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| Annual Course Evaluation | |  | **ADMIN**  *(Planning and Information Services)* |
| The RATIONALEWhat prompted you to participate in the PPR workshop? | | | |
| **Purpose** | The prompt came internally from our senior committee relating to teaching and learning and feedback from all the faculties about the priority for process review was the current annual evaluation process. This is a university-wide review we do every year using certain key metrics for all the taught programmes that are on offer across the faculties to make sure that it's meeting the learning outcomes for the students, to make sure that the students are providing positive feedback or we’re actually dealing with any issues that might have been identified during the year.  It seemed a good example to start with because annual evaluation is something everybody has to do and it's quite time-consuming at the moment; the process is far too arduous, it’s long with a lot of duplication. So we wanted to use the PPR to find out what's wrong with it and that’s how we started. | | |
| **Stakes** | The annual evaluation process assesses the quantitative and qualitative ‘health’ of every course that is run at the University. It therefore requires input from nearly all teaching staff with significant support from administrative staff in terms of preparing data for the reports and management/coordination of the process. As the name suggests, this is an annual event, with the expectation that a written report be produced per course.  Preliminary discussions with faculties surfaced a number of specific issues with the current process, which we categorised as concerning governance, sustainability, efficiency & effectiveness, data sources, formats and interpretations. Notably, the form itself has evolved organically over many years, involves a lot of work on all sides with a lack of review of why we need each element of information. | | |
| **Objectives** | * Identify practices within the current process which: * duplicate effort * are inefficient or ineffective * have the potential to be standardised across the institution * Identify problem areas to prioritise attention and consider actions to resolve. | | |
| The PROBLEMWhat was the issue, challenge, opportunity the review focused on? | | | |
| **Context** | The process review was undertaken against a backdrop of initiatives at the University around process efficiency, one KPI being to reduce the admin burden on academic staff by 20%, whilst adhering to external monitoring, such as QAA procedures. There is an interest within the professional support team of how we manage and monitor our business processes, how we know what we’re doing is efficient and effective, also driven by feedback from faculty saying this particular process which affects a lot of staff is difficult and it could move forward better.  I think that the area of concern was from the support staff, because they had to do a lot of work in order to provide the information in a way the academics could use it and make sense of it, so there was a lot of processing time. The people doing that were very high-grade members of faculty, so it was actually quite an expensive process. | | |
| **Need** | Course evaluation is a process that is undertaken by academic staff in partnership with admin support. Discussions about reviewing it had developed organically during school manager meetings and in conjunction with strategic planning activities with support services.  Course evaluation is done by each faculty because every course has to be evaluated, but the actual process cuts through the organisation. What we wanted to get was an oversight of how that looks, the institutional point of view rather from the view of a particular faculty or a particular course leader, so we could clarify a tangible improvement in efficiency and cost saving. PPR offered an opportunity for getting the right people in the discussion across different staff groups and different faculties and services across the University. | | |
| **Participants** | Key participants of the process are included in the process review. This includes academic staff, school managers and administrative support staff from all schools. We also included a representative from Registry who are responsible to external stakeholders, namely QAA for course quality assurance as well as one of the faculty quality officers. | | |
| The SOLUTIONWhat did participating in the process review achieve for you? | | | |
| **Key understandings** | The advantage of the PPR was that it was fairly informal. Some project management business analysis tools are quite hard and structured with kind of boundaries around them. When you’re dealing with the actual people involved in the process, you have to be more fluid about it and one of the benefits of the workshop was that it created quite an empathetic atmosphere. An appreciation was developed between people who didn't previously understand all the participants' roles in the process. This made people feel more empowered about the process, informed and able to make suggestions to improving it.  That ownership, getting the people involved was really important, because we had a range of admin support staff and academics and people of different levels of seniority as well, so it was a really good mix of people in the room but it was also a level playing field, everybody contributed to it.  Considering it was a short time, a lot of really positive work got done and although in some of the feedback forms it said it was a shame that some schools were not represented, we did invite every school to nominate two members of staff, so one of the issues with doing PPR is to actually engage staff with the process and highlight the benefits of it. | | |
| **Intended outcomes** | The tangible map we produced as an outcome of the process review is really powerful for showing people a solid picture of what's going on at a ground level. This can only emerge after all the critiquing, asking lots of why questions so you need full engagement. From here, we are starting to produce an estimate of cost reduction, mostly comprising people's time and getting feedback from staff in order to evaluate the value of improvements arising from the PPR, both in financial cost reduction and staff wellbeing.  The benefits of PPR was having the time and the availability of the relevant people and their willingness to engage with it. Since they know there are issues with the annual course evaluation process, they already bought into the objectives for the review. A positive outcome was that they wanted to be there and were prepared to contribute collectively. That started with the guidelines, setting out the terms of reference and the rules of the day, which levelled everybody out a bit and they felt that they're already being heard. When it came to actually mapping out the current process, people were ready to go with it, because they already had ideas and were just mapping out what they do first.  One of the actions we wanted out of the review was to try and get a baseline cost for staff time involved, so we produced a monitoring template of the key tasks that have been identified, about 10 and then suggested that faculty keep to those high-level tasks and then just put alongside who does them and what grade they are and how long it takes them (i.e. half a day, a day, quarter of the day). | | |
