**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

SUMMARY REPORT

This summary is extracted from the full report on the internal teaching review of the School of Social Science following the panel’s visit on 24 and 25 March 2009. It includes the panel’s overall impressions of the provision, a record of the panel’s commendations and recommendations and a list of the programmes the panel recommended to ASC to be revalidated.

**1. Overall Impressions**

It was evident the School operates very much as an overarching administrative structure, yet Departments within it retain some administrative independence together with academic autonomy. The panel felt that the School has yet to reap the synergies that a fully integrated School can bring. To this end, the panel **recommended** that the School seek to introduce mechanisms by which inter-departmental discussion and the sharing of good practice could be more strategically addressed.

***Response:*** *The School is strongly committed to maintaining the integrity of its three constituent Departments. The benefits of doing so are clearly spelled out in our SED (section 22). First, it is because our courses are designed, delivered, monitored and assessed by Departmental colleagues who are experts in their disciplines, know each other’s research interests, and share in teaching the same students that we can both maintain confidence in their high quality and embed our teaching in a research-led context. Secondly, the primary affiliation of students to Departments encourages them to develop a strong sense of disciplinary identity and belonging to an intellectual community, which in turn delivers benefits in terms of retention. In its concern to emphasise the advantages of the School structure, the ITR Report has glossed over the very significant disadvantages that would flow from any concomitant weakening of Departmentality. The School indeed does, and of course will continue, to ensure the sharing of good practice between its constituent parts.*

The panel further **recommended** that the School and its constituent departments review and revise committee structures to ensure that committee remits were stated and clearly understood, and to include greater elected student representation on the committees.

***Response:*** *As stated in the SED (section 4.2), the dual, cross-cutting structure of Departments (covering all areas of responsibility) and specific School committees (covering all Departments) ensures that the School is integrated organically at all levels of functioning rather than hierarchically from the top down, and that it operates overall as a community of colleagues. This structure works well, at once maintaining the integrity of Departments, with its concomitant benefits (see above), and providing mechanisms for inter-Departmental strategic dialogue. Though we will take steps to clarify the structure and ensure that remits are stated and clearly understood, we see no grounds for its radical overhaul.*

*We will include student representatives in School and Departmental committees where appropriate (see below, 3.7).*

The panel noted that there had been a high turnover of staff in the School, particularly within Politics and International Relations in recent years, leading to high, and unequal, staff:student ratios across the School. The panel further noted the disproportionate number of male to female staff, particularly at more senior levels. The panel was assured that the School were aware of the imbalances and hope that steps to address these problems can be made more clearly a priority.

It was evident that the School’s disciplines aimed, with considerable success, to provide an environment for learning which was engaging, academically rigorous, and rooted in traditional pedagogic values. The School engaged significantly with research-led teaching particularly throughout Honours level courses. The panel were particularly impressed with the structured development of the programmes from Levels 1 – 4 and also from undergraduate to postgraduate taught programmes within the School.

The panel were also impressed with a significant number of recent developments within individual departments aimed to enhance the quality of the learning experience of their students.

The panel did however feel that there was scope for greater engagement with institutional-wide enhancement priorities and activities within the School and suggested that that the School seek to make themselves more aware of opportunities to engage with learning and teaching enhancement activities both internally and externally.

The panel were impressed with the friendly and supportive attitude of administrative staff towards students, a view confirmed by feedback from a number of students who were interviewed. It was evident from the panel visit that the School’s secretariat work extremely well and the panel were impressed with their collective approach to the day-to-day running of administrative duties.

**2. Commendable features**

(Note: numbers in brackets e.g. [3.3] refer to the relevant paragraph of the panel’s full report.)

