

WHAT IS A POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM REVIEW?

A Program Review is a rigorous, systematic, objective, impartial, expert-based examination, evaluation and self-evaluation of how effectively a program is working, as part of the ongoing pursuit of higher levels of achievement and quality in the university, and in the service of program improvement. A Program Review includes:

- Preparation and submission of a self-evaluation document;
- Review of the self-evaluation document by the Program Review Panel;
- Collection and submission of additional documentation to the Program Review Panel;
- Scrutiny of the documentation by the Program Review Panel;
- A visit by the Program Review Panel to the program and its officers;
- The production of a report that comments on judgements about the program, the strengths of the program, areas for improvement, and recommendations for further action.
- Following the receipt of the report, a follow-up action plan for the program's development.

Program review addresses questions such as:

- What are we doing, why, how and how well on the program?
- How high is the quality of the program?
- How do we know?
- How can the program be improved and the improvement sustained?

It addresses major questions such as:

1. What does the Faculty *say* it is doing and values about the program?
2. What *procedures* does the Faculty have for planning, monitoring, reviewing, developing what it says it does and values about the program?
3. What *processes* does the Faculty have for planning, monitoring, reviewing, developing what it says it does and values about the program?
4. How does the Faculty know and inform itself and stakeholders if these procedures and processes are *working/being used*?
5. Are the procedures and processes in place, operating and *effective* in meeting the Faculty's stated mission, values, purposes, policies, self-evaluation contents and criteria for the effectiveness of the program?
6. How does the Faculty *inform itself and stakeholders* about the procedures and processes for planning, monitoring, reviewing, developing what it says it does and values about the program?
7. How does the Faculty inform itself/stakeholders about how these procedures and processes for the program are effective in terms of *outcomes* and *quality* (i.e. impact analysis)?
8. How high is the quality of the program and its elements?

9. What benchmarks and benchmarking does the Program operate?
10. How has the program *improved* its quality over time, and how do we know?
11. What recommendations can be made for needed *interventions and developments*?
12. *How and where* can the quality of the program be improved and enhanced, *by whom* and in what *time frames*?

A Program Review is conducted by internal members of the university and by external reviewers. It comprises a self-evaluation by the program and the program committee(s), together with a review by members of the university who are not from the Faculty, and who include senior officers of the university. The intention is to show that the program has proper procedures and processes for quality assurance, that these are actually operating, that they are making a positive difference, and that they are impacting on the program. Within Program Review, self-evaluation has a primary purpose of bringing about improvement, to ensure that the program is meeting its goals, and has procedures for informing itself of this, and that its statements of quality are evidence-based. It is designed to identify and diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the program in a way that can bring about improvement, i.e. its intention is constructive and formative. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (2008: 5) indicates other several possible intended outcomes of self-evaluation within Program Review:

- ‘Verifying that processes are in place, and whether these are operating effectively
- Determining whether existing policies and procedures are effective in meeting [program] goals, and identifying any gaps
- Providing information that may not normally be evident (such as localised innovative practices in teaching and learning)
- Enhancing understanding (across staff, student and/or other stakeholders) of organisational processes and outcomes
- ‘Reality testing’ achievements toward strategic goals
- Increasing engagement with change
- Disclosing weaknesses and forcing confrontation
- Promoting honest communication
- Encouraging benchmarking, internally and/or externally
- Providing a base for ongoing comparison and benchmarking
- Identifying activities that are misaligned with organizational [and program] goals/objectives
- Providing evidence of quality processes in place
- Promoting empowerment and engagement of participants
- Promoting an evidence-based culture
- Promoting learning
- Enabling self-identification of improvement gaps and development of associated strategies to address these prior to external audit.’

(Adams, R., Strong, J., Mattick, L.E., McManus, M.E., Matthews, K.E. and Foster, J. (2008) *Self-review for Higher Education Institutions*. Melbourne: Australian Universities Quality Agency.)

A 'program' is defined here as an entire set of courses leading to an award.

A 'course' is defined here as a single element of a program to which an identifying code has been assigned.

'Examination' is defined here as any formal assessment, examination, and/or evaluation of performance which contributes to the grading of students in a course or program.

'Assessment' here is defined as the process of reaching a decision on the marks/grades to be awarded to students. It also includes the provision of formative feedback to students where appropriate (see also below: releasing marks).

An 'award' here is defined as the degree/certificate/diploma awarded, together with its classification (where appropriate).

A program review involves: evaluation and self-evaluation; internal peer review; the involvement of external parties with the appropriate disciplinary expertise; and student, alumni, faculty and administrative input.