Procedures for Review of Trinity Research Institutes

1. Context

Trinity College’s vision is as a University of global consequence undertaking research for impact and providing a research-led education.

Trinity has formally established Trinity Research Institutes (TRIs) to facilitate world-leading and multidisciplinary research. TRIs are described as initiatives born from the School structures in College and are only approved when their strategic and scholarly impact is clearly demonstrable for College.

A TRI is granted approval for a period of five years after which it will be subject to an external quality review, including a site visit, as outlined in Section 9 of the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013 (Appendix 1).

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this procedure is to set out broad guidelines for the review of a TRI, which aims to facilitate a critical self-assessment of the Institute by the Institute Director, its Principal Investigators, the Heads of the participating Schools and the relevant Faculty Dean. These procedures are supported by and should be read in conjunction with the General Procedures for Quality Reviews which outline the generic elements of the process which are common to reviews of Schools, Programmes, Administrative/Support areas and Research Institutes.

2.2 The purpose of the review is to facilitate an assessment by an independent, external review team of both current and potential future performance against international centres in academic fields broadly wide enough to ensure an appropriate range of international comparators on the following scale which are the criteria for review outlined in Section 9 of the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013 (Appendix 1):

1. International reference point for research in the discipline: clearly a world leader.
2. Internationally competitive in a majority of areas of its research: a significant player internationally in the field.
3. Internationally competitive in only a minority of its research: major part of research of national importance.
4. None or very little research of international significance: some research of national importance.
5. Almost no research of national importance.

2.3 The added value of the existence of the TRI in supporting research in the corresponding field over and above doing so through Schools alone should also be assessed.

2.4 The review will provide a recommendation to the College’s Research Committee as to whether or not the TRI should continue to be recognised as a Trinity Research Institute for a further five years.

3. Scope
3.1 This procedure applies to TRIs that have been formally approved under the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013;
3.2 Where a TRI takes primary financial and administrative responsibility for a Trinity Research Centre (TRC), the review of the TRC will be included in the quality review of the TRI;
3.3 This procedure does not apply to other (research) units which have not been formally approved as TRIs or to research groupings that are externally funded other than to the extent that they are fully/partially housed in a TRI under review;
3.4 Where a School takes primary financial and administrative responsibility for a TRC, the review of the TRC will be included in the quality review of the School (refer to the School Review procedure).

4. Benefits
Reviews of TRIs:
4.1 Afford the TRI the opportunity to evaluate its own operation and performance in a structured way;
4.2 Allow the University to evaluate whether a TRI continues to meet the criteria for which TRI status was awarded;
4.3 Fulfil the University’s commitment to the quality assurance of its education and research provision;
4.4 Demonstrate alignment with the guidelines set out under the Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012.
5. **Procedure** (see also the *General Procedures for Quality Reviews*)

5.1 Establish a Coordinating Group to guide the review process, chaired by the Director of the Institute, and including the Heads of participating Schools, representatives from governance groups, Principal Investigators, Directors of TRCs that fall under the auspices of the TRI, senior administrative and technical support staff.

5.2 Agree the approach to engage stakeholder groups’ input into the conduct of the self-assessment exercise. This may include the conduct of surveys or focus groups in the period leading up to the review, as well as invitations to speak to the external review team during the onsite visit. The timing, content and administration of surveys and focus groups as well as the schedule for the onsite visit should be undertaken in consultation with the Quality Office.

5.3 Conduct a SWOT \(^1\) analysis with various internal audiences, staff groupings, and participating Schools. The purpose of the SWOT is to facilitate a critical reflection on the Institute’s performance and direction in light of the College Strategic Plan and conduct an appraisal of the Institute in terms of attainment of research impact, funding, infrastructure, profile with industry and in the public domain.

5.4 The self-assessment exercise is an opportunity for the Institute and participating Schools to collate in one document data arrays for the previous five years or since its establishment.

