



Periodic Review Policy

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Table of Contents

1.	Purpose.....	4
2.	Scope	4
3.	External Reference Documents.....	5
4.	Policy	5
4.1	Principles	5
4.1.1	Effective Academic Governance	5
4.1.2	Continuous Improvement.....	5
4.1.3	Devolved Quality Assurance	6
4.2	Definitions	6
4.3	Types of Periodic Review	6
4.4	Objectives of Periodic Review	8
4.5	Schedule of Periodic Reviews.....	8
4.6	Periodic Review Process.....	9
4.6.1	PROBE (Periodic Review and Objective Evaluation)	9
4.6.2	PEER (Periodic External Evaluation and Review)	9
4.6.3	Documentation and Publication	9
4.6.4	Feedback Mechanisms.....	10
5.	Responsibilities	10
5.1	Registrar and Chief Academic Officer	10
5.2	Dean of Faculty.....	10
5.3	Chief Officer	10
5.4	Head of School	11
5.5	Head of Department	11
5.6	Programme Board	11
5.7	Academic Council	12
5.8	Senior Leadership Team	12
6.	Documents Related to this Policy.....	12
6.1	ATU/QQI Reports	12

6.2	Policies.....	12
6.3	Procedures	12
7.	Revision History	13
	Appendix 1: Overview of Monitoring and Periodic Review	14

1. Purpose

Periodic Reviews are a cornerstone of academic quality assurance and enhancement in Atlantic Technological University (ATU). They provide a structured, evidence-based opportunity to reflect on the efficacy, relevance and achievements of University activities in Faculties, Schools, Academic Programmes and Professional Services units.

A periodic review is a comprehensive evaluation designed to assess *inter alia* academic standards, alignment with University strategy, student outcomes, and capacity for continuous improvement. Quality, standards, flexibility and the appropriateness of response to changing needs are analysed during the review.

In an evolving higher education landscape shaped by technological change and external regulatory requirements, periodic reviews ensure that quality assurance and enhancement remain aligned with ATU's strategic mission to *'become an internationally renowned university that enhances the quality of life in our region and creates a sustainable future for all'*.

ATU positions quality assurance and enhancement as 'everybody's business' in which staff and students work in a collaborative manner to ensure an integrated approach that fosters a quality culture. As students are key stakeholders in quality assurance and enhancement, the importance of the student experience is highlighted to provide a student-centred education within a professional and supportive environment.

ATU's commitment to quality assurance and enhancement is underpinned by a focus on *continuous improvement* and excellence in serving our students, our stakeholders, our region and wider society. To achieve this, it is University policy to carry out an internal cycle of reviews (periodic reviews) to augment and develop the quality of ATU's academic and service activities as per best practice and in compliance with relevant statutory obligations.

The purpose of this policy is to outline ATU's approach to periodic reviews and describe the process as it applies to all units under review. It demonstrates how ATU meets its statutory obligations regarding internal quality reviews of its academic and professional services units and their activities.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff of the University. As periodic reviews are internal review mechanisms, they provide an opportunity for evaluation and reflection on the work of the University. The input and engagement of students, alumni, external stakeholders and external reviewers is also critical to the success of periodic review processes. Those involved should also familiarise themselves with this policy.

The University has also established mechanisms to support the quality assurance of continuous improvement. Changes to existing programmes and modules outside of the periodic review process are managed via the processes set out in *AQAE020 Monitoring, Evaluation and Enhancement of Programmes Policy*.

The current policy should be read together with related approved policies and documents within the ATU Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (AQAEF).

3. External Reference Documents

ATU operates according to the provisions set out in the:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015) Brussels, Belgium ESG
- Technological Universities Act 2018, as amended by the Higher Education Authority Act, 2022
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
- Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Amendment Act 2019.

The following guidelines were considered in the development of this policy:

1. QQI Programmatic Review Manual (January 2022)
2. QQI Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (July 2016).
3. QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016).

