UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

# BUSINESS SCHOOL

*Summary*

This document is extracted from the full report on the Internal Teaching Review of the Business School conducted in May 2005. It includes the Panel's overall impressions of the provision and a record of the Panel's commendations and recommendations.

# Overall Impressions

The Business School was created in August 2002 from a merger of the Departments of Accountancy and Finance, Economics, Management and Property. The Panel recognised that new roles and structures were still developing in the School, but it was evident that the School has a firm commitment to teaching and is open to the potential benefits of self-critical reflection and constructive commentary. The Panel ***highly commended*** the School’s engagement with and positive attitude towards the internal teaching review process.

The Panel ***commended*** the School on the thoroughness of its programme review reports, and those who were involved in producing the documentation, in particular, the undergraduate programme co-ordinators and the graduate co-ordinator. The reviews were extremely informative and complemented the Self Evaluation Document, which tended to play down some of the Schools’ most significant achievements, clearly identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of the School’s provision.

The Panel ***commended*** the School on its high standards and appropriately wide range of teaching, learning and assessment methods. This was endorsed by positive comments from the students at all levels whom the Panel met. The External Subject Specialist with primary responsibility for Economics also ***commended*** the School’s students as they were articulate, thoughtful and a credit to the School.

The Panel was impressed by the School’s friendly atmosphere, which all students and staff that they spoke with appreciated. The Panel was impressed by the motivation, commitment and positive attitude of the staff from all levels and especially ***commended*** the probationary staff members, the Teaching Assistants and the Teaching Fellows.

The Panel ***commended*** the professionalism and commitment of the School’s Advisers of Studies and the Senior Advisors of Studies. The Panel stressed the importance of the School continuing to encourage as many of their staff as possible to become Advisers of Studies.

The School has developed a Mid-Semester Course Evaluation Form and the Panel considered this to be an ***exemplary*** practice. The Working Group on Student and Graduate Feedback was impressed by this development and has recommended to the UCTL that other Schools in the University should consider adopting a similar format for mid-semester feedback.

The Panel felt that the School did not engage fully with the idea of ‘enhancement’ in the review process. Although teaching innovation is taking place in the School it was clear to the Panel that most of the staff had as yet only a limited awareness of the meaning, implications and applications of quality enhancement. The Panel acknowledged that the School is ambitious in this respect and has started to make important progress.

The Panel ***strongly recommended*** that the School should appoint student representatives to their main School Committees. From the documentation and interviews with staff the Panel was of the opinion that the School may wish to consider revisiting and simplifying their committee structures.

The Panel was concerned that the School has not taken employability as seriously as it might and ***recommended***that the School should consider redeveloping Employers’ Liaison Groups. However, the Panel was pleased to note that a School Employers’ Liaison officer had been recently appointed.

**Commendable Features**

*Note: numbers in brackets indicate the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full Report.*

The Panel commended the following aspects of the School’s provision:

* The match between staff's research interests and their contribution to teaching (2.2)
* The commitment and professional attitude of the School's staff (3.1)
* The attitude, enthusiasm and professionalism of the probationary members of staff (3.3) and the teaching fellows and teaching assistants (3.4)
* the enthusiasm, commitment and aspiration of the Convener of the Undergraduate Teaching Committee (4.5)
* efforts made since formation of the School to introduce uniformity of educational provision and administration (4.7)
* steps to develops new parts of the curriculum that work across the School's different disciplines (5.2)
* new research-led courses in Accountancy and Finance (5.3)
* the high quality of the programmes in Accountancy and Finance, which, in the opinion of the Panel's external subject specialist rated amongst the best in the UK (5.4)
* the work of the School's Disabilities Coordinator (5.7)
* introduction, in collaboration with the Academic Learning Study Unit, of a transferable study skills programme for MBA students that pays particular attention to the needs of students joining from diverse cultural backgrounds (5.8)
* the standards, high quality and wide range of teaching, learning and assessment methods used by the School (6.1) and (6.2)
* the use of IT to enhance teaching and learning, including extensive use of WebCT and specialist econometric and data analysis packages (6.4)
* the thoroughness of the programme review reports submitted (7.1)
* the use of a Mid-Semester Course Evaluation form, an innovation that the Panel identified as ***exemplary*** practice (7.4)
* the quality of feedback given to Economics students (7.5)
* production of a School handbook for research students (9.3)
* the "Doing Business in the North-East" initiative, which attracted 200 local businessmen to discuss the skills required of graduates (10.2)
* plans for a Partnership Agreement with the University Careers and Appointments Service (10.3)
* sustained efforts to meet the requirements of degree-accrediting bodies: the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS), the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) (11.1)
* the School's survey of staff's opinions on changes in the higher education environment conducted as part of the ITR preparations (12.3)
* the professionalism and commitment of the School’s Advisers of Studies (15.2)
* the informal support and social events provided for postgraduate students (15.5)

**Recommendations**

*The Panel invites the School to consider the following recommendations, and asks that the Head of School and the Head of College, consulting with other staff as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each.*

The Panel recommended that School:

**Staffing**

[The Panel noted that large parts of the curriculum were taught by staff without long-term, full-time contacts, a concern shared by he School.]