With regard to the School of Social Science’s provision, the panel commended:

***Range of Provision***

2.1 The School’s excellent range of provision with respect to choice of degree programmes at undergraduate level and selection of courses to support the programmes, including in particular the recent changes made to Level 1 and Level 2 of the undergraduate programmes in Sociology. [1.3]

2.2 The clear and structured development from Levels 1 – 4 of the programmes within the School. [1.4]

2.3 The specialised concentration of Northern Studies in the Department of Anthropology particularly given the related concentrations of interest in this area in the School as a whole. [1.8]

***Aims of Provision***

2.4 The research-led teaching conducted throughout the School’s Honours courses (Levels 3 and 4). [2.2]

***Staffing***

2.5 The administrative staff for their cohesive nature and collective approach to the day-to-day running of administrative duties/tasks. [3.4]

2.6 The bi-weekly meetings conducted by the School administrative staff which helped to ensure knowledge transfer across the Departments and the split between the ‘School’ tasks and ‘Department’ tasks which displayed flexibility and appropriateness within the team. [3.5]

***Teaching, learning and assessment***

2.7 The School’s clear commitment to small group teaching, with maximum tutorial class sizes of 13 in Levels 1 and 2. [6.3]

2.8 The School’s ‘Good Writing Guides’ for each Department. [6.4]

* 1. The Department of Politics and International Relations pilot internship at the Scottish Parliament. [6.6]

2.10 The Department of Anthropology on the introduction of the ‘Library Pathfinder’ assessment, in which students are required to complete a piece of course assessment requiring them to learn how to find their way around the Library and use its resources and databases correctly. [6.7]

2.11 The Department of Politics and International Relations for holding a dissertation-writing workshop for MSc International Relations to address English language concerns of international students. [6.13]

***Course and programme monitoring and review***

2.12 The School for its work with the Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) initiative to redesign page 2 of the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF). [7.6]

***Training and supervision of research students***

2.13 The Department of Sociology for ensuring each postgraduate research student (from Year 2 onwards) is interviewed by their Supervisor once every half-session. [9.1]

2.14 The Department of Anthropology for their annual weekend retreat with fellow postgraduate research students from the University of St Andrews (Joint Postgraduate Training Workshop). [9.3]

2.15 The staff-initiated and supported peer-led writing workshops for postgraduate research students in Anthropology, which were highly valued by the students. [9.4]

2.16 The School for bringing externality to the process of PgR student monitoring and advice by involving other staff in addition to each student’s Supervisor(s) in the six-monthly review of each student’s progress. [9.6]

2.17 The Department of Anthropology for maintaining regular contact and monitoring of postgraduate research students undertaking long-term fieldwork in the UK and in other countries and also for easing their integration back into the University community when they return. [9.8]

***Student support, retention and progression***

2.18 The efforts made by the School to date to improve the Induction experience of new entrants to the School, particularly at undergraduate level. [15.7]

2.19 The ‘Virtual Buddies’ online pre-sessional support tool for students which had been piloted within the School in September 2007. [15.8]

2.20 The Department of Politics and International Relations use of online quizzes and introduction of ‘Lifeboat’ sessions which aim to identify and help students who may be experiencing difficulties in grasping areas/topics/lectures, before such difficulties lead to more serious problems. [15.12]

2.21 The School for their efforts to ease the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study which includes each Department holding meetings to all interested Level 4 (and Level 3) students to discuss and provide information about possible postgraduate study. [15.13]

2.22 The introduction of annual prizes in each Department to motivate and reward the most successful students. [15.14]

2.23 The Advisers of Study for their commitment to the needs of the students, which was clearly valued by students. [15.15]

2.24 The willingness of the School administrative staff to participate regularly, although informally, in pastoral care of students. [15.16]

***Recruitment access and widening participation***

2.25 The School’s organisation of, and participation in, the annual Higher Modern Studies Conference for 5th year pupils from schools in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. [16.1]

2.26 The continual provision of the Professional Development Day (run in conjunction with the University’s Continuing Professional Development Service) for Modern Studies school teachers across Scotland. [16.2]

***Quality enhancement and good practice***

2.27 The School for all areas highlighted as good practice across the Departments including:

* the support offered by the Department of Sociology for their Senior Single Honours Sociology students with respect to their dissertation work by holding a ‘mini conference’ in which they present draft papers and receive peer feedback prior to final submission,
* extensive use by the Department of Politics and International Relations of guest lecturers including prominent Scottish and European parliamentarians and civil servants for undergraduate students,
* the introduction of the ‘Library Pathfinder’ assessment by the Department of Anthropology. [19.1]

**3. Recommendations**

(Note: numbers in brackets e.g. [3.3] refer to the relevant paragraph of the panel’s full report.)