4. Policy

4.1 Principles

ATU commits to building and embedding a quality culture which is engaged, reflective, transparent and focussed on enhancement. The approach to periodic review in ATU is underpinned by three key principles.

4.1.1 Effective Academic Governance

This principle recognises that ATU has a robust and transparent system of governance of quality assurance and enhancement to manage all periodic reviews. This is supported by an integrated and transparent governance framework for the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (AQAE) Framework within ATU.

4.1.2 Continuous Improvement

This principle recognises that periodic reviews may identify areas for improvement. All reports related to periodic reviews are published on the ATU website to ensure

accountability and transparency. Following a periodic review, recommendations and associated actions will be available to view to ensure that quality processes facilitate the sharing of good practice internally and externally.

4.1.3 Devolved Quality Assurance

This principle recognises that quality assurance is a function of all areas of the University. Self-evaluation followed by a review by external peer experts is the basis of the periodic review process. ATU acknowledges the critical and shared role of all staff and students in embedding a quality culture and respects and supports staff and student contributions to that culture. In addition, peer review is deployed as an important reference point for confirming and developing the quality of the University's activities and implementing enhancement activities identified during the self-evaluation and peer review.

4.2 Definitions

Annual Quality Report (AQR): ATU is required to provide QQI with an Annual Quality Report (AQR). The AQR is an evidence-based report documenting the development and evolution of each institution's internal quality assurance and enhancement system. It summarises and provides links to ATU AQAE policies and procedures and provides updates on the AQAE Framework during the reporting period. This enables ATU to map its AQAE Framework against national and international standards and guidelines to demonstrate implementation consistent with regulatory requirements. The AQR also captures enhancement activities during the reporting period which feed into Institutional Review.

Periodic Review: Structured evaluations conducted on a rolling basis within a 5-7-year cycle to assess the quality, relevance and effectiveness of Faculties, Academic Programmes and Professional Services units. Periodic reviews serve to assist the development of a shared identity, ethos and philosophy while maintaining, respecting and building on the University's multi-campus context. Such reviews provide an evidence-based mechanism for reflection, enhancement, and strategic alignment with the University mission, vision, values and external standards to support continuous improvement and promote accountability across the University. Faculty Reviews are led by the relevant Dean of Faculty; Programmatic Reviews are led by the relevant Head of School, supported by Heads of Departments; Professional Service Reviews are led by the relevant Chief Officer for the unit under review, supported by managers within that unit.

4.3 Types of Periodic Review

This policy applies to Faculty Review, Programmatic Review and Professional Services Review. External quality assurance reviews are detailed in *AQAE015 Institutional Review Policy*. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the Monitoring and Review processes in ATU.

Faculty Review is a strategic evaluation of an entire Faculty focusing on strategic direction, academic leadership, teaching quality, research output, resource allocation, programme portfolio, and alignment with University Strategy.¹ The overall faculty performance, governance of quality assurance and enhancement and contribution to the University is assessed. A Faculty review is a high-level evidence-based review of the Faculty's operation and structure, programme portfolio, research and engagement to develop a Faculty Strategy aligned with the *ATU Strategic Plan*.

Programmatic Review is a strategic evaluation and detailed assessment of the suite of programmes within a School. Such programmes include all taught and structured research programmes including collaborative and joint programmes where applicable. Each School will initially prepare a brief *Programmatic Review Context, Themes and Priorities Report* to establish the parameters and direction for the Programmatic Review. This report will outline the School approach to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy as well as an identification of the School's thematic priorities for the Programmatic Review. This is followed by an in-depth review of programmes including context of programme delivery, student and other stakeholder feedback, staff reflections, response to themes identified in the School Report, proposed changes to the programme and implementation of key elements of the Academic Quality Assurance and Framework. The process and documentation required for programmatic review will be proportionate for the type of award being reviewed.

The outcome of the Programmatic Review is a revalidation (or not) of the programme. This may include consideration of conditions/recommendations and planned actions to address them. All programmes that are successfully validated are approved until the next Programmatic Review.

