POLICY FOR ANNUAL PROGRAMME REVIEW
FOR RESEARCH PROGRAMMES (APR(R))

APR forms a core element of the University’s framework for quality assurance and enhancement. This policy applies to all research programmes, including all programmes within an external partnership/collaborative arrangement/doctoral college and those which lead to the following awards:

- PhD
- MD
- EngD
- DSocSci
- EdD
- DDS
- MPhil
- MSc by Research
- LLM by Research
- ChM
- MMus
- DEdPsy

For review of taught programmes, please see the Policy for School Education Action Plans.

1. Purpose of Annual Programme Review for Research Programmes

1.1 The value of Annual Programme Review (APR) lies in the opportunity for schools to reflect on the delivery of programmes during the previous year. Its purpose is to improve the quality of the programmes offered by the University, through:

a) providing a developmental opportunity to review all postgraduate research programmes within a school¹ / faculty;

b) considering any relevant external comments on the wider aspects of the programme(s), including those of external examiners and, where appropriate, employers;

c) considering feedback from students obtained through any internal and/or external surveys;

d) providing key information for Faculty Quality Teams (FQTs) through the APR reports, which are considered before carrying out annual FQT visits to schools;

e) encouraging and disseminating good practice by providing feedback to Faculty Quality Teams (FQTs);

f) providing input through the APR reports into School Reviews and external quality assurance visits.

1.2 APR(R) must be undertaken for all postgraduate research programmes, including PhD, MPhil, professional doctorates, Masters by Research, etc (as above), and all programmes that are delivered through external partnership/collaborative arrangements (for the latter see also 1.3).

1.3 A faculty may choose to review its research programmes at faculty level if this is more appropriate and if it is feasible to cover the range of points at that level. Where research programmes are grouped together in larger units for review, measures should be taken to ensure that the process still enables effective scrutiny of any specific issues arising for particular programmes (for example, by ensuring adequate representation at the APR meeting). However, the following programmes must be reviewed individually and a separate APR report produced for them:

¹ Use of the word school in this document also relates to departments or centres.
• Programmes that are delivered through partnerships/collaborative arrangements. The types of partnership programmes include the following (if unsure whether this applies to your programme, please contact the AQPO for advice).
  o Doctoral Training Entities (DTEs)
  o Joint Awards, Dual Awards;
  o and programmes in Flying Faculties (e.g. the EdD in Hong Kong)
• Distance Learning programmes
• Programmes that are teaching out

1.4 For programmes that are delivered through a Doctoral Training Entity which have a taught component that is not delivered by the University of Bristol, the annual review process for the taught component would be conducted by the lead institute. It is recommended good practice that the lead institute shares the outcomes of the annual review process for the taught component and that this is considered as part of the APR.

2. Submission of APR Reports
2.1 The University deadline for submission of research programme APR reports is 31st January. The purpose of this deadline is to ensure that annual programme review takes place in a consistent cycle across the university and that suitable information is available to FQTs at the time of making their visits.
2.2 APR reports and any appendices must be submitted electronically to the Academic Quality and Partnerships Office (AQPO) at apr-admin@bristol.ac.uk. The AQPO will make the report available to the relevant Faculty officers.
2.3 Any requests for an extension should be made at the earliest possible opportunity, via email to AQPO at apr-admin@bristol.ac.uk, so that these can be considered well in advance of the deadline.
2.4 Late submissions will be reported first to the Head of School before being escalated to the Faculty Dean, and then to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students).

3. Outline of Procedure
3.1 Normally APR meetings take place during the autumn term. This does not preclude any urgent action being taken, prior to APR, as and when the school becomes aware that change is required.
3.2 Heads of School or their nominees (e.g. Directors of Graduate Studies or equivalent) are responsible for ensuring that designated school staff have clear responsibility for carrying out APR, with respect to all research programmes within the school.
3.3 The school should gather together feedback and outcomes of routine monitoring activities on its postgraduate research programmes from examiners, students, and school staff. Documents should be circulated in sufficient time before the meeting and should normally include:
   a) any feedback from examiners of research students from the previous year;
   b) any student feedback on research programmes (quantitative and qualitative);
   c) quantitative and qualitative results from internal and/or external surveys;
   d) comments from supervisors of research students;
e) a standard set of statistical information for the relevant year;

f) any other information relevant to the programmes in that year; e.g. the last FQT visit report, School Review report, any Research Council visit report(s);

g) minutes of relevant liaison meetings with postgraduate research students;

h) relevant feedback from partners, e.g. placement providers;

i) if relevant, consideration of the University of Bristol Ethical Considerations document;

j) the previous year’s APR report and progress on any actions arising from it.