5.5 Prepare a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) based on the outcome of the above activities. The SAR forms the principal source of information for the External Review Team prior to their arrival on-site, and should be forward looking, have a strategic focus and provide a critical appraisal of the performance of the Institute and its future direction. Responsibility for the development of the SAR lies with the Co-ordinating Group. It should not normally exceed 50 pages (excluding the Appendices). The format of the SAR is outlined in Appendix 2 and includes the following suggested headings:

1. Introduction;
2. Mission & Strategy;
3. Organisation/Structure;
4. Governance and Management;
5. Performance (including comparison with international benchmarks);
6. Research Activities and Conduct;
7. Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Industry engagement;
8. Research-led teaching & student development;
9. Resources (finance/funding, staffing & infrastructure);
10. Administration;
11. Relationships – Professional, Public & Civic;
12. Communication & Marketing.

5.6 The data requirements to inform the Self-Assessment are outlined in Appendix 3

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\(^1\) Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
5.7 The on-site visit by the external reviewers occurs over 2-3 days. A draft schedule is agreed with the Quality Office eight weeks prior to the review date. A template for a draft schedule and principles to be followed in its development can be found in the General Procedures for Quality Reviews.

5.8 The Quality Office will provide a review of various drafts of the SAR and draft schedule. The final draft of the SAR with appendices and the schedule is to be submitted to the Quality Office eight weeks prior to the review date, who will arrange for proofreading of the final draft prior to its dissemination to the Review team.

5.9 A timeline detailing the key phases/deliverables for a review of a TRI can be found in Appendix 4.

5.10 Follow-up processes are detailed in the General Procedures for Quality Reviews.
Appendix 1: Policy on Trinity Research Institutes: Formation, Oversight, Operation and Financial Arrangements

Section 9 Review of a TRI

A TRI will normally be granted approval for a period of five years. Every fifth year, the TRI will be subject to an external quality review, including a site visit, under College Quality Review Procedures. Reviewers will be asked to assess the TRI for both current performance and potential performance against international centres in academic fields broadly wide enough to ensure an appropriate range of international comparators on the following scale:

- B. Internationally competitive in a majority of areas of its research. A significant player internationally in the field.
- C. Internationally competitive in only a minority of its research. Major part of research of national importance.
- D. None or very little research of international significance. Some research of national importance.
- E. Almost no research of national importance.

Reviews will be considered by the Research Committee in the context of the TRI’s five-year strategic plan. If the review is satisfactory, the TRI would be formally recognised for a further period of up to five years. If the review is unsatisfactory, then the TRI would be given time to plan and implement remedial action. However, if no remedial action is possible or the planned action fails to address the concerns of the reviewers, recognition may be withdrawn.

College reserves the right to withdraw recognition of a TRI if, for example, the TRI

- receives an unfavourable external review;
- fails to generate appropriate grant income or ceases to have a critical mass of principal investigators to qualify as a TRI and the situation is unlikely to improve in the short term.

In such cases, the Research Committee may, on the recommendation of the Dean of Research, commission an extraordinary external review before making a decision.

The full policy can be viewed here.
Appendix 2: Format of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

Headings and suggested questions to be addressed in the SAR:

1. **Mission & Strategy:**
   (i) Outline the mission and strategy of the TRI and evaluate whether it is achieving its stated objectives.
   (ii) Describe the key research areas/projects/groupings/collaborations/initiatives facilitated by the Institute and their strategic research objectives.
   (iii) How are the TRI’s key research activities aligned to the College’s research strategy and the research strategies of the participating Schools, and how do they progress the mission of the TRI?
   (iv) Describe the mechanisms used to ensure that a multi-annual vision for the TRI is in place and that there is succession planning (both financial and leadership).

2. **Organisational structure:**
   (i) Describe the organisational and operational structure of the TRI in relationship to participating Schools and TRCs.
   (ii) Evaluate whether the current structure facilitates the optimum operation of the TRI and enables it to fulfil its mission.