| **Light bulb moments** | There are lots of light bulb moments that happen during PPR. Mapping out the process highlighted all the duplication, the waiting and the amount of effort across all of our academic staff - anybody that's a course leader has got to do this work and then the realisation of this once every three years because it came from somebody from Registry who said that it’s actually once every three years.  One of the things the review highlighted was the time cost. It's an annual process, but the work involved may have a lead of four to five months to get this single report created on a per course basis. When you map it out and have something tangible laid out in front of you even at as a high-level approach, and then you put numbers to that in terms of staff grades and staff time. We worked out it cost the University about 2000 days, which is incredible overall. | | |
| **PPR techniques** | One of the key pushers for using PPR has been the communication part of it is, because it is critical to get the right message out to people about what is expected and providing enough guidance that it's understood. People do challenge what they do here and try and improve what they are doing, but it may be by changing processes at a very local level, they may be unaware of the implications of those changes further down the line, either within their own areas or in other departments or faculties. Using PPR enables us to get a better handle on institutional oversight of processes and map that out.  There are many ways of reviewing processes; PPR is probably the better way of doing them because you need more than an oversight view if you are not involved in the process on a day-to-day basis on the ground. When you talk to the person actually doing it, you realise the importance of each step, so you have to have some sort of participant involvement in the process review, no matter what the processes is. | | |
| **Actions / next steps** | The actions following the report were sent out to everybody that attended and people have got back to me with their thoughts, and we've been in touch with people who could not attended or only could come to part of the workshop day. We've kept that wider group going in terms of interviews and focus groups; they have become part of the process that are now going to implement the changes. We are writing a web-based application to streamline the process and some of those people will be involved in the testing of it a user feedback. | | |
| The RESULTWhat are the tangible outcomes & impact? | | | |
| **Immediate changes** | The perception was that every single course had to produce an annual evaluation report and the reality (for QAA purposes) turned out to be that detailed report had to be submitted only once every three years. There was some other rules, in that some other courses had to provide one every single year. So we immediately were able to change that part of the process and made it very clear that courses are only reviewed on a three-year basis and we’re also putting in a set metrics. | | |
| **Improvements made** | What we’re providing for the next academic cycle is a lighter version of the full solution, because of time constraints. From this review we created a set of metrics to evaluate the course 'health' as we call it and can flag up the ones that require a detailed report. So we have been able to cut down and streamline the volume of reports that are produced and we're developing a web-based application to be able to manager that.  As far as efficiency is concerned, we've produced a total baseline figure in terms of time and cost, but it's currently just an estimate. Because the process is currently implemented in different ways across our seven faculties, the template has to be generic enough to cover the basics that everybody does. You have to look at where there are breaks, lags, where there's duplication, so that’s like the next step to do with this estimate.  Admin managers in the faculties generally monitor such processes intuitively; they have a good handle on peaks and troughs, getting insights via regular meetings with their team. They are therefore best placed to note changes or improvements using metrics such as reducing work load pressure points and savings. | | |
| **Evidence of benefits** | In terms of benefits to annual evaluation stakeholders, people are delighted that something is finally being done with this process, because the issues have been known about for 4 or 5 years and nothing’s changed. So the fact that we are engaging with the issues and proposing improvements is welcomed. One of the concerns now is to manage their expectations about how much it can be improved given a short time space we have.  Being able to take the outputs from the workshop day and incorporate it directly into the new annual evaluation will be a good advert for the benefit of the process review approach. PPR can easily be applied to any other process. For example, I've been asked to start looking into student assessment, so it’s one of the tools that we'll be using to uncover the issues with that particular process. It's a practical way of surfacing the issues with how we do things.  Feedback from the academic admin managers perspective is they came away from the workshop more enthusiastic about the process, borrowing some of the techniques to see if they can embed those in what they are planning on doing within the faculty.  In terms of actually taking it further and embedding it across the University, I'm writing a report which is going to go to our HR group which is looking at process efficiency to put forward suggestions for using tools like PPR, but also other kind of business analysis feedback processes and interviews and that kind of thing that can be used as a toolkit for how we look at process improvement. | | |
