

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 28 May 2010

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Report of the Review of the Humanities Advanced Technology and
Information Institute (HATII), held on 26 February 2010**

Ms Helen Clegg, Clerk to the Review Panel

March 2010

Review Panel:

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| Professor Frank Coton | Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching), Convener |
| Dr Claire Warwick | University College London, External Subject Specialist |
| Mr Scott Gordon | Student Representative |
| Dr Jeremy Huggett | Department of Archaeology, Cognate Member |
| Dr Gordon Hay | Senate Assessor on Court |
| Dr Jane MacKenzie | Learning and Teaching Centre |
| Ms Helen Clegg | Senate Office (Clerk) |

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information

- 1.1.1 The Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) was formed in 1997, to bring together existing expertise in Information Communication and Technology (ICT) in the arts and humanities and cultural heritage sector. It developed from the success of ventures including the STELLA and DISH projects, and the various innovative uses of technology in existence throughout the Faculty.
- 1.1.2 The Department is part of the Faculty of Arts, and is located at 11 University Gardens, with access to two dedicated computer labs – one for use by students studying the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery programme, and one multimedia lab. It also has access to one teaching room and a range of portable equipment.
- 1.1.3 The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) had been prepared by the Acting Director of HATII and one of the Senior Lecturers. It was noted that input had been sought from staff, student representatives (both undergraduate and postgraduate), Graduate Teaching Assistants, and External Examiners. This was commended by the Panel as good practice.
- 1.1.4 The Panel met with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, the Acting Director of HATII, the Research Director of HATII, 15 members of key staff (including several contributing to teaching from outside of HATII), one probationary staff member, 4

Graduate Teaching Assistants, 7 undergraduate students and 6 postgraduate (taught) students.

1.1.5 The Department is made up of five core academic staff. It also includes two Resource Development Officers, three Honorary Research Fellows, and two visiting lecturers from the legal and museum professions. There are also seven Graduate Teaching Assistants and 14 externally-funded research staff (two of whom contribute to teaching). It was noted that, until January of this year, HATII had been operating with one less academic staff member, as the previous Director had left in January 2009. There had been a significant impact on workloads of other staff members as a result.

1.1.6 Student numbers for Session 2009-10 are as follows:

| Students | Headcount |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Level 1 | 89 |
| Level 2 | 32 |
| Level 3 | 36 |
| Honours | 74 |
| Undergraduate Total | 231 |
| Postgraduate Taught | 44 |
| Postgraduate Research* | 7 |

*(for information only - research is not covered by the Review)

1.1.7 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the Department:

- MA Joint Honours in Arts & Media Informatics and another subject from the Faculty of Arts
- MSc Information Management and Preservation
- MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery
- MSc Museum Theory and Practice

Level 1 and 2 Arts & Media Informatics courses are core to MA non-honours designated degrees in the Faculty, and HATII honours courses also contribute to these and to a number of honours degrees.

The Department also contributes to the following degree programmes offered by other departments or other institutions:

- MSc Information Technology (Lead Department – Computing Science)
- MLitt Collecting and Collections (Lead Department – History of Art)
- MLitt Decorative Arts and Design History (Lead Department – History of Art)
- MLitt Art: Politics: Transgression: 20th Century Avant-Gardes (Lead Department – History of Art)
- MLitt Art in the 19th Century: Revolution, Revival and Reform (Lead Department – History of Art)
- MLitt Making and Meaning: Approaches in Technical Art History (Lead Department – History of Art)

2. Overall aims of the Department's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan

The Self-Evaluation Report set out the overall aims of HATII's provision. The Panel was content that these aims were in line with the University's Strategic Plan, particularly the aims of providing high quality learning and teaching whilst ensuring teaching is informed by current research.

The planned restructuring of the University was considered by HATII to be a positive development, presenting a number of opportunities for shared teaching and research across the new School of Humanities. For instance, it was suggested by the Acting Director that there would be opportunities for recruiting additional PhD students within the new School structure, as this would overcome HATII's current difficulty in securing supervisors. This would consequently provide a larger pool of Graduate Teaching Assistants, who could assist with lab supervision and allow more teaching time for academic staff.

The Acting Director stated that this DPTLA review had been helpful at this time of transition, as it had allowed HATII to take stock and focus on how it wanted to develop within the new School structure. Given that the area of digital humanities was now considered essential to other disciplines, this gave HATII an opportunity to establish its place as central to the new School.

