

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Thursday 13 January 2005

**Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of the
Department of Psychology held on 11 March 2005**

Ms Jane McAllister, Senate Office

December 2005

The Review Panel commended the Department on the overall quality of its provision and the supportive environment fostered for students within the Department. Staff and students met by the Panel were clearly enthusiastic about the Department and its activities, and the Panel considered that future development of the Department would continue to be successful.

The Panel also commended the Department on the high quality of the documentation provided prior to the review, and the level of reflection in the Self Evaluation Report (SER).

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department give further consideration to possible ways of addressing the lack of A grades awarded in Levels 1 and 2. (*Paragraph D.6*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department is preparing descriptors for the different levels within the A grade. This is intended to increase the number of A grade awards. The addition of extra levels within the A grade should also help towards the goal of ensuring more students achieve an overall A grade when this is appropriate. Finally, while not wishing to deliver a fixed proportion of A marks, the Department has encouraged markers to award a reasonable proportion of A grades and to use the full extent of the scale. Our monitoring of the process in Level 2 for this term has revealed a doubling of the A grades awarded.

Recommendation 2:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider expanding its range of Level 4 provision to include more applied options. (*Paragraph C.4.9*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department has this year brought a proposal to the Board of Studies which will extend its range of Applied options in Level 4H. The new module examines psychologically-based interventions and will be of interest to students studying for careers in counselling, social work, health psychology, clinical and forensic

psychology. Its introduction has received encouragement from the student body. Our present consultation with employers indicate that they view its introduction favourably, and we are negotiating some input to the course from relevant professional psychologists. We have also been able to take advantage of an option called Cognition and Consciousness offered by the Humanities Technology Centre. In the future it is planned to run this jointly with Psychology and the Centre. In total there will be five clear Applied modules in Level 4, namely Applying Psychology, Applying Psychology to the use of Computers in Education, Abnormal Psychology, Psychologically-based Therapeutic Interventions, Alcohol Information Processing. There are also three options which are of relevance for people pursuing careers in Clinical or Health Psychology, namely, Biological Bases of Cognition and its Disorders, Cognitive Neuropsychology of Attention and Perception and the Cognitive Neuropsychology of Motor Control and Executive Function.

Recommendation 3:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider making the decision on which students would be eligible for Honours at an earlier stage, e.g. end of Level 1. (Paragraph C.5.10)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department requests that the recommendation to select Honours students at the end of Level 1 not be implemented. We have consulted with Chief Advisers of Studies and a sample of students all of whom are opposed to selection at the end of Level 1. Performance at this level is not an accurate enough predictor to recommend using it as a selection strategy. We believe that the reasoning behind the recommendation, see Section C.5.10, is not entirely supported by empirical evidence. Among BSc students who are denied a place in Honours Psychology many do in fact take up other others courses in Science. Of the 13 or 14 students who complete the three year degree BSc in Psychological Studies, only 2 or 3 could be judged as strong candidates for Honours in other subjects. We believe that the curriculum difficulties of this relatively small number of students would be better dealt with by more effective counselling in Year 2 particularly at the end of the Level 2A Option in January.

It has to be remembered that the present system of selection was proposed by a Sub-Committee of Senate and ratified by a Senate Meeting. Any decision to change our procedure would require the involvement of the Deans of each Faculty, their Adviser of Studies, the Admissions Officers and the Clerk of Senate as well as the Department. Our consultations with the Faculties has indicated their support for the present mechanism. The number situation has improved steadily over the past 5 years with a slight drop in Psychology Level 1 from 600 to 530 running alongside an expansion in Honours entry from 80 to 130. This has greatly eased the bottle-neck of entry into Honours.

Recommendation 4:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department examine how to address the level of basic skills demonstrated by Level 1 students on entry to the University, in conjunction with the Faculty's Effective Learning Adviser. (Paragraph F.1)

Action: Head of Department
Effective Learning Adviser for the Faculties of Science

Response - Head of Department:

We are exploring ways of improving basic skill levels of Level 1 students in conjunction with the Effective Learning Adviser. However, the approach we believe has to be a whole class approach where basic skills are targeted through the normal curriculum and where the Effective Learning Adviser acts as a consultant. We have built basic essay writing skills, note taking and literature searches into our Level 1 tutorial structure in order to tackle the skills deficit.

