

Professional Services Thematic Reviews

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document provides an overview of the Professional Services thematic review process. Thematic reviews take a holistic approach to the delivery of a particular function or service, encompassing delivery at central, faculty and departmental level. The overall aims are to ensure that the delivery of this support is aligned with the University's strategic priorities. Other reviews at the level of organisational teams or divisions may be held from time to time, outside of this formal process framework.
- 1.2. More specifically the purposes of the reviews are:
 - To provide assurance and an assessment of comparative performance.
 - To agree broad strategic direction and priorities in line with the University strategy.
 - To identify examples of best practice for dissemination.
 - To identify opportunities for continuing improvement and learner processes.
 - To produce recommendations for referral to the appropriate forum (for example UMAG, UPRG, Professional Services Leadership Team, Faculty Management teams/PRCs).
- 1.3. Outcomes and follow up actions would be fed into the relevant management and/or governance structures as well as informing the annual planning process. Responsibility for implementing the outcomes of the thematic review lies with the appropriate manager or management structures, although projects or specific initiatives may flow from the recommendations.

2. Process outline

- 2.1. A table with timings of each of the following steps is contained in [Appendix 1](#). This framework should be used flexibly and can be amended with approval from the Review Chair.

Step 1 - Scoping the review

Timing: ten weeks before review meeting date

- 2.2. The broad area for a thematic review will be defined by the Chief Administrative Officer and Director of Finance in collaboration with the rest of the Professional Services Leadership Team and other senior managers from across the University. Depending on the theme under review, the Chief Administrative Officer or Director of Finance will act as the Review Sponsor.
- 2.3. The scope for reviews should be set in the context of delivery of the Strategic Plan and shaped by the implementation plan. Themes might be identified through a consideration of institutional risks and opportunities; the annual planning cycle; reviews taking place elsewhere in the institution or changes in management information.
- 2.4. The Review Sponsor will identify the Review Chair and the Strategic Lead at this stage of the process. The Review Sponsor can also act as Chair for the review. The Strategic Lead will usually be the senior director responsible for delivery of the primary function. The Strategic Lead would be informed of the review's scope and invited to begin work on the self-evaluation analysis.

Step 2 – Confirming the review panel

Timing: ten weeks before review meeting date

- 2.5. [Appendix 2](#) contains overviews of the roles for those involved with the thematic review, including panel members.
- 2.6. The review panel will be led by the Review Chair and supported by the Review Secretary. The make-up of the panel will be finalised by the Review Sponsor with input from the Strategic Lead but will typically comprise:
 - Review Chair
 - Review Sponsor
 - Review Secretary
 - One or more members of Lancaster academic staff
 - One or more external reviewers from another institution and/or related body
 - Students' Union representative.
- 2.7. The external reviewer would be a senior and well-regarded professional from the appropriate area based at another University or within a related body (such as the research councils).
- 2.8. The panel member from the Students' Union will be tasked primarily with ensuring that the student perspective is adequately represented. They may wish to consult colleagues from the Students' Union as well as student representatives based in departments/faculties in advance of the review meeting to aid their understanding of the issue.

Step 3 – Identification of key stakeholders

Timing: nine weeks before review meeting date

- 2.9. Stakeholders have a major role to play in informing the thematic review. Stakeholders will be responsible for identifying concerns for further investigation as well as examples of good practice and their contribution will form part of the evidence base for the review.
- 2.10. The Strategic Lead should propose a list of internal and external stakeholders which will be confirmed by the Review Sponsor.

Step 4 – Submission of Self-Evaluation Analysis

Timing: five weeks before review meeting date

- 2.11. A self-evaluation analysis will be drafted by the Strategic Lead, forming a key part of the evidence base for the thematic review. The self-evaluation should itself be driven by evidence, qualitative and quantitative and should give consideration to benchmarking against peer institutions or equivalent services in other sectors where applicable. A template for the self-evaluation is in [Appendix 3](#).
- 2.12. The self-evaluation should be relatively short, reflective and strategic, reviewing all aspects of the theme across the whole University. The Strategic Lead will be responsible for co-ordinating responses from the teams involved in the work covered within the theme.

