

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**Academic Standards Committee - Summer Powers**

**Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of Economics**

**Held on 19th-20th March 2015**

**Mr Daniel Chandler, Clerk to the Review Panel**

**Review Panel:**

Professor Neal Juster	Senior Vice-Principal & Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Convener)
Professor Nick Bailey	Urban Studies (Cognate Reviewer)
Dr Michael McEwan	Learning & Teaching Centre
Professor Gavin Reid	Head of Dundee Business School, Abertay University (External Reviewer)
Mr Hugh Roberts	SRC Postgraduate Student Representative (Student Reviewer)
Dr Donald Spaeth	Senate Assessor
Mr Daniel Chandler	Senate Office (Clerk)

Observer: Mrs Catherine Omand (Senate Office)

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The Subject of Economics, within the Adam Smith Business School (ASBS) in the College of Social Sciences, has undergone major structural changes since its last review (DPTLA) in 2008. The then Department of Economics became one of three inter-disciplinary subject groups within the ASBS. Economics retained its two distinct postgraduate teaching centres (now re-labelled 'consortia'): the Consortium for Economic & Financial Studies (CEFS), focussing on applications in finance and the Consortium for Development Studies (CDS), focussing on growth and development. PGT programmes in CEFS have a strong professional focus and recruit in relatively large numbers, bringing in significant income to the College and University.

1.2 Since the last review, the Subject has also undergone a rapid increase in student numbers, especially at PGT level; predominantly international students from China. The PSR Panel noted that the Subject had also recruited a highly internationalised body of staff. Staff recruitment in the period running up to the 2014-15 Research Excellence Framework (REF), had weighted research excellence but post-REF, greater emphasis would be placed on staff teaching activity. Within the general research themes of the Subject (Macro- and Micro Economics, Financial Economics and Applied Economics) optional taught courses reflected the individual research interests of staff.

1.3 The effects of these structural changes, rapid expansion in numbers and the diversity in staff and student profiles were key general themes which the Panel wished to explore. The Panel recognised that the Subject and School had plans to address these challenges.

1.4. The Panel regarded the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) as highly detailed, well-presented and including honest self-reflection in some key areas, especially in relation to low NSS satisfaction scores and remedial strategies being adopted at Subject and School level. The Panel praised the level of staff involvement in the preparation of the SER (noting the dedicated 'away day') although the Panel received no strong impression from the students interviewed that there had been an equal level of student consultation on the document.

1.5 The Panel met with the Head of School and Head of Subject; 15 members of academic and support staff; 3 probationary staff; 3 adjunct staff and 10 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). In addition, the Panel met with 7 undergraduate students and 3 postgraduate taught (PGT) students. The Panel was disappointed that it was unable to meet with a larger number of PGT students, given the unusually large size of the PGT cohort within the Subject.

## 2. Background information

### 2.1 Student and staff Numbers

Academic staff	44 (42.75 FTE)
Adjunct staff	45
GTAs	33
Support staff (Subject dedicated)	6 (5 FTE)
UG students	440.5 FTE <sup>1</sup>
PGT students	419 (419 FTE)

### 2.2 Range of Provision

#### *Undergraduate*

MA (Social Sciences) Economics, Single Honours  
 MA (Social Sciences) Business Economics, Single Honours  
 MA (Social Sciences), MA, BSc, BAAcc, LLB Economics, Joint Honours  
 MA (Social Sciences), LLB Business Economics, Joint Honours  
 MA Economics with a subsidiary language, Principal Honours (being phased out)

#### *Postgraduate Taught*

CEFS:

MSc Asset Pricing and Investment  
 MSc Banking & Financial Services  
 MSc Finance & Management (joint with Management)  
 MSc Financial Economics  
 MSc Financial Forecasting & Investment

<sup>1</sup> Does not include exchange students and service taught Engineering students

MSc Financial Risk Management  
MSc International Trade & Finance  
MSc Investment Banking & Finance  
MSc Investment Fund Management  
MSc Quantitative Finance