3. **Governance and Management:**
   (i) Describe the composition of the governance and management structure of the Institute, showing the relationships across participating Schools and internal and external stakeholders.
   (ii) Evaluate whether the current governance and management structure of the Institute optimally supports and drives the vision and mission of the Institute, and enables it to attain a greater international profile.
   (iii) Outline the reporting relationships and evaluate how effective they are.
   (iv) How does the Institute identify and act upon emerging trends/risks that may affect the future activities and operations of the Institute?

4. **Performance:**
   (i) Does the Institute have a clear set of metrics, and an associated system of data gathering through which it evaluates performance in terms of effectiveness, value for money and impact?
   (ii) How does the Institute continually assess its performance against the criteria for TRIs outlined in the TCD Policy on Trinity Research Institutes?

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2 If any of the research groups housed in the TRI are recognised as Trinity Research Centres (TRC) they must be reviewed as part of the review of the TRI against the criteria outlined in the TCD Policy on Trinity Research Centres, i.e. activity, visibility and viability. Please ensure that sufficient evidence is provided to allow the reviewers to effectively evaluate the TRC against these criteria and to comment on the contribution of the individual Centre to the TRI under review.
How does the Institute benchmark itself against national and international comparator institutes and use the outcomes of such evaluations to continually improve performance and impact?

How does the Institute measure its research activity/productivity against the College’s key performance indicators (KPIs) for research?

5. Research Activities & Conduct
   (i) How does the Institute ensure integrity and ethical practice in the conduct of its research as outlined in the TCD Policy on Good Research Practice?
   (ii) Outline what Research Ethics Committee (REC) the Institute and participating Schools use to approve research proposals and provide in summary form a profile of proposals per annum for the past five years and the outcome.
   (iii) What are the quality assurance procedures in place around the delivery of research and support activities e.g. is the Institute a participant in external professional or regulatory accreditation programmes?

6. Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Industry Engagement
   (i) How does the Institute demonstrate and support innovation and entrepreneurship?
   (ii) What mechanisms are in place to promote commercialisation of research and technology transfer?
   (iii) How are campus-companies/spin-outs and technology transfer supported and developed by the Institute? What start-ups/spin-out companies have been generated from the Institute, from participating Schools?
   (iv) What systems are in place to support the management of intellectual property?
   (v) Provide evidence to show that the Institute is operating in an enterprise development space beyond that which would operate through participating Schools.
   (vi) How does engagement with industry and other external stakeholders further the teaching, research and development profile of the Institute, beyond that achieved by participating Schools?

7. Research-led teaching and student development
   (i) What undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes delivered through participating Schools does the Institute contribute to/collaborate in?
   (ii) What supports are provided by the Institute to enhance the student experience and involve students in the research activity of the Institute?
   (iii) How is the Institute’s involvement in teaching leading to the production of new researchers in its field of expertise?

8. Resources:
   (i) Finance & Funding:
      a. Provide a summary outline of the Institute’s sources of income, funding streams and expenditure.
      b. Outline whether the Institute has a business plan in place which focuses on sustainability through diversification of funding streams.
c. Evaluate whether the Institute has used its TRI status optimally to secure national and international funding, and to generate income for College.

d. Evaluate whether the resource allocation mechanisms in place within the Institute are appropriate.

(ii) **Staffing:**

a. Evaluate whether the current staffing levels are appropriate to support the operations and activity of the Institute.

b. What are the mechanisms in place to attract and retain research expertise to progress the Institute’s research mission?

c. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that Institute staff (including support/admin staff) are supported and that appropriate professional development opportunities are provided? Include information on:
   1. Mentoring and supports for young researchers;
   2. Promotion and career development opportunities for young researchers;
   3. Continuous professional development opportunities for existing staff.

d. How does involvement with the Institute enhance opportunities for professional development for postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows?

e. What opportunities are available for research-active staff to be involved in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, laboratory supervision and tutorials?

