

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW (ITR)**

**SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND COMPUTING SCIENCES (NCS)**

Panel Visit: 12-13 March 2025

**INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the School of Natural and Computing Sciences (NCS) was carried out under the University's published process and procedures for ITR which are available here: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/internal-teaching-review-6112.php>.
- 1.2 In addition to Curriculum Maps, the School was asked to submit a Critical Analysis (CA) document which addressed the following key areas:
- (i) **School context:** to include student numbers, demographics and outcomes; highlight any areas of teaching and learning practices that are specific to the School and a summary of the School's response to the previous ITR
- (ii) **Positive aspects of the School's teaching and learning:** to include examples of positive practice and particular strengths of the School as well as how this good practice is shared both within the School and beyond
- (iii) **Challenges that have been encountered in the School's teaching and learning provision:** to include potential areas identified for improvement and an action plan for how they might be addressed – or whether these were issues for discussion at the ITR
- (iv) **Future plans:** to include areas for development in the next few years, e.g. new course/programme developments, partnerships proposed
- 1.3 The ITR Panel was comprised of:
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| Ms Faye Hendry              | Chair<br>School of Education<br>Quality Assurance Committee |
| Dr Thangavel Thevar         | School of Engineering<br>Quality Assurance Committee        |
| Dr Jo Vergunst              | School of Social Science                                    |
| Miss Zyna Khwaja            | Business School (PGT)<br>Student Panellist                  |
| Dr Richard McCracken        | External Subject Specialist, Heriot-Watt University         |
| Professor Stephen Theriault | External Subject Specialist, University of Southampton      |
| Dr Charlie O'Hara           | External Subject Specialist, University of Strathclyde      |
| Dr Fiona McNeill            | External Subject Specialist, University of Edinburgh        |
| Miss Kyra Lamont            | Clerk, Academic Services                                    |
| Miss Isabella Fausti        | Assistant Clerk, Academic Services (Observing)              |
- 1.4 The Panel considered the documentation provided by the School, by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis (CA) as detailed in 1.2 above. In addition, prior to the virtual visit to the School, members of the Panel were provided with access to the School's Quality Assurance (QA) repository, containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and APR)),

Course Feedback Forms, minutes from meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and External Examiner Reports (EERs), as well as the minutes from various School Committees. Consideration of this documentation, along with the School's submitted CA, enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration.

1.5 The Panel conducted a visit to the School, where they met with a range of staff and students.

1.6 The themes for focused discussion agreed with the School prior to and during the visit were:

- (i) **Employability and Skills**, focusing on the School's efforts to embed employability and professional skills into the curriculum, and collaboration between the School and the University's Careers Service.
- (ii) **Student Support, Experience & Student Voice**, focusing on the provision of pastoral and academic support to students of all levels (including TNE), the quality of the overall student experience, and the ways in which the School collects and responds to student feedback.
- (iii) **Assessment and Feedback**, focusing on the timeliness and quality of feedback, the School's use of authentic assessments, modes of assessments, support and the impact of GenAI on assessment design and academic misconduct.
- (iv) **Delivery of Teaching**, focusing on the overall provision of teaching and learning across various campuses (including SCNU-JI and AFG), as well as the delivery of teaching in terms of individual disciplines.
- (v) **Structure and Staffing**, focusing on the School's overall structure (including TNE provision), student to staff ratios, and the opportunities for academic and professional staff development and promotion.
- (vi) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**, focusing on the School's efforts to Decolonise the Curriculum and other EDI initiatives, such as the implementation of the University's Anti-Racist strategy.

1.7 This report is split into three sections:

- (i) Part A gives the overall impressions of the teaching provision within the School, formed from the whole ITR process;
- (ii) Part B covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on a small number of themes as outlined above. It also details the Pedagogic Partnership Session, which involved more free-form discussion; and
- (iv) Part C details the School action plan which will form the basis of the annual follow-up reports.

