# Periodic Assurance and Continuous Enhancement Reviews (PACER)

# Introduction

1. A PACER is the University of Nottingham’s periodic quality assurance (QA) and enhancement (QE) review process. It is a **periodic programme** of **review**, in which academic Schools and Departments across all three international campuses focus on Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement in their Education and Student Experience (ESE) provision. The remit of the PACER is on undergraduate and postgraduate-taught provision and does not include apprenticeships or postgraduate-research delivery, which are covered by other quality processes.

PACERs are the replacement process for the Educational Enhancement and Assurance Reviews (EEARs) which ran from 2016/17 to 2023/24. PACERs started from academic year 2024/25.
2. The main purpose of the PACER process is to ensure that Schools/Departments are providing a high-quality student experience, that safeguards academic standards and delivers good outcomes for all students. It also ensures that the programmes delivered by Schools/Departments are aligned with the Office for Students (OfS) B Conditions, appropriate PSRB requirements, sector norms as well as local standards and quality assurance frameworks across international campuses. The process is designed to support colleagues’ performance in their ESE activity in a constructive and expertise-driven manner built around peer dialogue.
3. The philosophy underpinning the PACER is one of **peer support, collaboration** and **educational enhancement through the sharing of good practice in ESE, teaching and curriculum leadership**. Through the review visit and the subsequent report and follow up, the process aims to enable colleagues in Schools/Departments who are facing challenges in specific areas of their provision to learn from peers with expertise or proven good performance in those same areas. It also aims to ensure Schools/Departments with specific expertise are recognised and empowered to share that expertise.

# 2. Identifying the areas for review

## 2.1 Selection criteria

1. In advance of each academic session, a review of performance in key ESE indicators is conducted by the PACER Planning Board of the Schools currently in the pool of Schools/Department eligible for review. The membership of this board should include:
* PVC for ESE (chair)
* APVC for Teaching and Curriculum Leadership
* Director of Careers and Employability
* Chair of Quality and Standards Committee
* Head of Policy and Operations, Deputy Registrars
* UNM Representative
* UNNC Representative
* Associate Director, Educational Excellence Team
* Curriculum Nottingham Representative
* Delegates of the above, as agreed by the role holders
* Any other members as agreed by the chair.
1. The decision on which Schools/Departments to review should be based on a combination of strategic and evidence-led factors. The review of performance should look longitudinally at the data sets. A single year’s performance should not alone be considered a trigger for review. Nor should a single year’s performance be considered as a reason why a review is not justified. In-year or year-on-year performance should be monitored via other processes, e.g Business Planning.

Example indicators and factors that may factor into the review of performance are listed below:
* **Student Outcomes:**
	+ Continuation
	+ Completion
	+ Progression
	+ Awarding Gaps (including APP)
	+ TEF-specific subject level outcome issues
* **Student Experience:**
	+ National Student Survey (NSS)
	+ Nottingham Student Experience Survey (NSES)
	+ Student Evaluation of Modules (SEM)
	+ Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)
	+ TEF-specific subject level student experience issues
* UNM and UNNC metrics
* Quality measures, e.g QSC cases (number of cases alone is not necessarily indicative of a quality issue), compliance with complaints training, number of QSC complaints/appeals, or Tri-campus assurance issues.
* Alignment with strategic projects/priorities.
* Regulatory factors relating to UNNC and/or UNM.

These factors may shift over time and so should be interpreted as indicative rather than prescriptive. Data will be collated by the Educational Excellence Team in advance of the Planning Board meeting.

1. There may be a need to consider measures beyond those listed below in cases where there is evidence of a risk to academic standards or the student experience that has not been directly flagged in the normal course of review. This may include, but is not limited to;
* changes in the regulatory landscape or other external factors. In such cases, a recommendation will be made to the Quality and Standards Committee.
* significant changes to ESE delivery, eg the introduction of a dual intake.
* significant structural changes to the School/Department’s operations, e.g the merging of Schools/Departments or significant changes to their Leadership.
* PSRB visits could be a reason to undertake a review, though are not a requirement.

Distance from the last review will also be considered as a risk – no School or Department is recommended to go without review for longer than 8 years, regardless of performance against the indicators listed above.