| **Unintended & unexpected** | Some of the academics were really surprised about the amount of work that goes into preparing a form for them to then evaluate in terms of all the data and the stats that go in there and the copying and pasting from a spreadsheet into a word form, that I just don't think they had any awareness of. A couple of the academics afterwards said the PPR has been really good; they want to be kept informed and be involved in further developments on the process which was deemed very unusual. Feedback from faculty is that participants came back enthusiastic and motivated about process changed from that day, quite open for the things to be change.  What surprised process review participants was the supportive nature of PPR, how it actually brought people together who may not have understood the implications of the process on other groups of staff: a supportive appreciation and empathy. That made it so much easier in determining what the solutions would be, because people could put themselves others' shoes and were willing for compromises to be made. | | |
| **Longer term impact indicators** | If the new process can really streamline things for the admin team, it’s going to take out a lot of manual cutting & pasting and having to collect statistics from various different areas, so it will save a lot of person-hours in terms of data collection. It will also help the academics because they will get everything in one source.  One of the benefits is that PPR is not difficult to get to grips with, so by training people in the approach, they can apply it to their own context. It can work on a small scale or large-scale and has the potential to change the culture of how people think about the work instead of just doing things because that's the way we do things to think actually why am I doing it this way, so the potential for a shift in thinking, which is really powerful to get that momentum for change and improvement.  As an institution process review is a means by which we can get more of a handle on our key processes and how we do things. I think this first PPR has laid the foundations for that kind of work. In terms of types of process this fits, I think it's just a generic approach to look at what we do and why we’re doing it, perhaps to consider which processes are the most important, since we have processes related to teaching and learning, processes related to international development, processes around research, plus all the internal processes required to support those key areas as well. | | |

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| Lessons learned - what experience has been gained? | |
| **Prior experience** | Participants had done some business management training, but no formal process reviews. We used PPR to get stuck in and find out what the issues are. I devised a set of interview questions and went into all the schools and then I wrote a report on the back of that, so that was the thing that kind of kicked it off. You just do a few and you can learn it as you go - more by luck than judgement, we'd actually been using a lot of the principles of the PPR schema. |
| **Participative experience** | People were genuinely surprised by the collaborative nature of the exercise and that appreciation was really powerful. We were aware of some of the issues, but it was really useful through the workshop to put some steps in place to rectify these. Feedback from the people who attended was very positive and through those contacts, there is potential maybe later down the line to provide training across the organisation with this process, so people can apply process review to their own context. In this way, you are developing and using the people that participate in the PPR and the workshop as champions for process change.  The skills of process leaders are patience and communication. A participative review can sometimes take longer than you may have anticipated compared to doing it individually as a manager, but if you can bear with it, you end up getting good results.  *"The first-time I did it I was convinced I knew exactly what the process should be, and I thought ask a few people and it took a lot longer and it was only when I started hearing their viewpoint I know I’m wrong and what to change."* |
| **Personal skills / application to other processes** | Having done the preliminary work about the issues, what I found reassuring was it clarified both my understanding of the situation and validated some earlier reviews, so from a personal point of view it gave me more confidence in what I was doing.  As part of the work, a report will go to the relevant committees for circulated about the benefits of PPR for annual evaluation. People will be looking at the impact of the changes that we’re making to annual evaluation and validate how we went about doing it. Alongside that is a paper about some high level steps of process improvement that can be used right across the board and how do we start with it.  In terms of developing training for PPR, we would probably use it in a very local complex. Faculty teams already have quite a few processes PPR is being applied to, albeit at a local level of processes within the faculty, where there is a lot of manual intervention to prepare information to go out to staff or students. They are looking at mechanisms to automate, for example to use technology to produce a report that contains all the statistical information needed, rather than having to get it from two separate computer systems. The approach is borrowing bits from PPR and bits from other techniques and combining a few things to suit. |
| **Success tips** | * Getting people involved from a range of staff makes a big difference to the detailed picture you get, challenging assumptions people make about a process. For instance, you might have a grade 4 clerical assistant in the room with some senior academic, but that grade 4 who is actually doing some of the really nitty-gritty stuff can come out with some really useful suggestions, because they are the ones on the coal-face so to speak. * Mapping it out is a tangible way for people to view the process from all perspectives. It gives a holistic feel rather than the blinkered views that people may get from their position within the organization. * Noteworthy is that this goes beyond just people's roles and locations in the university. One faculty manager indicated the value of involving people with a range of 'subject mix' with regard to their orientations to 'data' or 'people', particularly as the process designed needed to be understood by non-technical stakeholders. * Although the University's main committee is essentially the 'owner' of the course evaluation process, it is the central registry who are the guardians/ custodians. So it's been important to get their buy-in to the new process and work with them so the same message goes out to the relevant groups of people including in our 7 faculties. |