With regard to the School of Social Science’s provision, the panel recommended:

***Range of Provision***

3.1 The School review course choice availability for all courses for students at Levels 3 and 4 especially for those on joint Honours programmes. [1.5]

***Response:*** *Course choices at Honours levels 3 and 4 are kept under continual review. At level 3, however, course choices are deliberately limited in order to ensure that all students are provided with the essential theoretical, methodological and substantive pre-requisites for research-led inquiry (SED 2.2). This is consistent with the clear structure of progression which is commended in the ITR report (see above, 2.2). At level 4, we aim to provide a wider range of options. The range is limited by staff availability, however, particularly in light of the importance of ensuring that staff have the time, through leave and other arrangements, to pursue their research.*

3.2 The School review the current procedures for capping and allocating places on Honours courses. [1.7]

***Response****: Presently, the caps set on class sizes at Level 4 differ between Departments, depending on the number of students taking their respective programmes, and based on previous years’ experience (thus Sociology courses are capped at 20 and Anthropology at 16). We apply these limits flexibly. Students choose their options using a web-based system. All students are sent an email to inform them of the date (in term-time) when the system will be live, and they are given two weeks to register their choices. This system was introduced since it is fairer and more accurate than date-stamping paper forms submitted to the office. It is hard to see what fairer system could be devised. If a course is full, then students are reallocated on the basis of their stated preferences. In the event that a student has a pressing reason to join a course that is already full (for example, because of its special relevance to their dissertation topic), they may request permission from the Head of Department and the course-coordinator to join the class. This has never been refused.*

3.3 The School make a formal commitment to maintain the Centre for Gender Studies and to support the Centre’s staff in the medium to long term as well as reinstating the undergraduate Gender Studies programme as soon as is practicable. [1.10]

***Response****: The following passage is excerpted from the School of Social Science Operational Plan for 2009-2012:*

*“A particular dilemma concerns Gender Studies. Following a decision taken in 2006, the undergraduate programme in Gender Studies is currently being phased out, and the final cohort will graduate in summer 2010. We aim to build an alternative programme at the MSc level, and a proposal for a new MSc in Sex/Humans/Bodies was submitted in autumn 2008, for commencement in autumn 2009. If successful, the programme could form the core of a new Centre for Gender Studies. The report of the Internal Teaching Review noted the withdrawal of the undergraduate Gender Studies programme with regret, and has recommended not only that the School should make a medium to long term commitment to support the Centre’s staff, but also that it should reinstate the undergraduate Gender Studies programme as soon as is practicable. It will be a challenge to implement these twin recommendations during a period of financial stringency, and at a time when there is strong student demand in other areas.”*

***School organisation***

3.4 The School seek to introduce mechanisms by which inter-departmental discussion and the sharing of good practice could be more strategically addressed. [4.1]

***Response:*** *There are representatives from each Department on every School committee, and this already provides a mechanism for inter-Departmental dialogue and sharing of good practice. We accept, however, the value of wider discussion among colleagues, not just within the School but equally beyond it. This was clearly demonstrated by the success of the 3-day School Teaching and Learning Conference, held in May 2009. This event is likely to be repeated.*

3.5 The School give thought to simplifying meeting structures, and that each Department revise committee structures to parallel School committee structures. [4.3]

***Response:*** *Normally, each Department meets as a whole to deal with issues relating to student experience, teaching and learning, postgraduate programmes and research. For every Department to have a structure of sub-committees paralleling the School committees in these respective areas would not simplify the existing structure but considerably complicate it.*