CDS:

MSc International Banking & Finance  
MSc International Development  
MSc International Finance & Economic Policy  
MSc Economic Development  
MSc Economics, Banking & Finance  
MSc Environment & Sustainable Development  
MSc Finance & Economic Development  
MSc Development Studies

### **3. Context and Strategy**

#### *3.1 Context and Vision*

3.1.1 The Head of School and Head of Subject conveyed to the Panel the overall vision and strategy for the Subject, indicating an awareness of the major challenges presently faced (see 1.3). The Head of School acknowledged the very high student-staff ratio, resulting from the expansion in student numbers and he explained that, post-REF, in the next recruitment phase, there would be a greater emphasis on teaching experience to redress the balance with research. This was seen as part of the underlying basis of the acknowledged, poor NSS overall satisfaction results. There was a drive to recruit non-professorial, younger staff, on university teaching contracts. On a connected point, it was clarified that a new Work Load Model (WLM), to become effective in 2015-16, had been devised which would reduce the amount of credit for publications by staff, adjusting the high ratio of research hours to teaching hours in the WLM the Panel had seen in the advance information.

The Panel **commends** the Subject/School's understanding of the need to balance research and teaching, exemplified by its recent review of the Work Load Model and its current recruitment strategy.

The Panel **commends** the promotion of Economics within the ASBS as a strong brand and its success in attracting excellent researchers and teachers in the field.

3.1.2 The Head of School also reported that he planned to forge further corporate links (including Scottish Government bodies as well as financial companies) to ultimately bring greater real world aspects into the taught programmes.

3.1.3 The issue of the sustainability of the large Chinese PGT market was discussed in detail. Related to this was the issue of the poor integration of a mono-cultural cohort. The Head of School described how the Subject was largely constrained by Recruitment & International Office (RIO) strategy and the articulation of Glasgow International College (GIC) students who were predominantly Chinese. The School had, however, introduced

mechanisms to recruit non-Chinese applicants (e.g. using 'no-show' admissions deposits to fund scholarships for students outside China). The School had also been negotiating with GIC to accept more students from other South East Asian countries. The School, itself, was developing its own collaborative links (mainly in research) in other countries as a long term recruitment strategy.

3.1.4 Whilst the Panel recognised these measures, it noted that the recruitment situation would not change radically in the short term. The Panel felt that a large mono-cultural group in the cohort of students in combination with a highly diverse international group of staff, could lead to a lack of mutual understanding, both in academic expectations and approaches to teaching. The Panel therefore recommended additional measures to support students and staff to improve the relationship (see 3.2.3).

3.1.5 The Head of School also highlighted the configuration of the Estate, in particular the Gilbert Scott building, as a major challenge to student and staff interaction (see 4.5.3). The lack of a common space as a source of dissatisfaction was also raised by UG students. The Panel was aware of University plans to redesign space in the Gilbert Scott and saw this as an opportunity for the Subject/School to benefit.

The Panel **recommends** that the School and Subject engage in the future re-design of the Gilbert Scott building to create interactive, social space for its students and staff.

### *3.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching*

3.2.1 The Head of Subject explained that the Teaching and Learning Forum was an opportunity for staff to share good practice and raise teaching issues with colleagues. Team building sessions with staff had also been instigated. Whilst the Panel praised these initiatives, it noted from the meeting with key staff and probationary staff, that the role of the Teaching and Learning Forum was unclear. As the Forum appeared to be a School initiative, it was unclear to the Panel how many staff attended and thus how far this influenced the sharing of good practice within the Subject.

3.2.2 The Panel noted, generally, that whilst the diverse backgrounds of teaching staff were a strength for the Subject, it could also lead to a tendency for diverse practices in the delivery of the curriculum and varying expectations on students. The Panel had a strong impression that this variability led to dissatisfaction, particularly from UG students. An example was cited of variation in tutorial delivery, with some staff providing solutions to problems and others not. This variation was also mentioned by the GTAs and by the students themselves, in relation to how tutorials were delivered.