The decision should be guided by University Strategy but informed by performance metrics and external factors. Where possible it is recommended that the focus not just be on areas of risk, but of strength. For example, if there is a prioritisation towards Feedback as an area of focus, the Schools chosen should include a mix of those with strength in that area and those with weakness.

1. Where a School/Department is selected for review, they will not be required to submit an ESE Self Evaluation Report in that academic year.
2. In situations where a School or Department’s identification for review is due to not having been reviewed for the stipulated maximum number of years listed in 2.1.3, or when the Chair of the PACER Planning Board agrees, then the School will be recommended for review, but will not be subject to the additional activity detailed in 9.1 and 9.2.
3. A School/Department may also nominate themselves for review by contacting the Educational Excellence Team. UNNC and UNM areas could also nominate Schools/Departments for review. This should be accompanied with a rationale for this and will be considered by the PACER Planning Board accordingly.
4. Where a School/Department flags that they are due to undertake a PSRB visit/accreditation, it is acknowledged that these are a significant amount of time and workload. Prioritisation should first go to the PSRB, and it is recommended that the Planning Board avoid scheduling PACERs concurrently with these visits. Where appropriate, documentation produced in these visits is encouraged to be adapted or reused from the PSRB visit in the PACER.

# 3. Confirming the visit

1. Once the PACER Planning Board has reviewed the data, it will consider the list of Schools and Departments that may warrant a review. A short-list of those under consideration will be drawn up, with 4 typically selected for full review per academic year.
2. The Heads of School/Department, their respective FAPVC and Head of ESE and relevant posts at UNNC and UNM, for the chosen Schools/Departments will be informed by the Associate Director, Educational Excellence Team, and invited to arrange an initial meeting to discuss the reasons for the nomination and to receive guidance on the process of preparing for the review visit. They will also be asked to nominate a contact within the School/Department who is responsible for liaising with the review secretary on all aspects related to the operational delivery of the review and will be required to agree to dates for the review.
3. Heads of School/Department that were shortlisted but not nominated for a PACER will be informed that they were considered by the PACER Planning Board. The Schools will be given the reasons/rationale for the consideration and the reasons why the School/Department was deemed out of scope in year. However, this will act as an early warning to Schools/Departments of future activity, or, where they were considered due to their expertise/good performance, as an acknowledgement of that expertise/good performance.
4. The PACER Planning Board decides in July/August on the reviews for **the year after next**. E.g., when the planning board meets in July 2026, the Schools/Departments they identify will be reviewed in academic year 2027-28, not academic year 2026-27.

This is intended to give Schools/Departments the time to prepare for the review, Chairs the opportunity to build an effective panel and for effective work with students to ensure representative evidence (including from PGT students) is produced to inform the review.
5. In exceptional circumstances, the right is reserved to conduct a PACER in the academic year immediately following the PACER Planning Board decision. However this is reserved only for exceptional circumstances, e.g an external factor.

# 4. Grace period following a PACER visit

1. As some issues can take more than one academic year to resolve, it is feasible that a School/Department may, based on their metrics, be eligible for review within a short interval from their last review.
2. In the interest of giving sufficient time to embed enhancements, while maintaining assurance that progress is being made, no School/Department will be recommended for review in the three academic years following a review visit.

# 5. The Review Panel

1. The Review Chair, as nominated by the PACER Planning Board, will recommend a review panel for each visit. As far as possible, the constitution of the panel should be matched to the needs of the visit, based on the factors that contributed to the decision to conduct the review. For example, if a School’s Assessment and Feedback scores in NSS and Awarding Gaps are the focus of the review, then it may draw on those with provable expertise in those fields.
2. A panel should comprise of 5-8 reviewers, with some variation permitted depending on the scale of the School/department under review. The Chair of the PACER Planning Board has the authority to limit panel sizes if such circumstances arise and is responsible for ensuring the opportunity to be part of a review team is inclusive.