The Panel wished to know how HATII saw itself, and how students perceived it, as it did not operate as a typical academic department, neither was it solely a service department. The Acting Director believed HATII covered a variety of functions, and that it was seen neither purely as an academic or a service department. She stated that students found HATII via the prospectus, as it offered courses they were interested in studying and offered a mix of skills they would require professionally. The staff group stated that they did not consider HATII unusual, as they had seen it evolve over time. They believed students saw it as a well-structured, cohesive learning environment. The student group reported that they were unsure how to categorise HATII, but did not consider its categorisation to be particularly important given the high degree of satisfaction they experienced studying there.

3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

3.1 Aims

The aims of HATII's programmes are detailed in the associated Programme Specifications and are in line with the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Programme Specifications are publicly available through the University website. There is, at present, no relevant subject benchmark statement for Arts and Media Informatics, and HATII has compensated for this by securing ongoing communication with educators and employers within the field. The Panel consider this to be entirely appropriate.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.2.1 The Intended Learning Outcomes for programmes and courses are outlined in the Programme and Course Specifications, on Moodle, and in the Course Handbooks distributed to all students. ILOs were developed in consultation with external examiners, students and employers.

3.2.2 The Panel noted from the SER that, in addition, ILOs were discussed with students during enrolment, and were repeatedly referred to throughout the course teaching. The student groups demonstrated a full understanding of the

ILOs and it was noted that work was ongoing to make links between ILOs and assessment even more explicit. At levels 1 and 2, students were informed very specifically about what was required of them in order to achieve the ILOs. This system would be rolled out to all other levels as a matter of course.

3.2.3 The student groups reported that, in some cases, the course descriptors and ILOs did not give a true reflection of the course content. They offered an example of an undergraduate course which had contained a significant amount of programming, but this had not been clear from the descriptor. Some students stated that their course choice would have been different if more accurate information had been given. The Panel **recommends** that HATII review all of its course descriptors in order to ensure they accurately and fully reflect course content.

3.2.4 It was noted that undergraduate students particularly benefited from a high level of practical, transferable skills, and student testimonies demonstrated that these were highly valued by employers.

3.3 *Assessment, Feedback and Achievement*

Assessment Methods

3.3.1 It was stated in the SER that a wide range of assessment methods were in operation, and this was clearly the case although the Panel noted that essays and formal examinations were still the most commonly used. Generally, at undergraduate level, non-honours courses were assessed by 50% coursework and 50% examination, and honours courses were assessed by 60% coursework and 40% examination. At postgraduate level, the balance of assessment was more varied.

3.3.2 It was reported that information on the modes of assessment for each course was available on the relevant Moodle site. However, it was noted that students did not normally have access to this information in advance of enrolling on the course, and therefore could not use it to inform their course selections. The student group stated that this advance information would have been useful. Therefore, the Panel **recommends** that HATII consider providing more detailed course and assessment information at pre-enrolment stage in order to allow students to make more informed course selections.

3.3.3 Feedback was given to students on their assessed work, which took the form of online or paper comments, mark sheets and verbal feedback. Grades were returned via Moodle or personally, and students were encouraged to attend one-to-one feedback tutorials. This option tended to be taken up mostly by postgraduate and mature undergraduate students. HATII aimed to provide feedback within three weeks of the submission date, although recognised that this was not possible in all cases, due to the small staff (and, often, their other roles elsewhere). Staff stated that, where feedback could not be provided within the three week period, students would be given clear information about the delay and when they would receive feedback. However, the student groups reported they did not know what the expected turnaround time was. An issue was reported by postgraduate students relating to an assessment they had submitted before the Christmas break and which had not yet been returned. The students did not appear to have clear information about when this might be returned to them. The staff group advised that the delay had been caused by staff illness. The Panel **recommends** that for cases where it is not possible to provide feedback within three weeks, HATII issues clear, formal guidance to all students outlining the expected turnaround time for the return of assignments and

feedback. The Panel further **recommends** that HATII develop a policy for informing students when a delay to the expected feedback schedule occurs.