## **PART A: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

- 2.1 Overall, the Panel were very impressed with the provision of teaching, learning and assessment in the School. The Panel commends the School for their use of innovative, authentic assessments, the timely delivery of feedback, and the delivery of high quality teaching across multiple campuses.
- 2.2 The Panel commends the School for securely embedding practical and professional skills into the curriculum, and for their excellent collaboration with the University's Careers Service – including the provision of a shared Professional Development course, careers fairs and internships.
- 2.3 The Panel commends the School for providing innovative, extra-curricular activities designed to enhance student community, and is pleased that international students have found the information provided by InfoHub and non-credit bearing introductory courses very helpful upon their arrival to Aberdeen.

- 2.4 The Panel recognises the excellent level of support provided to students in collaboration with the University's Student Support and Disability Service, noting that the School's open-door policy has been well received, and that academic and support staff are considered approachable.
- 2.5 The Panel commends the School for their approach to monitoring 'At-risk' students – noting the School's Engagement Officer(s) work well to monitor attendance and engagement in a systematic way, and signpost students to appropriate support as required.
- 2.6 The Panel commends the School for successfully establishing TNE partnerships with Al Faleh Group (AFG) College in Qatar and South China Normal University (SCNU) in China. The Panel recognises that these partnerships remain in their infancy, however, it is pleasing that the feedback from students has been positive in general. Going-forward, the Panel is supportive of efforts to enhance communication between Aberdeen-based academic staff and their respective TNE counterparts to strengthen the delivery of programmes across campuses.
- 2.7 The Panel recognises the strength of the School's provision in relation to the variety of degree programmes and courses available. It is understood that the School is working hard to enhance and develop their portfolio by identifying areas for growth in accordance with sector-wide needs (e.g. Astrophysics, Online PGT and short course offering).

## **PART B: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT; OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF AND THE PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP SESSION**

### **EMPLOYABILITY AND SKILLS**

- 3.1.1 Throughout the review, it became evident that there is a strong link between the School and the University Careers Service. The Panel was pleased to note that Careers Advisors are included in the design of a shared Professional Development Course between Physics and Chemistry. It is understood that there may be scope to provide a similar course tailored to the School's other disciplines. However, the Panel noted that Maths currently delivers a year long project with a view to developing students' professional skills. The Panel also learned that members of staff from the University Careers Service attend lectures during the start of term to introduce themselves to new undergraduate and postgraduate students in Aberdeen. The Panel also heard that all students are provided with the opportunity to book 1-1 appointments with Careers Advisors as well as the opportunity to enhance their CVs and covering letters - particularly for the UK job market. In terms of engagement, the Panel was advised that this is slightly lower with respect to PGR students. The Panel was informed that although the Careers Service does not host specific PGR careers events, the Postgraduate Research College provides tailored support, and research days are well attended by PGR students who are often focused on careers within academia. The Panel was informed that the Careers Service can also be accessed by alumni who are provided with life-long membership.
- 3.1.2 The Panel is pleased that the School's appointment of an Employability Champion has helped increase awareness of career fairs and various internship opportunities for NCS students, including the newly established Aberdeen Internship Programme which provides students with short-term internship opportunities (70hrs over 7-10 weeks) with local companies. It was noted that students have responded well to the sharing of Careers Events via MyAberdeen. Furthermore, the Panel were pleased to learn of the collaborative links between the School and industry partners – specifically in regard to honours level projects. Noting that some students have even received job offers with their industrial partners following successful completion of the final project. In terms of Graduate Outcome Data, the Panel noted that NCS students are considered to have strong job prospects with 67% in graduate employment and 18% in further study approximately 15 months after graduation. It is understood that it is too early to draw conclusions with regards to SCNU-JI students as the first cohort will graduate in Summer 2025.

