##### UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

##### SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**SUMMARY REPORT AND RESPONSE**

Panel Visit, Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd May 2006

**1. OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

The School of Education was established in 2001 following the merger of the University of Aberdeen and Northern College. In June 2005 the School relocated from its historical base at the Hilton Campus to the King’s College Campus. The Panel recognises that the School is still going through the process of change and integration but were generally satisfied with the progress made in integrating the School within the University.

The Panel ***highly*** ***commends*** the School’s positive engagement with the ITR process. The review procedure has been a constructive experience for the School, the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the University.

The Panel ***commends*** the School on the thoroughness of its annual programme review reports, and those who were involved in producing the excellent and comprehensive ITR documentation. The programme reviews were extremely informative and complemented the Self Evaluation Document, allowing for a greater understanding of the School’s provisions and achievements.

The Panel was impressed by and ***commends*** the motivation, commitment and positive attitude of the staff from all levels.

However, the Panel ***recommended*** that the School review its staff access policy. At the moment staff are located in staff-only corridors to which students cannot gain access. This was highlighted as an issue by many of the interviewees.

The panel looked at the issue of placements in depth. It is already recognised in the School, and at a national level, that there are problems regarding parity of assessment and treatment within primary and secondary schools. The panel recognises that work is underway to deal with these issues and it ***recommends*** that the School continue to develop effective strategies for combating the problems.

The Panel was very interested to hear about the new Scottish Teachers for a New Era (STNE) project underway within the School. This initiative is aimed in part at developing the research culture within the School. However, the Panel ***recommends*** that the School be careful not to over-manage the research interests of its staff. It is hoped that unrelated research develops out of STNE and that staff are encouraged to have ownership and control over their own research.

The Panel ***commended*** the School for involving all members of staff in the STNE project. It is also ***highly commendable*** that the Local Authority representatives have been involved in the process.

The Panel heard some comments from student groups regarding the timeliness of assessments and feedback. Some assessments (especially in Music) were found to clash with each other and it was reported by several that feedback was not circulated for considerable periods of time afterwards. The Panel strongly ***recommends*** that the School examine the feedback issues as soon as possible.

The Panel picked up on a sense of camaraderie within the student body. The School is to be ***commended*** for facilitating this sense of fellowship, both social and academic, within its students.

**2. COMMENDABLE FEATURES**

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

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

* the School’s positive engagement with the ITR process. It has been a constructive experience for all involved (Overall Impressions);
* the excellence and thoroughness of its Self Evaluation Document and additional documentation (Overall Impressions);
* the appropriateness of the School’s undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The panel believes this to be comparable to that offered by other Schools of Education in Scotland (1.3);
* the School’s commitment to part-time distance-learning programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level (2.2);
* the decision to adapt the School Forum into a more discursive and participatory vehicle (4.1);
* the School’s commitment to investigating means of streamlining its committee structure with the possibility of combining some of its committees and meetings (4.2);
* the effectiveness of the School Learning and Teaching Committee. However, the panel welcomes a review of student involvement on this committee (4.4);
* the structured and thorough approach to course and programme development within the School (5.1);
* the academically strong set of Postgraduate Taught programmes available within the School (6.1);
* the staff enthusiasm for and commitment to the Scottish Teachers for a New Era project. The panel were also impressed by the high level of involvement of the Local Authorities in the project (6.2);
* the School’s involvement in tackling the various problems and issues arising from the placement of its students in nurseries and primary and secondary schools. The Panel notes that the School is currently developing mentoring courses to be offered to all field practitioners supporting students (6.7, 7.3);
* the considerable steps taken, both by the School and the College of Arts and Social Sciences, towards increasing the integration of the School into the College and University structure (6.8);
* the excellent and detailed Annual Programme Review Reports. These consistently exceeded University norms. (7.1);
* the production of the School’s Quality Assurance Handbook. This has extended staff awareness of the University’s quality assurance and enhancement policies and procedures (8.2);
* the comprehensive and detailed information and guidelines made available to Postgraduate Research students and their supervisors (9.1);
* the implementation of a confidential annual monitoring meeting between individual research students and the Research Degrees Programme Director (9.2);
* the excellent School staff CPD website (12.1);
* the many different layers of support available to its students. These include Personal and Professional Advisers, ‘buddies’, tutors and ‘critical friends’ (15.1);
* the sense of camaraderie among the students, both in their academic and social lives. The school is to be congratulated for helping for encourage this (15.2);
* the introduction of elements of the School of Education curriculum into other parts of the University, e.g. the introduction of a Mathematics education elective within the Honours Maths programme and the creation of a new Physics degree with Education (16.1);
* the use of the STNE project as a platform to increase the School’s research capacity (18.1);
* the School’s intention to review its Workload model (18.2);
* the extensive range of teaching facilities and WebCT and library provision available to staff and students within the School (Conclusions).

# 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

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 the College Director of Teaching and Learning as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each.

The Panel recommended that the School:

## Range of Provision

* investigate the possibility of introducing an MSc in Counselling.

The School is reviewing the MEd Programme and developing a proposal for an MSc which we think will be more attractive to a non-education or inter-professional audience/market.

## Aims of Provision

* review the policy regarding access to areas of the MacRobert Building. The Panel was of the opinion that the layout of the building might militate against the ease of access to some staff for students.

The School has consulted with students and there does not seem to be any problem with access to staff. There have been swipe card issues with students having difficulty accessing classrooms but this has been addressed in the meantime.

## School Organisation

* review the Staff Student Liaison Committee with a view to establishing more effective methods of disseminating the outcome of meetings to all students.

Minutes of Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) will be made available on the School website. However students are quite comfortable at raising issues directly with Programme Directors/Course tutors independent of SSLC meetings. The School deals with any issues as they arise.

* take measures to engage students more fully with the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

Two representatives from undergraduate programmes have been invited directly to the School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC). This approach has been more successful than relying on nominations from the Students’ Association as has been the case in the past. There is no similar representation from postgraduate programmes as these students are normally studying part-time using the School’s on-line and/or distance learning programmes. They are usually professional individuals with full-time jobs and would have difficulty finding time and release from their place of employment to attend meetings. Minutes of STLC will be available on the School website for all students to view. As indicated above students on PGT programmes are very comfortable at raising issues directly with the School and any such issues will be referred to the Committee as appropriate.

## Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

* the School Teaching and Learning Committee work closely with the College Teaching and Learning Committee to examine and try to resolve problems relating to the lack of a comprehensive course credit framework within the University.

Specific issues relating to the first and second year course accessed by BEd students across the University have been discussed and resolved with the College Director of Teaching and Learning. Steps are in place to review the course credit models used at different levels in other UG and PGT provision so that credit transfer arrangements between programmes becomes more manageable

## Teaching, Learning and Assessment

* consider expanding its portfolio to include MSc programmes.

The School is currently reviewing the MEd Programme and review documentation and associated programme and course documentation will go to ST&L and CT&L in December 2006. A model for MSc provision is part of this package starting with an MSc in Counselling and with plans to develop the proposed MSc model with other specialist areas in the wider university (eg Computing with Education; Science with Education)

* review the procedures by which the School Teaching and Learning Committee reviews how competent all teaching staff are at using IT facilities.

*It has been agreed that Programme Teams will discuss the use of IT within its programmes, i.e. use of WebCT, face-to-face/on-line learning, and establish tutor competence. There have been no complaints from students regarding tutor IT incompentence and the School would welcome further information on this point.*

*Staff within the School are responsible for identifying their own training needs through appraisal and self-evaluation. The School has identified a comprehensive programme of CPD activities for staff which includes ICT development. A range of IT related CPD opportunities is also available through DIT with many staff undertaking such opportunities.*

* look at the committee and governance structure of the School with a view to streamlining.

The School has reviewed its governance structure and a copy is attached for information. The new structure includes elected staff members to the various committees to allow for wider consultation and discussion of issues across the School. The remit of each Committee has been reviewed to ensure greater focus. There is representation of research on learning and teaching and vice versa to minimise unnecessary overlap of discussion.

* ensure that assessment is set at appropriate times and that hand-in dates do not clash unduly.

This is being considered within the review of full-time ITE courses. It is not generally an issue with BA and PGT programmes and courses which are all part-time in nature and where assessment deadlines are set for participants with, in some instances, opportunities for negotiation for later submission dates where unexpected professional/work-related demands arise.

* ensure that assignment feedback is returned to students as soon as possible.

As a general rule there is a 4-week turn-around time for student assignments from the date of submission taking into account planned staff holiday periods. There may be exceptions to this rule if extenuating circumstances prevail.

* continue to review and develop strategies for tackling the various problems associated with placements. The School should also continue to endeavour to inform students of the details of their placements as soon as possible.

The ITE Second Stage Review is reviewing placement issues nationally. A national group has been set up to look at the evaluation of placements including quality and equity issues. SEED is funding the PRACTICUUM development which is an on-line system designed to help with the administration of placement and the flow of information to and from the School of Education – this will come on-stream next year.

### Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

* review the effectiveness of its use of student representation on various School committees.

As indicated above, there is additional student representation on Committees within the School. The involvement of the students will be monitored over the coming session with adjustments made to the number of student representatives attending, as appropriate.

## Training and Supervision of Research Students

* consider whether integration between the research and supervisory activities within the School and those within the College Graduate School may be possible.

Supervisors, as well as all full-time and part-time on-campus research students, from the School have participated fully in, and contributed significantly to, all research-related activities of the College Graduate School since its inception: induction events, research and generic skills training, student conferences, staff development days and the Graduate School Committee.  The point at issue here, as the full Report recognises, pertains only to part-time, off-campus research students in full-time employment who find difficulty in accessing these opportunities.  These students are always informed of, and encouraged to attend, relevant College events by the School.  The School will continue to facilitate this involvement while simultaneously offering School-based alternatives and encouraging the University in general to recognise the need to be flexible in accommodating what is now a significant proportion of its research student body.review its postgraduate research supervisory capabilities.

*supervisory capabilities.*

* review its postgraduate research supervisory capabilities. This follows the news that some potential self-funded postgraduate research students have been unable to be accepted into the School because of limitations in supervisory capacity.

*This statement should read potential self-funded students… may have been….  This has been discussed with the Director of the Graduate School and arrangements have been made for additional support from supervisors from outwith the School of Education.  Although more can no doubt be done in this respect, a measure of the School's efforts is that currently 50% of the research students have supervisory teams which includes some involvement by supervisors from other Schools in the College. We have also  increased the number of staff within the School with experience and capacity to supervise doctoral students. However, the study of education is inherently multi-disciplinary and inevitably no School of Education can aspire to accommodate research into every aspect of the subject.*

## Personal Development and Employability

* continue to monitor its graduates’ perception of their preparedness with regard to entering the teaching profession.

The School undertakes a range of strategies to gauge level of preparedness of exiting students for their Induction Year (IY). These have included over the last 12 months – questionnaire issued to all 2005 exiting students – data currently being analysed; focus group meetings with samples of exiting students 12 months and 24 months after graduation; involvement of local authority personnel on programme development groups to ensure more effective planning of content of ITE programmes vs IY needs; analysis of LA provided IY CPD programmes to assess overlap vs progression opportunities for exiting students.

## Student Involvement in Quality Processes

* appoint more than one student representative to sit on the School Learning and Teaching Committee. The representatives do not necessarily have to be officials of the Students’ Association.

Two undergraduate student representatives have been invited to join the School Learning and Teaching Committee, one of these from Music. Both students attended the first meeting of the Committee.

## Student Support, Retention and Progression

* with regards to student appeals, the Panel recommends that the School continue to review methods of placement support and to encourage appropriate and timely feedback to the students from the partner schools.

There are on-going discussions with the Registry re allowing representation from the School to be present at student appeal panels.

* establish a Fitness to Practise Committee (Education) as soon as possible.

This Committee has been set up in discussion with the Registry. Registry will be able to give information on the actual date of establishment.

## Recent Developments

* encourage its staff to develop their own research interests, outwith the STNE and Inclusivity projects.

This has always been the case; the School Research Coordinator and Strategic Coordinator continue to encourage staff, give guidance and advice.

* establish a formal link between the School Teaching and Learning Committee and the School Research Committee in order to facilitate the necessary discussion and analysis of the introduction of research-informed teaching.

This has been done.

#### Response from the Director of Learning and Teaching,CASS

CASS is very pleased with the ITR of the School of Education. CASS believes that since 2001 the School has coped exceedingly well with all the demands of merger, moving and integrating into the College and University structure.

In particular we welcome the number of ‘ commendable features’, and believe that most of the ‘Recommendations’ are easily achievable, or have been done.

This is particularly impressive given that new roles and structures were still developing in the School. CASS believes that the School of Education has brought new life to teaching in the university and clearly as the report says there is ‘motivation, commitment and positive attitude of the staff’ to teaching and learning.

School has engaged in ‘self-critical reflection’.

CASS is somewhat surprised that part of the ITR focuses on ‘not to over-manage the research interests of its staff’. While CASS not does disapprove of the sentiment, this is an odd comment in an ITR. There are some other examples of this tendency.

CASS would also like to point out that some of ‘the problems’ in the School of Education e.g. ‘parity of assessment and treatment’ affect all Schools of Education and are a national issue.

What has been learned from the ITR:

Both the School and the College will follow through the reports recommendations.

Perhaps the University needs to talk more to the School about ‘Fitness to Practise’ and who has control of students’ progress.

Perhaps the University should look at PPA’s, buddies, tutors and critical friends

CASS will help in the introduction of elements of the School of Education curriculum into other parts of the university

The university and CASS will need to work on ‘lack of a comprehensive credit framework’

Like the School of Business, the School of Education would argue that ITR is not a ‘light touch’.

Professor Salmon

November 2006