DIVISIONAL REVIEWS: OVERVIEW FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Purpose

Divisional Reviews are sexennial. The purpose of the Divisional Reviews is to periodically reflect upon and assess the services being delivered by each division with a view to identifying good practice and confirming the direction of travel, while considering the scope, quality, effectiveness and cost of those services. The reviews will also consider the contribution of the division to the University's strategic aims.

Process

The Divisional Review process is described in the 'Divisional Review Guidelines' document[1] and this sets out the broad framework in which reviews will take place, while at the same time allowing for some flexibility. This way the review can be adapted to the particularities of the division (e.g. in size, in scope), allowing for variability where appropriate, for example in the length of the review and the size of the panel. The process has been designed so that it will not be overly onerous or bureaucratic, but is also not intended to be 'light-touch' or superficial. The reviews will be appropriately resourced and supported by the Governance team in the Strategic Planning & Governance Office.

The Division prepares a Self-Evaluation Document (SED) focussing on central issues facing the Division, good practice, effectiveness, contributions to the University's mission and strategic plan etcetera, supported by relevant background information and data.

The self-evaluation process and resulting SED, is a critically important element of the review, and its preparation should engage as many people as possible. This element of the review will be given significant weight by the Panel. Each reviewer is therefore expected to have read this document thoroughly (and may wish to ask follow up, factual questions prior to the review itself). The SED should, wherever possible, include benchmarking information for comparison with similar divisions at other institutions and it is expected that external reviewers may be able to offer valuable insight in benchmarking against their own experience or institution.

The review process will take into consideration the current financial context of the University and the need to provide value for money in the delivery of services. Recommendations emerging from the review must be affordable.

External/independent challenge and validation is a key element of every review and so the role of the external reviewer is important in the Divisional Review process. Each review includes two external reviewers with strong credentials and experience in the area under review. The external reviewers prompt Divisions and the University to address issues that may come to light during the divisional review process, and to facilitate an institutional and divisional response to the review.

The Governance team (and the Review Co-ordinator) prepare a schedule for the review (the review usually takes place for between half a day and 2 days (depending on size of Division)) that includes:

- an informal meeting/dinner for the Panel and Registrar and/or Deputy Registrar
- tours of offices/facilities, if appropriate

[1] Available at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/divisional-reviews/

- time for Panel discussion and reflection.

The reviews will always (where possible) take place 'in the Division' and during the course of the review the Panel will meet:

- Registrar/ Deputy Registrar, if not a member of the panel
- Divisional Head
- Division senior team
- Divisional head of Divisions with key interfaces
- Sampling of staff from Division
- HR Manager
- Finance Manager
- Service 'users': students/Deans/Heads of School/academic staff (as appropriate)
- Members of the University Senior Executive Team (as appropriate)

The SED, supporting information/data and the review agenda/programme are sent to the Panel circa **3 weeks** prior to the review taking place.

There are some key issues/cross-cutting themes that the Panel should consider as part of the review, although the list below is not exhaustive nor does every item on this list need to be considered in every review. There will be specific issues that need consideration for each Division:

- How effectively does the Division support the University Strategy and institutional priorities?
- What are the key challenges to the Division in carrying out its function effectively?
- Does the structure of the Division enable it to effectively perform its function? Should its structure or remit change?
- What should the University's future ambitions/strategy be for the Division?

Key responsibilities of the External Reviewer

- External reviewers, as recognised experts in the professional field of the Division undertaking the review, provide critical judgement, ensure the objectivity of the review process, and determine how the division compares to similar divisions they have had experience of.
- Reviewers should bring an informed and unbiased view to the assessment of the Division. External reviewers should judge whether the plans of the Division are appropriate, considering such factors as the current condition of the Division, trends in that particular area, the nature of the Division, and the characteristics of the stakeholders/customers it serves. It is helpful if the reviewers can agree in advance the questions that they will specifically address during the review, but should not feel constrained from covering other issues that might arise during the course of the review.

After the review

The review report and recommendations from the panel will be produced within **4 weeks** of the review by the Panel Chair and Review Coordinator and with input from the Panel, and the Divisional Head. From this, a prioritised response to the review, including Action Plan based on recommendations (and with associated costs considered) will be prepared by the Division. The action plan will be monitored by the Head of Division, the Registrar/Deputy Registrar (as appropriate), the Panel Chair, and regular progress reports to UMT.