- 3.3.4 It was noted from the SER that there was an issue relating to a practical assessment which was submitted at the end of the teaching period. This meant returning grades and feedback prior to the examination was not usually possible. The coursework could not take place earlier in the session, due to the technical skills not being acquired early enough. HATII was in discussion with the Learning and Teaching Centre with a view to finding a solution to this problem. The Panel **recommends** that further discussion takes place with the Learning and Teaching Centre in order to resolve this issue, perhaps by front-loading the technical skills aspect of the course.
- 3.3.5 Students stated that they would like feedback on their formal examinations. Given that these were heavily weighted, and a good deal of effort went into preparing for them, students felt it would be helpful to know how well they had performed.
- 3.3.6 Where possible, anonymous marking was carried out, although this was problematic in terms of project work where staff knew which projects students were working on.
- 3.3.7 At honours level, all assessment constituting 40% or more of a course was second marked, as was all postgraduate work. A sample of the remaining work was also second marked. The Panel was concerned that this was not sustainable, particularly in the light of ambitions to increase student numbers. The panel also noted that the levels of assessment activity associated with some courses appeared to be very high. It is possible that there could be scope to reduce the volume of assessment activity through improved assessment design. The Panel therefore **recommends** that HATII give consideration to putting processes in place to reduce the amount of student work being second marked, particularly at postgraduate level and, in conjunction with appropriate Faculty staff and staff from the Learning and Teaching Centre, consider the options for reducing the volume of assessment HATII undertake.
- 3.3.8 HATII's approach to dealing with plagiarism centred on explanation and assistance at Level 1, where students were more likely to unintentionally plagiarise due to incomplete referencing rather than attempts to deceive. HATII stated it had not experienced problems of plagiarism beyond this.
- 3.3.9 Peer assessment was employed within HATII and the critical evaluation skill gained through this was considered to be crucial in terms of future employability.

3.4 *Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

Undergraduate

- 3.4.1 Given that Arts and Media Informatics is not a subject fully studied at school, the undergraduate curriculum is designed to allow progressive learning and skill development, moving from an introduction to the subject at levels 1 and 2, to a deeper understanding at honours level. HATII has noted that a large number of non-UK students take the level 1 course as a matter of interest, and that many of the UK students who continue to honours did not initially intend to do so but change their mind when exposed to the subject. Flexibility is therefore key, in order to accommodate these different backgrounds and motivations, particularly as the University of Glasgow is one of very few universities offering an undergraduate degree in Arts and Media Informatics (albeit only available as a joint honours subject at present).

- 3.4.2 There was a combination of theoretical, practical and critical skills in all undergraduate courses, with all assessed work containing an element of practical work. Whilst resource intensive, this was considered crucial in terms of employability and the acquisition of transferable skills.
- 3.4.3 An Undergraduate Teaching Review is undertaken annually, where discussions take place about course developments and comments made by External Examiners.
- 3.4.4 It was noted that, at present, Arts and Media Informatics was available only as a joint honours subject. The Acting Director stated that this was due to resourcing issues, but stated that there was a keen interest in offering a single honours route within the next few years. A number of the students in the undergraduate group met by the Panel stated that they would have studied the subject as a single honours pathway, had it been available to them. Staff agreed that the addition of a single honours pathway was an aim, but that it took a good deal of time to make a convincing case for investment in this. They recognised that potential students were being lost due to the lack of a single honours route.
- 3.4.5 Undergraduate students reported that there were a number of topics on which they would appreciate teaching – for instance, 3D animation and artificial intelligence. However, this had not been possible due to staffing constraints. They reported that staff sometimes offered assistance in these areas informally, but that formal classes would be the ideal situation. They considered these topics to be important not only for employability reasons, but also for access to further study. For example, some students expressed an interest in Masters level game design or animation, but felt their undergraduate degree did not prepare them for this sort of degree. The Panel understood the importance of these subjects to the students, and acknowledged that, with appropriate resourcing in place, such developments would be useful. However, at present, it was necessary for HATII to take a step back and consider its strategy and focus.
- 3.4.6 With regard to lab time, students reported that they received two hours of lab time per week, which they did not consider to be sufficient. They reported that it was more effective to have the two hours as a single slot, but this did not always happen. They considered that, for some courses, lecture hours could be used more effectively as lab time, although they recognised that lectures were important for particular topics. It was stated that the lab time did not necessarily need to be fully supervised, but perhaps only for part of the time. The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to increasing the amount of lab time available, with part of this being unsupervised, although it is acknowledged that, given the existing difficulties with access to labs, this may not be viable. Consideration should also be given to altering the balance between lecture and lab sessions, so that, if appropriate, some sessions might be entirely lab based rather than a lecture followed by a practical session,

Postgraduate

- 3.4.7 HATII offered three MSc programmes, two of these being introduced in 2008. These had been developed in response to identified needs within the cultural heritage sector.
- 3.4.8 It was noted that the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery programme was unusual in that, normally, such a programme would reside within Computing Science. This offered a unique selling point and allowed other HATII-based activities to be demonstrated at the same time.