(iii) **Infrastructure:**

a. Provide details on any defined space that the Institute occupies and an assessment of whether it is fit for purpose;

b. Outline how the Institute is using its infrastructure to secure international funding and attract international postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers;

c. Have sustainable models been developed for the Institute’s infrastructure?

d. Detail how the Institute’s facilities are shared between the Institute and its participating Schools, including, for example, how the Institute uses any School equipment, resources and personnel and *vice versa*;

9. **Administration:**

(i) Evaluate how the administrative procedures and operational processes in place to support the Institute are reviewed and enhanced for example:

a. annual planning cycle;

b. ethics approval of research proposals;

c. maintenance of research active staff profiles on RSS;

d. open access on Trinity’s Access to Research Archive (TARA);

e. marketing, communications and maintenance of the Institute website;

f. publication of statistical and annual reports for internal and external audiences;

g. SLAs that support the maintenance and optimal function of the TRI research infrastructure and equipment;

h. event management, symposia, conferences, launches;

i. systems and databases e.g. CRM, Finance, HR;

j. grant application procedures.
(ii) How does the Institute consider and implement relevant College-wide policies such as the TCD Policy on Good Research Practice and Research Ethics Policy?

(iii) What procedures are in place in the Institute for ensuring records are managed and retained as per College policies and contractual agreements with funding bodies?

(iv) Are systems and procedures aligned to and informed by the requirements of external funding, professional and regulatory accreditation bodies?

10. Relationships – Professional, Public & Civic

(i) How does the Institute evaluate the success of its public engagement activities?

(ii) Demonstrate how the Institute ensures that its public and professional activities support and enhance the Institute’s research activities.

(iii) Describe how the Institute continually reviews and enhances its internal and external relationships.

(iv) How does the Institute influence College and national policy?

11. Communication & Marketing

(i) How does the Institute ensure that its marketing and communication activities further the goals/objectives outlined in its strategic plan and meet the expectations of its stakeholders?

(ii) In relation to the Institute’s communication and marketing activities, outline the following:
   a. Mechanisms for communicating the opportunities, successes and innovations of the Institute to its staff, students, the wider College community and external stakeholders;
   b. Opportunities to elicit feedback from external stakeholders such as employers, funding bodies, collaborative partners etc.;
   c. Links with the Communications and Marketing Directorate.
Appendix 3: Suggested data for inclusion in the Appendices or to be made available to External Review Team during the onsite visit.

**Management & Governance:**
- Organisation chart showing the composition and relationships of the Institution Board, the Management Committee and the External Advisory Committee;
- Institute organisational charts which include an outline of its relationship with the participating schools;
- Copies of Annual reports of the Institution Board to the Dean of Research;
- Terms of Reference for the TRI;
- Copies of audit or consultancy reports;
- Risk Management Plan/Issues Register;

**Research Activities:**
Data for the last five years on the following:
- A summary table of grants and contract funding (both active and pending) for each research theme/grouping associated with the Institute;
- Copies of Principal Investigator and Institute Research Staff profiles – from RSS;
- Impact evaluation reports for the TRI;
- A table showing research yield – proposals vs awards;
- Prizes/awards received;
- List and brochures announcing Institute run conferences, seminars events;

**Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Industry Engagement**
- Evidence of support for start-up/entrepreneurial activity including student activity such as Launchbox; campus companies, knowledge transfer, IP, patents/licenses, industry contracts, collaborative projects;
- Evidence of purposeful cycle of industry engagement domestically and internationally.

**Research-led teaching at Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Postdoctoral levels:**
- Module descriptors for taught programmes the Institute delivers or collaborates in;
- Research Seminar series the institute leads or participates in;
- Laboratory and Research supervision

**Resources: Finance**
- Financial status report for the Institute, within the context of the original budget outline;
- Financial projections for the next 3 years;
- Bi-annual reports to the Finance Committee and Planning Committee;
- Applications and outcome of funding grants from external funding bodies –SFI, ERC, Horizon 2020 against funding strategy/targets.

**Staffing**
List of members of the Institute by:
- role/job-title (whether, for example, the members are principal investigators (PIs), post-doctoral fellows, or students);
- contract type;
- School affiliation.
**Infrastructure**

- Space management plan;
- Available resources/equipment/facilities (e.g. Laboratory equipment, Technical support for researchers, access to collaborators and partnerships, Shared spaces for staff and students).

