



Professor David Watt
Convener, Academic Standards Committee
University of Glasgow

10 October 2010

Dear David,

DPTLA Review of Mathematics — Further Responses to the Recommendations

I am responding on behalf of the School of Mathematics & Statistics following the restructuring of the University and the merger of the former Departments of Mathematics and Statistics, which has involved a change in the senior management of the School. Before replying in detail, I would like to point out that the performance of all teaching staff is monitored through student questionnaires, and there is no evidence for colleagues being perceived as ‘unpopular’.

Recommendation 2

The previous response is withdrawn and replaced by:

The Mathematics Learning and Teaching Committee has reviewed student demand for all Level 3 and Level 4 courses. Teaching efficiencies have been achieved by retiring several courses with consistently low numbers, whilst preserving an invigorating student experiences via a portfolio of optional courses in Pure and Applied Mathematics, together with several carefully selected interest courses such as Financial Mathematics and Probability that attract students independent of specialism.

Recommendation 7

Prior to teaching in the School of Mathematics & Statistics, all GTAs are required to participate in a training programme administered by the L&T Centre. In response to the DPTLA review, the Convenor of Learning and Teaching has directed all staff using GTAs for tutorial work to provide regular and constructive feedback on their performance. In particular, the performance of GTAs at Level 1 is monitored on an individual basis via student questionnaires. The School is investigating setting up a GTA forum and will ask the newly-formed College Graduate School for guidance.

Recommendation 8

The School has reverted to small group tutorials at Level 1 as recommended in the DPTLA review. Excluding Engineering students, there are approximately 40 such groups each with approximately 15 students. Many of these take place at the Level 1 Mathematics hour of 11am and run concur-

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rently with two large Level 2 classes. The School has considered the possibility of extending its small tutorial provision to Level 2. Several factors come into play. First, there is the shortage of suitable accommodation already flagged in the previous response to the DPTLA panel. Second, there is a limitation on the number of personnel the School can deploy at 11am in addition to those engaged in Level 1 small group tutorials. By contrast with the teaching at Level 1, a complication at Level 2 is that many tutorials require specialised knowledge that is less easily managed within the framework of small group tutorials using a mixture of staff and GTAs. Therefore accommodation issues aside, the School took the view that the mathematical education of Level 1 students would benefit from small group tutorials, but on balance, that Level 2 students would enjoy a superior educational advantage from a larger group tutorial in which they are guaranteed access to experienced staff who are knowledgeable in the specialised discipline of the tutorial.

Recommendation 11

The previous response is withdrawn and replaced by:

The Mathematics Learning and Teaching Committee carefully considered other ways to support students in their studies beyond that which is available through tutorial classes. The discussion focussed on two important points, namely the diverse nature of the material taught by the School in its programmes and the fact that lecturers usually give two courses per semester. The outcome of this discussion was that office hours ordinarily provide the most efficient mechanism to deliver the spectrum of specialist help required by students, noting that the availability of office hours does not exclude the provision of help at other mutually convenient times, e.g. as might be arranged by email.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Nicholas A. Hill
Head of the School of Mathematics & Statistics