3.5 Student Recruitment

- 3.5.1 The availability of Arts and Media Informatics as a joint honours subject had existed since 2003, and entry was through the Faculty entry system. Student numbers, whilst still fairly small, had increased, although there was a challenge in attracting students in first year due to the fact that the subject is not taught in schools. Staff had been working with colleagues in the Recruitment and International Office, to identify possible opportunities to increase the number of students at honours level. There had been success in retaining students from level 1 to level 2, but HATII wished to do more to attract students into level 1. It was hoped that the new School structure may help, with Arts and Media Informatics being recommended by Advisers of Study as a third subject. It was evident that students enjoyed the subject once they had discovered it. A noticeable web presence was critical, as there was known to be a limited appreciation of what the subject was.
- 3.5.2 An additional difficulty at undergraduate level was a lack of familiarity with the terms 'Arts and Media Informatics' and 'Digital Humanities'. The student group had reported that they, and many potential employers, had not been clear about what this involved. The Acting Director stated that this issue had been discussed in the past, with no satisfactory conclusion. In order to raise awareness of the programme content, and to assist with recruitment, the Panel **recommends** that the Directors of HATII meet with colleagues in Corporate Communications and the Recruitment and International Office to discuss possible alternative degree titles for the undergraduate degree.
- 3.5.3 Postgraduate numbers were also increasing, particularly for the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery which was recruiting internationally. With the appointment of a Postgraduate Administrator, there was now an opportunity to focus on postgraduate recruitment activity. One initiative currently in progress was the development of recruitment video clips, which it was hoped would positively impact on international recruitment.
- 3.5.4 With the planned increase in postgraduate numbers would come an increased workload – for example, if HATII intended to continue to offer one-to-one feedback tutorials to all students. There was concern that this level of support could not be sustained with higher student numbers. However, staff members were keen to increase PGT numbers as this in turn converted into higher research student numbers. Consideration had been given to focussing on PGT and research provision, but it had been concluded that it would be wrong not to offer undergraduate provision, as the skills taught were so essential to the graduate attributes agenda. It was hoped that the new School structure would allow honours courses to be taught cross-school, resulting in more students at undergraduate level but with the same amount of resource. Nonetheless, the Panel **recommends** that HATII give serious consideration to its long term strategy and focus so that it can continue to deliver high-quality provision in a sustainable manner.
- 3.5.5 On the subject of part-time and distance-learning provision, it was noted that there were part-time students at postgraduate level. Distance-learning, however, was not offered due to the necessary resources. This was a possible development opportunity for the future but, at present, HATII did not have the available resource.

3.6 *Student Progression, Retention and Support*

- 3.6.1 HATII had developed a strong relationship with its students, allowing flexibility, engagement with teaching and learning, and an approachable, supportive environment. Every effort was made to assist and support students, not only in times of difficulty, but throughout their studies. This allowed potential problems that might hinder progression to be picked up early. The student groups clearly valued this and stated it as one of the main strengths of HATII. It was firmly believed that HATII's small size was instrumental in this, as it had fostered a sense of identity and belonging.
- 3.6.2 Honours induction takes place at level 2, in the second semester, and detailed information is provided to assist students in selecting their honours combinations.
- 3.6.3 There is also an induction week for postgraduate students, including welcome meetings, study skills sessions and orientation sessions. Additionally, a 'boot camp' had been implemented in the current session for the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery students. This covered a variety of topics and included talks from industry professionals.