3.6 That teaching assistants be represented on all School and Departmental Teaching & Learning Committees and Staff Student Liaison Committees or equivalents. [4.4]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.7 That undergraduate and postgraduate students be represented on all School and departmental committees, if necessary having a ‘reserved agenda’. [4.5]

***Response:*** *To be implemented where appropriate. It would not be appropriate for students to be represented on the School Committee for Research and Knowledge Transfer or the School Executive Committee. Only postgraduate student representatives should be included in the Postgraduate Programmes Committee.*

3.8 All Departments convene a full Staff Student Liaison Committee comprising all class reps. and teaching staff (including Teaching Assistants) for the courses under discussion. [4.6]

***Response:*** *To be implemented. Arrangements are currently in hand to establish a full Staff Student Liaison Committee in each Department.*

3.9 The School more widely publicise the availability of School and departmental committee reports and minutes to students and support student reps. in the dissemination of these by a variety of means, in order to ensure the ‘feedback loop’ is closed. [4.7]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.10 The School ensure that all committees have a full and clear remit. These remits should be available, for information, to both staff and students. [4.8]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.11 The School ensure full and detailed minutes of all committees are recorded and retained. [4.9]

***Response:*** *Minutes of all committee meetings are recorded and circulated to committee members. The minutes of School Consultative Group and School Executive Committee meetings are also uploaded onto the School intra-net. The only gap in the minutes supplied to the ITR Panel related to a period during which a member of the office staff did not attend the meetings. For this reason, minutes of Departmental meetings were neither taken nor kept over this period.*

***Teaching, learning and assessment***

3.12 To encourage improved student attendance, a record of all lecture attendance should be taken, the School seek to gather information as to why students are not attending, and teaching staff, in partnership with course co-ordinators, consider how to make such large group teaching more engaging, innovative and interactive. [6.2]

***Response:*** *It is not practically feasible to record lecture attendance in large classes, especially at sub-Honours levels where students number in hundreds. We are not in favour of using pedagogical devices such as PRS as a way of monitoring attendance. We are, however, actively investigating the reasons for non-attendance, and will take whatever steps we can to remedy the situation, on condition that these do not compromise the academic quality and substance of our teaching.*

3.13 Support be given for the further development of the pilot internship scheme at the Scottish Parliament and that thought be given across the School to allow other students to benefit from placement learning experience. [6.6]

***Response:*** *We are looking into this.*

3.14 That the ‘Library Pathfinder’ assessment be rolled out to the other Departments within the School. [6.7]

***Response:*** *We are considering this.*

3.15 The School investigate further the use of less traditional forms of assessment, particularly in Levels 1 and 2. Further where the School is aware of good practice in this area, that they instigate measures to ensure the sharing and dissemination of such practice. Finally that the School introduce formative assessment, and feedback, within the first 6 weeks of each Level 1 and 2 course, in order to allow students to gain at an early juncture the opportunity to assess ‘how well am I doing’. [6.8]

***Response:*** *We are currently looking into alternative forms of assessment and at the possibilities of formative assessment at an early point in sub-Honours courses. Already in autumn 2008, SENAS forms for changing the assessment pattern along these lines were submitted for Level 1 courses in Politics & International Relations.*

3.16 (i) course coordinators ensure that teaching assistants provide supportive and meaningful feedback on coursework indicating clearly the strengths and weaknesses of students’ submissions.

(ii) where feedback proformas are in use, all students receive in addition to ‘tick boxes / sliding scale’ feedback, written comments which focus on possibilities for enhancement.