For programmes with a taught component:

k) feedback from external examiners, either in the form of their most recent report or an extract of the minutes of the exam boards if the report is not yet available;

l) copies of all external examiner school response forms that were sent to the externals;

m) student and staff feedback on units (quantitative and qualitative);

n) a report of unit changes that were approved by the Faculty during the last academic year, provided by AQPO on the UPMS reporting pages;

o) programme specifications as shown in the Programme Catalogue, including the sections of descriptive text;

p) unit specifications (as shown in the Unit Catalogue, see above);

3.4 The above documents plus any other evidence about research postgraduate provision over the previous year are discussed at an appropriate school meeting, e.g. a dedicated APR meeting or a dedicated section of a research committee meeting. This policy alongside the APR(R) report template (see section 4) should be referred to during the APR meeting to ensure that all relevant matters are covered.

3.5 It is important that the APR constitutes a collective reflection on the programme(s) and not the views of a particular individual or information compiled from a range of other meetings held throughout the period.

3.6 Attendees of the APR meeting will typically include the Director of Graduate Studies, Research Group leads, Graduate Administration Manager and research student representatives (not an exhaustive list). Where programme(s) to be reviewed are delivered through an external partnership/collaborative arrangement, attendees would typically include the Collaborative Partner where appropriate, e.g. for Joint Awards. It must be ensured that appropriate representatives of all such partners have access to the supporting information, contribute to and attend the APR meeting.

3.7 Where student representatives attend the main APR meeting, schools may have a Reserved section of the meeting agenda for any discussions to be attended by staff members only.

4. The Report

4.1 The APR report must be prepared using the standard APR(R) template for research programmes, in order to ensure that all issues relevant to APR have been covered and to enable ease of reference to particular issues in the APR report during subsequent quality enhancement processes (e.g. FQT visits, School Reviews). It should include a list of the
programme(s) reviewed, the date of the meeting and a list of those attending indicating which members of the review are students. It should be obvious from the report that all elements have been discussed, positive/negative issues raised and any outcomes/ actions noted.

4.2 **Review of Supervisors/Examiners’ Feedback (section 5):** This should include consideration of whether any changes need to be made as a result of supervisor/ examiner feedback, and of any issues relating to the supervisor/student ratio.

4.3 **Review of processes (section 6):** Scrutiny of any procedures relating to research students within the school / faculty. Please refer to the University Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes for an overview of areas for consideration and discussion, including requirements on supervision and annual progress monitoring.

4.4 **Review of student progress and attainment (section 7):** Statistical information for the current year should be discussed to review student intake and progression data. This information is drawn from the central student record system (SITS) and will be sent to the school by early October.

4.5 **Other internal and external review (section 8).** Any internal or external reviews of programmes should be discussed, for example, FQT, School Review or Research Council visit/reports. What issues/actions arose and what actions have been taken?

4.6 **Programme structure, content, specification and learning outcomes (sections 9 and 17):** Programmes with a taught component must complete this section. This is the annual confirmation that the programme specification (including structure) is accurate. The current programme and unit specifications are published in the Programme and Unit Catalogues.

i. In relation to review of assessment load and methods, please refer to the University Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes and the Institutional Principles for Assessment and Feedback.

ii. In completing this section, please also refer to Expectation A3.3 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which states that: “Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.”

“Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. For equivalent qualifications, the threshold level of achievement is agreed across the UK and is described by the qualifications descriptors set out in the national frameworks for higher education qualifications” (UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, QAA). Please refer to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA 2008).

iii. Please also use this section to comment on other key aspects of the programme, such as how it contributes to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and any developments that have taken place in the use of technology to support learning (TEL).

iv. Further guidance on the review of interdisciplinary units is available on the AQPO website.