- 3.1.3 The Panel noted that students can map a range of skills associated with their programmes using MySkills (accessible via Blackboard), and that there are plans to use digital badges to acknowledge these skills. It is pleasing that there is a strong awareness of various transferrable skills as well as practical knowledge obtained via labs and tutorials. Additionally, the Panel noted that the use of a reflective journal in Chemistry has helped students to reflect on their own set of professional and transferrable skills. This is an element of good practice which the School might wish to consider replicating across disciplines where possible. The Panel was informed that PGR students are often expected to demonstrate for undergraduate students. It was noted that technical staff play a key role in supporting PGR students to carry out demonstrations and further their professional skills. It was reported, however, that some Maths PGR students were not fully aware of their career options aside from entering into academia so it may be helpful to increase awareness of alternative routes. Additionally, it was reported that PGR students are not as well connected to career announcements shared via MyAberdeen, and distribution of this information could be better streamlined as it is currently delivered via three channels (email, Teams and MyAberdeen). It is understood that PGT January starts have benefited from the opportunity to discuss employability and career information directly with academic staff who have taken the initiative to arrange these meetings. If capacity allows, the School may wish to consider extending this opportunity across disciplines.

### **STUDENT SUPPORT, EXPERIENCE & STUDENT VOICE**

- 3.2.1. The Panel heard from a range of students across all levels and disciplines regarding the overall Student Experience, Student Voice and Student Support available. In general, both undergraduate and postgraduate students were positive about Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meetings and the functionality of the class rep system. SCNU-JI students reported that they found SSLCs a useful way of communicating feedback. However, it was reported that students do not necessarily want their name attached to any feedback which may be challenging. There were some Aberdeen-based undergraduate students who felt that the training for Class Reps could be improved – particularly by including guidance on how to handle difficult conversations. It was also suggested that Class Reps may benefit from a handover at the start of a new academic year. The Panel heard that that SSLC processes appeared unclear to AFG students, and that there were some difficulties obtaining level three class reps this year. The Panel learned that Class Reps for Chemistry and Maths have created surveys in order to obtain feedback from their classmates. Reps reported that this was a useful way of obtaining feedback from large classes. The Panel recognises this as an element of good practice which could be more widely used in other disciplines.
- 3.2.2. During discussions, it became apparent that closure of the student feedback loop was an area that would benefit from further enhancement. A number of undergraduate and postgraduate students from Aberdeen and AFG reported not knowing whether or not their feedback had been acted upon and the reasons associated with not doing so. As such, the School may wish to consider increasing usage and awareness of “You Said, We Did” announcements via MyAberdeen and/or by e-mail. In doing so, this would increase the level of transparency associated with student feedback, provide a clear, robust response to feedback concerns, and ensure the reasons for doing so are clearly communicated to students. Additionally, it may be beneficial to allot time at the start or end of classes for Class Reps to obtain feedback which could be in the form of a survey for larger class sizes. The School may also wish to consider varying the number of staff present so that students do not feel overwhelmed and ensuring that SSLCs are well-structured with a clear agenda to maximise productivity. That being said, the Panel were pleased to learn that in addition to SSLC meetings, information sessions are held at the beginning of the academic year to recap feedback at programme level, and that Maths produces a digest of SSLC minutes for students via MyAberdeen. It may be helpful to consider repeating this process for other disciplines to assist with closing the feedback loop.
- 3.2.3. It was clear that satisfaction levels differ between undergraduate and postgraduate students with regard to the Personal Tutor (PT) system. There were a number of Aberdeen-based undergraduate students who thought that being partnered with an academic who was unrelated to their discipline was less meaningful, and that some PTs were not as engaged as others. One student reported that she requested a transfer of PT because they were not particularly engaged and she felt that it would not be beneficial for reference purposes. The Panel was advised that TNE students are also assigned