(iii) the School establish a formal policy of routine briefings by course coordinators and teaching assistants to ensure consistent feedback on assessments. [6.9]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.17 The School address coursework concerns of Masters of Research (Social Research) students with immediate effect. [6.10]

***Response:*** *Grades for first half-session postgraduate courses in the School were required by Registry by the end of the following February, and were on student portals then. Assignments, examinations and grades for the M.Res. in Social Research were as confirmed by the postgraduate external examiner for the Department of Sociology. As in previous years, the Department convened SCEF (Student Course Evaluation) meetings for its postgraduate students to review coursework and other matters arising.*

3.18 The School seek to instigate measures as soon as possible to improve procedures to ensure that all assessments and examinations are marked with full knowledge of disabilities. [6.12]

***Response:*** *The School is already assiduous in its provision for students whose disabilities entail their having to sit examinations in separate rooms. In all such cases, the office labels the respective examination books with clearly printed disabled provisions. Further measures may be introduced, however, to ensure that this procedure does not compromise the anonymity of marking. We accept that there may be scope for improving our procedures for ensuring that markers are aware of the disabilities of students submitting work for in-course assessment and/or sitting their examinations in regular venues. In the latter case, this might be better administered by the Registry, which keeps a central record of disabled provisions.*

3.19 The Department of Politics and International Relations dissertation-writing workshop and handbook for MSc International Relations students be adapted and rolled out across the School. [6.13]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

***Course and programme monitoring and review***

3.20 That the School, programme and class representatives make greater use of other forms of gathering feedback (other than email) from students, particularly during their early years. [7.3]

***Response:*** *We are looking into this.*

3.21 The School review its practices regarding the dissemination and collection of SCEF forms. [7.5]

***Response:*** *The School has already pioneered an experiment with the electronic dissemination of online course evaluation forms.*

***Training and supervision of research students***

3.22 The Department of Sociology’s practice for ensuring each postgraduate research student (from Year 2 onwards) is interviewed by their Supervisor once every half-session be rolled out across the School. [9.1]

***Response:*** *A new system for monitoring the progress of research students is being implemented with immediate effect by the Graduate School of the College of Arts and Social Studies. Our procedures are largely compliant with this system. Where they are not, they will be adapted to conform to it.*

3.23 The School consider developing the Department of Anthropology’s staff-initiated and supported peer-led writing workshops for postgraduate research students in other Departments and also on a School wide basis. [9.4]

***Response:*** *Support for postgraduate research students at this level is a matter for individual Departments.*

3.24 That a School-based training programme should be made available for new postgraduate research supervisors and that the School ensure that with any team of supervisors at least one must have previously supervised a student to completion. [9.5]

***Response:*** *Supervisors already avail themselves of training opportunities provided by the College of Arts and Social Sciences and by the University. The benefits of adding a further layer of School-based training are not obvious. It is already normal practice in the School for inexperienced supervisors to be paired with more experienced partners in the co-supervision of research students. This is not always possible, however. The rigorous application of this rule could lead to students being allocated to supervisors who are inappropriate in light of their research interests. It could also lead to some experienced supervisors carrying impossibly heavy loads.*

3.25 The School review its approach to six-monthly reviews, seeking to learn from best practice elsewhere in the University. [9.6]

***Response:*** *As for 3.22, above.*

3.26 The School recognise postgraduate supervision in the School’s work allocation / work load model. [9.7]

***Response:*** *We have already devised a new work allocation model, to be implemented with immediate effect, which gives explicit recognition to the supervision of postgraduate research students.*

***Personal development and employability***

3.27 The School seek to establish links with employers, for example, via recent graduates and the Alumini of the School, in order to inform course and programme design. [10.2]

***Response:*** *Our courses and programmes are designed, above all, to reflect and respond to academic developments in the subjects we teach. It is precisely because they know that these courses and programmes are informed by high quality scholarship that they are valued by employers and former students alike. In terms of the future employment of students, our programmes rank among the best in the UK.*

3.28 The School seek to address postgraduate research students’ request for career advice in relation to non academic career opportunities as soon as possible. [10.4]

***Response:*** *As noted in our SED (9.6.2), specifically for research students in Anthropology, advisory and discussion sessions on future careers are included in the workshops organised by the STAR (Scottish Training in Anthropological Research) programme, based on a consortium of postgraduate training outlets in social anthropology at the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews. In 2008-09, careers staff were invited to talk to students taking the Masters of Research in Political Studies. In future years we will do the same for research students on other programmes in the School.*

