



Briefing for panels on periodic reviews 2024-25

This guidance outlines the University's current Academic Framework project, and the approach to be taken for periodic reviews alongside this work.

About periodic reviews

Periodic reviews evaluate a course or group of related courses to assure the continuing quality of provision in the department.¹ It is a collaborative process, with the panellists, who act as 'critical friends' to the department, considering the curriculum and learning opportunities, support and resources across courses. Periodic Review usually takes place every five years.

Periodic review panels are asked to agree the appropriate outcomes for the provision they are reviewing. The panel decides whether to approve the provision for the next five years and can set conditions on this approval. Any conditions set must be met before the next academic year. The panel can also make recommendations; the department must respond to these, but any action taken as a result can take place over a longer timescale. The panel can also choose to recognise and encourage developments already in progress, and to mark specific, shareable good practice in the department with commendations.

Separate procedures exist for the Periodic Reviews of courses delivered at partner institutions. For more information about the purpose and procedures of periodic review, visit the [webpages](#).

Academic Framework

Higher education providers are currently experiencing a changing and sometimes challenging landscape while preparing for the implementation of the planned introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE). [Government guidance](#) suggests that in Spring 2024 all providers need to begin their preparations to be ready for the rollout of the LLE fully across the sector in Autumn 2027/28. Across the sector, it is also being discussed that fewer, larger modules (such as 30 credit ones) may not only offer a simplification and cost savings, but greater student benefit as well.

As such, an Academic Framework project is currently underway at the University of Essex, focusing on areas that can deliver immediate and meaningful impact. The key areas of the focused project are:

¹ Please note that within these guidelines, the term 'department' refers to a Department, School or Centre.

- **Academic Calendar:** Exploring potential restructuring of the calendar to bring assessments closer to the period of learning, which will enhance the student experience and improve educational quality.
- **Module Structure:** Aligning our module structure with the incoming Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), including the introduction of modular credits in 15, 30, and 60 credit blocks to support flexible learning and short courses.
- **Empowering Departments:** Giving academic departments more autonomy to innovate in areas like course design and pedagogical approaches.

This aims to enhance our academic offer for applicants and future-proof the curriculum in readiness for the introduction of the LLE. It also seeks to better support the development of international partnerships and new educational products, and better support students and staff.

Approach to periodic reviews for 2024-25

Given the focused scope of the Academic Framework project, panels are asked to use the following principles when reviewing documentation, asking questions, and setting outcomes as part of the periodic review process. Chairs of panels should lead discussions in a way that ensure the principles can be followed.

- The periodic review process reflects on the previous four years. Reflection and review will be fundamental aspects of the University adjusting its academic framework and individual departments or course leads considering what changes may be needed in their own provision. As such, the panel plays a vital role in accompanying departments through the initial stages of review and reflection, before designing and implementing new provision.
- When reviewing documentation and asking questions, please remember that each department and school is being encouraged to innovate, as such curriculum change could be likely to take place in future.
- Where the panel decides that a condition or conditions should be set, these should require action prior to the next academic year, as normal. Conditions are set for issues where the panel agrees that action *must* be taken and therefore delay would not be appropriate.
- When setting recommendations and developments in progress, the panel should be aware of the possibility of institutional changes in the medium-term. Consider whether setting open, flexible outcomes that would be applicable under multiple structures of provision would be more appropriate and constructive.

- Please carefully consider before asking departments to re-design elements of their curriculum, to avoid duplication of curriculum re-design in response to the academic framework project. Where such change is needed to ensure that the courses remain up-to-date and fit for purpose this should still be identified and the panel should agree on what timescale this should take place.

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