**Administration:**

- Copies of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and evidence of compliance with those of research partners/collaborators/suppliers;
- Copies of certification against quality standards such as ISO or AAALAC (Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International) Accreditation or requirements of professional and/or regulatory bodies;
- Service level agreements with units in College such as Comparative Medicine, Centre for Microscopy and Analysis, the Hazardous Materials Facility etc;
- MOUs/SLAs;
- Research Ethics Approval Policy as per the College Policy on Good Research Practice.

**Relationships – Professional, Public & Civic**

- Public engagement activities such as open days, school visits, Science Gallery events, symposia etc. in which the Institute is involved;
- Professional activities undertaken by Institute staff such as:
  - Sponsoring or participating in conferences and symposia;
  - Editing academic journals and books;
  - Acting in an advisory capacity on public commissions, boards and task forces;
  - Preparing special reports and working papers;
  - Member of an editorial board of a refereed journal etc;
  - Consultancy;
  - External secondment.
- Links with:
  - other units within the University such as the Communications & Marketing Directorate, Trinity Research & Innovation, Launchbox etc;
  - companies and suppliers;
  - industry.
Appendix 4: Template for Reviewers’ Report:

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Key findings of the review including overall assessment of the TRI;

1.2 Recommendations including recommendation on continued recognition of the TRI by the University

Reviewers are asked to consider the following questions/issues in their report:

2. Governance and Management

2.1 Mission and Strategy

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- the performance of the Institute against its Mission and Strategy;
- achievement on raising the profile of the TRI and securing international funding;
- the value-add the TRI brings to the research sphere in which it operates and to the achievement of the College’s strategic research objectives;

2.2 Leadership

Reviewer opinion is sought on whether:

- the profile and composition of the governance structure has enabled the Institute to attain a greater international profile?
- the Institute’s governance and administration structures operate in accordance with the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013 (Appendix 1);
- the Institute Director has succeeded in bringing together a critical mass of researchers to realise a vision beyond that associated with the participant schools?
- the Institute Director and Principal Investigators are working across a spectrum of areas (European engagement, enterprise outlook, innovation, competing for and winning international funding, raising the profile of the TRI and increasing international visibility) to articulate the value of the TRI?
- there is evidence of succession planning both (financial and leadership), and a multi-annual vision;

2.3 Performance:

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- the current performance and potential future performance of the TRI:
  a. against the criteria for a TRI outlined in the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013 (Appendix 1) and in particular the requirement to have substantial external funding and a strong business plan focussing on sustainability;
b. **against international comparators by reference to the following scale as outlined in the College Policy on Trinity Research Institutes, 2013:**

1. **International reference point for research in the discipline: clearly a world leader;**
2. **Internationally competitive in a majority of areas of its research: a significant player internationally in the field;**
3. **Internationally competitive in only a minority of its research: major part of research of national importance;**
4. **None or very little research of international significance: some research of national importance; or**
5. **Almost no research of national importance.**

- whether the TRI has achieved a level of research impact that is outside the remit of the participant Schools?
- the metrics/KPIs the TRI uses to evaluate the quality of its research, impact, innovation and entrepreneurial activities and administrative processes?

### 2.4 Relationships – Professional, Public & Civic

Reviewer opinion is sought on the:

- success of the TRI’s engagement with professional, public and civic bodies promote a greater understanding of its work and facilitate opportunities new and innovative partnerships?
- success of the TRI’s in influencing public policy/discourse through demonstration of thought leadership?

### 3. Research

#### 3.1 Strategy

Reviewer opinion is sought on whether:

- the Institute has a coherent research strategy?
- the Institute represents an area of coherent research excellence within the College?
- there is a critical mass of principal investigators of acknowledged high international standing that has created visibility for the TRI beyond the participant Schools?