3.7 *The Quality of Learning Opportunities*

- 3.7.1 Student participants expressed great satisfaction with the quality of their learning opportunities and with HATII as a whole. They praised the enthusiasm of the staff and the GTAs, and stated that the inclusive, supportive environment greatly enhanced their studies. The Panel was satisfied that this was an accurate reflection of the general experience within HATII.
- 3.7.2 Necessarily, HATII was found to use a number of innovative teaching and learning methods, making good use of visual aids and technology. It was noted that live internet access was used in many classes as an integral part of teaching. Podcasting was also used regularly in honours classes, and students found this to be extremely valuable. The possibility of extending this to other courses was being investigated and the student groups agreed this would be helpful in addition to scheduled classes. The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to the increased use of podcasting, in addition to scheduled classes, at all levels.
- 3.7.3 The use of practical, technology-based work was considered essential within HATII, and a large range of hardware and software was available in order to help students develop their skills. Custom-built workstations had been installed for the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery students, and industry standard packages were available to students on all programmes.
- 3.7.4 It was noted that staff from other Faculties, and from outside of the University, were employed to teach on all programmes, bringing their particular expertise. These included visiting staff from the museums sector and the legal profession. It was reported that, even if HATII's own staff was larger, outside teaching would still be used as it brought a professional perspective and enhanced learning. The Panel recognised the benefits of this practice, and had no wish to discourage it. However, HATII was asked to be mindful of the fact that external staff would have competing priorities, and may not have the same degree of commitment as HATII staff. This could conceivably jeopardise the elements of the courses taught by them. The Panel **recommends** that HATII consider developing contingency plans for delivering the courses currently supported by external staff to ensure the continued sustainability of their programmes.

3.8 Resources for Learning and Teaching

Staffing Resources

- 3.8.1 Given the small size of HATII, and the resultant small number of academic staff, the Panel wished to know what challenges this presented, particularly given that HATII appeared to be providing a substantial amount of teaching. The Acting Director and the staff group recognised that workloads were high, but advised that consideration was already being given to the possibility of withdrawing from areas of activity which were not core to the work of HATII. It was stated, and demonstrated, that despite heavy workloads, staff enthusiasm was considerable and HATII's operation relied to a large extent on this enthusiasm and goodwill. Nonetheless, the Directors and staff shared a concern about workloads becoming unmanageable, whilst reporting that staff would be reluctant to give up certain aspects of their research or teaching. Enthusiasm underpinned this, and the Panel did not wish to discourage staff. However, the Panel **recommends** that serious consideration be given to curtailing non-essential activities in order that these are not available at the expense of HATII's core teaching and research activity.
- 3.8.2 The Panel noted the very heavy reliance on certain members of staff, which it considered presented a significant risk in terms of the sustainability of the courses for which those staff members were responsible. The Acting Director and the staff clearly recognised this as an issue and, whilst accepting that additional HATII staffing was highly unlikely, planned to expand the range of external staff in order to minimise risk. The Panel did not believe this was a particularly advisable course of action, for the reasons given in Paragraph 3.7.4 above.
- 3.8.3 It was noted that the probationary member of staff was largely responsible for the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery programme and brought specialist knowledge to this. He reported that, although he was undertaking the New Lecturer Teaching Programme, his very heavy workload prevented him from doing more than the minimum required to complete the programme. This conflicted with the usual University policy under which probationary staff should receive a reduced workload. The Panel was concerned about the very heavy reliance on this one staff member for the continuation of what was a very popular programme. The Acting Director agreed that this was of concern, though noted that, given the pioneering nature of this programme, there was necessarily a small number of potential staff from which to recruit. The Panel **recommends** that an appropriate level of support be provided for the probationary member of staff, in terms of his career development within the University. The Panel further **recommends** that HATII give consideration to formulating a contingency plan to ensure the continued provision of the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery programme is not placed in jeopardy.
- 3.8.4 Whilst the input of staff external to HATII (and, in some cases, to the University) was recognised and valued, the Panel considered that reliance on those staff to teach particular courses added to the issue of sustainability, as noted above. In the light of the University restructuring, it was possible that staff from other departments may undergo role changes, or be obliged to review their priorities. This could threaten the availability of the courses on which they teach.
- 3.8.5 It was noted that the previous Director of HATII had left the University in January 2009, and an Acting Director was appointed. In January 2010, the Research Director was appointed. Both had teaching responsibilities and, although the new arrangements were still in early stages, it was anticipated that each would have particular managerial roles within HATII.