to Personal Tutors who arrange to meet with them during the first semester which is reportedly working well. The Panel was advised that the School Administration Team keep detailed records of student engagement – including details of any students who may have received C6s and C7s in the past and may benefit from intervention by skilled personal tutors and/or the Engagement Officer. The Panel welcomed the use of an Engagement Officer to help minimise the risk of discontinuation and improve engagement levels where possible. In terms of attendance monitoring, it was noted that SCNU-JI students may be more likely to miss essential monitoring emails regarding C6s and C7s as they are reportedly not as engaged with their University of Aberdeen email account as other student groups. The Panel was also informed that the School Administration Team also keep a record of mathematical attainment at secondary level which is used to identify students who may require additional maths tutoring and support. In addition, the Panel noted the range of support provided by both the School and the PGR College to support postgraduate research students. However, the Panel learned that postgraduate students were not always clear on the reporting structure within the School if they experiencing challenges with supervision.

- 3.2.4. The Panel heard from the Student Support representative, who explained that Student Support is open to all students, engagement is student-led and involves a person-centred approach. The Panel were informed that there is a team of available support staff with respect to AFG and SCNU-JI. However, it was noted that some students struggled to meet IELTS requirements despite the language support available which impacted upon progression. The Panel learned, however, that the School's use of drop-in office hours and open-door policies were well received by all students. Academic staff advised that it was more common for students to ask questions following the lecture or practical rather than during it. SCNU-JI students intimated that they are more likely to approach their lecturer first if they require support because they are the most familiar with them. The Panel learned, however, that January starts and international students have found the University's InfoHub and the non-credit-bearing introductory courses very helpful in terms of signposting towards various services/supports provided by the University upon arrival to the UK.
- 3.2.5. The Panel were pleased to learn that the School has invested in a number of innovative community building initiatives for students across all levels, including an annual School Ceilidh for Chemistry students, and the popular GameJam for students of Computing Science where a number of prizes can be won. The Panel heard that Outreach and Engagement Officers liaise with new students and relevant societies to ensure maximum involvement from both undergraduate and postgraduate students. It was noted that in these activities and that this is on the School's radar for further enhancement. The AFG and SCNU-JI students would benefit from inclusion Panel was also made aware that SCNU-JI students in their final year can apply to take part in a short exchange visit which has been well received. Postgraduate students reported that the PGR society has been very successful at boosting engagement and community amongst postgraduate research students. In addition, PGR students are encouraged to attend the PGR annual research symposium.

### **ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK**

- 3.3.1 The Panel learned that there are some good examples of authentic and innovative assessments, and the School's approach to marking and moderation is in line with University's policies and procedures. It was noted that External Examiners are invited to contribute to the development of examination papers (including reference to local contexts) and to attend Examiners' Meetings, which include staff from AFG but not presently SCNU. It is understood that conversations are underway as to whether it may be beneficial to have a representative from SCNU present at Examiners' Meetings. However, the Panel were advised that SCNU-JI exam papers are scanned to staff in the UK to mark in accordance with internal guidelines. Academic staff did report differing expectations with regards to first-marker duties in AFG; however, it is understood that a change in staffing may have already assisted with these isolated concerns.
- 3.3.2. The Panel commends the School for designing authentic assessments with a focus on real-world problems, such as sustainability, noting that it can be challenging to generate authentic assessments in terms of certain disciplines (i.e. theoretical maths). It is understood that the School recently

engaged with TESTA in regard to the School's undergraduate provision (Chemistry, Maths, Physics and Computer Science). The Panel learned that this revealed a slightly tendency to over-assess in certain areas as a result of continuous assessment. The Panel were advised that Course Coordinators are invited to contribute to School Executive Committee Meetings and discipline-specific monthly meetings in order to discuss and share good practice with regard to assessment and feedback. Furthermore, the Panel learned that the School works closely with the University's Student Support and Disability Service to incorporate special measures, such as a scribe, to assist students with disabilities in examination settings.