## 5.1 Panel Composition

1. **The Review Chair**: A few options for roleholders are provided, to enable flexibility based on workload and the review context;

	* FAPVC for the respective Faculty
	* UNM/UNNC Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning (or delegate).
	* ESE Senior Leader – an ESE Leader who would have delegated authority of the FAPVC for the review. This could be someone with previous leadership experience, or as a development opportunity.
	* Subject Leader - someone relevant to the issue(s) that prompted the review.
2. The Chair’s responsibilities are;

	* + To conduct the pre-meeting with the School/Department leadership team, supported by the review secretary.
		+ To recommend panel members to the Educational Excellence Team.
		+ To work with the School/Department under review to cultivate a supportive and constructive relationship that enables and empowers action to improve performance that is evidence-led.
		+ To identify the appropriate additional documentation required for the review.
		+ To chair the review team’s planning meeting, in which they will confirm the areas of inquiry that are being assigned to each member of the team.
		+ During the review visit, to ensure that each session is conducted in a collegial, supportive and inclusive manner, while ensuring that the relevant avenues for discussion are appropriately covered.
		+ To ensure the focus of the review remains on the identified issues and is aligned to University strategy and the University PACER process, as agreed by ESEC.
		+ To chair panel meetings (except where specifically delegated) during the review visit.
		+ To chair the post-review meeting of the panel and agree with the other members of the panel the main findings and conclusions of the review visit, and to ensure that these are correctly recorded by the secretary.
		+ To approve the formal report of the PACER visit once this has been agreed between the review team and the School/Department being reviewed.
3. **External Panellist (one)**:

These are to be drawn from sector-experts either in the subject matter or the ESE issue identified by the role, e.g a Teaching and Learning leadership expert may be appropriate.

A reviewer will be identified by and nominated to the PACER Panel by the Review Chair, in coordination with the PACER Planning Board and/or School/Department under review They will have had no formal links to the School/department within the previous two years and should have experience of conducting periodic review within their own institution, or external review on behalf of the QAA or another relevant professional body.

Payment is the responsibility of the Educational Excellence Team.
4. The External Panellist’s responsibilities are:

	* + To identify and make comparisons with similar provision or activity at other institutions and, where relevant, comment on the currency of the department’s programmes, or their education and student experience related practices and processes, in the context of developments in the discipline and/or the wider sector.
		+ To assess whether the School/Department’s programmes are in line with relevant regulatory or subject benchmarks (e.g QAA Subject Benchmarks).
		+ To provide an external context to inform actions and recommendations.
		+ To counter any inward-looking tendencies of the panel.
		+ To provide input on tangible enhancement activities that could improve School/Department practice.
5. **Student Panellist (one):**These are to be drawn from students from the Faculty, ideally with ESE experience. This could include, but is not limited to: Student Engagement Associates, Student Reps, Senior Reps etc.

Where the evidence indicates issues with particular student demographics, there may be a preference for students from those groups to be prioritised. These are a paid role and payment is the responsibility of the Educational Excellence Team.

In the case of a student panellist being from UNM or UNNC, the Educational Excellence Team will liaise with relevant colleagues to organise payment in a manner suitable to the campus situation.
6. The Student Panellist’s responsibilities are:
	* + To ensure the viewpoints of students are considered throughout the review.
		+ To challenge panellists to ensure that the student voice is not lost in the consideration of evidence.
		+ To ensure authenticity and credibility of action.
		+ To communicate forwards the outcomes of the review amongst students.
7. **Quality Assurance Panellist(one):**These are to be drawn from current or former members of Quality and Standards Committee.
8. The Quality Assurance Panellist’s responsibilities are:
	* + to ensuring the school is compliant with the Quality Manual and any other relevant aspect of QA.
		+ To provide input on tangible enhancement activities that could improve School/Department practice.
9. **Other Panellists(multiple):**These are to be drawn from expertise from across academic and professional services staff within UoN. These should have experience relevant to the risks identified as triggers for the review, and/or other relevant ESE expertise. For example, a School identified to have issues with Graduate Outcomes may have a panellist from the Careers Service, and/or may have an academic colleague experienced with embedding employability in the curriculum.