- 2.13. The self-evaluation will form the basis of the discussions with the identified stakeholders. It should be submitted to the Review Secretary.

Step 5 – Collecting stakeholder feedback

Timing: four weeks before review meeting date

- 2.14. The Review Secretary is responsible for scheduling meetings with the stakeholders identified during Step 3 of this process. The discussions will be relatively informal, held with individuals or in small groups. The Review Secretary will make brief notes of the feedback sessions for inclusion in the panel's papers.
- 2.15. The Review Secretary will be joined at each meeting by a member of PSLT or a Senior Faculty Administrator. They will facilitate discussion, ensuring relevant topics within the review scope are covered.

Step 6 – Preparation for the review meeting

Timing: Papers to be sent to review panel two weeks before review meeting date

- 2.16. Approximately two weeks before the meeting date the Review Secretary should send the following to the panel:
- Agenda
 - Relevant datasets and other background information
 - The self-evaluation analysis (see [Step 4](#))
 - Stakeholder feedback summaries (see [Step 5](#))
 - A review brief (see 2.17. below).
- 2.17. The Review Secretary will be responsible for compiling a brief for the review panel put together using information from the self-evaluation and other available evidence, including discussions with stakeholders. The brief should be approved by the Review Chair prior to circulation to the panel. Where information deemed sensitive and commercial in confidence is a required element of the review documentation, a confidentiality agreement should be considered for any external members of the panel.
- 2.18. The brief should form the themes for discussion at the review meeting and might contain:
- A SWOT analysis of the theme under review
 - Comparisons with other equivalent services delivered elsewhere
 - Issues for further discussion and consideration.

Step 7 – The review meeting

- 2.19. The Review Chair determines the timetable for the review with a recommendation coming from the Review Sponsor and Review Secretary. Some points worth noting when finalising the schedule:
- The external reviewers may require travel/accommodation support to facilitate their involvement in the meeting.

- It may be useful for the Review Panel to have a closed session at the start of the day to confirm lines of inquiry and the plan for each session.
- The review panel should normally have opportunity to meet with the Strategic Lead.
- The review panel should ideally have access to those internal staff with expertise in the area under review. The schedule should be formulated to allow these staff to meet with the panel at some point during the day if required.
- The review panel should have a closed session towards the end of the day to agree the wording of the key recommendations, so that these can be shared with the Strategic Lead as soon as possible.

Step 8 – Report and action plan

Timing: Report to be drafted within two weeks of the review meeting

- 2.20. The Review Secretary produces a draft report within two weeks of the review meeting date. This draft report is shared with the Strategic Lead for correction of inaccuracies and to allow the formulation of an action plan. The Review Chair is responsible for signing off the final report but may choose to consult with other members of the review panel.
- 2.21. The report should include:
- A general assessment of the processes considered as part of the review
 - An evaluation of each theme considered
 - A summary of the review panel's conclusions
 - Areas of identified best practice (and ideas for how these could be disseminated)
 - Recommendations
- 2.22. The University Management Advisory Group will receive the report. PSLT will also have opportunity to view the report and discuss the development of an action plan.
- 2.23. In response to the recommendations made in the review report, the Strategic Lead will produce an action plan. This will cross-reference the review report and set out actions against each recommendation. The method for monitoring progress against each action will also be indicated.

