

Sharing experiences from past programme reviews: tips for new reviewers



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* Before the site visit
Desk review of SER

DESK REVIEW OF SER

- * **Tip # 1- Read the PR manual carefully and check against the SER, identify the main points of information about a programme, check for discrepancies**
- * The first thing that a reviewer should do is be familiar with the PR manual and its contents. No matter how often you have done reviews it is good to refresh your mind by reading it before opening the SER
- * Start reading the SER, checking the contents of the PR manual; go through each criteria and its standards matching them with what is written in the SER

DESK REVIEW OF SER

- * Read the first few pages of SER and check for the important information such as on the start dates, major modifications of the programme through structural changes (3+1, 2+2 etc), topic emphasis changes, changes to the owning department or addition of new departments as contributors etc.
- * Some programmes have undergone complex changes that are difficult to track

DESK REVIEW OF SER

- * A surprising number of SERs do not clearly state the date of commencement of the programme under review especially when it has undergone major changes in its past
- * Some do not indicate the time period that should be considered for the review. Important as the information presented during the sit visit is sometimes/often outside the period of review
- * Check for discrepancies of dates and major changes - need to verify during site visit

Common problems with language and style of SER

- * Grammatical mistakes, use of words that are not appropriate for a particular term/sentence conveying a wrong meaning
- * Too long sentences so that what is meant at the beginning is lost towards the end of sentence; sentences that contradict each other in the same paragraph, same criterion etc.

I discover sometimes during the site visit that what is written in SER is not what was intended

Tip #2 - Problems with goals, graduate profiles, mission and vision statements

- * Identify programme goals, graduate profiles that are outdated and/or do not align with of the programme content described in the SER
- * Programmes will represent programme goals in a variety of ways. Ask questions about how they were set and when during site visit

Tip #3- Identify the missing information

Even though the PR manual sets out somewhat exhaustive lists of evidence, some SERs do not refer to the major evidence needed for a standard-note those areas to be verified during site visit

Tip # 4- LOOK AT THE SWOT CAREFULLY

- * Very often incomplete and weak in its analysis of the programme. The SWOT often does not include the major strengths, weaknesses of and threats to the programme
- * Identification of opportunities is very weak
- * Appears that those who wrote the SER do not know how to do SWOT properly/left it to be done by junior staff/have done it in a great hurry with inadequate attention

Tip 5- Read SERs of clustered programmes more than once before site visit

These are the most difficult SERs to unbundle!!

When good programmes are clustered with weaker ones, the good one tends to suffer, but the weaker one also gets pushed up (in terms of marks allocation) due to the performance of the good one!! - often the evidence is not complete for some programmes with only good ones having them

This can work both to the benefit and detriment of the clustered programmes

Presentation of Dr. Mampitiya discusses cluster reviews

*Poorly written SER with poor SWOT, contradictory statements, incomplete sections and evidence citation is also an indication of the underlying process of preparations for review; they have been written in a hurry, largely by staff without sufficient experience, without good SER writing team co-ordination, and/or weak ownership/leadership of the process

DESK REVIEW OF SER

- * Giving marks on the desk review of SER- I do not give full marks during the desk review. I usually allocate 1 or 2 marks, reserving full marks or reducing it further after the site visit
- * Personal preferences apply- some reviewers give 3 marks per standard and then reduce if needed after site visit

- *For most well established universities criterion 1 will get very good marks. The reason being that all or most of the evidence is available. Without meeting many of the standards of criterion 1, those universities would not have been able to function the way they have upto now.
- *As there are overlaps in type of evidence required between standards of different criteria, if relevant and adequate evidence has been included in, other criteria automatically get good marks for some standards

During the site visit

Quality of site visit has improved

- * As QA programmes have been in existence for many years, there is a definite improvement in the organisation and execution of the site visit
- * Also there is an operational structure to QA work- director of QA, faculty level QA cells, committees that co-ordinate QA work, and greater awareness and understanding of the importance of QA in academic programmes
- * Universities have developed good skills towards treating the review team well



