# Program review – external review process

## Overview

The external review is the stage of the program review process that follows the completion and internal approval of the Self-study Report. The external review is conducted by a team of three members, two of whom are external to BCIT, and one who is a faculty member from another school at BCIT. The purpose of the external review is to validate the Self-study report (in particular the recommendations) and provide additional insight regarding program strengths and opportunities for improvement.

## External Review Team Composition

The external review team will typically consist of three members, nominated by the self-study team and selected by the school dean and Dean, APQA:

  i)   Two external experts, both of whom are academic peers from other postsecondary institutions, or one academic peer from another post-secondary institution and an industry/employer representative, depending upon the nature of the program under review. One of these members will be asked to chair the external review process.

  ii)  A BCIT academic member from a program in a different school.

## Criteria for selection of external reviewers

The external review process must be, and be seen to be, a genuine appraisal carried out by qualified individuals who have no self-interest in the outcome. It is both an expected element of program review within public post-secondary norms, and it provides legitimization of the review process. Thus, the thoughtful selection of those to serve on the external review team (ERT) is crucial to the success of the program review process. Those selected to be members of the ERT will:

- Be a member of a peer institution or an appropriate industry representative
- Have recognized competence in the field of study, discipline of the program, or industry
- Not be, or be perceived to be, in a conflict of interest (for example, not be a former member or recent graduate of the program (i.e. within the last five years); have no professional links with faculty, staff, or administrators of the program, etc.)

With this in mind, the self-study team (SST) nominates four to six external candidates and two to three internal candidates to act as reviewers. The internal candidates should come from a different school, preferably from a program that is scheduled for review the following year or who have previous program review experience. For the external candidates, nominations should include a balance of relevant candidates from both academic institutions and industry.

Programs are required to provide the following accurate information for *each* candidate, using the External Review Team Candidate Form on the APQA site:

- Candidate's full name
- Title & credentials
- Contact information (email, and telephone number)
- Brief rationale for nomination (e.g. previous Program Review experience)

-   Description of any prior contact with the program under review
-   Confirmation from the self-study team that there are no conflicts of interest which would preclude the participation of the candidate on the ERT

## External Review Team Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Guidelines

These guidelines are to assist program areas in their nomination of external review team candidates and to assist the external reviewers themselves. These guidelines reflect the requirements as outlined by the DQAB  (*http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/post-secondary-education/institution-resources-administration/degree-authorization/degree-quality-assessment-board/conflict-of-interest-and-confidentiality-policy*)

*External reviewers must avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest including that which might impair or impugn the independence, integrity or impartiality of the review. There must be no appearance of bias, based on what a reasonable person might perceive.*

When identifying candidates to serve on the external review team, select those experts who are recognized by their peers for having a broad outlook, open mind, and sound judgment. Candidates should possess the qualifications to engender the confidence of all those involved in the development, results, and actions resulting from the program review.

### Definition of a Conflict

(Adapted from DQAB Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy)

An actual or potential conflict of interest arises when an expert is placed in a situation in which a) their personal interests, financial or otherwise, or b) the interests of an immediate family member or of a person with whom there exists, or has recently existed, an intimate relationship, conflict or appearance of conflict with the expert's responsibilities to the program under review, BCIT, and/or the public interest.

External experts appointed by the school dean and Dean, APQA should not have had any actual, perceived, or potential conflict of interest to the program under review within the previous two years, have any such connection or for a period of up to three months following the completion of their duties related to the program review. Some examples of such connections include:

-   Preparing an application or providing expert advice used in developing the program,
-   Making public comment for or against a program or institution that might result in the apprehension of bias,
-   Working for or previously employed in the program,
-   Being a learner or a recent graduate of the program (i.e. within the last five years),
-   Working as a consultant for the program,
-   Serving in an advisory capacity or on a board for the program,
-   Having financial or other business interests with the program,
-   Supervising learners or employees of the program, or
-   Collaborating regularly with anyone in or associated with the program.

Some experts are invited as representatives of private sector organizations that broadly represent private sector interests. In such cases, there would not normally be a conflict of interest unless the member has been actively involved in developing, promoting, or publicly commenting on a program.

**Disclosure of Conflict**

It is unlikely that an external reviewer with a conflict of interest will be nominated, let alone selected, for the external review team. However, should it occur, the following procedure will be used. Where an expert sees an actual or potential conflict of interest, or is unsure whether one exists, the expert must disclose their circumstances to and consult with the school dean. It is then the responsibility of the school dean to determine whether a conflict of interest exists, and to inform the program's self-study team and the Dean, APQA of their decision. Similarly, if a program learns of a conflict of interest regarding an individual appointed by the school dean and Dean, APQA, then the program area will make full written disclosure to the school dean.

**Action Required When a Conflict Exists**

The school dean will exercise their discretion in determining if an actual or potential conflict of interest exists, and notify the parties accordingly. Should the school dean determine that an actual or potential conflict exists, the external expert must decline to serve as a reviewer. In this event, an alternate will be selected from the list of candidates provided by the program area.