3.2.3 The Panel did not see this as a problem with academic standards but more an issue of communication between staff and students, sharing of practice and supporting staff in the delivery rather than the content of courses.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject provides additional guidance and support for staff with a view to achieving greater consistency in delivery and also considers developing a clearer central policy for how teaching is delivered across the curriculum. Where variation in delivery exists for valid pedagogical reasons, staff should justify this to the Head of Subject and the reasons for variation in teaching delivery should be clearly explained to students.

## 4. Enhancing the Student Experience

### 4.1 Admissions, Retention and Success

4.1.1 The Panel found no causes for concern with the Subject's ability to recruit high calibre students. UG and PGT students both expressed the view that the ASBS was a popular choice, with a strong brand and they would recommend it to prospective students. The very good retention levels were also noted by the Panel.

4.1.2 The Panel acknowledged the recruitment measures being taken by the School to bring in international students from countries other than China and the School/Subject's awareness of the long term risks in reliance on a single, overseas market (see 3.1.3).

### 4.2 Equality and Diversity

4.2.1 The Panel noted the strong international diversity in the staff but regarded this as both a strength and possible area for concern (see 3.2.2). The Panel noted from the School documentation the gender imbalance in staffing but did not have time to explore this theme during the review.

### 4.3 Supporting Students in their Learning

#### 4.3.1 Support mechanisms

4.3.2 The Panel felt assured that there was an awareness of the specific support needs of the international cohort including those students coming via the Glasgow International College (GIC) route. The UG students interviewed spoke highly of the support provided by administrative staff in the School and Subject.

The Panel **commends** the support provided by the School/Subject administrative staff and the initiatives to support the international student body including the work of the College international student officer and Mandarin-speaking Mental Health Officer.

### 4.4 Student Engagement

4.4.1 The Panel was impressed by the undergraduate students it met with and their informed and articulate comments.

### 4.5 Effectiveness of Feedback mechanisms

4.5.1 The Head of Subject confirmed that there was an active Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and class representation system in operation. Issues arising from SSLCs were brought to the attention of the UG Learning & Teaching Committee but it was unclear how often the 'loop was closed' by the Subject/School. The UG students acknowledged that there was generally a lack of interest in class representation within the student body, except in unusual cases affecting whole classes. A particular case of unusually poor cohort performance in the Economics 2A course last year was cited but the Panel were informed that this had been dealt with by curriculum readjustment (see 5.2).

4.5.2 The Panel was impressed by a number of student-led initiatives, in particular the GU Economics Forum. Whilst it was confirmed that the School had backed this financially, there was some disappointment among the students at the low attendance by Economics staff.

The Panel **recommends** that the staff engage more with student-led initiatives, building on the networks students have developed themselves as a mechanism to enhance the cohesiveness of the Subject as a community.

4.5.3 In general, the UG students suggested that access to staff outside formal teaching could be improved and there appeared to be variation between courses and years of study. Whilst the students cited the fragmented accommodation of the Gilbert Scott building as a factor, there was a view that the attitudes of some staff also played a part, including variable use of Moodle to advertise office hours. The Panel noted from the SER, that the Subject suggested the condition and layout of their accommodation was the main cause of difficulties and the vagaries in student access to staff but the Panel concluded from discussions with the UG students, that staff attitudes in some cases were a more underlying cause. PGT students indicated to the Panel that they sometimes felt apprehensive in approaching senior staff, although the Panel acknowledged a potential cultural basis to this.

In the view of the Panel, the teaching staff in general could take a more proactive lead in engaging with students outside of formal, scheduled contact time, rather than simply creating the opportunity for students to attend during office hours. The Head of Subject should consider ways to support and help staff effect this change.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject review office hours in general and how these are communicated to students and take measures to improve staff – student engagement outside of formal contact time. This should be achieved by helping staff in general to take a more proactive lead in engaging with students outside of formal teaching.