Response - Effective Learning Advisers

With our faculty entry system this issue is not solely one for the Department of Psychology. The SLS provides workshops on relevant topics, and also one-to-one appointments, which are open to all students. The effective learning advisers do provide in-course sessions on a variety of topics for large lecture groups in 1st year, for example essay writing for biology 1 students; however, it can be counter-productive to provide similar sessions when there is a large overlap in cohort between courses.

We are happy to meet with the Psychology 1 teaching team to discuss alternative appropriate means of addressing the perceived lack of unspecified learning skills. In order to help first year psychology students we need to know what qualities are desired in their formative work. Any general assistance that we can provide needs to be in conjunction with full and appropriate feedback on formative work by subject tutors. One method of achieving a uniform quality of feedback is to use a feedback pro-forma on which both subject content as well as general skills are included. Advice and training for such a scheme should be sought from the TLS.

Recommendation 5:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider increasing the frequency of Level 2 tutorials. (*Paragraph C.4.5*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department will increase the frequency of Level 2 tutorials by 25% for introduction in session 2005-2006

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider introducing one of the laboratory exercises as a class group exercise in each of the Level 1 courses. (*Paragraph C.4.4*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department has prepared a laboratory group exercise in Level 1A and Level 1B for introduction in session 2005-2006.

Recommendation 7:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department offer more Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) sessions, to allow more students to benefit from the scheme. (*Paragraph F.6*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department has this session expanded its peer assisted learning provision especially in Levels 1 and 2. The Department is also developed its internal training and monitoring programme for the PAL facilitators.

Recommendation 8:

The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty Recruitment Committee give consideration to the discrepancy between Level 1 students' expectations of Psychology and the reality of studying the subject at undergraduate level, and examine ways of addressing this. (Paragraph C.5.5)

Action: Faculty Recruitment Committee, Faculty of Information and Mathematical Sciences

Response:

This issue was discussed at the Faculty Recruitment Committee where the Committee accepted the Department's strategy of promulgating a realistic view of Psychology as an undergraduate subject. This strategy involves amending promotional literature, reviewing web pages and ensuring at Open Days that a fair view of the discipline is offered.

Recommendation 9:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department include a description of the nature of undergraduate Psychology in its promotional literature for prospective students, and in increased interaction with relevant school staff. (Paragraph C.5.4)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

Promotional literature for prospective students has been revised to emphasise the scientific nature of Psychology. These aspects will be highlighted in interaction with school staff and in all the Open Days. Programme specifications reflect the broad but scientific nature of the subject.

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Student Recruitment & Admissions Service (SRAS) be fully briefed on the nature of Psychology at undergraduate level, in order that a clear view could be given to potential students prior to their application to University. (Paragraph C.5.6)

Action: Head of Department
Director, Student Recruitment & Admissions Service

Response - Head of Department:

The Department will support the Student Recruitment and Admission Service in their attempt to convey a clear view of the scientific nature of Psychology to potential

students prior to their application to University. However, in the end most students rely on the departmental information as well as information from the British Psychological Society web site in order to make their decision. Therefore ensuring that the departmental literature gives a clear picture of the discipline is our priority.

Response - Recruitment and Participation Service

The UK Recruitment and Marketing Section has been in contact with the Head of the Department of Psychology to arrange a meeting to allow the Department to brief UK Recruitment staff on the precise nature of the course. The meeting will include a review of printed and web-based literature to ensure the scientific demands of the course are adequately highlighted to potential applicants. The meeting will take place before the end of January 2006.

