

**UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL**

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH INSTITUTES (URIs)**

**REVIEW GUIDELINES**

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8. **Objectives**

The Review Process has the following objectives:

* + To assure the University that the University Research Institutes (URIs) are effectively fulfilling their key purpose: to complement and facilitate the University’s research and its research strategy.
  + To explore how the URIs add value to the University’s research and research strategy.
  + To ensure that the URIs have appropriate strategic plans in place, aligned with University and Faculty strategies.
  + To assist the University in identifying and evaluating strengths and/or weaknesses in:

research & entrepreneurship, engagement & research collaborations, UK and Overseas;

planning, resource management (including space) and administration (including systems);

partnership working and engagement; and

equality and diversity performance.

* + To help improve URI and institutional effectiveness and efficiency in relation to academic/research performance.
  + To help the University identify where there might be ‘gaps’ in its research activity that it may wish to fill.
  + To identify examples of good practice, areas for improvement and, where necessary, to recommend that URIs are given appropriate support to make changes.
  + To review all URIs in a rolling, six yearly cycle.

1. **Main Features**

The URI Review process is based on the principle of using existing documentation wherever possible, including Annual Programme Review (APR) documentation and other relevant materials.

The University's URI Review process has four distinctive features:

* + It is URI-based.
  + It is based on a process of self-evaluation carried out by the URI itself.
  + External Reviewers are included, to ensure objectivity.
  + The Review evaluates the full range of URI’s activities.

The process has the following main stages:

* + Identification and notification of a date for the Review.
  + Appointment of External Reviewer/s and other members of Review Panel.
  + URI submission of a self-evaluation document (SED), together with any relevant supporting documentary evidence.
  + Scrutiny of the SED and supporting evidence by the Review Panel.
  + Visit by the Review Panel to the URI, normally lasting one working day.
  + Production of a Review Report including recommendations.
  + Review Report submission to UPARC for its comment and approval.
  + Once UPARC has commented on and confirmed it is content with the Review Report, the PVC Research to liaise with the Director of the Institute to agree next steps, including follow up on any proposed actions.
  + The completed Review Report to be shared with the University Research Committee by the Secretary of UPARC.
  + The URI to continue reviewing progress against next steps either as part of their annual monitoring review process (if the actions are completed) or to ensure that any outstanding actions are completed. To provide the PVC Research with regular updates on progress against next steps.

1. **Procedure**

**Selection of URIs**

URIs will be selected for review by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), in consultation with the Deputy Vice Chancellor[[1]](#footnote-1) (and agreed as part of the annual School Review schedule at a meeting of UPARC) based on a rolling programme of Reviews. Directors of Institutes will be consulted as to appropriate timings of Reviews, so as to avoid clashes with important events where possible - for example, exam periods and University closure days. Scheduling will also where possible take account of internal considerations, such as strategic planning issues, and the schedule of any proposed external reviews.

**Arrangements for the Visit**

Confirmation of the URIs to be reviewed will take place approximately 12-18 months before the visit. The timing of visits will be arranged to accommodate URI priorities wherever possible. A member of the Governance team will contact the relevant Director, and will provide guidance on the Review process. Throughout the preparation period (i.e. the development of the self-evaluation document and the Review programme) the Review Co-ordinator will liaise closely with the URI by way of regular meetings to check progress, and answer any process-related and/or logistical questions.

A kick-off meeting between the Chair of the Review Panel (usually a PVC other than the PVC Research), the PVC Research, the Director of the URI due to be reviewed, and the Review Co-ordinator will take place at an early stage to plan and identify the main issues to be explored during the Review. The discussions will include (but are not limited to):

* + - Consideration of a draft programme, and whom the Panel might wish to meet during the Review visit.
    - Discussion of the type and format of the supporting data to be included in documentation for the Panel.
    - Consideration and agreement of the Review Panel membership (including internal and external members).

The Review Co-ordinator will ensure that external Reviewers are selected according to the guidance given at **Annex A**, and will take the lead in convening the Review Panel based on discussions held at the kick-off meeting.

All members of the Panel will receive the relevant documents **three weeks** in advance of the visit. They will be able to request additional information to help them prepare for the visit, provided they do so within a reasonable timeframe (no less than a fortnight before the visit).

The Review will normally take place over a period of one day (unless there are specific reasons why the Chair and/or Panel think a longer or shorter Review would be more appropriate).