*In the School there is some reliance on expert external speakers/lecturers or part-time staff to deliver particular courses, especially those required for professional accreditation. The School acknowledges that careful management of external staff is required and this increases the importance of course coordination. It is anticipated that the recent recruitment drive will reduce our reliance on part-time staff. Nevertheless, the School deems it as entirely appropriate that it should continue to draw upon expert visiting scholars from established universities to lead some modules for the MBA, MBA Property and MSc Property programmes. These offer considerable advantages in enriching student learning and in attracting international researchers to the School for periodic visits.*

* introduce a formal protection system for probationary staff that ensures ample opportunities for career development (3.3)

*Partly in response to the ITR the protection of probationary staff is formally part of School policy and probationary staff are allocated lighter than average loads of teaching and administration in order to allow the necessary time for career development. This is completely consistent with College regulations which state that, as a general rule, the maximum number of hours spent on teaching by probationers should not exceed 75 class contact hours in year one and 150 by year three. New staff to the School, particularly those in first appointments, receive continuing mentoring, help and guidance from course coordinators, Programme Coordinators and the Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Programmes. The School has introduced a dedicated induction session for new staff dealing with teaching, research and administrative matters.*

* introduce a formal mechanism of support for teaching fellows and teaching assistants (3.4)

No response!

**School organisation**

* appoint student representatives to their main School Committees (**strong recommendation**) (4.1)

*Student membership of the Graduate Programmes’ Teaching and Learning Committee was introduced in 2004/05 but no such representation exists at the Undergraduate level. Student representation on the Undergraduate T&L committee is being actively considered. The School is deliberating on credible methods of student selection, and is concerned abut preserving the effectiveness of these committees.*

* consider enlarging the membership of the School Teaching Committees to include direct representation of teaching fellow and teaching assistants (4.2)

*Given the relatively small number of Teaching Fellows/Teaching assistants in the School the School does not feel it is worthwhile to have representation from them on School committees, especially considering the further recommendation (4.3b) that School committee structures should be simplified. The views of Teaching Fellows/Assistants are gathered through Degree Coordinators/Programme Leaders as they are responsible for meeting with all colleagues teaching on their programmes. Degree Coordinators/Programme leader reports are a standing item on both the Undergraduate and Graduate T&L Committee’s agenda’s. The School believes that this system is highly satisfactory in its operation.*

* consider renaming their School Teaching Committees, *School Teaching and Learning Committees* (4.3)

*Agreed. The School Undergraduate Teaching Committee has been renamed the School Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Committee.*

* consider rationalising the committee structure (4.3)

*Given 4.1 above, the School intends to review its committee structures.*

**Course design**

* ensure that the pre-requisites for Honours courses be made explicit so that students without the appropriate background do not register (5.2)

*Given the huge range of courses available throughout the University it is impossible to detail all these courses and their pre-requisites in School documentation. In any case this is unnecessary since this information is easily available through the University Calendar which is available on the University website. The School will provide a direct link to the University Catalogue of Courses on the School web site.*

* consider introducing mathematics and statistics to the Economics degree programmes at an earlier stage (5.5)

*The lack of mathematics and statistics at the pre-honours level in Economics is a perennial issue in Economics and there is considerable sympathy with the Panel’s view within Economics. A concern has been that the imposition of a mathematical and or statistics course in level one or two may be off-putting to students and discourage them from progressing into Honour Economics. However, developments within the School may act to alleviate this problem. In particular, PO2001 (Understanding Statistics) has been made compulsory for level two Accountancy, Finance and Property students and this is running for the first time this semester. Economics will consider in the early 2006 making this course compulsory for all Economics students and the School will consider making this course compulsory for all Business School students. The implications for the level three Mathematical and Statistical Methods in Economics (EC3001) course will be thoroughly considered.*

* ensure that Property Students are allocated Advisers of Studies who teach on the Property Degree Programmes (5.6)

