**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

SUMMARY REPORT

Panel visit: Monday 15 November 2010

This summary is extracted from the full report on the Internal Teaching Review of the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy following the review carried out in November 2010. It includes the Panel’s overall impressions of the provision, a record of the Panel’s commendations and recommendations, the Panel’s conclusions and a list of the programmes which were revalidated.

**1. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

**The panel commended the quality of teaching and learning in the School. The panel commended innovative teaching practices and noted that exciting developments are taking place. The panel was also heartened by the positive response of students who expressed much appreciation for the quality of their teachers. The panel commended the policy of allowing easy access to staff so that students could address any concerns informally.**

**The panel were of the view that departmental divisions are still evident and may be a barrier to the dissemination of good practice across the School. The panel felt that further integration of the School would have considerable benefits for staffing and improved dissemination of good practice.**

**2. COMMENDABLE FEATURES**

*(Numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel’s full report.)*

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

**Aims of provision**

2.1 The panel **commended** the underlying ethos expressed in SED 5.9 about the broader civic mission and wider public value of the education offered and noted that it is clear from the supporting documentation that this ethos guides all aspects of provision.

**Staffing**

3.1 The panel **commended** the changes which have taken place in Philosophy leading to a significantly increased number of staff.

3.3 The panel **commended** the caps that have been approved for Honours enrolments in History (25 at Level 3) and (12 at Level 4).

3.4 The panel **commended** the School for the friendly and effective interaction between junior and senior staff.

3.5 The panel **commended** the mentoring system available to junior and probationary staff.

3.6 The panel noted that staffing levels are lower than desirable for the development of the School and **commended** the School for working effectively despite the level of staff.

3.7 The panel **commended** the efficiency of the School administration and noted that students spoke very positively about the discipline secretaries.

**School organisation**

4.1 The School comprises four disciplines which are located in different buildings. The panel **commended** the School on having moved the administrative staff into one building.

**Course and programme design, accessibility and approval**

5.1 The panel **commended** the School on the breadth of teaching methods and flexible approach to learning.

**Teaching, learning and assessment**

6.3 The panel **commended** the variety of assessment methods and especially **commended** the use of WebCT quizzes with Level 1 students in History of Art.

6.6 The panel **commended** the approach to formative self-assessment described by a member of staff whereby he writes a good, medium and poor essay and asks the students to mark these in class.

6.7 The panel **commended** the opportunities for field trips in History of Art and **commended** the work placement schemes in History and Divinity.

6.8 The panel **commended** the library tutorials which had been provided for History students which they had found to be very useful.

**Course and programme monitoring and review**

7.1 The panel **commended** the School on the consistently positive feedback and comments from External Examiners.

7.2 The panel **commended** the opportunities given for class representatives to speak to their peers at the end of classes without the staff present. The panel also **commended** the fact that History of Art student representatives are given the opportunity to write the minutes themselves.

7.5 The panel **commended** the strong emphasis placed on feedback to students on issues raised for consideration by committees.

**Training and supervision of research students**

9.1 The panel **commended** the student-supervisor relationships within the School, particularly within Divinity and Religious Studies where students spoke of a uniformly positive experience. Students felt privileged to receive the level of one-to-one attention that was available to them.

9.2 The panel **commended** the opportunities available for presenting work and receiving individual feedback from staff in History and the student-led reading seminars in Divinity and Religious Studies.

**Professional units / bodies**

11.1 The panel **commended** staff engagement with courses and training provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

11.2 The panel **commended** the School for its collaborations with the University’s Museum and Special Collections staff.

**Staff training and educational development**

12.2 The panel **commended** staff who participate in peer observation and review. The panel also noted that some courses are team taught, which would facilitate the sharing of good practice.

**Student support, retention and progression**

15.1 The panel **commended** the academic and pastoral care available in the School. The panel **commended** the School for creating an atmosphere in which students at undergraduate and postgraduate level felt supported.

15.2 The panel **commended** the appointment of a retention officer. The panel **commended** the initiative of weekly coffee meetings for Level 1 students to try to help them to feel part of the School community.

**Quality enhancement and good practice**

* 1. The panel **commended** the centralising of support for students with disabilities which has enabled excellent communication between the School Office, students and course co-ordinators.
  2. The panel **commended** the innovative teaching practices which are taking place within the School.
  3. The panel **commended** the policy of allowing students easy access to staff to address any concerns informally.
  4. The panel **commended** the School with regards to providing timely and constructive feedback to students. The use of a standard form was **commended** and the approach adopted in History of including learning outcomes as part of feedback on assignments was **commended** as being a very active approach.

**Impediments to quality enhancement**

20.5 The panel **commended** the School for seeking to put in place extra provisions for exams for disabled students and acknowledged that the late reporting of disabilities made this very difficult to administer.

**3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

*(Numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel’s full report.)*

The Panel invites the School to consider the recommendations in this section and asks that the Head of School and the Head of College, consulting with colleagues as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each.