**Roles and Responsibilities**

UPARC, with guidance from the PVC Research, has responsibility for the URI Review process. UPARC select URIs for Review, based on a rolling programme of Review, and the advice of the PVC Research. UPARC will also review completed URI Review Reports, provide comment and oversight, and confirm when it is satisfied with completed reports.

The PVC Research has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of any relevant Review recommendations approved by UPARC.

The Review Co-ordinator has responsibility for the following:

* + - * Ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made for carrying out the Review (and arranging regular meetings with the URI Director throughout the process to provide support and to monitor progress in the development of the SED and the Review programme.
    - Minuting the Review, and producing the first draft of the Review Report, as well as incorporating any revisions from the Chair and Review Panel, and/or reflecting any updates from UPARC.

## University Research Institute Review Team

Once a Review date has been confirmed, the URI appoints its own Review team, comprising the Institute Director, the URI Manager(s), and one other URI member of staff (generally someone with administrative experience/responsibilities). Neither the Director nor the other member(s) of the URI Review Team are members of the Review Panel, but will be available for consultation during the Review itself.

All members of the Institute should have the opportunity to engage with the Review, and if possible to contribute to the Self Evaluation Document (SED). They may also be involved in attending meetings with the Panel during the Review visit.

**Review Panel**

The Chair of each Review Panel is appointed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on behalf of UPARC (n.b. Chairs will be selected to take account of availabilities and other chairing responsibilities across all School, Divisional and URI reviews for the academic year). The Chair will be a full member of the Panel. Once the Chair has been appointed they will have responsibility for approving other members of the Panel, in consultation with the PVC Research (membership is usually discussed at/before the kick-off meeting), including the external Reviewer/s. Panel members will normally include:

* + The Chair (PVC/DVC)
  + The PVC Research
  + 2 External Reviewers
  + An academic member of staff who works with another University Research Institute.
  + A member of senior professional services staff with a good understanding/professional experience of the work of the University Research Institute (for example, a member of the Research and Enterprise Development Division).
  + The Director of another University Research Institute.
  + The Review Co-ordinator[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Chair of the Panel will normally take the lead in Review meetings, however all Panel members are expected to take a full part in all aspects of the Review.

**External Reviewer/s**

There will normally be two External Reviewers, who will be expected to look holistically at URI activities, and to comment on all aspects of the Review.

External Reviewers, as recognised experts in their fields, provide critical judgement, ensure the objectivity of the Review process, and help to determine how the URI compares to similar organisations or institutes of which they have experience. External Reviewers should bring an informed and unbiased view to the assessment of the URI. External Reviewers should judge whether the plans of the URI are appropriate, considering such factors as the current condition of the URI, trends in areas relevant to the URI’s work, the nature of the URI, and the characteristics of the stakeholders/customers it serves.

The Chair decides the skills, background and experience required of the external Reviewers for each Review and advises the URI of their requirements. Although External Reviewers will be required to have appropriate research and education standing, the Chair may also decide that the Reviewer should have other skills, e.g. academic leadership experience.

The URI will then be asked to provide a long list containing (ideally, **six**) names of suggested external academics who could act as External Reviewer/s on the Panel. Selection criteria and the process for selecting External Reviewers are available at **Annex A**. In some subject areas, where more than two external representatives are required, a Reviewer might be industrially or professionally based rather than from another academic institution, and might where appropriate be a consultant with specific expertise.

From the list provided by the Institute, the Chair - on the advice of PVC Research (as appropriate) - will select the External Reviewers. The Review Co-ordinator will then approach the potential External Reviewers to invite them to take part in the Review (in addition to inviting internal/student representative members to participate), and advise the kick-off group of confirmed Panel members.

**External Reviewers should not:**

* + Have had held a post at the University of Bristol for at least 3 years, and not have had formal links with the University in the last 3 years (e.g. acted as an auditor, Reviewer, consultant, etc.).
  + Have any potential conflict of interest. Every effort should be made to ensure that they have no direct links (personal or professional). It is at the Chair’s discretion to decide whether they consider a Reviewer to have a potential conflict of interest or direct links with the University/URI (personal or professional).
  + All be based overseas. The preference will always be to identify suitable external Reviewers from within the UK and/or Europe.
  + Have any direct contact with the Institute under Review and vice-versa, outside of the Review process.