- 3.3.4 The Panel learned that feedback is generally delivered to a high standard in accordance with the School's two-week turnaround timeframe. However, there are some differing expectations when it comes to the timeliness of feedback. For example, undergraduate students felt that feedback was only 'timely' when received in advance of the next assignment rather than being concerned with School and University targets. As such, it may be helpful to strengthen communication with students to manage their expectations regarding the timeliness of feedback. Additionally, it was apparent that students would appreciate consistently clear, constructive feedback which looks ahead to future assignments as well as current submissions. PGR students reported that the Annual Progression Exercise (APE) report was not structured very well as it makes it difficult for PhD candidates to provide feedback or raise concerns regarding the quality of supervision received. Additionally, it was revealed that there may be some disparity between the quality of industry partner engagement which may benefit from further exploration by the School.
- 3.3.5 PGR Data Science students advised that they have been permitted to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to complete certain assessments if acknowledged/disclosed appropriately. The Panel learned that, in addition to the University's general guidance, the School has developed internal guidelines for the use of GenAI as a tool. It is noted that this landscape is constantly changing, however, which may necessitate further updates to the related guidance. The Panel was informed of introductory courses provided at the start of term on the use of GenAI in relation to academic misconduct. In order to reduce the vulnerability of assessments to AI-related misconduct, the School has designed assessments specifically to avoid weakness to Large Language Models (LLMs) usage (e.g. the use of oral/Viva style assessments and group exercises). The Panel were advised of the need to ensure a consistent approach to dealing with cases of academic misconduct across all campuses. It is understood that this is an area that the School continues to improve upon with various TNE counterparts. The Panel were informed that students are provided with clear advice on academic misconduct at the start of their programmes and within individual course handbooks.

### **DELIVERY OF TEACHING**

- 3.4.1 Overall, the Panel was reassured that the quality of the School's learning and teaching provision was very strong. The Panel heard that students were satisfied with the quality of teaching provided and appreciated the "high quality" teaching materials provided by the School. The Panel was advised that many staff utilise a flipped classroom approach to foster greater engagement and increase attendance at lectures and tutorials. The Panel learned that mini lectures are provided to Chemistry students in advance which appears to have had a positive effect on engagement and preparedness levels. When speaking with undergraduate students, they confirmed that receiving lecture slides in advance was a helpful aid. The Panel was informed that both undergraduate and postgraduate students (across all disciplines) enjoy real-world scenarios and tutorials because it provides them with the opportunity to put theoretical frameworks into practice. Additionally, it was noted that students prefer these interactive options to more generally transmissive lectures. Students also stated that recorded lectures provide them with the opportunity to return to certain topics later and assist with the management of competing priorities and deadlines.