Professional Services Review is a strategic evaluation of a Professional Services unit. These include Professional Service units within the remit of the Chief Officers. The focus is on strategic direction, resource allocation, operational processes and alignment with University Strategy. A Professional Services Review is a high-level evidence-based review of the unit's operation and structure, to develop a Professional Services Strategy aligned with the *ATU Strategic Plan*.

Please refer to *AQAE069 Procedure for Faculty Review*, *AQAE070 Procedure for Programmatic Review*, *AQAE071 Procedure for Professional Services Review* for a more detailed outline of the stages and outcomes involved in the relevant periodic review.

¹ The four Faculties in ATU are the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, Faculty of Business, Faculty of Science and Health, and Faculty of Design, Education and Social Science. Each Faculty has an associated number of Schools and Departments.

4.4 Objectives of Periodic Review

The overall objectives of periodic reviews are as follows and based on the scope and type of review:

1. Ensure that the reviewed unit is aligned with and actively supporting the University's strategic direction and Strategic Plan.
2. Quality assure the unit under review and where possible benchmark its performance against comparable national and international standards in education or service delivery.
3. Gather feedback from students, staff, alumni, employers, and other key stakeholders to inform continuous improvement.
4. Identify key challenges and emerging opportunities that may impact future development.
5. Respond proactively to new developments in relevant areas.
6. Highlight areas of good practice that can be shared and scaled across the University.
7. Identify potential quality enhancements and develop actionable plans for their implementation.
8. Recognise and address areas of concern in a constructive and evidence-based manner.
9. Evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of existing quality assurance policies and procedures.

4.5 Schedule of Periodic Reviews

All periodic reviews are completed every 5-7 years. The exact schedule of each review is dependent on the type of review. Review schedules, including an ATU Master Review Schedule will be developed by the Quality Office in consultation with the Deans of Faculty and the Chief Officers.

4.6 Periodic Review Process

The initial phase of periodic review requires an agreement of a timeline and terms of reference for the review process between the relevant Dean of Faculty, Head of School, Chief Officer *and* the Quality Office.

Each type of review process consists of two main phases:

- (i) The PROBE (Periodic Review and Objective Evaluation) phase: an internal self-evaluation assessment
- (ii) The PEER (Periodic External Evaluation and Review) phase: an evaluation of the unit under review by an independent panel of external experts.

4.6.1 PROBE (Periodic Review and Objective Evaluation)

The PROBE is a comprehensive, objective internal evaluation that reflects on the context of the unit being reviewed, performance, achievements, potential areas for improvement, and thematic areas which may be determined by Academic Council. An array of evidence sources will be deployed to support a robust, data-informed review. The internal process involves all key internal stakeholders as appropriate and includes:

- consultations with internal and external stakeholders, including graduates, employers, Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies and community representatives, where relevant.
- analysis of the aims, outcomes, structure, historical performance, and changes since the last review.

The output of this phase is a detailed report – the **PROBE** Report - that provides insights into the units' performance along with recommended improvements and enhancements.

4.6.2 PEER (Periodic External Evaluation and Review)

After the internal self-evaluation review is complete, an external peer review panel will be conducted to evaluate each unit. At the end of the external review process, the panel will provide feedback through a formal report and make recommendations.

The external panel consists of experts with relevant academic and professional competence.

The external review panel will produce a detailed report – the **PEER** report – that addresses the quality of the reviewed unit and identifies areas for improvement and provides specific recommendations with due regard to both the PROBE report and the site visit findings.

4.6.3 Documentation and Publication

The PEER report document will be published to ensure transparency and public confidence.

4.6.4 Feedback Mechanisms

All participants involved in the Periodic Review process will be encouraged to provide feedback on the process, ensuring continuous improvement of the *review process itself*.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Registrar and Chief Academic Officer

The Registrar and Chief Academic Officer has overall responsibility for the leadership and coordination of academic policies and academic quality assurance, along with the provision of all student support services. In support of this policy, the Office of the Registrar and Chief Academic Officer, through the Quality Office, will

- support Faculties, Schools and Professional Services in the organisation, operational management and implementation of unit reviews
- ensure adherence to University governance, policy and regulatory frameworks
- provide appropriate briefing and training to ensure PEER review members are familiar with the University's context and the process and purpose of periodic review
- provide relevant templates for all stages of the review process
- undertake a review of this policy as required.