This may include;
	* + UNM or UNNC colleagues.
		+ Directors of Teaching/ESE for the Schools/Department under review in the year after next are also to be included on review panels.
		+ EDI representatives (e.g People and Culture Directors or EDI managers).
10. The other panellists’ responsibilities are:
* offering input on QE and QA aspects of the review.
* To co-produce recommendations for the School/Department.
* To identify good practice in the review process.

## 5.2 Panel Composition rules and the role of the Educational Excellence Team

1. No person who has teaching or leadership responsibilities within a School/Department under review can be on a panel for them.
2. Where a review is of a School/Department that has no UNM or UNNC affiliation, then there is no requirement to have a member from those staff groups on the review panel. However, in the spirit of tri-campus collaboration, UNM or UNNC members should be considered as potential members where they have relevant expertise for the panel role and review purpose.
3. All review team members will undertake to read all supporting documentation, participate fully in interviewing staff and students during the review visit, and make appropriate contributions to the preparation of the final report.
4. The Educational Excellence Team is responsible for facilitating communication between the School/Department and the review team in preparation for the visit. This includes agreeing the date of the visit, answering any questions the School/Department may have about the process and their preparations, and agreeing deadlines for the submission of key documents.

The Educational Excellence Team is also responsible for supporting the review panel in their preparations for the visit, including arranging and attending preparatory meetings, preparing agenda for each session, and agreeing attendees for each session between the School/Department and the review chair. This may also include panel member training.

The Educational Excellence Team is responsible for recording the key points of discussion and outcomes of each of the sessions, and for drawing this together to support the review team in reaching their final conclusions and recommendations. Subsequently, the Educational Excellence Team is responsible for drafting and coordinating the final report.

Training will be delivered to ensure panel members (and where appropriate, School/Department staff) are able to perform the role allocated to them.

# 6. Review Visit Preparation

## 6.1 Preliminary Meetings

1. **Initial meeting with the School/Department**
Following confirmation of the School/Department’s selection for review, the Head of School/Department, the Director of Teaching/ESE, and the nominated contact person will be invited to meet with the Educational Excellence Team. The purpose of this meeting is to:

	* Explain why the School/Department has been selected for review, and the specific evidence that was used to make that decision.
	* Ascertain whether there are additional areas the School/Department feels it would benefit from exploring as part of the visit.
	* Agree what information the School/Department will provide in its self-evaluative statement and supporting documentation.
	* Discuss and agree who the most relevant colleagues in the School/Department are in order to explore the identified areas in the appropriate way.
	* Identify suitable dates to conduct the review visit (typically 2 days, but variable depending on the size and shape of the School/Department under review).
2. **Meeting with Faculty ESE leadership**Once the review team has been appointed, the review chair, the secretary, and at least one other internal reviewer will meet with the FAPVC and Head of ESE and any other staff as deemed appropriate by the School/department leadership. The purpose of this meeting is to:
	* Establish whether the Faculty has any specific areas it would like the review visit to explore.
	* Understand the Faculty’s perspective on the areas that the School/Department has faced challenges with, and their actions to address them.
	* Establish what support the Faculty has provided and continues to provide to help the School/Department to enhance its ESE.
3. **Meeting with the review panel**Following the submission of all documentation from the School/Department, and the receipt of the Student Submission, the review chair will lead a meeting with the full panel. The purpose of the meeting is to:
	* Identify key lines of enquiry to be explored in the review visit.
	* Identify any issues with the evidence provided by the School/Department.
	* Allocate chairing responsibility for the meetings of the review visit.
	* Finalise the review visit schedule.

## 6.2 The Self-Assessment and the Student Submission

## The Self AssessmentThe purpose of the Self Assessment is to provide the School/Department with an opportunity to reflect on the challenges it has faced in the areas for which it has been nominated for the review, and to outline actions and interventions taken to date to address them. Where the School/Department has been flagged as performing well, it should reflect on the practice that lead to that and how they know it has been effective. This will help the review team to understand the context within which the visit will take place.

## In producing the Self Assessment, the School/Department should be honest about what it is finding challenging, where it wants to get to in terms of enhancement and improvement, and the support it feels it would need to get there.