#### 3.2 Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Industry Engagement

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- whether the TRI is operating in an enterprise development space beyond that which would operate through a School?
- the achievement of the TRI in liaising with industry partners to create innovative solutions that raise the research and development profile of the TRI?
3.3 Research-led teaching & student development:

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- what undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral programmes are being delivered that are beyond what would be done at school level?
- how many students from the TRI progress to work in industry?
- can the TRI can track the impact of its graduates on the value of the TRI?

4. Resources:

4.1 Finance & Funding

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- evidence that the TRI has a funding strategy that prioritises a diversity of income?
- evidence that the TRI has a funding model which encourages high European engagement?
- evidence that the TRI is competing for and winning international funding as a cohesive unit rather than on an individual basis;
- how the TRI has used seed funding it receives from College and its success in generating income for the College?
- if the TRI is internationally competitive and has sufficient autonomy, adaptability/flexibility to be able to respond to opportunities that arise without jeopardising research excellence.

4.2 Staffing

Reviewer opinion is sought on if:

- staff are optimally supported to fulfil the mission of the TRI, in terms of research productivity?
- key person risks managed in terms of specific roles e.g. the Director, individual PI’s, technical and administrative staff e.g. recruitment and retention?
- staff are provided with professional development opportunities and responsibilities with respect to industry engagements, presentation opportunities at seminars and conferences?

4.3 Infrastructure

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- if is the TRI is sufficiently leveraging its infrastructure to secure international funding and attract international postgraduate and postdoctoral students?
- what proportion of successful funding is linked to enabling infrastructure, which makes the TRI more competitive?
- whether the TRI has developed sustainable models for its infrastructure?
4.4 Administration:

Reviewer opinion is sought on:

- whether the TRI has appropriate administrative and operational procedures in place to support the effective running of the Institute?
- how is the Institute perceived by internal and external stakeholders in terms of the professionalism demonstrated through their interactions?
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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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| Initiation                    | 15-12 months prior to Review | Dean of Research, Institute Director, Quality Office | Agreement to proceed with Review  
Budget discussion  
Establish Coordinating Group.  
Agree detail timeline |
| Engagement                    | 14 -10mths         | Quality Office, Coordinating Group, Selection Panel | Nominate and select External Reviewers.  
Confirm date of review  
Agree content of survey, nominees for stakeholder focus groups, timing and administration of both surveys and focus groups |
| Data collection and analysis  | 10 -4mths          | Quality Office, Coordinating Group | Identify data needs, request and source data from various systems and College units e.g. Trinity Research & Innovation, Research Support System, Trinity Access to Research Archive; Finance Services Division  
Conduct surveys and focus groups  
Analyse survey outcomes.  
Write up focus group outputs  
Write up internal SWOT analysis.  
Analyse, collate and format data/results. |
| Draft Self-Assessment Report and Review Schedule | 10-3mths          | Quality Office, Coordinating Group | Drafting SAR, circulate for review and revise drafts.  
Book rooms for onsite visit.  
Identify interview attendees for schedule, send invitations to attend. |
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<td>Submission of draft SAR &amp; schedule to QO.</td>
<td>10-3mnths</td>
<td>Coordinating Group</td>
<td>QO review and comment on SAR and draft schedule.</td>
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<td>Coordinating Group incorporate QO comments and return draft SAR to QO to send for proofreading</td>
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<td>Proofreading</td>
<td>7 wks prior to Review</td>
<td>Quality Office</td>
<td>Proofread copy of draft SAR returned to Coordinating Group to make amendments and return final SAR, appendices and schedule to QO</td>
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<td>Dissemination of SAR to External Review Team</td>
<td>6wks prior to Review</td>
<td>Quality Office</td>
<td>Review documentation and Quality Office Briefing pack sent to External Review team.</td>
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<td>Pre-Review Teleconference</td>
<td>4 wks prior to Review</td>
<td>Quality Office</td>
<td>Confirm receipt of Review documentation. Respond to questions, requests for further information and/or changes to draft schedule</td>
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<td>Finalise arrangements for onsite visit</td>
<td>3-1wk prior to Review</td>
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<td>As per General Procedures for Quality Reviews</td>
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