5.2 Dean of Faculty

The Dean of Faculty has overall responsibility to lead, develop, manage and implement the Faculty strategic planning process aligned to the University's Strategy, and develop and report on key performance indicators for the Faculty. In support of this policy, the Dean of Faculty will:

- lead the Faculty Periodic Review
- mentor and develop relevant teams to ensure compliance with the Periodic Review
- ensure that the quality, standards and outcomes of all programmes are maintained and enhanced
- produce a detailed annual report for the Faculty to feed into Faculty Review
- draft an executive response to the recommendations of the Faculty Review which includes a Faculty Strategy.

5.3 Chief Officer

The Chief Officer has overall responsibility for leadership and coordination of the relevant Professional Services periodic review. They provide strategic leadership across all campuses, contributing to the development and delivery of the University strategy and vision. In support of this policy, the Chief Officer will:

- lead the relevant Professional Services Periodic Review
- mentor and develop relevant teams to ensure compliance with the Periodic Review
- ensure that the quality, standards and outcomes of all programmes are maintained and enhanced
- draft an executive response to the recommendations of the Professional Services Periodic Review which includes a Professional Services Strategy.

5.4 Head of School

The Head of School has responsibility for maintaining oversight of the quality, standards and outcomes of all programmes within the School. In support of this policy, the Head of School will:

- support the Dean of Faculty during the Faculty Review
- lead the development of the *Programmatic Review Context, Themes and Priorities Report*
- provide relevant staff and functional areas with appropriate information regarding the Programmatic Review.

5.5 Head of Department

The Head of Department has responsibility to lead, direct and manage the academic programmes at Department level. In support of this policy, the Head of Department will:

- support the Dean of Faculty and Head of School during relevant periodic reviews
- coordinate the Programmatic Review in the relevant Department in conjunction with the Programme Board and academic and professional services staff
- coordinate Programmatic Review responses and implementation.

5.6 Programme Board

The Programme Board is responsible for the delivery and monitoring of all programmes of study leading to a University award. In support of this policy, the Programme Board will:

- support the Head of School and Head of Department in the conduct of periodic review
- review, on a regular basis, the academic content and structure of the programme, its academic coherence and relevance, and maintenance of academic standards to feed into Programmatic Review
- undertake a comprehensive self-evaluation exercise of programmes and produce the PROBE report and meet with the external panel
- consider and implement the recommendations of the Programme External Evaluation Review (PEER) report.

5.7 Academic Council

Academic Council² is responsible for the review and approval of the outcomes of Faculty and Programmatic Review and relevant Professional Services reviews. In support of this policy, Academic Council will

- review relevant Annual Reports
- review and approve relevant Faculty Strategies and Programmatic Review responses
- monitor the implementation of relevant PEER reports.

5.8 Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is responsible for reviewing and approving Professional Services reviews. In addition, PEER reports with resource implications can be referred to the SLT for its consideration. The SLT may delegate consideration of these implications to relevant functions.

6. Documents Related to this Policy

6.1 ATU/QQI Reports

- *ATU Strategic Plan*
- *CINNTE Institutional Review Report: Atlantic Technological University, QQI*

6.2 Policies

- *AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Programmes Policy.*
- *AQAE015 Institutional Review Policy*
- *AQAE020 Monitoring, Evaluation and Enhancement of Programmes Policy*

6.3 Procedures

- *AQAE069 Procedure for Faculty Review*
- *AQAE070 Procedure for Programmatic Review*
- *AQAE071 Procedure for Professional Services Review*

² Academic Council may nominate one of its Committees to review and approve relevant review reports.

7. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Policy	Academic Council 28/11/2025

Appendix 1: Overview of Monitoring and Periodic Review