*The Panel’s report appeared to indicate that Property spanned two Schools. This is not the case although many students taking Property courses, as with other Business School students, are enrolled on courses outwith the School. Graduate programmes in Property sit, with the exception of some law teaching, within the Business School. There is also an impression of fragmentation in teaching delivery across Schools following changes in structure of provision. However most courses remain, to a large extent, unchanged in terms of content and, in many cases, have the same lecturers as in previous years. There is also increasing integration of Property courses within the School. Both the level one Property course (Introduction to Investment and Finance, PO1001) and PO2001, mentioned above, are required as part of other degree programmes within the School and are open to all students within the School. Property students are also increasingly taking options from other School disciplines.*

*The Panel felt that students were further disoriented by having advisers from different Schools. In fact the same three advisers had been advising the students prior to and after changes to provision structure, two of these advisers being in Property and one being in Geography & Environment. All advisers had previously been in the same academic Department. The policy is consistent with the University’s overall policy in relation to advising, that students be advised by academic staff who teach on their named degree programmes. In relation to staff student liaison committees, students were not required to attend different committees in both Schools.*

**Teaching, learning and assessment**

* take steps to improve the interaction between students from different levels of study (6.3)

*The Panel noted that there was very little interaction between students at various levels/years and recommended that the School endeavour to improve interaction across levels. Interaction across years in the School has been achieved through discipline based societies (The Economics Society has a membership drive at levels one and two), through the enrolment of level three and four students in some level three courses, and via Staff-Student Liaison committees which straddle various levels. Beyond this the School considers that there are limits on what it can achieve, though this will be subject to further discussion.*

# Course and programme monitoring and review

* improve the consistency of feedback across the School (7.5)

*Property has been using standard feedback forms for some time. The School therefore disagrees with the comment that feedback was very limited. Copies of feedback forms are kept on record (for example, for external examiners meetings) and are available for the Panel themselves if they wish to judge the extent and usefulness of feedback given on coursework. Nevertheless, the School Teaching and Learning Committees will examine how the current system may be improved.*

**Academic standards and the academic infrastructure**

* consider introduction of a formal mechanism to share the experience obtained by staff acting as external examiners elsewhere (8.1)

*It is not clear how this can be achieved or how other Schools or institutions do this. Currently four members of the School Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Committee are external examiners for other institutions.*

**Training and supervision of research students**

* revise the research student handbook to include more details of University regulations and procedures (9.3)

*The Code of Practice for the Supervision of Research postgraduate students is based upon the College of Arts & Social Sciences draft Code of Practice for Research postgraduate students and conforms with both the University’s own regulations and the national “threshold standards” for research postgraduate students. The School has recently developed a Postgraduate Research Handbook and this contains both the Business School Code of Practice (with details of the monitoring and assessment mechanisms used within the School) and, as an appendix, the University Code of Practice. It also links to the University website where relevant policies and regulations can be accessed.*

* introduce a strategy for the development of supervisory skills (9.3)

*At present the School does not have an explicit strategy. Guidance is provided by pairing experienced supervisors with less experienced staff and a significant number of School staff have recently attended a course on personal development planning (PDP) for research students. Nevertheless, the School Postgraduate Research Committee will consider the form and implementation of such a strategy. This is likely to be based around the courses for new supervisors provided by the Centre for Education and Staff Development and their courses on skills updating for experienced supervisors.*

**Personal development and employability**

* resurrect the Employers’ Liaison Groups (10.1)

*The Business School recognises the importance attached to redeveloping Employer Liaison Groups and has appointed an Employer Liaison Officer. Subsequent meetings of School Teaching and Learning Committees will consider the progress made on this issue. A separate employers’ liaison group is being considered for Graduate programmes.*

**Staff training and educational development**

* introduce a formal staff development policy (12.1)

*The formation of a more formal School level policy on staff training and development will be considered.*

**Student involvement in the quality processes**

* introduce student representation on the School’s Teaching Committee (13.1)

*See comments under 4.1 above.*

# Public information/management information

* consider appointing a School Alumni Officer (14.2)

*The appointment of a School Alumni Officer is being considered at the undergraduate level. At the postgraduate level the Bon Accord Alumni Association was set up for the graduate programmes in 2004/2005, involving considerable work by students, the DISS Web Unit and the Graduate Programmes Coordinator.*

**Recruitment, access and widening participation**

* improve engagements with local schools and employers (16.3)

*Though the School is heavily engaged with the University Open Days and School liaison programme the School has no direct contacts with local schools and their careers teachers. The Undergraduate Teaching and Learning committee will consider this. Greater contacts with local employers can partly be achieved through the re-introduction of Employer Liaison Groups (see 10.1 above). At the graduate level the School will continue to develop relations with businesses and involve businesses in our programmes through initiatives such as the MBA Executive Practitioner Seminar series and through inviting practitioners to present seminars on our courses.*