#### *4.6 Graduate Attributes / Employability*

4.6.1 The discussions with students and staff indicated an apparent lack of knowledge about graduate attributes (GAs) in the curriculum or some confusion about the difference between GAs and work-based learning opportunities. Some UG students were aware of GAs in the Honours year only. UG students reported that some staff did talk about GAs but most students found the courses largely theoretical in the early years and the applied areas in Honours were geared mainly to investment banking. There was generally a view amongst the UG students that their courses were too theoretical and lacked real world application (see 5.1).

4.6.2 There appeared to be a concern from staff that since a substantial amount of theory had to be taught at Years 1 and 2, there was little room in the curriculum to add GA related learning (and other more applied elements) without increasing contact hours; a worry given the large class sizes in Years 1 and 2. The Panel suggested, however, that there was scope for more embedded 'soft skills' in the curriculum which would not necessarily increase the overall teaching and assessment burden for staff.

4.6.3 The Panel noted, however, that the students reported in positive terms the work of Dr Dickon Copsey, the College Employability Officer, to promote employability.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers revising the curriculum to add more GAs in terms of 'soft skills' (e.g. presentation skills and group work).

#### *4.7 Internationalisation*

4.7.1 The Panel did not investigate study abroad but noted from the SER that there were study abroad opportunities offered by the Subject.

## **5. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching**

### *5.1 Curriculum Design*

5.1.1 The Panel praised the recent initiatives to review the curriculum and ILOs. The Panel was assured that there was a regular review process via the usual University QA processes (e.g. Annual Monitoring; use of feedback from External Examiner reports) and student feedback from SSLCs and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Panel also noted the range of staff participation in Sector developments in the teaching of Economics (e.g. membership of the Economics Network and consultation with leaders in the field such as UCL).

5.1.2 The Panel noted two clear themes from the students: a desire to have more applied examples in the mainly theoretical early years of the UG programme and a more heterodox approach to Economics in the curriculum. The Panel discussed this at the meeting with the staff but acknowledged that the Sector currently dictated the more theoretical approach to the subject and heterodoxy in Economics research was now not REF returnable. The Panel was at least reassured that the Subject was aware of this tension and had engaged in the Sector debate on bringing case-studies into undergraduate teaching.

### *5.2 Mathematics in the curriculum*

5.2.1 The Panel discussed mathematics in the curriculum in detail as it had an impact on more than one area of the review. The UG students suggested that international students arrived with a more advanced grounding in mathematics and they suggested that the early part of the course was 'too easy'. In contrast, other (mainly UK) students, were challenged by the mathematics and some seemed to have been surprised by the extent of the mathematical content. This dichotomy was reaffirmed in discussion with the overseas GTAs about their students.

5.2.2 The Subject stressed to the Panel the central importance of mathematics to the discipline. It was considered essential to provide a firm grounding before Honours. In contrast, the Panel noted that UG and PG students expressed surprise at the importance of mathematics, since it was not required for admission. The Panel was pleased to acknowledge that the Subject had addressed this issue by moving the Mathematics for Economics course into Year 1 and creating tailored tutor groups based on ability, although this was in response to a significant poor cohort performance and notable adjustment of marks. The Panel were also unclear what extra mathematics support had been offered to the cohort moving from 1B to 2A before the mathematics course had been moved to 1B. Moreover, it was not clear how the Subject would support the mathematics skills of students entering in Year 2.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers a longer term strategy in relation to mathematics in the UG degree programme and its recruitment of, in particular, Home students (e.g. should Higher/ A level mathematics be required for admission?). The Subject should also communicate to prospective students better, the mathematical demands of its programmes.

### *5.3 Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching*

5.3.1 The Panel noted the Subject's efforts to engage in learning technologies, summarised in the SER. The School Teleform project was highlighted as good practice, as was the online feedback on examinations and coursework, via Moodle, although the Panel felt that this needed to be expanded from only Honours and PGT courses to gather its true worth.

