

VU Amsterdam
Internal educational quality assurance
Mid-term reviews
Summary

Purpose and basic principles of the mid-term review

The purpose of the mid-term review of an educational programme is twofold. Firstly, through a peer review it serves to enhance quality by looking at how the programme is delivered now and what improvements could be made. Secondly, a mid-term review is part of VU Amsterdam's internal quality assurance (QA) system. As such, it reveals the extent to which the Executive Board is "in control" of the quality of education provided by the university. The review therefore indicates what the findings of a real accreditation procedure would be if the programme were to undergo it at this point in time. Amongst other things, this means that it must check that the recommendations from the previous external assessment have been adopted, that the programme's final products (students' graduation work) are up to standard and that the other criteria of the limited programme evaluation have been met.

The following basic principles underlie the mid-term review.

- *Focus upon learning and improvement*

An MTR is a chance for a programme to express its ambitions, and have them judged by peers. This means that it focuses very much upon learning and improvement. Which in turn requires open and honest internal assessment of the programme's own performance.

- *Part of the integrated system of risk management*

The mid-term review is the moment at which an educational programme identifies risks and discusses them with expert peers. These conversations should therefore focus mainly upon points where questions arise or risks are seen.

- *Limit administrative burden*

It is important to ensure that a mid-term review does not duplicate the accreditation workload or impose excessive demands on support services and the peer assessors involved. So it is essential to consider the administrative burden the procedure places upon the various parties involved, and to make sure this does not outweigh the added value it delivers.

Place and role in the internal QA cycle¹

The mid-term review takes place three years after external accreditation. Consequently, a programme has three years after both exercises to:

- translate the conclusions of the final report into improvement activities;
- agree those activities with the Faculty Board;
- implement them; and,
- assess their effects.

¹ For a description of the internal QA system and its specific tools, see the QA cycle diagram (Appendix 1).

The MTR cycle begins with an intake interview six months before the panel’s visit and ends with an approved final report.

Outcome and results

As a result of a mid-term review, activities are undertaken to better manage risks and to improve the programme. These are based upon the recommendations provided in the panel’s report.

The report is intended to provide clarity for all those involved with the programme about the degree to which it currently meets the criteria set out in the limited evaluation, including any possible improvements. A distinction is drawn between essential improvements and recommendations. The former are those the panel believes must be adopted in order to avoid serious risks to the success of the next accreditation procedure. The latter focus upon the learning and improvement objective of the mid-term review and are well-intentioned advice from the panel intended to enhance the quality of the programme. As far as possible, specific suggestions are made for both the essential improvements and the recommended actions.

The Director of Studies discusses the findings of the review with all the programme’s stakeholders and evaluates those findings and their follow-up activities in its subsequent annual report and plan. This incorporates that follow-up into the regular planning and control cycle, so that the Executive Board is also able to monitor improvement activities as part of its consultative interaction with the faculty.

Structure

Activity	Responsibility	Timing (completion)
Intake meeting of review secretary, Director of Studies and faculty Quality Assurance Officer.	Secretary	T-26
Provide input for Action Plan (AP): names of five peers and one Director of Studies from another programme to be approached to undertake review; specific points the programme wishes to discuss; recommendations from the most recent independent quality inspection; other points to consider.	Director of Studies	T-24
Complete AP with timetable, student panel member, required documents and programme proposal.	Secretary	T-22
Approval of AP by Faculty Board.	Faculty QA Officer	T-20
Following approval of AP, approach and appoint panel members.	Director of Studies	T-16
Submit documents for desk research and assessment analysis.	Director of Studies / Faculty QA Officer	T-20
Director of Studies compiles a brief description of the programme, possibly in conjunction with tutors.	Director of Studies	T-20

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Desk research by review secretary in preparation for panel visit.	Secretary	T-8
Analysis by student assessment expert in preparation for panel visit.	Secretary approaches expert	T-6
Discuss desk research and student assessment analysis with Director of Studies to check for inaccuracies.	Secretary	T-5
Programme receives final desk research and student assessment analysis.	Secretary	T-4
Delegations are invited and informed about the purpose and structure of the mid-term review.	Director of Studies	T-10
Panel members receive desk research, student assessment analysis and underlying documents.	Secretary	T-4
Programme ready.	Director of Studies (secretary sends programme to panel members)	T-2
Practical matters for day of panel visit (accommodation, catering, parking...).	Faculty QA Officer	T-1
Day of panel visit		T
Compile report, co-ordinate with panel, submit to programme for right of reply.	Secretary	T+4
Submit final report to Faculty Board.	Secretary	T+8
Discuss improvements and recommendations within the programme.	Director of Studies	T+10
Director of Studies and Faculty Board agree follow-up activities.	Portfolio holder for teaching	T+10
Include follow-up activities in programme's next annual report, and if necessary, earlier in a separate action plan. Subsequent annual reports provide progress updates.	Director of Studies	If action plan: T+12
Faculty Board notifies Executive Board about the follow-up to the panel report. This is also described in the faculty's annual teaching report, with updates in subsequent years.	Portfolio holder for teaching to MTR co-ordinator	T+12
Executive Board receives notification from Faculty Board, plus a copy of the panel report.	MTR co-ordinator/Rector	T+12
Points arising out of the mid-term review are discussed at the next meeting of the Inter-Board Consultative Platform.	MTR co-ordinator	