1. **Documents**

A checklist of documents that will be sent to the Review Panel is at Annex B. Institutes are asked to produce a Self-Evaluation Document, and to keep supporting documentation to a minimum (around 12-15 pages for the SED, and a maximum of 30 pages for the appendices).

**The Self-Evaluation Document (SED)**

Since the emphasis in the Review process is on self-evaluation, the production of the Self-Evaluation Document by the Institute is a vital element of the review, and is generally the most time- and resource- intensive element of a URI Review. The final document should aim to be around 12-15 pages long and **should not** exceed 20 pages (excluding appendices, which **should not** be more than 30 pages long)[[3]](#footnote-3).

Each SED should include 'core' information presented in a structured way. Where appropriate it should emphasise future plans including research and entrepreneurship and financial projections. It **must** contain a SWOT analysis carried out by the URI of its own strengths, weaknesses and ability to meet objectives.

**Guidance on Writing the SED**

The URI should ensure that the SED provided to the Review Panel is clear and comprehensible (particularly to external Reviewers), includes an Executive Summary, the URI’s SWOT analysis of itself, and any specific information requested by the Chair/Panel. The URI may choose to base the SED on previous Academic Review documentation, provided that such documentation covers the full six year Review period, and reflects any particular information requested by the Chair/Panel during the preparatory period for the Review. The SED should specifically contain information under the following subheadings:

* + How does the URI complement and facilitate the University Strategy?
  + How does the URI complement and facilitate research in the University?
  + What does the URI consider to be its key achievements? What have been its key challenges?
  + What does the URI consider to be the key opportunities and difficulties for the future? What are its future ambitions?
  + How effectively does the URI carry out internal partnership working? Specifically, how does it engage with the Faculties, Schools, and professional service Divisions?

These elements provide a broad framework for the Review. Other headings may be added, depending on the Institute’s priorities, or themes identified during the preparatory period for the Review (e.g. by the kick off group). Both the kick-off group and the URI should bear in mind that questions asked by the Review Panel members at the Review meetings are likely to be informed by the SED**.**

The SED will be supported by data provided by the Planning and Business Intelligence team. Where possible, this data will be provided to the URI in time for the Review kick-off meeting. The URI is responsible for raising any issues with the data with the Planning and Business Intelligence team as soon as possible after receiving the data pack. The URI is not required to produce any additional data or analysis (unless specifically requested by the Review Panel), though it may choose to do so to support the arguments made in the SED (relevant data can be provided as annexes to the SED).

**URI Consultation and Circulation of Self-Evaluation Document**

The draft SED should be submitted to all members the Institute for comment, and fully discussed at a meeting of the URI’s staff. It is expected that all staff involved in meeting the Review Panel will have seen and/or contributed to the SED. The Institute is also expected to share a copy of its SED with any other individuals who are involved in meeting the Review Panel during the Review itself.

When the SED has been agreed by the Institute, a copy should be sent to the Review Co-ordinator **four weeks before the visit** to enable it to be sent to the Review Panel three weeks before the Review.

**PVC Research SWOT analysis**

The PVC Research will be asked to produce a written SWOT analysis of the URI. The SWOT analysis should be sent to the Review Co-ordinator at least **four weeks** before the start of the Review so that it can be included in the paperwork for the Review Panel. Note: The SWOT analysis is for the Review Panel only (not for inclusion in the URI’s SED, which will include the URI’s own SWOT).

1. **Review Programme**

The length of the Review will be decided by the Panel Chair and the PVC Research, in discussion with the Institute Director and the Review Co-ordinator, but the Review visit will normally take place over one day. The programme will be drawn up by the Review Co-ordinator, in consultation with the Panel Chair, the PVC Research and the URI Review Team.

Normally, the programme will start with an initial meeting of the Panel to discuss specific themes and issues for consideration during the Review.

The Review programme will normally include the following elements:

* + A meeting with the Institute’s Director
  + A meeting with the URI manager(s)
  + Meeting(s) with selected Faculty and School academic representatives
  + Meeting (s) with ‘user groups’ i.e. those who use or engage with the URI’s services and activities
  + Meeting(s) with Theme Leaders, where the URIs undertake theme-led work
  + Meeting(s) with representatives of professional services Divisions, e.g. RED, Communications and Marketing, Finance, etc.
  + Meeting(s) to discuss research, entrepreneurship and engagement.
  + *A meeting with Early Careers Researchers (optional)*
  + *Any other meetings, as determined by the Panel Chair.*

The Review Panel will be mindful of potential issues of confidentiality arising from the Review meetings.