## The Self Assessment should reflect on the data provided to the School/Department, such as its performance against key ESE metrics, as well as its own locally held information, such as its enhancement plans/business plans, Student Staff Fora (SSF) minutes, and responses to external examiners’ reports. These sources of information should be provided as appendices with clear cross references within the Self Assessment.

## The template format for the Self Assessment will be approved by the EET and published each year and provided to each School/Department at its preliminary meeting.

## The Student SubmissionThe purpose of the Student Submission is to provide independent evidence of the student perspective on the School/Department’s offering. This is to support the panel in understanding and evaluating the performance of the School/Department. The School/Department under review should have no involvement in the provision of this submission.

## The approach for the Student Submission will be agreed between the EET and the Students Union published each year and provided to the appropriate stakeholders.

## 6.3 Other Required Documentation

## Unlike with previous iterations of this process, outside of the Self Assessment and the Student Submission, there are no standardised documentation required for submission from the School/Department. Instead, the Review Chair can identify additional evidence that can inform the review’s line of enquiry.

## These additional sources of evidence may include but are not limited to:

* Programme documentation
* Alumni input
* Action Plans (e.g Disability Action plans)
* Professional Competencies benchmarking
* Compliance with CMA guidance information.
* Handbooks
* Tutoring Statements
* PSRB submission
* Statements or evidence from Professional Services, e.g reports of Moodle usage or Libraries usage.

Where these are already submitted via other processes, these will be requested from the professional services involved in running the process, not the School/Department.

## Chairs are reminded to use discretion when making requests – it is important not to overburden Schools/Departments with too many document requests.

## The Educational Excellence Team will also collate relevant datasets for the review panel, including, but not limited to, NSS Data, Awarding Gap data, Graduate Outcomes etc.

# 7. The Review Visit

1. The Review Visit should be conducted through a series of collegiate and collaborative discussions between the Review Panel and a series of staff and students from the School/Department. It is intended to be a supportive and collaborative process.

The purpose of the visit is to reach a collective understanding of the School/Department’s ESE practice, context and any key factors contributing to their operation. Along with the pre-review documentation, it should also ensure the School/Department is meeting baseline quality standards.

The Review Visit should also agree a set of realistic and useful recommendations that will enable the School/Department to enhance its education and student experience.
2. A review team’s visit may last approximately 2 days, depending on the extent of business, the size of the School/Department, and the number of interviews it has been deemed necessary to schedule. Based on the Chair’s preference, not all of these interviews need to happen sequentially – the panel could split at various points to address relevant issues pertaining to their role on the panel.
3. The review team will agree with the School/Department in advance of the visit a detailed timetable of interviews to be conducted. These interviews should align broadly with the issues covered in the Self-Assessment.
4. During the review visit, the following role holders should always be interviewed:
	* The Head of School/Department.
	* The Director of Teaching/ESE
	* The Chair of the School/Department Teaching Committee.
	* UNM/UNNC ESE leads (as appropriate for the School/Department under review).
	* The Lead School/Department Representative.
	* Programme Leaders for all relevant programmes.
	* A range of staff who teach on or support the delivery of the relevant programmes.
	* A range of students from the relevant programmes (UG/PGT).
5. The discussions in the review visit should offer challenge and scrutiny to the School/Department in a respectful and professional way. These should be evidence and expertise-centred discussions that allow for the exchange of ideas to improve practice (in all directions).
6. The Review Visit should also agree a set of realistic and useful recommendations that will enable the School/Department to enhance its education and student experience.

# 8. The Review Recommendations

## 8.1 Review Summary

1. The Review Secretary will draft a summary of the discussions within five working days of the conclusion of the review visit. This will be circulated to the review panel.
2. The Review Secretary will organise a Post-Review Panel Meeting. This is recommended to be a half-day discussion, though exact length will be determined by the review chair dependent on the nature of the School/Department under review and the wider intentions of the review.
3. The Review Chair will prepare an agenda of the key areas they wish to explore with the panel. This should build on the lines of enquiry identified in the pre-review meeting, and the outcomes of the review meetings, though it is not limited to that.

