



# Thematic Review Guidance

## Purpose of Guidance

This guidance is for support service and academic areas included in a Thematic Review at the University of Edinburgh.

## Scope: Guidance is not Mandatory

Staff involved in Thematic Review

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## Document control

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<b>Guidance superseded by this guidance</b>	n/a				
<b>Alternative format</b>	If you require this document in an alternative format please email <a href="mailto:Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk">Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk</a> or telephone 0131 650 514481.				
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# Thematic Review Guidance

## 1. Introduction

**1.1** Thematic Review is the process by which the quality of the student experience is reviewed in relation to a particular theme or aspect of student support, rather than an individual service or academic area.

**1.2** The role of student support is of crucial importance in determining the overall quality of the student learning experience.

As part of the University's Quality Assurance Framework, a review of the strategic and operational role of support services in relation to their impact on the student experience is conducted annually by a sub-group of the Senate Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC). This annual review process allows the University to reflect on the contribution of support services to the 'quality culture' within the institution, the ways in which the services engage with students to monitor and improve the quality of services, and the ways in which the services promote high quality learning and continuous quality enhancement.

**1.3** A key element of the annual review process is the identification of key issues and common themes which emerged across the University during the previous year. These are then considered by SQAC and inform the choice of topic for future Thematic Reviews. The Thematic Review process is reserved for issues of significance to the University requiring in-depth exploration, as determined by SQAC, and therefore reviews may take place on an irregular basis.

## 2. Aims, Scope and Objectives

**2.1** The aim of Thematic Review is to identify and analyse areas of good practice and areas for enhancement across student support in relation to a select category of student experience or 'theme'. The approach aims to take an overview of strategy, services and user experiences pursuant to a particular theme that cuts across many areas of the University, in relation to both support services and academic areas.

It is intended that the process should be positive and constructive, supporting the service and academic areas in the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

**2.2** The scope of Thematic Review can be broad or narrow depending on the nature of particular theme.

For example, a broad scope encompassing student support across the University and examining a wide range of issues may be appropriate for a particular theme relevant to the student body as a whole. Alternatively, a narrower, more limited scope may be more appropriate when examining issues which impact on a discrete section of the student population.

The scope of a Thematic Review is determined by SQAC with due consideration given to the findings of the annual review of student support services, relevant statistical data and the University's strategic priorities.

**2.3** The objectives of Thematic Review are to:



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- facilitate discussion between schools, colleges and support services;
- evaluate the extent to which provision meets and supports the needs of students and relevant stakeholders, including staff;
- evaluate the ways in which support engage with stakeholders to monitor and improve the quality of provision;
- share and disseminate examples of good practice;
- identify opportunities for enhancement and monitor action taken in response;
- evaluate the extent to which the activities are aligned with relevant institutional strategic objectives, as well as external requirements;
- determine action or support required at institutional level.

## 3. Process

3.1 The Thematic Review process consists of the following key stages:

- Planning
- Consultation
- Report
- Implementation

## 3.2 Planning Stage

A review panel will be selected by the by the Convenor of SQAC, including a Review Convenor, in consultation with the Deputy Secretary Student Experience and Academic Services. The panel will include a school academic representative, a school administrative representative, a student representative, an external member, and a Review Administrator (Academic Services). The Review Administrator will act as liaison between the review panel and the support areas.

The review panel will hold an initial meeting to discuss the scope of the review and agree a remit. At this meeting the panel will agree upon timelines for the review, which support services will be included and what documentary evidence will be required. The panel will also determine the most appropriate methodological approach to the consultation stage. For example, this may entail a day of scheduled meetings, a survey, or a set of focus groups or interviews with key stakeholders.

The support services and academic areas included in the review will produce a brief report providing a reflective and self-critical evaluation of the provision in relation to the theme of the review. The support service and academic area may be asked to provide further supporting documentation in advance of the review, however no material in addition to the reflective report should have to be created especially for the review.

In turn, the review panel will hold a meeting to consider the reflective reports (and other documentary evidence), identify initial findings and where further information may be required. Final arrangements for the consultation stage will be agreed at this point, including arrangements for meetings with key stakeholders.

## 3.3 Consultation Stage



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The review panel will conduct consultations with key stakeholders (i.e. student and staff service users, support service staff, and University management) in line with the chosen methodological approach.

The review panel will hold a meeting at the conclusion of the consultation stage to discuss findings and agree initial commendations and recommendations which will form the basis of the review report.

## 3.4 Report Stage

The review report is drafted by the Review Administrator.

The report will identify and analyse areas of good practice and areas of enhancement across the student support services in relation to the theme. The report will include the following sections:

- Executive Summary - highlighting the key findings, commendations and recommendations;
- Introduction – noting the rationale for the theme and the chosen methodology;
- Analysis – in-depth consideration of the key findings, commendations and recommendations;
- Appendix – including a list of documentation considered by the review panel and a prioritized list of commendations and recommendations.

The Review Convenor agrees the draft before it is circulated to the review panel for comment and approval. The draft report is then sent to the relevant support or academic area for correction of factual errors. The review report is then submitted to SQAC for consideration and approval of the commendations and recommendations.

Following approval, the final report is circulated by Academic Services to the heads of support services and academic areas included in the review, Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance, Deputy Secretary Student Experience, review panel, and copied to all areas responsible for action. The report is published on the Academic Services website.

## 3.5 Implementation Stage

Following receipt of the final report, the support services and academic areas are responsible for taking forward action on the recommendations made by the review. The reviewed areas are responsible for informing student service users of the review outcome and actions taken to address recommendations.

Approximately 14 weeks after receiving the final report, the areas with remitted actions submit an initial progress report to SQAC for comment, approval and feedback.

A year after receiving the final report, areas with remitted actions submit a further progress report to SQAC for comment, approval and feedback. At this point, where recommendations are still outstanding, SQAC will agree an appropriate approach to ongoing monitoring of recommendations.