Appendix 1 – Standard review schedule (simplified)

Step	Timing	Activity	Actioned by
1	Review meeting – 10 weeks	Review scope established and Review Chair confirmed	CAO and Director of Finance
1	Review meeting – 10 weeks	Review scope confirmed with the Strategic Lead	Review Sponsor
2	Review meeting – 10 weeks	Membership of review panel confirmed, including Review Secretary	Review Sponsor
3	Review meeting – 9 weeks	Identification of key stakeholders relevant to the thematic review	Strategic Lead
4	Review meeting – 5 weeks	Submission of self-evaluation analysis to the Review Secretary	Strategic Lead
5	Review meeting – 4 weeks	Stakeholder feedback collected through face-to-face meetings and other appropriate methods	Review Secretary (with support from PSLT members)
6	Review meeting – 3 weeks	Brief for the review panel drafted and agreed with the Review Chair	Review Secretary
6	Review meeting – 2 weeks	Papers for the review meeting circulated to panel members	Review Secretary
7	Review meeting	One day meeting of the review panel	Review panel members
8	Review meeting + 2 weeks	Report and recommendations drafted for sign-off	Review Secretary
8	Review meeting + 4 weeks	Final report submitted to PSLT for information and UMAG for consideration in the first instance	Review Chair
8	Review meeting + 8 weeks	Action plan drafted in response to review recommendations	Strategic Lead

Appendix 2 – Role definitions

Review Chair

The Review Chair can be the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Finance or someone external to the University appointed by the Review Sponsor. Their role is:

- To lead the thematic review and provide oversight of the review process
- To agree the papers for the review panel in collaboration with the Review Secretary
- To agree the schedule for the review panel
- To act as chair during the panel meeting
- To sign-off the final report and provide an overview of findings to UMAG.

Review Sponsor

The Review Sponsor will normally be the Chief Administrative Officer or Director of Finance depending on the theme of the review.

- To appoint the Review Chair and act as a senior point of liaison throughout the process
- To define the scope for the thematic review in collaboration with senior University colleagues
- To identify and liaise with the Strategic Lead
- To agree the membership of the review panel including the Review Secretary and external members
- To act as a member of the review panel.

Review Secretary

The Review Secretary will be identified by the Review Sponsor in consultation with the Professional Services Leadership Team and Senior Faculty Administrators. Where appropriate an Assistant Review Secretary may also be appointed to provide experience of the review process or as a development opportunity. The Review Secretary's role is:

- To manage the review process and provide advice to the Review Chair
- To set the timetable for the review in line with the guidelines contained within this document (agreeing deviations with the Review Chair)
- To liaise with review panel members both internal and external, facilitating their involvement in the process
- To liaise with the Strategic Lead, outlining the process and timescales for their contribution to the process e.g. self-evaluation analysis
- To co-ordinate meetings with stakeholders and the meeting with the review panel
- To produce a brief for the review panel and papers for the review panel meeting
- To draft a final report for the Review Chair's sign-off.

Strategic Lead

The Strategic Lead is the person with institutional functional responsibility for the area being reviewed. They will therefore be required to offer a cross-institutional perspective. Their role is:

- To liaise closely with the Review Sponsor, Review Secretary and Review Chair on all aspects of the thematic review

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- To recommend appropriate stakeholders and external panel members
- To produce the self-evaluation analysis and provide other data which may be useful to the review panel
- To produce a proposed action plan in response to the recommendations of the final report
- To oversee progress on the agreed action plan against proposed timescales.

Review Panel

The composition of the review panel is to be decided by the Review Chair in conjunction with the Review Secretary. Their role is to:

- To familiarise themselves with the material provided as part of the review process and to analyse this information
- To possibly lead on a specific aspect of the review as defined during the scoping of the review, dependent on the panel member's expertise
- To attend the review meeting.

Appendix 3 – Headings for self-evaluation analysis

The Strategic Lead should co-ordinate the development of the self-evaluation analysis working with colleagues from across the University. This document should not exceed 2000 words but supplementary data can be added as an appendix.

Primary headings

1. Summary of the services, functions and processes considered part of the thematic review
2. Analysis of current performance including benchmarking data and management information where available
3. Discussion of what is established as good practice elsewhere in the HE sector, and external to the sector where relevant.
4. Analysis of the strengths and weakness of the current approach(s) adopted at Lancaster
5. Suggestions for improvement and refinement of current approaches and processes