

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 25 May 2012

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to Recommendations Arising from the Report of the Review of the School of Psychology held on 25 February 2011

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Recommendations

A number of recommendations had been made, many of which concern areas that the School had itself highlighted for further development prior to the review or in the SER.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are listed in the order of appearance in this report.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that the School reflect on its schedules for the submission of assessed work, with particular focus on Level 3 semester 2, and consider how best to support students in managing the associated workload. [*para 3.3.5*]

For the attention of: **Head of School****Response:**

Our teaching management group has looked again at the deadlines for submission of assessed work and paid particular attention to LV3 semester 2. We have discussed this on a number of occasions at our Teaching Management Group (which includes two undergraduate representatives), and also with LV3 and LV4 students at the Staff Student meetings (SSMs) held in the autumn of 2011. At that time the current LV3 student reps indicated that the class would favour submission dates which allowed independence and flexibility in workload planning, and did not favour pulling ahead the submission date of either the Miniproject or Critical Review. It was determined (by discussions with the class reps at SSMs) that a calendar clearly indicating hand in dates and feedback opportunities would aid students to better manage the associated workload. This has been prepared, is being used in the current session and will be re-evaluated at the end of the academic year. Further, staff responsible for the Professional Skills training in Honours emphasise the importance of developing and demonstrating independence in managing workload as a core element in building the employability skills that are in demand by future employers and postgraduate training courses.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommends that the School compile a guide explaining the various forms of assessment feedback, indicating when such feedback should be provided. The Panel also recommends that, using the guide as a springboard for on-going discussion with students, the School investigate what other forms of feedback would be most helpful and laying out clearly to staff and students expectations about the nature of feedback that should be provided and in what time frame. [*para 3.3.13*]

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

In response to the recommendation regarding assessment feedback, the School has compiled a Feedback calendar for levels 1-3 that is circulated to both students and staff. This includes information for each piece of coursework regarding when the feedback will be available, which category of staff member provides the feedback (e.g. tutors, lecturers etc.), whether the feedback is in the nature of generic or individual comments, and whether the delivery of the feedback is written or oral. In addition, notes are included on the feedback calendar to remind students of the importance of feedback for learning - that feedback is only of use if it is read, digested and acted on by the student; and that the feedback may encompass a wider definition than students may have previously considered (e.g. feedback can come from tutorials and informal discussions with tutors and peers). In addition, the L3 feedback calendar incorporates information regarding how the feedback given also feeds forward too, thus highlights to students that feedback on a previous piece of work should be kept and re-read for subsequent pieces of work, in order to be of maximum utility for the student.

In addition, new procedures for providing feedback have been implemented and piloted this year in Levels 3 and 4. In Level 3, these include a new interactive-lecture style feedback session for the Level 3 class exam. This is an exam put on entirely for formative purposes, and feedback was strengthened this year by providing a whole class session after marking for markers to give general feedback and to engage in face to face dialogue about it (the element most often missing in feedback provision), whereby the markers provide generic feedback by commenting on different aspects that would have contributed to a good answer to each question, as well as any common problems. Also, a few staff members also piloted a new L3 class exam feedback sheet highlighting for each individual answer what specific aspects were good and which could be improved regarding the key general learning outcomes of knowledge and comprehension of the topic, and the quality of the essay as a communication that answers the question asked.

For the first empirical project in L3, students this year were able to post questions to staff on a forum about the different aspect of the process, including the write-up. This allowed staff to deal with student concerns before the submission deadline. A new feedback form was introduced for this year too, whereby staff provide comments to students on the basis of the two key assessment criteria, in terms of what was good in how they met these and what could be improved for next time. All coursework feedback to L3 students is also offered in relation to an Advanced Academic Writing Skills VLE, that offers detailed generic help with common areas of difficulty for students, such as critical thinking and report writing. The generally high standard of student writing means that these are lightly used, but equally provide a mechanism for addressing any problems a tutor observes.

In Level 4, a new self-evaluation form has been developed for the Critical Review, whereby students evaluate their own CR in light of the assessment criteria, both throughout the process and overall when they have finished the CR. The marker then provided feedback on the work based on student's comments on the self-evaluation form. This student-centred approach was introduced to deepen students' understanding of the assessment criteria; to encourage students to learn to reflect on their own performance more generally; and to set up a feedback dialogue between staff and student about the Critical Review.