4.7 **Unit changes and learning outcomes (section 10):** Programmes with a taught component must complete this section. Unit changes that were approved by the Faculty during the academic year should be discussed to analyse how these may accumulatively impact upon the programme aims and intended learning outcomes, and whether the assessment is still aligned. Were the programme intended learning outcomes updated as a result of any changes to mandatory units? How well does the assessment and feedback align with the Institutional Principles for Assessment and Feedback?
4.8 Discussion of external examiner reports/feedback (Section 11): The meeting should include a discussion of the existing school’s responses to External Examiner reports, which should have already been sent to the External Examiner. The discussion should include all comments and recommendations arising from the external examiner’s reports and how these have been responded to. If the school disagrees with a recommendation from the External Examiner, this should be ratified at the APR and reported in the template. Progress on actions arising from the External Examiner response forms should be reviewed.

4.9 Student development and support (section 12): This should include analysis of the support available to research students within the school / faculty, including the suitability of induction, and evaluation of capacity to support the type and range of students and their diverse needs. Please refer to the University Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes for an overview of areas for consideration and discussion, including requirements on induction and on skills development.

4.10 Review of student feedback (section 13): Student feedback, both quantitative and qualitative, should be considered at the meeting. The APR meeting should also consider how internal school feedback compares with that gathered from any external surveys (e.g. PRES), how research students are involved in deciding any actions needed, and how they are informed of actions taken in response to their feedback.

4.11 Strategic issues (section 14): The Head of School should be invited to include within the report a brief summary of strategic issues that affect the programme(s); for example, school management/ administration arrangements, financial context, student recruitment, impact of sector developments, and significant learning facilities and resources (such as library resources, IT provision, lecture/ seminar and laboratory space).

4.12 External partnerships/ collaborative arrangements (section 15): Where there are partnership programmes or collaborative arrangements in place, this section gives the school an opportunity to discuss the mechanisms in place for such provision. The school should highlight any issues and/or risks and discuss how these may be mitigated. This is also an opportunity to comment upon any co-supervision arrangements with external partners. The essential underlying principle for any postgraduate research programme delivered collaboratively that leads to a University of Bristol award is that academic standards and quality are safeguarded, regardless of where learning opportunities are delivered or who delivers them. See Chapter B10 of the UK Quality Code.

4.13 Dissemination of APR outcomes (section 16): The outcomes of the APR must be reported to students. The school should consider the best way to achieve this. This should include a paper containing the highlights of the APR being received as an annual standing item at Staff Student Liaison Committee and uploaded onto the relevant Blackboard site (see 5.2).

4.14 Appendices: The APR report should include references to other documents where appropriate, although it is not necessary to append these additional documents to the report.

5. How is the APR used?

5.1 The actions and outcomes of the APR must be reported to students and their comments sought. This should include a paper containing the highlights of the APR being received as an annual standing item at Staff Student Liaison Committee and the report uploaded onto the relevant Blackboard site.

5.2 AQPO will upload the full APR report to Blackboard unless the School submits the paper containing highlights that went to the SSLC (see 5.1) for this purpose.

5.3 The APR reports should be received by the relevant School Graduate Studies Committee.

5.4 The outcomes of the APR should be used developmentally by Schools. The APR report should specify any actions identified as a result of the review discussions, who will follow up on these, and within what timeframe. Actions should be added to the School’s Education Action Plan.
5.5 The outcomes of APR feed into the work of FQTs, which consider APR reports as a key source of information before carrying out their annual visits to schools (see Guidelines for Faculty Quality Teams). The annual FQT report will include reference to APR. APR reports are considered as part of the School Review process.

5.6 Where a review of a newly approved programme was stipulated after one year of operation, the APR report will be shared with the relevant Faculty Education Director and considered by University Education Committee.

5.7 An annual overview report of APR activities that identifies University-level issues, aspects of good practice, and a summary of programmes that are teaching-out is compiled and reported to the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (UAQSC). The UAQSC will actively monitor the progress with any University level issues that have been identified. Aspects of good practice that are identified in the annual overview report will be published in the Good Practice Directory.

5.8 AQPO maintains a shared folder (\ads.bris.ac.uk\filestore\misappusers\APR-and-ExEx) in which are stored read-only copies of APR reports received in the last three years and the statistics supplied by AQPO for APR meetings. FQT members and faculties use this folder to access APR reports prior to FQT visits.