Recommendation 11:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department emphasise the differences between Psychology as studied at school and at undergraduate level in introductory lectures and the Level 1 class handbook, and that the expectations on students both in Level 1 and throughout their degree be made clear. (*Paragraph C.5.7*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department has refocused its Introductory lectures at the beginning of Psychology 1A to emphasize the role played by Experimental Method and in particular the importance of studying the brain's functional characteristics. This is intended both to alert students to the scientific nature of the discipline and to give them the basic knowledge needed to make the transition from for example, their experience of Higher Psychology. Our scientific approach has been clear throughout the description of lectures in the handbook. Students will be supported in the transition through the use of formative self assessment quizzes and through structured support for the writing of laboratory reports. Two of our staff namely, Dr. McCottor and Dr. Bishop have applied for a small grant which will allow the creation of software for teaching elementary statistical concepts. This software will be implemented in Psychology 1A. and will support students who have difficulty making the transition to a more science-based way of thinking.

Recommendation 12:

The Panel **invites** the Department to review their Level 3 non-Honours provision, with particular regard to teaching, learning and assessment methods, in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Service (TLS). (*Paragraph C.3.8*)

Action: Head of Department
Director of Teaching and Learning Service

Response - Head of Department:

The Department has consulted with the Teaching and Learning Service with a view to modifying the Level 3 Non Honours provision. We have decided to introduce a system of weekly tutorials to diversify our delivery of the curriculum. At present 50% of the course is based on course work and we do not see much scope for increasing this.

However, weekly tutorials along with Project Group meetings will add substantially to the teaching provision.

Response - Teaching and Learning Service

At a meeting with Dr McCulloch of the Teaching and Learning Service, Prof O'Donnell explained that the non-Honours students in 3rd year are on a designated programme, and that they are reviewing the content to make changes in 2006/7 to more applied themes. In the meantime, the department has some flexibility in delivery through 'The Small Projects' system, where students use the tutorials to complete mini-projects.

Many of the students are looking for another way to enter a career in Psychology, but the mini projects are intended to develop their skills to determine other career trajectories that they might undertake. The external examiner thought that some of the projects were of honours standard, and it was suggested that the department might include oral presentations within the tutorials to enhance employability skills, and support the projects.

Some concern was expressed about the timing of assessments and the excessive number of pieces of feedback, and the department intends to look at the balance for the current academic year, as well as providing earlier and prompter feedback. This will be in addition to providing clearer explanations for what is required for assessment.

Dr McCulloch is liaising with Professor O'Donnell about the introduction of new group tasks into the third year non-Honours tutorials, and the dynamics of small group work.

Recommendation 13:

The Panel **recommends** that the University consider the wider implications of the teaching of Designated Degrees across all Honours subjects. (*Paragraph C.3.5*)

Action: Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching)

Departmental Response:

The wider implications of the teaching of designated degrees is to be considered by the Vice-Principal, Learning & Teaching. There is a departmental view on the issue which is that even with an increase in the numbers studied for an Honours Degree there will always be a need to provide a 3-year qualification for a small group of students.

Response - VP (Learning & Teaching)

Awaited

Recommendation 14:

The Panel **recommends** that the Teaching and Learning Service consider introducing a further session of teaching observation for probationary staff within the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme. (*Paragraph E.3*)

Action: Director, Teaching and Learning Service

Response:

This needs to be discussed further within TLS (and the new LTC), because of parity and equity issues for the participants of the NLTP and workload issues for the staff of TLS. The introduction of Peer Observation of Teaching (Recommendation 15) within the department may negate the need for additional support from TLS. This is to be discussed further with the department.

Recommendation 15:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider introducing a system of peer observation for teaching staff. (*Paragraph E.4*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The Department has introduced a system of peer observation for teaching staff for Session 2005-2006.

Recommendation 16:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department review the membership of the Teaching Management Group (TMG), with a view to allowing more junior members of staff to become involved in this pivotal departmental activity. (*Paragraph C.4.3*)

Action: Head of Department

Response:

The member of the Teaching Management Group has been extended to involve more junior members of staff. The Present TMG has the following members:

Professor P. J. O'Donnell, (Chair), Dr. P. Bishop Professor A. M. Burton, Dr. I. W. R. Bushnell, Professor A. M. Burton, Dr. S. W. Draper, Dr. S Martin, Dr. L. Moxey, Ms S. Robertson, Professor A. J. Sanford & Professor P. G. Schyns. Attending: Mrs. S. McGill.

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Last modified on: Wednesday 21 December 2005