5.3.2 The Panel concluded, however, that the use of technologies was more confined to highly engaged staff rather than widely used. It was not clear if all staff used Moodle. Comments from UG students suggested that the extent and effectiveness of Moodle use was inconsistent and some attributed excellent Moodle course sites to the work of administrative staff rather than the academic staff. The evidence provided by a single Honours student did not support the view that Teleform feedback provided any enhancement to learning. Whilst the Panel praised the development of Teleform, it noted that the system facilitated but did not guarantee good feedback and the Subject should continue to enhance its application.

5.3.3 The Panel was pleased to hear from PGT students that they had not experienced problems accessing the Bloomberg terminals, clearly a valuable and popular resource. Generally, students had no concerns about access to IT resources.

The Panel **commends** the acquisition of the Bloomberg terminals as an important ancillary resource for students.

The Panel **recommends** that staff more widely engage in new learning and assessment technologies. All staff should use Moodle and where necessary, take ownership of those sites. In the longer term, the Subject should investigate learning technology as one avenue for dealing with large student numbers (for example, online formative assessments and Peer to Peer assessment; reportedly suggested by the SSLC). These investigations may even lead to a 'blended' learning approach in the future.

### *5.4 Assessment and Feedback*

5.4.1 The Panel wished to explore a perceived lack of variation in assessment methods and an over-reliance on traditional examinations. The Panel had noted External Examiner comments to this effect, corroborated by the views expressed by some students.

5.4.2 There appeared to be reluctance by staff to introduce greater coursework assessment due to concerns about plagiarism and extra workload, especially in the very large UG classes in Years 1 and 2. The Panel noted some innovations in this area, such as the 'briefing notes' style of essay which was much harder to produce from plagiarised sources.

5.4.3 In the Panel's view, there was still scope for the introduction of more innovative assessment. This could be in part, formative and use online resources such as Moodle to avoid increasing staff workload. The Panel also suggested a review of the balance of assessment across a student's full degree programme.

5.4.4 The Panel acknowledged the Subject's concern over low satisfaction on assessment feedback in the NSS and welcomed its remedial initiatives (e.g. the Teleform project, see above). It was acknowledged that the Subject was facing the challenge in this respect, of large student numbers in the UG programme. The Panel clarified with the Head of Subject



that there was a feedback turnaround policy of two weeks for small courses and 3-4 weeks for large courses. Moreover, at PGT level, all feedback was scrutinised by the programme convener before release.

5.4.5 Comments from students indicated to the Panel that these times were not always met. These comments were not fully explained by the two known cases last year, reported by the Head of Subject, where feedback was delayed by individual Staff sickness or personal reasons. A feedback delay of a month was reported on a PGT course by one student who felt this was too long.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject ensures that its policy on timing of feedback is consistently met across its provision. The Subject should also review the use of Teleform to ascertain how far this system is improving the quality of feedback generally. The Subject should fully engage with the external LEAF Project<sup>2</sup> in this respect.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject introduces greater variation in assessment and reduces the reliance on traditional examinations. Greater use of learning technology should be explored as a means to introducing more innovative assessments. The Subject should also map individual students' experiences of assessment across the years of the UG programme and review where variation in assessment needs to be placed in the individual student's 'journey' through the programme.

## *5.5. Engaging and Supporting Staff*

### *5.5.1 Probationer and early career support*

5.5.2 The probationary staff who met with the Panel generally reported that they were well supported by the Subject and provided with advice and information about School and University processes. They reported that the UG Programmes Manager was particularly supportive on non-academic matters. The group also reported that they had found the PG Certificate in Academic Practice very useful. It was confirmed that the probationers were fully involved in Subject and programme meetings, discussions on Learning and Teaching matters and sharing good practice. The Head of Subject informed the Panel that all new staff were provided with mentors, matched to their research interests but the Panel did not have time to discuss this area with the probationary staff.