- 3.8.6 The Panel noted that a number of staff members at non-teaching grades were contributing to teaching, including the Acting Director herself. The Acting Director advised that there were historical reasons for this and that, although unusual, the different staff members brought their own particular expertise and this allowed teaching to be informed in ways that would not otherwise be possible. This permitted the current range of provision. However, given the non-traditional routes many staff had taken, there was some concern that academic issues were being overlooked. Whilst there was no question about the quality of teaching and research, and the student groups were clearly very satisfied, closer attention perhaps needed to be paid to the management of academic processes. There was also a feeling that the Acting Director had not been sufficiently supported in the development of her role, and this had placed undue pressure on her. The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty provides an increased level of support not only to the Acting Director in the development of her role, but to HATII as a whole with regard to its management of academic processes. This could include mentoring by senior academic staff and the Learning and Teaching Centre, and visits to other departments to offer ideas for enhancing practice.
- 3.8.7 HATII had only recently been able to appoint a postgraduate administrative assistant, and had previously operated with little or no secretarial or administrative support. The work of the two administrative staff was clearly very much appreciated although it was acknowledged that their workloads were considerable. The centralisation of certain tasks, such as Annual Course Monitoring, overseas recruitment and examination arrangements, had helped relieve pressure on academic staff. Staff stated they would be keen to have more administrative support, but agreed the situation had vastly improved over the last year.
- 3.8.8 It was reported by the Directors and by the staff group that HATII's small size made its day to day management easier, and that there was excellent communication amongst staff. However, despite the benefits this brought, it was acknowledged that this had led to informal links becoming established, with very little in the way of formal procedures. For example, minutes of departmental meetings were vague with little demonstration of loop-closing or evidence of links between different committees. HATII staff agreed that this was the case, and reported that efforts were being made to formalise processes. Additionally, they believed processes would become more formalised with the advent of the new School structure. However, one area the Panel wished HATII to consider was the inclusion of non-HATII staff in relevant meetings. A number of those teaching on the programmes came from elsewhere in the University, or from the professional sector, and the Panel considered it vital to include them in meetings related to teaching, learning and curriculum development. Therefore, the Panel **recommends** that HATII take steps to formally include staff from outside of HATII, but who teach on its programmes, on relevant committees discussing teaching, learning and curriculum development.
- 3.8.9 It was stated in the SER that Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) played an important role in learning and teaching across all programmes, offering excellent teaching support. All GTAs undertook centrally-provided training and those met by the Panel appeared to greatly enjoy their work. They were satisfied with the level of support they received from other staff and with the feedback they received on their performance. The GTAs believed that the experience of teaching enhanced their research, despite adding to their workload. Those met by the Panel undertook varying teaching commitments, with some choosing to do significant amounts of teaching. All stated that they enjoyed preparing for and taking classes.

- 3.8.10 The GTAs had undertaken training to assist them in their roles, and they received mentoring from staff. Responsibilities varied, but some undertook marking and assisted in the review of dissertations. They considered this to be good experience without being too onerous. All stated that they felt well supported, and were never asked to take on tasks outside of their experience. They felt they were seen as approachable by students, and could offer real-world examples to demonstrate the importance of certain concepts.
- 3.8.11 It was noted that there was an available pool of research students, but these were not being utilised in teaching roles within HATII (although in some cases, they were providing teaching in other departments). It was reported that possibilities had been discussed, but due to external funding constraints, there were restrictions on the extent to which the research students could contribute.
- 3.8.12 It was evident that there was a good deal of collegiality within HATII, and staff members reported that it was a friendly, supportive environment in which hierarchy and egotism had no place. Staff took the view that teaching materials should be shared, not owned, and this allowed for a cohesive approach to teaching. External staff reported that they were always made to feel welcome and valued, although they necessarily did not experience the same feeling of inclusiveness as HATII staff.

Physical Resources

- 3.8.13 The Panel was given a short guided tour of HATII and visited its teaching rooms and labs. Whilst the labs were well equipped, it was noted that there was little teaching space within the building and that centrally booked rooms were mainly used. With the plan to increase postgraduate numbers, it was likely that the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery lab would no longer be large enough to accommodate all students on that programme.
- 3.8.14 It was noted that much of the software being used by students was not available on the standard University desktop (for example, Photoshop). This meant there were often access issues for students as they necessarily had to use HATII labs rather than library desktops. The limited opening hours of HATII labs therefore presented some difficulty, and had been under discussion within HATII for some time. The Panel **recommends** that HATII initiate discussions within the Faculty of Arts, and with the Head of Estates and Buildings, with a view to resolving the issue of access. This might involve negotiating evening and weekend access, or the installation of specific pieces of software on non-HATII computers.
- 3.8.15 The Panel noted that the Arts Support Team was placed within HATII, providing technical support across the Faculty. The Acting Director advised that this arrangement worked very well and enabled interdisciplinary research and teaching to be supported. She also stated that the staff were essential in supporting technical elements of the courses on offer, and were very highly valued. It was firmly believed that having this resource within the building offered an edge to assist HATII in operating in a highly effective manner.

