

## University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee – Monday 22 November 2010

## Updated Responses to the Recommendations Arising from the Review of Mathematics held on 12 and 13 February 2009

Ms Fiona Dick, Senate Office

At the meeting held on 28 May 2010, Academic Standards Committee received the update on progress with recommendations from the above review held in February 2009 and noted that these had been reviewed by the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) in the absence of the Panel Convener who had retired. While the Vice Principal was satisfied that the majority of the recommendations had been given full and appropriate consideration, there was discussion surrounding a number of issues.

Firstly, in respect of both recommendations 2 and 11, ASC noted the Department's comments regarding the teaching staff on unpopular courses, and members were concerned that teaching differences could be allowed to hold back enhancement of learning, teaching and student support. The Committee agreed that the Department should undertake a further review of the issues raised in recommendations 2 and 11.

Secondly, it was noted that the issue of founding a GTA forum (recommendation 7) had not been addressed by the Head of Department, and that the Dean's response suggested that this would best be dealt with at School level. ASC agreed that the Department should provide an update on this matter.

Thirdly, it was noted that the Department had not been able to run small group tutorials in Level 2 due to a lack of small group tutorial rooms (recommendation 8). ASC agreed that this matter should be referred to the Director of Estates & Buildings for a response on the accommodation situation.

The Department of Mathematics that was the subject of this review has undergone significant change following the restructuring of the University including a change in the senior management of the School. The Head of School asks that ASC bears this in mind when considering the updated responses provided here. He has also requested that his letter to Professor Watt be provided to the Committee [See [Annex A](#)].

The updated responses are provided below:

*Recommendation 2*

The Panel **recommends** monitoring student demand and closure of consistently unpopular Level 3 and 4 courses. (Paragraph 4.4.2)

**For the attention of: The Head of Department**

### ***Updated Response – November 2010***

The previous response is withdrawn and replaced by: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***

The Panel **recommends** that GTAs are offered staff review of and feedback on their teaching performance and more specific feedback from their students. In addition the Panel **recommends** that the Department, possibly in conjunction with the Faculty, considers founding a GTA forum to assist in their training and development as teachers (Paragraph 4.3.6)

**For the attention of: The Head of Department and the Dean**

#### ***Response – Head of Department***

The Convener of the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee contacted all staff for whom GTAs are involved in tutorial work, indicating that regular feedback, positive as well as negative, be given to our GTAs. He will review this at the end of the current session to see whether the new system is working satisfactorily, or whether yet more guidance and feedback is required.

#### ***Response – Dean***

Student feedback from the Tutoring and Demonstrating sessions held with new PhD student (in addition to the L&T centre course) have suggested having students involved more in their training, e.g.as mentors, or even just a being available for question and answer sessions.

Not sure a fully fledged faculty forum would be very successful (teaching gets very subject specific), but general involvement of 2nd/3rd/4th year students at the start of generic skills training is feasible at Faculty/College level. After this it is thought that the recommendations is best dealt with at School level.

### ***Updated Response – November 2010***

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 Panel **recommends** that the Department reverts to small group tutorials at Levels 1 and 2, with one tutor per group per semester in Session 2009-10. (Paragraph 4.6.9)

**For the attention of: The Head of Department**

### ***Response:***

The Department has reverted to small group tutorials at Level 1, as far as possible. It was not possible to hold small group tutorials at Level 2. In both cases, the difficulties were caused by Central Room Bookings, who could not provide us with sufficient small group tutorial rooms at the times when our students were available to attend.

### ***Additional Response – Estates & Buildings – November 2010***

There is a particular difficulty in accommodating Mathematic tutorials in small seminar or tutorial spaces. The dominating factor which Mathematics view as essential to their teaching whether large lecture theatres or small tutorial rooms is the adequacy of writing boards, preferably blackboards but white boards will be acceptable (outwith the Mathematics building) if both quality and quantity are good enough. However, in the vast majority of cases the width of the teaching wall determines the quantity or otherwise of blackboards. In addition there is a tendency for black/white boards to be eased out by the provision of new equipment in some upgraded spaces. Some clarification is therefore needed as to the exact facility required for tutorial teaching. E&B note that there are 2 large teaching spaces within the Maths building which might be flexibly adapted for smaller group teaching, depending upon actual school class sizes.

### ***Updated Response – November 2010 – Head of School***

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 concurrently 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 agreed 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 Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews the present uptake by students of open office hours and other advisory and support mechanisms with a view to streamlining the

opportunities for students to consult staff in order to maximise potential benefit to students and economy of staff time. (Paragraph 4.6.8)

**For the attention of: The Head of Department**

***Updated Response – November 2010***

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.