***Staff training and educational development***

3.29 The School Executive Committee actively promote staff development opportunities to all staff, more proactively encourage their involvement particularly with respect to new styles of teaching, learning and assessment, and more actively promote and encourage peer-review of teaching. [12.2]

***Response:*** *We are keen to experiment with new styles of teaching, learning and assessment, and have sought to promote these, for example through the School Conference on Teaching and Learning held in May 2009. We do not, however, assume that new styles are better than old ones, and we are more concerned to explore ways of complementing more traditional styles than of replacing them. We already encourage the peer review of teaching.*

3.30 The School liaise closely with HR and other avenues of support as appropriate to ensure the support provided by the School to female staff is equal to that of their male equivalents. [12.3]

***Response:*** *We are committed in the School to providing support to female staff commensurate to that provided to their male counterparts, and will endeavour to take transparent and constructive steps to ensure that this commitment is borne out in practice.*

3.31 The School review arrangements for the induction and training of teaching assistants, in particular with respect to payment of attendance at training sessions, making all training sessions on offer compulsory and ensuring that greater emphasis on the training programme is given to the designing and delivery of tutorials as well as addressing the needs of students with disabilities. [12.7]

***Response:*** *Induction for teaching assistants is mandatory, and as from 2009-2010, the training session for TAs offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching has been made mandatory as well. This session covers the use of Turnitin, administrative issues and delivery methods. Attendance at mandatory training sessions is already factored into the calculation of payment for TAs. Course co-ordinators are expected to meet with their TAs to discuss course content, and to address the needs of students with disabilities.*

3.32 The School put in place mechanisms to ensure course co-ordinators engage with teaching assistants more frequently in a manner that allows the School to be assured of the quality of its teaching and assessment provision. [12.8]

***Response:*** *Course co-ordinators have been asked to meet regularly with their TAs.**In order to moderate the marking of in-course assessments by TAs, and to ensure that they are all marking to the same standards, Heads of Departments are now provided with a report showing the average marks of each TA.*

3.33 That ongoing mentoring and monitoring procedures (including peer reviews) be put in place to further support teaching assistants and that the School appoint a member of academic staff with the responsibility to oversee and co-ordinate the continual support and staff development of teaching assistants. [12.9]

***Response:*** *The mentoring of teaching assistants in each Department is formally the responsibility of the respective Heads of Department.*

***Student involvement in quality processes***

3.34 The School seek to simplify the system of student representation at School and Departmental level and that all Departments convene a Staff Student Liaison Committee comprising all class representatives and teaching staff (including teaching assistants) for the courses under discussion. [13.4]

***Response:*** *A staff-student liaison committee will be set up in each of the three Departments (see above, 3.8). We note however that the call of the ITR Report for student representation on all School and Departmental committees (see above, 3.7) can only add to the complexity of the system.*

3.35 The School ensure that the departmental staff student liaison committees align with the School Advisory Committee, with respect to timing and frequency, and that clear, consistent and visible mechanisms are in place for deciding which reps join the School Advisory Committee. [13.5]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.36 The School develop and facilitate a clear mechanism by which differing categories of student representatives can communicate in a timely manner at appropriate junctures to ensure their views are fed into the School Advisory Committee. To this end, if not already in place, the School publicise prominently, photos, names and contact details of all class and programme year groups, and that a clear, well publicised timetable for the collection and collation of student opinion is developed. [13.6]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.37 That all committees that feed into the planning and review of both undergraduate and postgraduate course/programmes have student representation. [13.7]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

***Public information/management information***

3.38 To ensure measures to improve student support, retention and progression of all students, the School Director of Recruitment & Student Experience (SDRSE) and his committee work closely with the School Teaching & Learning Committee (see also 15.5) to monitor the experience of differing equality groups including gender, disabilities, home/international students and ethnicity to establish if there is a correlation to student performance, and if so to take action where necessary. In addition more support, in particular English Language support, to be made available to international students and that the School work with the Language Centre on this. [14.4]