## 8.2 Post-Review Panel Meeting

1. Within two weeks of the review visit, the review chair will lead a meeting for the full panel. The purpose of the meeting is to:
* Agree a series of recommendations for the School/Department to address the key challenges facing the School/Department in the relevant areas identified pre-review, or ways to innovate and improve further.
* Identify key findings from the review, including areas of good practice.
* Acknowledge and record any key challenges affecting School/Department performance outside of their control.
1. Where relevant and appropriate, recommendations should be practical – they should connect Schools to internal services or people with relevant expertise, to enable them to action the recommendation.

Whilst the remit of the PACER process is undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, and does not include apprenticeship programmes or PGR delivery, it is recognised that some recommendations may have impact beyond the areas covered in the PACER. All actions taken as a result of the PACER should be considerate of the impact they may have on other areas of the School/Department’s provision.
2. Immediately after the Post-Review Panel Meeting, the Chair and Review Secretary (and any other representatives of the panel, as appropriate) should feedback the initial key findings and recommendations to the Head of School/Department and any relevant delegates.

## 8.3 The Review Report

1. Within fifteen working days of the Post-Review Panel Meeting the Review Secretary will produce a full draft report of the PACER.
2. The report will detail the agreed upon recommendations for improvement in the following categories ‘essential’, ‘advisable’ or ‘’desirable’ and, where appropriate, identify good practice and/or acknowledge positive actions already under way. Where appropriate and applicable, the report will also set out what support may be available to help the department or programme concerned to meet expectations and within what period. Recommendations will be contextualised so that it is clear why a recommendation is being made, and how it is intended to support the School/Department.
3. The report should determine whether additional post-review development is required for the School/Department. If the panel, as agreed by the chair, feels that the seriousness of the School/Department’s performance does not pose a significant risk, then they may decide that it is not required. Where a review is triggered by risks presented externally or via metrics, it should be the standard for there to be post-review monitoring of activity.
4. Once it is approved by the Review Chair and agreed with the review team, the report will be forwarded to the Director of Teaching/ESE for comment on any factual errors.
5. If any changes are required because of the fact checking exercise, then the amendments will be made by the Review Secretary within five working days. Following that, the full report will be shared with the Head of School/Department, Director of Teaching/ESE for that department and the respective Faculty APVC and Head of ESE, as well as UNM and UNNC equivalent roles.
6. Once finalised, the report will be submitted to Teaching and Learning Committee for institutional level reporting and other Committees/Groups as appropriate. Thematic reports on the respective areas of the reports submitted to the relevant senior Committee structures. These will focus on common and evolving themes and trends across the full range of reviews, not just annual trends. The reports should be visible internally without the need for permission to access.

# 9. Post-Review

## 9.1 The School/Department Response

1. In cases where the School/Department was not recommended for post-review development, then no further action is required. They are encouraged to consider and adopt the recommendations as appropriate, but no oversight or governance is required for this until the subsequent review.
2. In cases where the School/Department was recommended for post-review development, then the School/Department should agree how they will follow the report. This should include performance/measurable indicators that align with the review outcomes. These might not be explicit metrics which may not be appropriate but could include the completion of activities. The School/Department may also consider how they embed these recommendations into local/Faculty action planning.
3. These performance indicators should be agreed by the School/Department ESE Committee by the end of the academic year in which the review was conducted.
4. These performance indicators should be agreed with their FAPVC, Head of ESE, and a member of the PACER Planning Board before the start of the next academic year.
5. The School/Department ESE Committee (or equivalent) is responsible for actioning the recommendations produced by a PACER, and for ensuring progress against the identified measures.

## 9.2 Annual Progress Updates

1. Once a year, each School/Department that is working to address PACER recommendations will meet with their FAPVC, Head of ESE, and a member of the PACER Planning Board. Other members should be included, as appropriate to the context. This should be arranged by the Educational Excellence Team.
2. The purpose of the meeting is to identify where progress has been made against the recommendations and any assistance the School/Department may need to make progress on their outstanding actions.
3. The Educational Excellence Team will record the progress of these meetings and include these in the annual reporting.
4. These annual progress conversations should occur until three years after the review, or until all indicators are clear, whichever arises first. During this period the School/Department is not eligible for a PACER. Once three years have passed following the review visit, the School/Department becomes eligible for review again.