- 3.4.2 The Panel was advised that SCNU-JI classes are delivered via Block Teaching method which involves condensing one semester's worth of classes into one month. It is understood that there is a flying faculty in place to deliver block teaching at SCNU-JI who teach twice per year. The Panel was advised that this is particularly demanding of SCNU-JI students to manage alongside their linear SCNU timetable. The Panel heard that SCNU-JI students spend on average 20-30 hrs a week with one lecturer, and it can become tiring which may affect their ability to study effectively. Some students said that it would be helpful to receive feedback sooner to help inform their next assignments. Additionally, it was noted that in China all courses must include a final exam as opposed to continuous assessment. That being said, students have reported some positives in relation to Block Teaching, such as being able to focus all their energy on one course at a time and 'not having to worry' about other techniques or courses. It was noted that the impact of Block Teaching is under review which may assist with concerns surrounding competing SCNU deadlines. The Panel was advised that SCNU-JI courses are taught in English. The Panel learned that support staff travel to China to provide language support to students undertaking English courses. It was noted that students are often more confident in their English written abilities than their conversational skills. It is understood that 6 Chinese students were not permitted to continue on the SCNU-JI programme route as IELTS requirements had not been met.
- 3.4.3 It is understood that, in addition to oversight from the Director of Undergraduate Pathways, a link tutor is associated with every course delivered in Qatar and the School Administration Team are working well in collaboration with the administrative staff based in Qatar. Following discussion with some of the academic staff involved in the preparation of courses and materials for the delivery of teaching at AFG, it became apparent that there were some challenges in terms of communication. Specifically, in regard to expected roles and responsibilities which the School is working hard to address. The Panel learned that courses are sometimes dual taught in Qatar, and may involve interactive, practical lessons, including being taught how to use GitHub and Codeio software appropriately. The Panel was informed that third year AFG students created a software application as part of the Software Engineering courses. The Panel learned that second year students in AFG found the Algorithms and Data Structure course challenging; they felt that some of the material was too condensed and a number of students were not satisfied with the grades they achieved. Academic staff advised that it might be beneficial to consider the ways in which the overall proficiency of AFG students could be enhanced with respect to Computer Programming and its related pre-requisites. In terms of the Maths and Physics courses delivered at AFG, academic staff reported a stronger level of communication with AFG counterparts, and better parity between the quality of lectures delivered in Qatar and Aberdeen. It was noted, however, that there is a slight change to the teaching timetable as teaching does not take place on Fridays for cultural reasons. Additionally, the Panel was informed that extensive discussions had taken place to ensure that holidays such as Ramadan were appropriately accommodated. The Panel was advised that whilst there are no classes during Eid & Ramadan there are assessment submissions due. It was noted that most students have a good grasp of English although academic English can be slightly harder to master.

### **STRUCTURE AND STAFFING**

- 3.5.1 The Panel learned that staffing levels are in accordance with minimally viable product which is presently 6.8 (FTE) Administrative Support Staff and 89 (FTE) Academic Staff. It was raised that number of Teaching and Scholarship staff is low. However, staff to student ratios are acceptable although there is room for improvement with regards to Maths. The Panel was advised that these ratios naturally fluctuate in accordance with recruitment levels. Additionally, technical and support staff reported that the need to have staff in the Science Teaching Hub (STH) has created a reduced presence in Meston and this has been felt due to the overall reduction of staff.
- 3.5.2 The Panel was informed that the School Forum is a regular touch point for staff in terms of raising their concerns. Key concerns are addressed by the School Executive Committee. The Panel heard that meetings between academic staff and the Director of Undergraduate Pathways (DUP) are typically informal and provide a great opportunity to share best practice and prepare for the start of term. The Panel was advised that current workload models are devolved to disciplines and may not necessarily

account fully for research activities. It was noted that there were some concerns regarding the ability to balance teaching and research commitments as the T/R track is particularly demanding.

- 3.5.3 In terms of support and progression for academic staff, staff expressed contentment with regards to the annual review process and felt that line managers were often supportive. The Panel was informed that the new promotion system has helped place a spotlight on innovative practices but elements of good practice could be better disseminated. Additionally, it was felt that the career pathway was better defined with respect to each pillar (education, scholarship and research). The panel was advised that a Teaching and Scholarship position has recently become available and the successful candidate will hopefully be appointed as Chair.
- 3.5.4 The Panel learned that career mentoring is available to support Continued Professional Development. However, it was noted that Professional Service staff roles are not always open to regrading. Therefore, if an individual wants to progress they often have to change their role. It was noted that demonstrators and technical staff benefit from having their involvement in research acknowledged where appropriate and in line with the Technician Commitment.