5.5.3 The Panel was impressed by the enthusiasm of the newer staff and their engagement with Learning and Teaching matters (e.g. the attendance at the Teaching & Learning conference in Maastricht) and ideas for innovation. The probationary staff highlighted the challenge of teaching large class sizes of students from diverse backgrounds. They did not suggest that the Subject had provided them specifically with guidance on teaching large classes.

5.5.4 The probationers informed the Panel that they were satisfied with their workloads. The balance between teaching and research was appropriate and the administrative burden was kept light to allow them time to settle in.

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<sup>2</sup> Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback

### *5.5.5 Support and training for GTAs / Adjunct Staff*

#### *GTAs*

5.5.6 The Panel noted the unusually large number of GTAs employed to deliver tutorials (at Sub-Honours; Honours and PGT levels) and recognised that their training and support would therefore have a key impact on the student experience. The general view of the GTAs was that staff were largely supportive but there was variation between individual staff, the amount of detail provided about the tutorial material and the structure of the courses. There was some disquiet about a lack of guidance on the general aims of tutorials. It was confirmed that all GTAs underwent the University's basic training, although they found this of little use, being generic, and valued external courses (e.g. one provided by the Economics Network) and informal sharing of practice amongst the GTAs themselves, as this was subject specific. The GTAs confirmed that they were paid for office hours and had the freedom to schedule these themselves. They also confirmed that they were supported in marking assessments with sample marking reviewed at 'markers meetings' with staff.

5.5.7 The GTAs felt that their workload only became an issue with regards to the time allocated for tutorial preparation, responding to student email queries and marking and feedback, which was inadequate, leaving them often to do more hours than they were paid for.

5.5.8 The Panel was impressed by the commitment of the GTAs it met with and valued their clear views on their students' learning and academic progress. There was a view amongst the GTAs that the Subject did not push the UG students hard enough and that some UG students did find the course too easy. The Panel had noted this view in relation to the diversity in mathematical skills but these comments appeared to be about the UG programme generally, at least in the pre-Honours years.

5.5.9 The students generally spoke highly of the GTAs' teaching and the PGT students valued the knowledge of those GTAs who had taken the same degrees at Glasgow before their PhDs.

The Panel **commends** the commitment of the GTAs.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages GTAs more in the internal Subject discussions. It should also review GTAs' workload and time allocated to marking, specifically to ascertain if inadequate time to produce feedback is contributing to low student satisfaction on timing and/or quality of feedback.

#### *Adjunct Staff*

5.5.10 The Panel met with three adjunct staff, each of whom had a different profile and was employed in a different role, ranging from mainly PGT/UG dissertation supervision to running their own self-contained courses. In the Panel's view, these staff members were confident and committed and had the required levels of support and communication with the Subject. Beyond this the Panel could draw no conclusions but it did not see any areas for concern in this area.

## *5.6 Resources for Learning and Teaching*

5.6.1 The Panel explored dissertation supervision as a key resource issue. The Panel considered the heavy workload and necessity of using external staff to supervise a large proportion of dissertations and its possible impact on the student experience.

5.6.2 The Head of Subject and the staff informed the Panel that the Subject had moved dissertation supervision to the permanent staff (each supervising 12 projects). The PGT Dissertation Co-ordinator, however, suggested that nearly half of PGT dissertations were externally supervised. In this and subsequent discussions, the Panel was not clear how many dissertations had been or were to be supervised internally, whether they were PGT or UG and how the Subject was defining an 'external' supervisor.

It was later clarified by the Head of Subject that the cap on the maximum number of PGT dissertations allocated to one individual staff member had been raised from 6 (in 2013/14) to 12 (in 2014/15). The effect of this in 2014/15 was that about 50% of dissertations were internally supervised. The higher numbers indicated by the Head of Subject were projecting to 2015/16, when the full changes in the new WLM would come into effect, and a reduction of research hours would mean that most staff members would supervise 12 students.