SITE VISIT



- *To make the most of the limited time of the site visit and as some criteria require subject specialists the review team is allocated by the chairperson to different criteria for inspection of evidence; but a single reviewer should not attend a meeting or inspect facilities etc
- *The final decisions are taken collectively in consultation with all members and in agreement

Tip # 6- Make the most of the presentations made to the review team

- *As the number of words of the SER is limited, the presentations made by the dean, HoDs, Director QA and IQAC co-ordinators can provide information that is not included in the SER but of much relevance to the PR or new evidence that strengthens claims of the SER

Tip 7- Identify irrelevant information and/or misinterpretation of the evidence

- * A common mistake. The contents of the report do not address the required standard/topic as given in the PR manual
- * Written in a vague manner and sometimes misleading
- * Sometimes the most relevant piece of evidence is missing while others that are not as relevant are included. Some programmes have evidence over and above what is required but do not always include them in the SER
- * Very important as this issue leads most often to reduction of marks
- * **HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS? WILL COME TODAY AFTERNOON**

Tip # 8- Request missing information during site visit

- *Some reviewers may ask for additional information during the site visit. I often request due to missing information. Others may not and consider that all what has been presented is what should be considered
- *How to decide on internalization ???

***Tip # 9-** Develop ways to identify the level of ownership of the programme, the methods by which the staff are attempting to improve its relevance, efficiency and quality etc.

E.g- has there been wide participation of staff at all levels to the review preparations, are the students well aware of the reasons for QA, are student feedback survey results being implemented properly, staff evaluation survey done seriously and results implemented. Or has it been mostly done in preparation for the review and not as internalised process?

- *Are there any 'hidden' issues to do with the programme- verify if what is informed to you is supported in more than one way.
- *E.g. Ragging- often reviewers are informed during site visits that ragging is absent, only to be told by other stakeholders who approach reviewers separately and state contrary information

Tip # 10-Organisation of the evidence during site visit also provides important hints about the preparation process

This is important as much of the time of the site visit is spent on looking through documentary evidence

- *The programme should organise the evidence in a logical manner but also to reduce wastage of time. Some programmes organise it very well so that evidence can be accessed easily and quickly. But some have organised it in such a manner so that more time is spent locating a piece of evidence

Tip # 11- Check the vision of the staff about the future of the programme

* This is not only stating the vision and mission statements of the programme. Have a discussion about the recent and potential future trends in the subject areas of the programme.

* Have they considered the status/position of the programme 10 years into the future with respect to changes in the wider society and the world

Tip # 12 - Display the correct attitude and behaviour and be mindful of your words especially during meetings and wrap up

Is of paramount importance. It is very good to maintain a cordial and polite atmosphere at all times. Not only by your words, but tone, body language etc.

Avoid making statements about how quality is maintained in your own university or department. If you have to do so to illustrate a point, explain in ways that show that you are not comparing

***Tip # 13- Base your decisions on standards and marks according to the PR manual without deviation based on personal aspects and take final decisions after consultation within the review team including the junior members**

***Allowing emotions and friendships or professional connections to modify your decision is not a good idea at all. It will create more problems for you than you imagine after the review.**

Tip # 14- Consider this opportunity be a reviewer as one of the best and most rich learning experiences

Reviewing has taught me so many new types of knowledge, skills and need for attitudinal change.

I have met and been acquainted with so many university academics outside of my specialized field who I would have never met if I stayed within the confines of my department and university.

- * I thank all my colleagues from the state university system of Sri Lanka with who I have worked as a member of review teams, or have been subject to review. Special thank you to Prof. Vasanthi Arasaratnam (University of Jaffna) and Dr. Dilrukshi Yapa Abeywardena (University of Kelaniya) whose views I sought when writing this presentation.
- * I am grateful to all academic, academic support staff, students and other types of stakeholders of higher education who enabled me to get many years of experience in reviewing without which I would not be able to make this presentation

GOOD LUCK!!

**Thank you for your
attention**