***Response:*** *The School Director of Recruitment & Student Experience and his committee is already working closely with the School Teaching & Learning Committee. The monitoring of the experience of various groupings is not a matter for the School but one that should be addressed at University level, and we recommend that this be discussed with the Advisor on Equality and Diversity. It is, of course, the role of the Language Centre and the Centre for Learning and Teaching to provide English language support for students and the School does direct students requiring this to such sources of assistance.*

3.39 The School ensure that comprehensive annual reports including an analysis and critical commentary of student numbers, retention rates, pass rates and degrees awarded at both UG, PgT and PgR level are considered by departmental and School Teaching & Learning committees, and that the discussions and consequent action points that arise from them are fully minuted. [14.3]

***Response:*** *The School has concerns about the reliability of the data so far provided to it, arising from a server failure, and the very considerable amount of time required to process these data into a form that can be subjected to meaningful analysis. It is not immediately apparent that the time devoted to this exercise, which is necessarily time diverted from other tasks, will yield results of any utility for enhancing the quality of our teaching.*

3.40 The School provide in its one year ITR follow up report to the Academic Standards Committees in December 2010 either:

* the annual reports and corresponding minutes and action points for academic years 2007/08 and 2008/09.

OR

* the data requested in the initial Programme Review Reports. [14.5]

***Response:*** *As part of the ITR process, the School was required to provide, for each of its programmes, an analysis of data on student numbers, retention and pass rates, based on statistical profiles to be provided by the Registry. Due to a server breakdown mentioned above usable statistics were difficult to produce, though the School of course did what it could and provided some brief commentary. We hope that the ITR acknowledges the difficulties the School faced in this regard. For our part we will of course endeavour to provide fuller analysis and commentary in our one-year follow-up report in so far as data can be made available.*

3.41 To aid the School in doing so, that the School work together with Registry, following the August 2009 examination diet, to determine exactly what data, and in what format, the School requires in order to produce said analyses. [14.6]

***Response:*** *As noted above, the School will endeavour to provide what it can and looks forward to working with Registry in this regard.*

***Student support, retention and progression***

3.42 The SDRSE and its associated committee seek an early opportunity to establish contact and enter into dialogue with key colleagues in SRAS, Registry and Student Support who coordinate institutional initiatives in the area of student support, retention and progression. [15.3]

***Response:*** *This dialogue has already begun.*

3.43 The SDRSE and its associated committee seek to appoint both undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives to the committee with immediate effect and that the committee seek wider student engagement, for example via the use of student focus groups. [15.4]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.44 The SDRSE and its associated committee meet more regularly, as a minimum once per term, and that these meetings should tie in with the student year. [15.6]

***Response:*** *To be implemented. It is important to note that the School Committee on Recruitment and Student Experience was newly established in 2008-09, and that at the time of the ITR its procedures were still being worked out.*

3.45 That the School seek to introduce additional opportunities for level 1 students to interact with staff and fellow students throughout the first semester. [15.9]

***Response:*** *This recommendation presents a challenge on account of the very large student cohorts at this level.*

3.46 That the School seek to ensure course details and options are made available in advance of the start of each semester for postgraduate taught students studying the Masters of Research programmes. [15.10]

***Response:*** *Students taking the M.Res. programmes are not postgraduate taught (PGT) but postgraduate research (PGR). Nevertheless, we will endeavour to ensure that details of M.Res. programmes are made available at an earlier date than at present.*

3.47 The Department of Politics and International Relations examples of online quizzes by the Department of Politics and International Relations and introduction of ‘Lifeboat’ sessions be rolled out across the School and that the School review the marketing of the ‘Lifeboat’ sessions so as not to discourage students from attending because of any stigma the latter might perceive about attending such a session. [15.12]

***Response:*** *Online quizzes may be appropriate for some subjects taught in the School, at the introductory level, but they are quite inappropriate for others. It is not necessarily sensible to ‘roll out’ procedures that work in one area to every other area as well.*