The Panel felt that the Subject needed to review this further to get on top of the issue and should consider more radical solutions in the longer term, given that student numbers were unlikely to decrease and even with changes to the WLM, some significant reliance on external supervision would be necessary. The Panel suggested that the Subject could explore other forms of independent study, group projects, greater commonality of topics offered or even the removal of the dissertation (Sector academic requirements accepted).

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject reviews dissertation supervision to fully understand the resource requirements and the amount of external supervision that will be required and its possible effects on the student experience. In the longer term, more innovative ideas should be considered to alleviate the labour intensive nature of traditional dissertation supervision, including consideration of alternative types of independent study where academically possible.

## **6. Academic Standards**

6.1 The Panel was assured by the documentation submitted by the Subject and School that all expected QA processes were in operation to maintain and review academic standards. The standards and appropriateness of the syllabus and learning outcomes were confirmed and reinforced by the Subject's successful PSRB accreditations. The Panel were also assured that the expected feedback mechanisms were in place, including action on External Examiner reports.

## **7. Summary of perceived strengths and areas for improvement**

### *7.1 Key strengths*

- The maintenance of a strong reputation in research and teaching within the equally strong brand of the Adam Smith Business School and the ability to attract high calibre staff and students

- A research-informed curriculum and staff engagement with the Sector debate on the future direction of Economics education
- A sensitivity to the support needs of the international student cohort and highly committed administrative staff in the School and Subject
- A diverse body of staff bringing international experience into the Subject
- Committed and hardworking ancillary teaching staff (GTAs and adjunct staff)
- A good range of PGT provision, reflective of the Market and backed up with valuable professional accreditation

## *7.2 Areas for improvement*

- More consistency across the delivery of teaching and greater communication to students about the reasons for diversity in practice across courses and tutorials.
- Consideration of more applied 'real world' examples in the UG curriculum where academically possible.
- Consideration of greater variation in assessment in the curriculum and further work on assessment feedback, building on the introduction of Teleform.
- A greater use of e-learning in the curriculum, beyond Moodle, and an increase in the number of staff involved in innovative practice.
- The need for a longer term strategy to deal with the heavy workload associated with dissertation supervision.
- The need to foster a greater sense of community between different groups of students and between students and staff.
- The need for better communication of the mathematical demands of programmes to potential applicants.

## **8. Conclusion**

8.1 It was clear to the Panel that the Subject and School were making efforts to provide excellent teaching and student support, faced with the challenge of a very high student to staff ratio and specific issues relating to a large mono-cultural / linguistic cohort at PGT level. The School and Subject were beginning to show a greater commitment to teaching, post-REF, through its revised Work Load Model and recruitment strategy. The unusual but necessarily high reliance on ancillary teaching (by GTAs and adjunct staff) proved not to be an area of weakness, with the Panel impressed by the commitment of the staff interviewed and the good feedback from students. External dissertation supervision was seen as an exception here and it was felt that there was more work to do to review this and reduce reliance on external staff.

8.2 The international character of the Subject (both in terms of staff and students) was seen as both a strength and a potential weakness. Whilst this brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Subject, there was a need to ensure a greater level of consistency across teaching delivery and assessment practice, especially at undergraduate level.

8.3 Related to this was a need to create a more integrated 'community' in the Subject through greater staff involvement in student-led networks and initiatives. The limiting factor of social/interactive space, however, mainly beyond the control of the Subject and School, was acknowledged by the Panel.

8.4 The Panel concluded that the PGT provision was very good in range and content and reputationally strong in the international market. There was an impression, however, that some undergraduate students had differing expectations about their programmes to those of the Subject and staff. The Subject had clearly responded to the issue of mathematics in the curriculum but beyond this, the Panel believed that there was more scope to vary the curriculum and assessment methods and staff were overly hesitant about academic and logistical constraints. In this respect, innovative use of e-Learning technology as a response to dealing with large class sizes could be further explored by the Subject.

