><b>Learning &amp; Teaching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of learning and teaching methods</li> <li>• The fitness for purpose of on-line materials</li> <li>• Measures to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progression rates from year to year</li> <li>• Resit rates</li> <li>• Performance of students in different types of assessment</li> <li>• Proportion of good honours degrees/merits/distinctions awarded</li> <li>• Effectiveness of measures to reduce the attainment gap</li> <li>• Commentary on the most recent GOS (graduate employment) results</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in the resource base for the course (including the departure of key staff and new arrivals)</li> <li>• Staff development issues and priorities</li> <li>• Adequacy of an access to learning resources (teaching accommodation including specialist accommodation, hardware, software, library resources, specialist equipment)</li> <li>• Access to placements (where relevant)</li> <li>• Staff achievements (FHEA/PhD etc,)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student Survey results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An analysis of the NSS results for 2020 and how they compare with previous years</li> <li>• An indication of whether actions taken in the past have had a bearing on the most recent results</li> <li>• What have Module Evaluation Questionnaires told you about the student experience, what action have you taken?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality Assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on action plans from periodic review where appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Professional, Statutory &amp; Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any new or anticipatory changes from relevant PSRB</li> <li>• Continued compliance with the expectations of PSRBs</li> </ul>

## Annual Course Review School level report template

<b>Academic session:</b>	
<b>Name of School:</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	
<b>Have the ACR processes for the School been satisfactorily completed?</b>	<i>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.</i>
<b>ACR School level report approved by:</b>	

<b>Effective practice</b>
<i>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.</i>
<b>Review of key themes/issues or risks from the previous year's Annual Course Review summary</b>
<b>Risks and Issues</b>
<i>Please identify any specific risks or issues highlighted in individual ACRs that the School will take action on:</i>
<i>Please identify any specific risks or issues highlighted in individual ACRs that the University should be aware of:</i>
<b>Any additional comments or feedback</b>
<i>Please provide any general comments or feedback from the review of ACRs that is not covered elsewhere.</i>

## **Annex A**

Please list those course ACRs considered in the compilation of this report.

Please list courses ACRs not completed