## Steps in selecting/inviting external reviewers

There are three steps involved in selecting the members of the external review team:

1. Faculty in the program being reviewed compile a list of potential external and internal reviewers, ensuring that the reviewers have no self-interest in the outcome of the review. APQA can help identify potential internal candidates. External candidates should not have any actual, perceived, or potential conflict of interest in the program under review within the previous two years, or for a period of up to three months following the completion of their duties related to the program review. The PC sends the list of candidates to the AQPA lead, filling out the External Review Team Candidate Form with complete and accurate information for each candidate.

2. The AQPA lead reviews the ERT Candidate Form to confirm completeness and forwards it to the Dean APQA and the school dean, who will identify a prioritized selection of ERT members, considering the complementary background of the review team as appropriate to the program under review.

3. The AQPA lead formally invites the external candidates for the site visit, to be held at a specific date.

## Responsibilities of the External Review Team

The purpose of the external review process is to assist the program area and BCIT in identifying specific program strengths and successes upon which to build, to validate the recommendations from the review process, and identify other issues the program should take into consideration.

Specifically, the external review team will assess:

- Whether the recommendations in the Self-study Report are supported by the findings in the Self-study Report
- Whether the findings in the Self-study Report are validated by the ERT site visit
- If there are any additional observations or recommendations for the program area to consider.

## Preparation for the ERT site visit

Four to six weeks prior to the site visit, each ERT member will be contacted by the AQPA lead to confirm their willingness and availability to participate in the external review team site visit. Site visits are conducted virtually (i.e. via Microsoft Teams) unless specifically requested by program teams to have the site visit on campus. ERT members who are external to BCIT will be provided remuneration for their expertise in fulfilling the ERT responsibilities outlined in this guideline. (Note: if schools determine that the site visit will be held on campus, any costs related to ERT member travel, accommodations, catering, etc. will be covered by the school budget. Additional time may be needed to coordinate logistics for on-campus site visits.)

Two weeks prior to the visit, confirmed ERT members will be provided with a copy of the Self-study Report and any other program and/or Institute documents that will provide a complete picture of the program and its role in BCIT.

All members of the ERT must maintain confidentiality with regard to their findings before, during, and after the site visit. Any questions or concerns of the ERT should be addressed to the Dean, APQA or a member of the program review staff. To ensure an efficient and productive site visit, the AQPA lead, in conjunction with the program area's administrative assistant or support person, will undertake the following:

The AQPA lead will:

- Send documents to ERT members two weeks prior to site visit
- In consultation with the school Dean and APQA Dean, select a Chair for the ERT and invite them to take on the Chair role
- Solicit suggestions for interviewees from the program's SST
- Develop the site visit agenda in collaboration with the SST
- Schedule meeting times for senior BCIT administration
- Finalize and distribute the meeting agenda
- Ensure program area arrange for clerical support for the ERT during the site visit
- Ensure all details of the site visit are coordinated

Program area including the SST and others (e.g. administrative assistant) will be responsible for the following:

- Send out invitations to stakeholders on behalf of the program
- Notetaking during site visit
- Other preparations as needed

Additionally, the **self-study team (SST)** will:

- Discuss with APQA lead who should attend as stakeholder participants/interviewees, and how many participants, prior to sending invitations Confirm agenda with APQA, which includes scheduled times for the ERT to meet with school dean, SST and other stakeholder participants.

Coordinate availability and invite faculty (including Flexible Learning), staff, students, graduates, industry/PAC members to scheduled meetings with ERT
- Provide copies of documents requested by the AQPA lead and/or the ERT prior to the site visit
- Provide copies of any additional documents the SST would like to send to the ERT or have on site during the ERT visit

Roles and responsibilities may be adjusted as needed to facilitate a smooth, collaborative process.

## Site Visit

The ERT will review the Self-study Report submitted by the internal self-study team, undertake a site visit, and during the site visit will seek the input of learners, alumni, employers, staff, faculty (including Flexible Learning), and administration. The visit will normally be a half-day event.

The following outline standard activities during the site visit:

- External reviewers meet with the Dean, APQA, school dean, and self-study team for initial and exit discussions.
- External reviewers meet with program faculty (including those who teach into the program from another department and Flexible Learning), staff, learners, alumni, and industry (e.g. representatives from the Program Advisory Committee).
- During the site visit, the ERT should draft the main elements of their report and present a verbal report.

**One to two weeks following Site Visit**
- The external review team chair writes the final ERT report as agreed to by all of the external reviewers. APQA provides a template for this report.
- The ERT chair forwards the report to the APQA lead who reviews it prior to distributing it to the Dean, APQA, and the school dean.
- Following Deans' review and approval, the APQA lead will forward the ERT report to the self-study team (SST).
- The self-study team reviews the report and consider its response (see Program Review – Concluding the Process)

The following documents associated with this guide can be found on the APQA site:

- - ERT guidelines
- - ERT candidate form
- - ERT report template
- - ERT sample site visit agenda template