Finally, a new L4 maxi project process feedback sheet is also being piloted this year. This form provides feedback to the students regarding areas that are commonly asked about by potential employers, i.e. things that staff are often asked to write about in references, so that students have time to work on these before moving into the job market. Thus, students are offered given feedback about their strengths and areas for

improvement regarding their academic abilities (e.g. critical thinking), personal organisation (e.g. time management; forward planning of work) and personal qualities (communication/teamwork skills; level of autonomy) etc.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel recommends that the School continue to monitor the proportion of A grades being awarded at Levels 1 and 2, and as part of this monitoring, reflect further on the local grade descriptors and assessment weightings. *[para 3.3.18]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

Our proportion of A grades at Level 1 and 2 has continued to increase, as indicated by our External Examiner, Dr Kevin Paterson at our Exam Board meeting. This was reported to our Teaching Management Group and noted that it now took us in line with other Russell Group University statistics. We will continue to monitor this comparative figure in the future.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommends that the Subject Management Group work with staff in the School to develop a clear vision for the future of the Psychology curriculum that recognises the core competencies and emerging themes within the discipline and capitalises on the breadth provided through the linkages between the School and the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. *[para 3.4.4]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

As a subject we have worked over the past academic session to update our provision to reflect the core competencies and emerging themes within Psychology. To this end we have recruited new Neuroscience Institute staff into teaching at both Level 4 and postgraduate, as well as taken advice on core changes to the curriculum at the lower levels. This has included increasing the contribution from Clinical Staff into our training as well as completely reframing our practical provision over the four years of the undergraduate training to take full advantage of our staff expertise in research methods in Psychology. Finally, we have established a joint degree with Neuroscience and Psychology. These changes greatly strengthen our current provision, and place us in an excellent position going forward in training our students in the most cutting edge aspects of the subject.

Recommendation 5

While commending the richness of the optional courses available at Level 4, the Panel recommends that the School consider carefully the balance of benefits and costs to establish the optimum number and range of options. *[para 3.4.11]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

We have carefully evaluated our Level 4 options and refined the offering. In 2011/12 we offered 21 options from our previous list of 31. We have removed some options with very low take up by students, and also worked to consolidate and reframe others

to dovetail student interests and well as staff expertise. This has allowed increased efficiency in our provision.

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommends that the School explore the possibility of expanding the range of Joint Honours programmes, particularly in light of the developing role of the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. [para 3.4.13]

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

The subject offers a wide variety of joint degrees (54). On the recommendation of the panel, we are working to increase this beginning with a joint degree in Neuroscience and Psychology will be offered to students from autumn 2012. Additionally, we are investigating the possibility of other offerings, including a non-accredited option which would release students from the accreditation requirements which have hindered some joint degree pairings in the past.

Recommendation 7

Within the context of limitations placed on the School by British Psychological Society requirements, the Panel recommends that the School investigate options for enhancing the opportunities for study abroad. [para 3.4.16]

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

In response to the new BPS regulations regarding studying abroad as part of an accredited programme, we have worked hard to develop a working 'formula' of what students should study in their third year overseas and upon their return to Glasgow in their fourth year that meet both these external regulations and the School regulations for progression into L4. To this end we have 7 students studying away this academic year, including our first Erasmus exchange student, and at least 6 students who have been accepted for international exchange for the next academic year - this was out of a total of 7 applications from eligible students (the remaining student was offered a place, although since this was not at her first choice of university she declined), thus, all applicants who were eligible were offered an exchange place. Although the Erasmus deadline has not yet passed, it is likely that this will be the case for Erasmus too, that all applicants who are eligible will be offered an exchange place.

Additionally, staff from the school have made visits to several respected Psychology programs abroad (including Universitas 21 partner, University of Connecticut) to facilitate program planning and BPS approval of programs offered abroad. The number of Erasmus exchange partners with which we have a workable agreement is also likely to increase this year to include other universities that are in the top 200 in the world.

Finally, we have also been developing opportunities for our students who may prefer not to complete a portion of their degree program abroad to still nonetheless have a relevant overseas experience. Two such opportunities are in the form of course – related work experience placements, in collaboration with the British Academy's IAESTE programme, and the ERASMUS mobility programme. Thus, we are aiming to send successful students away on both these summer internships for the first time this summer. In addition, we have been liaising with the GU students' Psychology Society to arrange a Student Exchange programme for a group of around 25 people for 7-10 days next summer, where we organise a programme of academic events for a group

of visiting European students here, and then our students are hosted by these students in Europe for a similar programme of events.

Recommendation 8

While recognising that the School has a number of effective means of initiating and responding to student feedback, the Panel recommends that, for clarity, the School ensure that issues raised at staff-student liaison committee meetings are reported on at subsequent meetings. *[para 5.4]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response

Tutors from each level have been informed of this recommendation, and the practice has been taken on board this academic year. Additionally, we have instituted additional meetings for student reps and Class tutor at Honours levels. Individual students also raise issues with the class tutors, particularly at levels 1 and 2. When these are received, the response is sent to the class in order to disseminate the information to the whole cohort.

The minutes of all the staff-student liaison committees are now posted on the School's VLE and will over time develop in to visible archive. This makes sure that students can see the concerns of past students. Also the representatives are provided with a copy of the minutes to post on the Social Network site that they use for consultation.

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends that staff use the excellent reports from Levels 3, 4 and M to inform the approach adopted in Level 1 and 2 annual monitoring reports in the future. *[para 5.5]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

Response:

This has been done, and the Teaching Management Group and Quality Officer from the School and the College has reviewed the annual monitoring reports from Levels 1 and 2 and have incorporated additional material to insure that the reflective practice evident from the course team is adequately reflected in the documentation.