4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards

Benchmark Statement and Other Relevant External Reference Points

- 4.1 It was noted in the SER that there was currently no benchmark statement for Arts and Media Informatics at undergraduate or Information Management and Preservation, Computer Forensics and E-Discovery at postgraduate level, but programme specifications were informed by SCQF level descriptors, external

consultations within the sector, and external examiners. The Panel considered this was appropriate.

External Examiners

- 4.2 It was stated that External Examiners were one of the main ways in which HATII ensured standards were maintained, through providing a means of comparison with other institutions. The range of work reviewed by them was at their discretion but, for courses with small student numbers, they might review all work.
- 4.3 External Examiners had been generally positive about HATII and its teaching, and comments made had informed course and programme developments.

5. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

Programme Enhancements

- 5.1 HATII's commitment to sector-relevant teaching was one of its main strengths, and the inclusion of a number of visiting lecturers from the professions was considered to greatly enhance the student experience. The student groups stated that they valued this highly. They also noted that industry-standard software was in use and that this was not the norm in most institutions. They therefore felt this offered a significant advantage.
- 5.2 HATII's small size had allowed it to develop a supportive, open and personalised environment. Whilst this did have workload implications, it was clearly valued greatly by the student groups. Undergraduate students undertaking the joint honours degree stated that they did not enjoy such an environment in other departments, and most stated that, had it been available, they would have been keen to study Arts and Media Informatics as a single honours programme. Postgraduate students also appreciated the level of attention given and reported that they had received excellent support since the beginning of the application process.

Personal Development Planning (PDP)

- 5.3 It was stated in the SER that HATII and the Faculty of Arts were addressing the issue of PDP. At present, honours students had an annual PDP meeting with the honours convenor. It was planned to make the development process more frequent and formal, to aid students' self-reflection.

Student Feedback Opportunities

- 5.4 It was noted in the SER that staff/student communication was encouraged and that a good deal of feedback was provided by students. However, the Panel noted that, although the Staff/Student Liaison Committee was in operation, there did not appear to be any formal mechanism for responding to student concerns raised in that forum. The student groups reported that they often did not receive feedback as to how issues raised had been dealt with. The student groups stated that, although they were aware of student representatives and the Staff/Student Liaison Committee, they were more likely to raise issues individually (and informally) with the relevant staff member. They felt comfortable proceeding in this way due to the approachable staff and the supportive environment of HATII. Staff confirmed that the majority of discussion took place informally in the classroom, but agreed this could usefully be formalised. The Panel **recommended** that a more formal mechanism for recording issues raised, and for reporting back to students any action taken, required to be implemented in order to ensure the feedback loop was complete.

Annual Course Monitoring

- 5.5 It was stated in the SER that the results of annual course monitoring, together with general student feedback, informed course and programme enhancements.
- 5.6 Although HATII did have a Teaching Committee, it did not appear to operate as effectively as it might, and did not appear to be used to discuss programme and course enhancement. The Directors and staff agreed that this was a fair assessment and reported that they were keen for this to improve. It was reported that an annual review meeting took place, but this was not minuted and the Teaching Committee minutes did not reflect any discussion. The Panel **recommends** that the remit of the Teaching Committee be reviewed in order to ensure the inclusion of enhancement, and that minutes of the Teaching Committee are taken which reflect this discussion fully and accurately.

6. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching

Key Strengths

- The approachability and enthusiasm of staff, which was reported to inspire student interest in the subject area
- The quality of support provided to students and the individual attention given, not only in times of difficulty but throughout the whole student lifecycle
- The commitment to employability and the inclusion of a large practical element to all courses and programmes, demonstrating academic and professional engagement
- The innovative learning and teaching methods in use

Areas to be Improved or Enhanced

- The reliance on a very small staff and, in one case, one staff member, for the continuity of courses and programmes
- The tendency towards providing teaching for a growing number of courses, programmes and students, despite being already overstretched
- The management of academic processes and the formalisation of procedures

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Panel was impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff and GTA groups, and with the focus on employability and practical work. With both staff and students citing it as a strength, the small size of HATII appeared to be of great benefit, allowing for a more personalised approach as well as a varied, if heavy, workload for staff. The student groups were articulate and enthusiastic, and were a credit to HATII.