3.48 The School raise student awareness of annual prizes in each Department to motivate and reward the most successful students. [15.14]

***Response:*** *To be implemented.*

3.49 The School ensure course coordinators (or other appropriate members of staff) are available to be contacted; either in person or by email/phone ,by students preparing for resit examinations during the 3 week period prior to the August examination diet. [15.19]

***Response:*** *There is always an academic available within the School to deal with such matters during this period. We believe that it is wrong to require course co-ordinators to be available for the three weeks prior to the August resit, for three reasons. First, course co-ordinators, like all staff, are entitled to summer holidays which, for those with young families, are constrained to fall within the school holiday period. Secondly, for staff not on holiday, this is time they can best use to concentrate single-mindedly on the research and writing that they are contractually required to carry out. Thirdly, students already know by early July whether they will need to resit their examinations, and if they need support in preparing for them they have every opportunity to request it immediately rather than waiting until the three weeks preceding the diet. We would actively encourage students to do so and are of course committed to ensuring that suitable levels of support are available to students throughout the year.*

***SFC quality enhancement engagements***

3.50 That the School seek to make themselves more aware of opportunities to engage with teaching and learning enhancement activities both internally and externally. [17.1]

***Response:*** *The School looks forward to working actively with colleagues in Registry and CLT to promote the opportunities and benefits of such engagement to colleagues.*

***Impediments to quality enhancement***

3.51 The School raise its concerns about admissions standards for incoming undergraduate students with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (SRAC). [20.1]

***Response:*** *The School has raised its concerns about admissions standards for incoming undergraduate students repeatedly and vociferously, at all levels of the University, and with the backing of the College of Arts and Social Sciences.*

3.52 The School raise its concerns regarding its current accommodation and social space for students directly with the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the Estates Department. [20.2]

***Response:*** *Our concerns have already been raised, and the need for new build has been incorporated into the College’s Estates plan.*

**4. Conclusions**

Departments within the School of Social Science had a strong sense of identity and collegiality. Students were broadly very positive about their experiences. The School’s strengths lie in its traditional and research-led offerings.

Whilst the School had made good progress in some areas towards engendering commonality amongst the departments, primarily in an administrative capacity, the panel considered the Departments, their staff and students, had yet to gain fully the advantages that a School structure can engender.

The panel would like to thank all members of staff within the School of Social Science for the work that has gone into producing the ITR documentation and for their commitment to the review process.  The panel would also like to thank all students and staff whom it met during the visit; the visit itself went very smoothly, with most interviewees being extremely forthcoming and co-operative when speaking to the panel.

***Response:***

*The School would like to thank all members of the Review Panel, and most particularly the external subject specialists, for undertaking the Review and for all the work that went into producing the report.*

**5. Revalidation of Courses**

The panel revalidated the following programmes:

Undergraduate programmes:

1. MA Anthropology Designated

MA Anthropology Single Honours

MA Anthropology Joint Honours

1. MA Gender Studies Designated

MA Gender Studies Joint Honours

1. MA Political Studies Designated

MA Politics and International Relations Joint Honours

MA International Relations Joint Honours

MA Politics Joint Honours

1. MA Sociology Designated

MA Sociology Joint Honours Degree

MA Sociology Single Honours

Postgraduate programmes:

TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

Politics and International Relations

i. MLitt Latin American Studies

ii. MSc International Relations

iii. MSc Middle East Security

iv. MSc Strategic Studies

v. MSc Democracy and Human Rights

Sociology

i. MSc Globalization

ii. MSc European Politics and Society

RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Anthropology

i. MRes (Social Anthropology, Ethnology and Cultural History)

ii. MPhil in Anthropology

iii. PhD in Anthropology

Politics and International Relations

i. MRes (Political Research)

ii. MPhil in Politics and International Relations

iii. PhD in Politics and International Relations

Sociology

i. MRes (Social Research)

ii. MPhil in Sociology

iii. PhD in Sociology