The Panel **recommended** to the School:

**Staffing**

3.3 The panel noted that there appeared to be relatively few junior lecturers in History of Art and **recommended** that the balance of senior to junior staff could be improved.

3.5 The panel **recommended** that further thought be given to inducting new staff who arrive in January / February.

**School organisation**

4.1 The panel recognised that the distinctions between the disciplines are important on some levels, the panel **recommended** further streamlining of administrative procedures within the School.

4.2 The panel sympathised with the lack of a social space for School staff and **recommended** that more formal structures may therefore be needed for disseminating good practice amongst colleagues.

**Course and programme design, accessibility and approval**

**5.5 The panel recommended that students, in Levels 2 and above, be required to choose their courses at an earlier stage. Not knowing numbers on courses until the week before teaching resulted in an unnecessary practical and administrative burden.**

**Teaching, learning and assessment**

6.2 The panel noted the inconsistent use of WebCT and **recommended** a more consistent approach between and within disciplines. The panel recognised that the students generally wanted WebCT to be used more, especially to assist students with disabilities.

6.4 The panel were of the view that the School’s policy on blind double marking of all work at Levels 3 and 4 was very labour intensive and **recommended** that a system of moderation be introduced instead.

6.5 The panel noted the inconsistent use of Turnitin and **recommended** that there should be a consistent policy to ensure equal treatment of students with regard to plagiarism.

**Course and programme monitoring and review**

7.2 The panel **recommended** that the Staff-Student Liaison system be strengthened at undergraduate level. The Minutes of meetings could be posted both on WebCT and on the website. The panel commended the opportunities given for class representatives to speak to their peers at the end of classes without the staff present and **recommended** that this be implemented in all subject areas.

7.3 The panel, following meetings with PGT and PGR students, **recommended** that the School facilitates expression of collective student views and increases students’ awareness of the existing opportunities for the communication of such views through the School PG Committee.

**Training and supervision of research students**

9.3 Students seemed unaware that funding could be available to assist with trips to libraries where materials were not available at Aberdeen. The panel **recommended** that the School advertises this and other funding opportunities more generally to students.

9.7 The panel **recommended** that there be informal and regular opportunities for research students to provide feedback and receive information.

**Staff training and educational development**

12.3 The panel noted that a few staff who had taught previously commented that initial training provided on arrival at Aberdeen was not at a high enough level and that more subject-focussed training would be desirable. The panel **recommended** that thought be given to how this could be improved, but also to how more extensive training could be provided to those new to teaching whether they be PGR students or part-time teaching staff.

**Student support, retention and progression**

15.4 The panel **recommended** that the School evaluates its postgraduate induction provision considering issues such as the tailoring of the provision for different groups of students and the adequacy of publicity about the timing of the provision.

**Quality enhancement and good practice**

19.2 The panel **recommended** that more formalised structures for disseminating good practice between different disciplines would be beneficial.

19.4 The panel commended the approach adopted in History of including learning outcomes as part of feedback on assignments and **recommended** that this practice be considered for adoption across the School.

**Matters to be taken up outside the School**

5.4 The panel **recommended** that the University consider the accessibility of buildings for disabled students and students with mobility issues. It was noted that the Crombie Annexe where many of the academic History staff are located has no lift and is only accessible via stairs. The panel also recognised that parts of King’s College have limited accessibility.

20.4 The panel **recommended** that the University considers improvements to buildings where the School is located, specifically to improve disabled access and to modernise older rooms.

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

The panel recommended **unconditional revalidation**.

The panel wished to thank all members of staff within the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy for the work that had gone in to producing the ITR documentation and for their commitment to the review process. The panel also wished to thank all students and staff who participated in the visit; the visit itself went very smoothly and the panel were made to feel very welcome.

**5. REVALIDATION OF PROGRAMMES**

The following programmes were revalidated.

**Undergraduate:**

**Master of Arts (MA)**

Master of Arts (MA) in Divinity

Master of Arts (MA) in European Studies

Master of Arts (MA) in History

Master of Arts (MA) in History of Art

Master of Arts (MA) in Philosophy

Master of Arts (MA) in Religious studies

**Bachelor of Divinity (BD)**

**Bachelor of Theology (BTh)**

**Postgraduate taught programmes:**

**Master of Letters (MLitt)**

MLitt Art and Business

MLitt Art in Scotland

MLitt Cultural History

MLitt History and Philosophy of Science

MLitt Irish and Scottish Studies

MLitt Jewish Studies

MLitt Medieval Studies

MLitt Modern Historical Studies

MLitt Philosophy

MLitt Renaissance and Early Modern Studies

MLitt Visual Culture

**Master of Theology (Mth)**

MTh Biblical Theology

MTh Church History

MTh Practical Theology and Christian Ethics

MTh Systematic Theology

MTh Theology and Religious Studies

**Doctor of Ministry**

DMin Ministry

**Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)**

PGDip Pastoral Studies

**Master of Research (MRes)**

MRes Methods and Practices of Philosophical Research (to begin in 2011-12)

**Postgraduate research programmes**