HATII demonstrated a number of strengths, as well as an awareness of the areas requiring improvement. The most substantive of these are reflected in the recommendations that follow.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. They have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer, and are not ranked in any particular order.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Recommendation 1

The Panel **recommends** that HATII review all of its course descriptors in order to ensure they accurately and fully reflect course content [*Paragraph 3.2.3*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Assessment

Recommendation 2

The Panel **recommends** that HATII consider providing more detailed course and assessment information at pre-enrolment stage in order to allow students to make more informed course selections [*Paragraph 3.3.2*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 3

The Panel **recommends** that for cases where it is not possible to provide feedback within three weeks, HATII issues clear, formal guidance to all students outlining the expected turnaround time for the return of assignments and feedback. The Panel further **recommends** that HATII develop a policy for informing students when a delay to the expected feedback schedule occurs. [*Paragraph 3.3.3*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 4

The Panel **recommends** that further discussion takes place with the Learning and Teaching Centre in order to resolve the issue relating to the technical assessment, perhaps by front-loading the technical skills aspect of the course [*Paragraph 3.3.4*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII; Director of Learning & Teaching Centre**

Recommendation 5

The Panel therefore **recommends** that HATII give consideration to putting processes in place to reduce the amount of student work being second marked, particularly at postgraduate level and, in conjunction with appropriate Faculty staff and staff from the Learning and Teaching Centre, consider the options for reducing the volume of assessment HATII undertake. [*Paragraph 3.3.7*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching),
Director of Learning and Teaching Centre**

Curriculum Design, Development and Content

Recommendation 6

The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to increasing the amount of lab time available to undergraduate students, with part of this being unsupervised, although it is acknowledged that, given the existing difficulties with access to labs, this may not be viable. Consideration should also be given to altering the balance between lecture and lab sessions,

so that, if appropriate, some sessions might be entirely lab based rather than a lecture followed by a practical session, [Paragraph 3.4.6].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Student Recruitment

Recommendation 7

In order to raise awareness of the programme content, and to assist with recruitment, the Panel **recommends** that the Directors of HATII meet with colleagues in Corporate Communications and the Recruitment and International Office to discuss possible alternative degree titles for the undergraduate degree [Paragraph 3.5.2].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII; Director of Corporate Communications; Director of Recruitment & International Office**

Recommendation 8

The Panel **recommends** that HATII give serious consideration to its long term strategy and focus so that it can continue to deliver high-quality provision in a sustainable manner. [Paragraph 3.5.4].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII; Dean of Faculty of Arts**

The Quality of Learning Opportunities

Recommendation 9

The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to the increased use of podcasting, in addition to scheduled classes, at all levels [Paragraph 3.7.2]

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 10

The Panel **recommends** that HATII consider developing contingency plans for delivering the courses currently supported by external staff to ensure the continued sustainability of their programmes [Paragraph 3.7.4].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Resources for Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 11

The Panel **recommends** that serious consideration be given to curtailing non-essential activities in order that these are not available at the expense of HATII's core teaching and research activity [Paragraph 3.8.1].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 12

The Panel **recommends** that an appropriate level of support be provided for the probationary member of staff, in terms of his career development within the University. The Panel further **recommends** that HATII give consideration to formulating a contingency plan to ensure the continued provision of the MSc Computer Forensics and E-Discovery programme is not placed in jeopardy [Paragraph 3.8.3].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 13

The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty provides an increased level of support not only to the Acting Director in the development of her role, but to HATII as a whole with regard to its management of academic processes. This could include mentoring by senior academic staff and the Learning and Teaching Centre, and visits to other departments to offer ideas for enhancing practice [*Paragraph 3.8.6*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII; Dean of Faculty of Arts**

Recommendation 14

The Panel **recommends** that HATII take steps to formally include staff from outside of HATII, but who teach on its programmes, on relevant committees discussing teaching, learning and curriculum development [*Paragraph 3.8.8*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 15

The Panel **recommends** that HATII initiate discussions within the Faculty of Arts, and with the Head of Estates and Buildings, with a view to resolving the issue of computer lab access. This might involve negotiating evening and weekend access, or the installation of specific pieces of software on non-HATII computers [*Paragraph 3.8.14*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII; Dead of Faculty of Arts; Director of Estates & Buildings**

Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

Recommendation 16

The Panel **recommended** that a more formal mechanism for recording issues raised by students, and for reporting back to students any action taken, required to be implemented in order to ensure the feedback loop was complete [*Paragraph 5.4*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**

Recommendation 17

The Panel **recommends** that the remit of the Teaching Committee be reviewed in order to ensure the inclusion of enhancement, and that minutes of the Teaching Committee are taken which reflect this discussion fully and accurately [*Paragraph 5.6*].

For the attention of: **Directors of HATII**