The programme will include short periods in each day when the Panel has a private meeting, to allow time for discussion of issues raised by different groups.

There will be a final Panel meeting at the end of the day, to discuss recommendations and the structure of the Review Report.

Following this, the Panel will meet the Institute Director, and then the rest of the URI staff, to provide initial oral feedback on their findings. However, the Institute should bear in mind that the final Report will provide more specific and detailed recommendations for action.

1. **Review Report and Follow-Up Action**

**Review Report**

All members of the Review Panel must contribute to the drafting of the Report: the Review Report is the Report of the Panel as a whole. The initial recommendations for inclusion in the Review Report are developed as part of the final Panel meeting. The first draft of the Review Report is then structured within the template (Annex C), by the Review Co-ordinator who then circulates the Report in turn to the Chair and PVC Research, and then the rest of the Panel for comment.

When the Panel has agreed the Report, it is sent to the URI for correction of any factual errors only: the URI is not otherwise able to change the Review Report. The Chair of the Panel has final responsibility for signing off the completed report. This whole process can take up to three months, depending on the meeting at which UPARC is able to receive the Report. The Review Co-ordinator (in consultation with the Secretary to UPARC) will confirm which UPARC meeting the report is likely to be considered at as early as possible, in order to get a date in the diary promptly.

**The Review Report should be as concise as possible**; following the report template it should normally include the Panel’s conclusions (where available) on the following areas:

* + Contributions to University Strategy
  + Contributions to Research
  + Contributions to Education
  + Management and Organisation
  + Partnership Working
  + The International Role (partnership and collaboration)
  + Commendations of those aspects of the URI’s activities that are innovative or reflect good practice
  + Overall conclusions (i.e. of the extent to which the URI is meeting its stated strategic aims, its ability to achieve its own ambitions, and how well its work is aligned with and supportive of University strategy and research)
  + Recommendations for improvement for the URI, Faculties (if appropriate) and the University.

**Separate / confidential report**

Reviews sometimes identify management and other weaknesses that, although sensitive, need to be explored in depth when the report is considered. If such issues are identified and the Chair of the Review Panel believes that specific attention should be drawn to them, they may choose to ask for a separate, confidential report to be made to the Vice-Chancellor.

**Review Report to UPARC**

UPARC will consider the Review Report once it has been given final sign off by the Panel Chair. The Institute Director will be invited to join UPARC during this discussion and if the URI wishes to submit additional comments to UPARC at the meeting, it may do so, via the Director. The Director is expected to present to UPARC their reaction to the Review including their indications of priority actions to follow. UPARC may decide not to endorse all recommendations made by the Review Panel and the Report will be amended accordingly.

**Follow up action**

Once UPARC has approved the Review Report, the completed Report will be shared with the URI, as well as with the University Research Committee.

The PVC Research will liaise with the Director of the URI to agree any next steps and actions arising from the Report (particularly from the recommendations). The PVC Research will be responsible for updating UPARC and the University Research Committee on any key updates or changes arising from the Report outcomes.

**Publication of the Review Report**

The Review Report will be published internally on the Governance website.

## Institute Review Process Annual Overview Report

An annual overview report of any strategic issues identified through the School Reviews process is drafted by the Governance team for consideration by UPARC and the Education Committee. Any relevant issues from the URI Review(s) undertaken during the year will be reflected in this thematic report.

# Resources

The fee and expenses of the External Reviewers and Review catering will be met from the funds centrally allocated for this purpose. The budget available specifically for hotel bookings and Review Panel refreshments is limited. Please contact the Strategic Planning & Projects Office for more information. The Institute is not expected to book or pay for the catering/refreshments for the Review, but is expected to book the Review meeting rooms and any associated IT & AV equipment (where necessary) as the Review will normally take place within its own premises.

**List of Annexes** (available on the website separately)

Annex A – External Reviewer selection Guidance

Annex B – Panel Document Checklist

Annex C – Review Report Template

Annex D - Template URI Review Programme

Annex E – Brief Guidance on Partnership Working

Annex F – Kick-off Meeting Template

1. To ensure that URI Reviews align with the schedule of School Reviews taking place during the same academic year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. n.b. The Review Co-ordinator attends all meetings attended by the Panel. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Institutes who produce larger SEDs may be asked to refine them before they can be sent to the Panel. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)