### **Commendations**

- 1) The Panel **commends** the School/Subject's understanding of the need to balance research and teaching, exemplified by its recent review of the Work Load Model and its current recruitment strategy (para. 3.1.1).
- 2) The Panel **commends** the promotion of Economics within the ASBS was a strong brand and its success in attracting excellent researchers and teachers in the field (para. 3.1.1).
- 3) The Panel **commends** the support provided by the School/Subject administrative staff and the initiatives to support the international student body including the work of the College International Student Officer and Mandarin-speaking Mental Health Officer (para. 4.3.2).
- 4) The Panel **commends** the acquisition of the Bloomberg terminals as an important ancillary resource for students (para. 5.3.3).
- 5) The Panel **commends** the commitment of the GTAs (para. 5.5.9).

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations should be taken forward by the Head of Subject and should be noted by the Head of School, for information. Recommendation 11, however, would be more appropriately led by the Head of School.

- 1) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject provides additional guidance and support for staff with a view to achieving greater consistency in delivery and also considers developing a clearer central policy for how teaching is delivered across the curriculum. Where variation in delivery exists for valid pedagogical reasons, staff should justify this to the Head of Subject and the reasons for variation in teaching delivery should be clearly explained to students (para. 3.2.3).
- 2) The Panel **recommends** that the staff engage more with student-led initiatives, building on the networks students have developed themselves as a mechanism to enhance the cohesiveness for the Subject as a community (para. 4.5.2).
- 3) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers revising the curriculum to add more Graduate Attributes in terms of 'soft skills' (e.g. presentation skills and group work) (para. 4.6.2).

4) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers a longer term strategy in relation to mathematics in the UG degree programme and its recruitment of, in particular, Home students (e.g. should Higher/ A level mathematics be required for admission?). The Subject should also communicate to prospective students better, the mathematical demands of its programmes (para. 5.2.2).

5) The Panel **recommends** that staff more widely engage in new learning and assessment technologies. All staff should use Moodle and where necessary, take ownership of those sites. In the longer term, the Subject should investigate learning technology as one avenue for dealing with large student numbers (for example, online formative assessments and Peer to Peer assessment; reportedly suggested by the SSLC). These investigations may even lead to a 'blended' learning approach in the future (para. 5.3.3).

6) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject ensures that its policy on timing of feedback is consistently met across its provision. The Subject should also review the use of Teleform to ascertain how far this system is improving the quality of feedback generally. The Subject should fully engage with the external LEAF Project in this respect (para. 5.4.5).

7) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject reviews office hours in general and how these are communicated to students and take measures to improve staff – student engagement outside of formal contact time. This should be achieved by helping staff in general to take a more proactive lead in engaging with students outside of formal teaching (para. 4.5.3).

8) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject introduces greater variation in assessment and reduces the reliance on traditional examinations. Greater use of learning technology should be explored as means to introducing more innovative assessments. The Subject should also map individual students' experiences of assessment across the years of the UG programme and review where variation in assessment needs to be placed in the individual student's 'journey' through the programme (para. 5.4.5).

9) The Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages GTAs more in the internal Subject discussions. It should also review GTAs' workload and time allocated to marking, specifically to ascertain if inadequate time to produce feedback is contributing to low student satisfaction on timing and/or quality of feedback (para. 5.5.9).

10) The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject reviews dissertation supervision to fully understand the resource requirements and the amount of external supervision that will be required and its possible effects on the student experience. In the longer term, more innovative ideas should be considered to alleviate the labour intensive nature of traditional dissertation supervision, including consideration of alternative types of independent study where academically possible (para. 5.6.2).

11) The Panel **recommends** that the School and Subject engage in the future re-design of the Gilbert Scott building to create interactive space for its students and Staff (para. 3.1.5).