### **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

- 3.6.1. The Panel commends the School on their continued commitment to ensuring Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of the teaching and learning provision, and the overall working environment. The Panel heard that the School and the wider University places a large focus on EDI in general as evidenced by the introduction of anti-bullying and anti-racist strategies. It was discussed that in the future it may be possible to design universal policies instead of having separate policies for staff and students.
- 3.6.2. The Panel was informed that there are numerous articulation and widening access routes into NCS programmes – including direct entry into third year of the BSc Computing Science programme via the International Study Centre. The Panel learned that this route is particularly demanding. However, it is reassuring to note that the initiative has been successful despite smaller student numbers. The Panel notes that this is one of few Schools who have two permanent TNE arrangements with campuses in Asia (SCNU-JI and AFG).
- 3.6.3. The Panel was pleased to learn that outreach activities are underway in local secondary schools to tackle the gender-bias which can be felt towards Natural and Computing Sciences. Panellists were pleased to learn of the 'Women in Physics' graduate event designed to support female Physicists and that the Royal Society for Chemistry is also involved in running recruitment activities. The Panel remains mindful of the need to promote gender balance where possible. However, it was pleasing to note that there is a number of women from across the University taking electives in computing courses such as Website Development.
- 3.6.4. The Panel was informed that the Dean for Student Support and Experience is helping to ensure that assessments are inclusive, and rooms are suitably accommodating for students who have engaged with the University's Disability Services. However, administratively this can prove challenging to provide due to timetable constraints and the need to source additional invigilators. For example, Support Staff advised that the School recently organised special measures for 35 tests across different levels and disciplines in one week. The Panel noted that this challenge is exacerbated by the high number of tests and exams used in the school, which staff may wish to continue to revise in lieu of alternative assessment methods which do not require such accommodations.
- 3.6.5. With regards to support for students with inclusion adjustments, the panel was pleased to hear that helpful accommodations have been made to teaching spaces and resources to ensure learners' needs are met. Alongside this, staff should continue to ensure that (where possible) teaching materials are made available online as students reported that they found this helpful, particularly if they have specific learning differences.



## **PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP DISCUSSION**

- 3.7.1 During this session, staff and students were asked to consider the types of things that the School of Natural and Computing Science has been doing well, what they should stop doing and what areas they could improve upon. **Appendix A** provides full details of the issues raised; however, the key points have been summarised below for information. The School is therefore invited to consider Appendix A to help inform future practice. For clarity, student comments are written on bright yellow post-it notes whilst staff comments are written on pale yellow post-it notes.
- 3.7.2 There was agreement between staff and students on many of the issues discussed. Both groups felt that there may be a tendency to over-assess due to the volume of continuous assessment within some courses. For example, Optics and Photonics was noted as being particularly demanding; however, it is understood that the Course Coordinator is working to address this issue.
- 3.7.3 Staff explained that developing resit papers requires significant time, and the use of alternative forms of assessments may not be suitable due to parity concerns. As such, staff discussed whether altering the timing of the Summer resit diet might allow for increased opportunity for academic staff to conduct much needed research.
- 3.7.4 Students stated that they would like to see an increased choice with regards to their electives. However, during discussion, it was noted that this might not be possible due to the need to streamline the School's portfolio in respect of costs. Staff suggested that it might be possible to provide students with wider reading lists, and build more personalisation and choice into courses themselves, and perhaps offer time for the discussion of research papers on broader but related areas.
- 3.7.5 Staff expressed that it takes a lot of time to make resources electronically accessible, but this is not always practicable, and it is important that resources can be accessible in a range of different ways (guidance, content etc).
- 3.7.6 Students stated that they appreciated the School's open door policy and felt this was an area that was particularly well done. They also expressed their appreciation for the use of tutorials and real-world examples which they found particularly valuable. Students explained that it was very helpful to have recordings of lectures because it allowed them to focus their efforts on assignments during particularly busy periods.
- 3.7.7 In terms of areas for enhancement, students noted that the scheduling of certain classes could be improved because there were instances where the same course was split into one AM and one PM lecture on the same day. Students intimated that wherever possible they would be grateful if large gaps between classes could be avoided as it prevents them from engaging in part-time work and may disrupt travel arrangements. Students also requested a centralised calendar which would highlight areas of overassessment, competing deadlines and/or course conflicts in advance. Staff advised this information is passed to the NCS Office staff; therefore, it might be possible but could look rather unwieldy unless split by discipline.