**SHEFC Quality Enhancement Engagements**

[The Panel noted that the School demonstrated a limited awareness of these, or the wider concept of quality enhancement]

*The School agrees that Quality Enhancement in the eyes of staff remains an ambiguous term. Though staff seem to be clear on instances, the School does need to demonstrate procedures by which it can guarantee these favourable examples. To this end, the School seeks a clear definition of Quality Enhancement and also of the kinds of processes that this entails. The School will then introduce Quality Enhancement as a standing item on the agenda of the Graduate and Undergraduate Programmes teaching and Learning Committees.*

**Recent developments**

* include in the one-year follow-up report an update on the integration of Property into the Business School, to include consideration the impact on students (18.1)

*The School recognises that changes to the structure of provision of delivery in Property were of concern to students. However, when students met external examiners in June 2005, they indicated that the changes had not adversely impacted on their studies or degree programme. It should also be pointed out that the more significant changes have happened within the School of Geosciences. Provision of courses within Property has not been adversely affected by changes to the structure of the institution.*

*For some time there has existed a committee from both Property in the Business School and Geography & Environment in the School of Geosciences that has examined proposed degree programme changes to will continue to permit the flexibility of degree programme choices available in the MA system. Property has kept Geography fully aware of any planned changes and has only made changes once awareness has been raised and any concerns addressed. The changes within Property have permitted greater integration within the Business School and subsequently have opened up a wider choice for Property students from courses within the School.*

**Impediments to quality enhancement**

* consider using the University approved electronic plagiarism detection (20.2)

*The plagiarism software will be piloted on a number of pre-honours and postgraduate courses this academic year with outcomes being reviewed in the early Spring.*

*Additional comments from the College Director of Teaching and Learning*

**Introduction**

CASS is very pleased with the ITR of the Business School. In particular we welcome the number of ‘highly commended’, ‘commended’, and ‘exemplary’ comments. This is particularly impressive given that as the report says ‘new roles and structures were still developing in the School’. Again as the report says the ‘School has a firm commitment to teaching’ and has engaged in ‘self-critical reflection’. Given that the School embraces a number of disciplines these are very welcomed comments.

CASS notes the’ exemplary’ comments on the Mid-Semester Course Evaluation.

1. Short commentary on the Business School’s action plan

I have had meetings with Professor Michael Hughes (Head of School) and Dr. Harminder Battu (Convenor of the Teaching and Learning Committee). We have discussed the positive and negative aspects of the report. I am satisfied that the School not only took preparing the ITR seriously, but that they have also taken the comments seriously. They will continue with the good work they are doing and the report has encouraged them to go further.

On the negative side there were five main criticisms:

* Employability
* Student representation
* Probation
* Staff induction
* Property

The School does recognise the importance attached to employability and has appointed a School Employment Liaison Office. The School will also be contributing to the College Employment Committee. Both the School and College are aware that most of what they do does relate to employability, but perhaps is not transparent enough.

Student representation is a problem for the university, but the School recognises that it needs to make better efforts to improve the role of students, and has begun consultations to achieve that.

Probation is especially an issue for some parts of the Business School, and the Business School will fall into line with the new College policy on hours of teaching/administrative tasks that probationers should undertake. They are undertaking to improve the mentoring of new staff.

The Business School has recently introduced an Induction for all new staff and they have been given as an example of best practice what the Law School provides.

Property has remained a contentious issue for some years. Progress is being made as all the Property staff are in the Business School although some students straddle disciplines.

1. What it has learned from the ITR

The Business School has learnt from the whole document and I am happy that they will follow through the report's recommendations. The College will take forward the recommendations that are deemed to be best practice.

The Business School would argue that ITR is not a ‘light touch’.

*Appendix: Business School Action Plan*

**Action Points**

1. Increasing student awareness of learning outcomes
2. New style “user-friendly” programme specifications
3. Integration of temporary staff
4. Websites and student access to relevant committee minutes
5. Examination process
6. Guidelines for course coordinators
7. Enhanced mechanisms for obtaining student feedback
8. Student involvement in SENAS submissions
9. WebCT and WAI compliance
10. Signage and staff help for those with mobility difficulties
11. Pastoral care of postgraduates – advising system
12. Mounting of syllabi on web pages
13. Ensuring all documentation is on website
14. School investigation into group work with two development officers
15. Support for new staff
16. Student awareness of the relevant skills associated with CAS marks across levels.
17. Evaluate mid-term evaluation surveys (related to 7)
18. Development of School teaching seminar groups
19. Greater involvement with employers and School ELG
20. Review of entrance into Honours