**DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS**

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

**RESPONSE TO PANEL REPORT of November 2008**

The members of Physics staff thank the committee for the diligent way in which the review was conducted and for the areas of teaching that were commended. This response will focus on the recommendations of the committee. Please note the recommendations are in italics and these are addressed in plain text underneath.

*3. RECOMMENDATIONS*

*SCHOOL/ DEPARTMENTAL ORGANISATION*

*3.1 the Department should look to appoint a named person responsible for accreditation and quality assurance to ensure continuity and consistency of standards. [4.2]*

It is agreed that this responsibility should be clarified. It has been decided that one person should not have sole responsibility for this but that it should be shared by the Head of Teaching and the Deputy Head of Teaching.

* 1. *the discussion of departmental issues at the Staff Committee should be formally minuted and the minutes published on the departmental website. [4.2]*

This will be done from now on. Though we reserve the right to redact the minutes where issues requiring a degree of secrecy (for example examination questions), confidentiality (for example concerning discussions of issues relating to named individual staff or students) or any other material which might reasonably be regarded as sensitive is involved.

* 1. *SCEF returns should be discussed by the Staff Committee. [4.3]*

This has been agreed and will be done from now on.

* 1. *elected student representatives should be considered for membership of the Staff Committee. [4.3]*

This has not been agreed because it is felt that a number of items at the staff committee meetings cannot be discussed in front of students e.g. examination questions, issues concerning individual students, issues concerning individual members of staff and even some more fun issues such as the student projects for Braemar where a degree of surprise adds to the enjoyment and spontaneity of the experience.

* 1. *SSLC minutes should be published on the departmental website. [4.4]*

This will be done from now on, though we reserve the right to redact items if they can reasonably be deemed to be offensive, or infringe the rights or confidentiality of any individual.

*COURSE AND PROGRAMME DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY AND APPROVAL*

*3.6 programme and course development and design should be undertaken in a formal committee setting with minutes being published on the departmental website. [5.3]*

Programme and course development may be considered by groups of staff as appropriate. However, changes etc./results of deliberations will be presented at a staff committee meeting where they will be minuted.

*3.7 Department review the balance between theoretical and experimental work available for students with a view to increasing the proportion of laboratory work. [5.4]*

This balance between practical and theoretical work will need to be reviewed in light of IOP accreditation. This will also be raised at the forthcoming Staff Student Liaison committee meetings.

*TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT*

*3.8 while the Panel was impressed with the content of the Physics website, they recommended that its appearance should be updated and that the content be reviewed regularly. [6.1]*

This is currently being reviewed and a new website should be complete for the new term starting September 2009.

*3.9 during the Panel’s visit, students highlighted their wish for more written assessments at all levels of their degree programmes to prepare them better for tackling level 4 projects. The Panel recommended that the Department address the issue by reviewing course content to try to include more written assessments at earlier stages.[6.4]*

This topic will be raised with all staff and will be a topic for the next staff meeting.

*3.10 due to the success of the Braemar weekend, it was recommended that the Department review the possibility of offering a similar event to first and second year students. [6.5]*

This will be considered at the next staff meeting.

*COURSE AND PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW*

*3.11 the department should aim to increase and enhance the amount of student feedback gained through implementing a range of strategies to aid the return SCEF forms from students. [7.1]*

The staff would be pleased to try and implement this if the panel would share information on the strategies that they are suggesting.

*ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND THE ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE*

*3.12 it was clear during the Panel’s visit that some members of the Department were not familiar with the contents of the Academic Quality Handbook. It was therefore strongly recommended that all academic staff, including bought-in teaching staff, should become familiar with the guidance published by the University in the Handbook (*[*www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality*](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality)*). [8.1]*

All staff have been informed of the Academic Quality Handbook and its purpose.

*3.13 while the use of curriculum mapping was undoubtedly a useful tool in tracking the development of themes and skills throughout a degree, it was felt that it could be usefully redrafted to make it more accessible to students [8.3]*

This will be reconsidered for accreditation purposes. Following this a student friendly version will be made available.

*TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF RESEARCH STUDENTS*

*3.14 that a social space should be provided so that Physics research students could readily meet each other [9.1]*

This is difficult to achieve because Physics research students have a number of different “home” departments. The Physics department has now moved to Meston and there is social space for both staff and research students.

*3.15 the Department should ensure that all research students are made aware of courses offered by the Scottish Universities Physics Alliance and are provided with the necessary facilities to take such courses. [9.2]*

The Head of Physics (Research) will ensure that information is made available to research students and the department will endeavour to have the appropriate facilities available.

*PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY*

*3.16 there appeared to be little awareness of or enthusiasm towards personal development plans amongst undergraduate students. While postgraduate research students were aware of PDPs their involvement with them was slight. It was felt that the Department consider advertising PDPs more widely amongst students to ensure that they are aware of the scheme and the facilities which it offers. [10.1]*

PDPs are mentioned to all students in 1st year as well as in the 3rd year careers course. The Department will seek advice on how more information can be passed to students and what procedures are applied elsewhere within the School.

* 1. *while the Panel recognised that the Department aims to highlight student awareness of employability skills through courses such as PX3011 Research Skills in Physics and PX4006 Project A, it recommended that the Department increase its coverage of employability skills. [10.2]*

The department will ask for a careers representative or other university expert on employability to address a staff meeting. The department will also investigate how employability skills are covered in other Physics departments.

*3.18 the Department should re-establish links with employers in order to inform course and programme design in a way which will benefit students’ employability. [10.2]*

This will be considered at the next staff meeting.

*STAFF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

*3.19 it was recognised that it may be difficult for part-time staff to attend training events because of the need to maintain teaching schedules and because of timetabling issues. However, the the Department should do its utmost to ensure that part-time staff are supported and encouraged to attend appropriate training. [12.1]*

The department will encourage staff to take appropriate training wherever appropriate.

*3.20 the Department’s policy of assigning a mentor to each newly-appointed member of academic staff should be implemented promptly after their arrival at the University. [12.3]*

The department agrees to carry this out.

*PUBLIC INFORMATION/ MANAGEMENT INFORMATION*

*3.21 the Department should look to implement a document management system to include, but not limited to, minutes of all meetings such as the Teaching Committee and the SSLC. [14.2]*

Discussions are underway with administrative support in the School Office to facilitate this.

*3.22 while the Department confirmed in the SED that it does not currently monitor student retention and progression by gender or by ethnic origin, it was felt that they do so in order to enhance their already impressive oversight of student progress. [14.3]*

This could potentially be done but would require guidance on how this could be implemented. However, the small numbers in Physics will lack statistical power in drawing conclusions from these data.

*STUDENT SUPPORT, RETENTION AND PROGRESSION*

*3.23 while the provision of personal tutoring sessions was viewed as impressive, it appeared that student awareness of this pilot scheme was minimal. The Department should take steps to increase student awareness of these supportive tutorials. [15.1]*

It has become clear that these sessions need to be timetabled. This will not be possible in the forthcoming academic year but we aim to include this when first year is reorganised following curriculum review.

*3.24 the Department should review mathematics provision for physics students at levels 1 and 2, especially with regard to PX2014 Dynamical Phenomena, and the rescheduling of Advanced Calculus, as student feedback strongly indicated that its having been moved to the second half session was unhelpful. [15.2]*

A meeting with colleagues from maths will be sought to look into this.

*3.25 with the University’s overall non-continuation rate being at 10%, and the School of Natural and Computing Science being 14.9%, the Department is encouraged to review possible strategies to reduce the Physics non-continuation rate of 16.2%. [15.3]*

We will aim to continue our development of personal tutoring and also investigate more thoroughly the reasons why students leave the university. Alterations to the first year courses commensurate with the restructuring of the first year courses to eight courses (curriculum reform) should also assist in this endeavour.

*3.26 the employment of Level 4 students as demonstrators is an effective and useful way of providing students with experience and employability skills. Both the Department and students alike would benefit from increased awareness and an extension of this initiative. [15.5]*

The department agrees with this point and will endeavour to extend it where appropriate.

Norval Strachan on behalf of Physics staff (1st July 2009).