## **PART C: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN**

4.1 The School is asked to consider the following action plan which has been formulated by the Panel following the review. A follow-up report should be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) in a year's time to outline the progress made by the School.

### **4.2 Continue to enhance the Student Voice by:**

- i. Working with the Students' Union to provide Class Reps with training (e.g. how to handle difficult conversations), and allow opportunities for handovers and the sharing of advice between outgoing and incoming reps where appropriate (e.g. use of surveys) (see 3.2.1)
- ii. Ensuring adequate representation of all year groups and levels at SSLC meetings by clearly promoting and explaining the class rep role early on. (see 3.2.1)
- iii. Utilising "You said, We did" announcements more widely to close the feedback loop and enhance transparency in terms of the student feedback process (see 3.2.2). Considering whether an SSLC digest can be implemented across all disciplines as it is an efficient way of disseminating key information contained within SSLC minutes (see 3.2.2).
- iv. Reviewing and sharing good practice around effective running of SSLCs; for example, by having a clear agenda, an appropriate ratio of staff to students, and giving students opportunities in class or through other means to gather feedback from peers

### **4.3 Continue to enhance Student Support by:**

- i. Improving awareness of the various support and management structures for PGRs during their PhD journey and consider assigning an impartial mentor to PGRs who is unrelated to their supervision team (see 3.3.4).
- ii. Encouraging SCNU-JI students to regularly engage with their UoA email accounts to minimise the risk of missing important emails (inc. monitoring communications) (see 3.2.3).
- iii. Providing additional support to students who may be struggling with more challenging elements of Computer Programming (e.g. Algorithms and Data Structure course) (see 3.4.3)

### **4.5 Continue to enhance the Student Experience by:**

- i. Continuing to create innovative opportunities to enhance student community with a view to boosting cross-campus interactions (see 3.2.5).

### **4.6 Continue to enhance Structure and Staffing by:**

- i. Improving communication between Aberdeen and AFG counterparts, and clarifying expectations to resolve challenges associated with marking and assessment (see 3.2.5 & 3.3.1).

### **4.7 Continue to enhance the Delivery of Teaching by:**

- i. Continuing to monitor the impact of block teaching on SCNU-JI students and staff (see 3.4.2).
- ii. Considering whether it is feasible to provide students with wider reading lists, and building more personalisation and choice into courses in lieu of an increased choice of electives e.g. choice of readings, areas of focus for assessment, etc. (see 3.7.4)
- iii. Continuing to ensure that teaching materials are made available online (where possible) as students stated this was very helpful - especially if they have specific learning differences (see 3.6.5)

#### **4.8 Continue to enhance Assessment and Feedback by:**

- i. Building on good practice in the School around varied, innovative and authentic assessment, and signposting clearly to students where academic or disability supports are available for assessments (see 3.3.2).
- ii. Reviewing courses to ensure there is no over-assessment, particularly when this limits timeliness and usefulness of feedback (see 3.3.2).
- iii. Considering whether it would be helpful to create an assessment calendar which could be used to identify any conflicts and made visible at the start of the year to assist students with their planning (see 3.3.7).
- iv. Continuing to develop guidance for students around use of GenAI, as well as signposting this to students and providing advice in terms of how to use it appropriately (see 3.3.5).
- v. Continuing to make marking and feedback processes and timelines transparent to students (e.g. standardisation, second marking and moderation processes, clarify the need for feedback turnaround time) (see 3.3.4).
- vi. Continuing to ensure feedback is consistent, clear, constructive and looks ahead to future assessments (see 3.3.4).

#### **4.9 Continue to enhance Employability and Skills by:**

- i. Continuing to share good practice around skill development (e.g. through the shared professional development course) (see 3.1.1).
- ii. Ensuring parity of access to career information for PGR students with a focus on careers outside of academia (see 3.1.3).

### Staff Feedback:

