**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

SUMMARY REPORT

Panel visit: Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 November 2011

This summary is extracted from the full report on the Internal Teaching Review of the School of Psychology following the review carried out in November 2011. 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 exciting developments. The panel was heartened by the positive response from students toward the School.

The panel noted the existence of a keen sense of collegiality and a common goal amongst staff in the School in respect of the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research. The panel noted the organised nature of the School and the willingness and commitment of Staff. The panel **commended** the School for their policy of shadowing important administrative roles in order to maintain continuity of provision in case of staff illness and to enable efficient handover of responsibilities.

The panel recognised the difficulties the School faced with staffing, particularly in light of the British Psychological Society requirement that the staff-student ratio does not exceed 1:20.

**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:

**Section 2: Aims of Provision**

2.1 The panel **commended** the School on their core aim, ‘to ensure students acquire a solid grounding in the main contemporary theories and research findings of psychology across its major subject areas. Their learning experience should be one that transforms them into highly competent individuals who possess a range of generic, personal and technical skills that equip them for the challenges posed by the 21st century’.

**Section 3: Staffing**

3.2 The panel **commended** the School on their planned Teaching Away Day to discuss resource issues in light of challenging staffing conditions.

3.4 The panel noted the specific national threat of cuts to Psychology funding in Scotland and **commended** the School for their proactive attitude in putting as much in place as possible to withstand the potential challenges ahead.

3.5 The panel **commended** the varied and stimulating teaching environment provided, made possible by staff members active in a wide range of research areas.

3.5 The panel **commended** the willingness of staff to undertake various roles including the majority of staff acting as Advisers of Studies.

3.5 The panel **commended** the School’s policy to have many of the major teaching and administrative roles held by two individuals in order to maintain continuity and overcome any difficulties which may arise from staff absence.

3.8 The panel **commended** the efficiency and dedication of the School administrative staff. The panel was heartened by their positive and enthusiastic attitude and noted the large role they play within the School.

3.8 The panel **commended** the work undertaken by the School Teaching Technician but noted concern over the lack of backup for this role.

**Section 4: School Organisation**

4.1 The panel **commended** the organisational structure of the School, specifically commending the work of the Teaching Advisory Group (TAG) and the External Liaison Group.

4.2 The panel **commended** the School Teaching Away Days and noted that staff attitudes are positive towards these.

**Section 5: Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval**

5.1 The panel **commended** the School for the introduction of the Behavioural Studies programme arising from comments made during the previous ITR.

5.2 The panel **commended** the breadth of teaching methods and flexible approach to learning.

5.4 The panel **commended** the School’s intention to implement compulsory practice at answering short answer questions (SAQs).

5.5 The panel **commended** the work done by the School in supporting students with disabilities.

5.6 The panel **commended** the School for the resources it provides to all students which can particularly help those with disabilities.

5.7 The panel **commended** the School on its willingness to provide alternative assessments for those with disabilities on the rare occasions when this was necessary.

5.8 The panel **commended** the School on its use of MyAberdeen.

**Section 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

6.1 The panel **commended** the quality of teaching and learning in the School.

6.1 The panel **commended** innovative teaching practices and noted exciting developments.

6.2 The panel **commended** the School on the use of Camtasia lecture recording software, which is used by the majority of staff.

6.3 The panel **commended** the School on small group workshops provided at level 1 despite large class sizes.

6.6 The panel **commended** the School on their system of providing feedback, which also received very positive comments from students.

6.6 The panel noted the School’s aim to provide feedback to students within one week of assessment and **commended** the sending of an email to all students on a course providing generic feedback.

6.8 The panel, following feedback from students, **commended** the School on their advising structure and advisers of studies.

6.10 The panel **commended** the School on embracing MyAberdeen and encouraged the School to continue to use the system to its full potential.

**Section 7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review**

7.1 The panel **commended** the School on the consistently positive comments and endorsements from external examiners for all taught programmes offered.

**Section 8: Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure**

8.1 The panel **commended** the School on its findings that the degree programmes offered by the School have been designed in accordance with the academic standards required by the University, as set out by the QAA, and the requirements of the BPS.

**Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students**

9.2 The panel **commended** the introduction of a methods course as a result of ESRC accreditation review including the Inclusion of post-grads in meetings with seminar speakers and a mock funding application.

9.4 The panel **commended** the School for the support provided to all postgraduate students, including the work done by the postgraduate convenor and supervisors.

**Section 10: Personal Development and Employability**

10.2 The panel **commended** the School for the work undertaken with the University’s Careers Service and University Alumni to provide advice to students relating to careers and professional development.

10.3 The panel were pleased to note the involvement of some students in the STAR award and with the Achieve website. The panel **commended** the School for their encouragement of these tools and would urge the School to continue this encouragement.

**Section 11: Professional Bodies/Units**

11.3 The panel **commended** the School on involvement with the Centre for Learning and Teaching in projects such as the implementation of PRS and Camtasia.

**Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development**

12.1 The panel **commended** the School on all probationary staff being assigned a mentor.

12.4 The panel noted the enthusiastic responses from staff toward advising and **commended** the School on having almost all staff named as advisers of studies.

**Section 15: Student Support, Retention and Progression**

15.2 The panel **commended** the School for their use of MyAberdeen, which received a very positive response from students.

* 1. The panel **commended** the proactive policy of chasing up students who missed a tutorial as a means of ensuring students who are experiencing difficulties get the support they need at an early stage.

**Section 16: Recruitment Access and Widening Participation**

16.1 The panel **commended** the recruitment techniques used by the School including the University’s Open Day and MA and BSc Applicant Days.

16.2 The panel **commended** the School for its desire to explore the use of distance learning options to aid widening access.

**Section 17: SFC Quality Enhancement Engagements**

17.2 The panel **commended** the School on the inclusion of enhancement themes within the curriculum including: Graduates for the 21st Century, Research-led Teaching Linkages, The First Year: Engagement and Empowerment, Flexible Delivery and Employability.

**Section 18: Recent Developments**

18.1 The panel **commended** the School on the steps they had taken to act upon the points raised by the previous panel.

18.1 The panel appreciated the explanations provided for points which had not yet been addressed. The panel recognised the proactive nature of the School in setting out action points for the coming years and **commended** them for this.

**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:

**Section 3: Staffing**

3.1 The panel noted that the School will undergo BPS Resource Review in February 2012 and **recommended** that the staffing levels be reviewed by the College.

3.6 The panel **recommended** that the balance of senior to junior staff could be improved.

3.7 The panel **recommended** that thought should be given to how this issue could be improved.

3.8 The panel **recommended** that thought be given to the consequences of the absence of the Technician and **recommended** that provisions be put in place to address this issue.

**Section 4: School Organisation**

4.2 The panel **recommended** that it may be appropriate to invite post docs with teaching responsibilities to the away days.

4.3 The panel noted a lack of a formal process for reporting good practice within the School. The panel **recommended** that this issue be considered in order to try to disseminate good practice amongst as many people as possible.

4.3 The panel **recommended** that this could be highlighted at an away day.

**Section 5: Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval**

5.3 The panel **recommended** that the School revisit the system of double marking to ensure clear procedures are in place.

5.3 The panel noted that coursework at Honours level was not double marked and they **recommended** that this issue be addressed if these marks contribute to Honours classification (see Section 7.7.5 Academic Quality Handbook).

5.5 The panel acknowledged the process followed by the School and **recommended** that the School raise awareness of disability provision/support to students, as suggested in the SED.

5.5 The panel **recommended** that it may be possible to introduce a more efficient, centralised system of tutors being aware of students with disabilities without having the responsibility to check this information before each class.

5.7 The panel **recommended** that thought be given to the issues presented by students who require extra time for online assessments through the VLE.

5.8 The panel **recommended** that the use of discussion boards and the inclusion of contact details on course pages is encouraged.

**Section 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

6.2 The panel **recommended** that the use of Camtasia should be universal across the School.

6.2 In light of the recognition of the Support Technician’s large workload, the panel **recommended** that staff should upload their own recordings.

6.4 The panel did, however, note concern on the part of students as to the anonymity of peer assessment when completed in class and **recommended** that this be reviewed.

6.5 The panel **recommended** that the school ensure students are well prepared for each new variant of assessment.

6.7 The panel **recommended** that the School try as far as possible to remove any chances of a student being able to pass purely by guessing.

**Section 7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review**

7.2 The panel recognised a lack of a formal process by which staff can share best practice from their own experience as external examiners. The panel **recommended** that this issue be raised at the appropriate School committee, such as the TAG.

**Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students**

9.5 The panel noted with concern the provided list of completion dates. While the School commented that the data received from Registry was not good, the panel highlighted a concern that on occasion a student, registered as part time, will complete their studies as a full time student. The panel **recommended** that this practice should not continue.

**Section 10: Personal Development and Employability**

10.1 While it was clear to the panel where the GAs were embedded in the curriculum they **recommended** that more thought be put into how to highlight GAs to students. The panel noted that courses at levels 3 and 4 would be revalidated for the coming Academic Year.

10.2 The panel **recommended** that the School, possibly in conjunction with the Careers Service, provide Behavioural Studies students with a careers talk at the end of level 2, to help them learn more about the options their degree programme will provide them with.

**Section 11: Professional Bodies/Units**

11.3 The panel did, however, **recommend** further engagement with CLT should be encouraged, including the encouragement of staff to attend CLT courses.

**Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development**

12.1 The panel **recommended** that a more formalised induction for teaching staff be introduced. The panel noted that this is particularly important when staff start outwith the normal course of the Academic Year.

12.2 The panel noted positive responses from new staff on the proposal that new staff sit in on lectures given by their peers. The panel **recommended** that the School incorporate this into induction.

12.3 The panel noted the view amongst some staff that criteria for promotion were largely research based with a perception that excellence in teaching and administration would not lead to promotion. The panel **recommended** that the Head of School consults with Head of College to determine the best way to address this perception amongst the School’s staff.

12.4 The panel **recommended** that the Registry provide new advisers with an information sheet or checklist during advising to help them with the process.

**Section 13: Student Involvement in Quality Processes**

13.2 The panel **recommended** that students be invited to take part in the Teaching Advisory Group (TAG) and, if appropriate, School away days.

**Section 15: Student Support, Retention and Progression**

15.1 The panel **recommended** that the School ensure students studying Psychology are inducted into the School and made to feel as much a part of the community as possible.

15.3 The panel **recommended** that the School continue to highlight the advantage to students of undertaking STAR or the BP tutoring scheme.

* 1. The panel **recommended** that the School provide more information to students in level 2 about the requirements of level 3 to ensure they are suitably prepared.

15.4 The panel **recommended** that model answers and guidance on completing SAQs be provided.

**Section 16: Recruitment Access and Widening Participation**

16.3 The panel **recommended** that specific support be put in place for students entering a Psychology programme at level 2.

**Section 17: SFC Quality Enhancement Engagements**

17.1 The panel noted the School’s engagements with some of the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) Enhancement Themes, however, as identified by the School within the SED, the panel **recommended** that staff be tasked with engagement with an disseminating information from any future enhancement themes.

17.2 The panel **recommended** that the School continue to build on the foundations of addressing these Enhancement Themes.