

Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of School of Life Sciences: 27 and 28 October 2011

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the School of Life Sciences. *Periodic Subject Review* is an internal subject review focused on the quality of provision as experienced by students. The review looks at the range of programmes, course content, the teaching methods employed, assessment, facilities and much more.

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_246737_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/psr/>

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel commends the School on the overall scope and quality of its provision, and for its conscientious approach to student support and its effort to maintain a high quality student experience. The Review Panel noted the concerns raised regarding the conflict between research and *teaching obligations* and encourages the School and College to establish a robust and consistent approach to the allocation of teaching duties. The School and Research Institutes should continue to work together to ensure that *research-led* teaching continues to be a strength of the degree programmes offered.

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Student support

- Staff within the School work towards ensuring that students have an engaging and positive experience through their commitment to teaching and support for the students [*paragraph 6.1*]
- Use of *Moodle* for group work in Biology Level 1 which works towards integrating all students into the learning experience and facilitating student engagement, both socially and academically [*paragraph 4.6.1*]

¹ Numbers refer to the paragraphs in the full report that contain the relevant discussion.

- The use of innovative technology to improve teaching administration and feedback to large student cohorts [paragraph 4.3.3]
 - Maintaining the quality of the student experience through a period of significant change [paragraph 4.6.4]
-

Areas to be improved or enhanced

1. Curriculum Design, Development and Content

- Urgently redevelop the final taught year of the MSci to provide the attainment at *SCQF Level 11*, required by the *QAA* and by the University regulations, bringing it into line with MSci programmes at other UK universities [paragraph 4.4.2]

2. Student support

- Review guidance given to students progressing from Level 2 to 3 prior to any formative assessments, to ensure that students understand the level of attainment and depth of knowledge required in order to achieve certain grades, particularly with respect to written reports and essays [paragraph 4.3.1]
- There is dialogue with undergraduate students on an annual basis to ensure that they understand the processes used when marking assessments and the use of different forms of feedback, e.g. written, verbal and *Peerwise* [paragraph 4.3.2]
- Ensure that *Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs)* are minuted and that the minutes are made readily available to students. The School should also ensure that actions taken in response to issues raised are reported back to SSLC's and this is recorded in the minutes of these meetings such that the feedback loop is closed [paragraph 6.2]
- *Postgraduate Taught students* are sent an information pack prior to arrival, including information about induction and timetables and given an early opportunity to meet with their peers [paragraph 4.6.3]

3. Learning and Teaching Resources

- Highest priority to be given to establishing effective workload and financial models, ensuring both teaching and research are properly supported within the College in 2012-13, preventing division developing between research and teaching staff [paragraph 4.8.5]
- Establish a robust, transparent and consistent process for the allocation of teaching duties, in which all academic staff are encouraged to engage in learning and teaching and ensure that research-led teaching continues to be a strength of the degree programmes offered by the College [paragraph 4.4.3]
- *Probationary* members of staff are given an *induction* programme and meet regularly with mentors to help enhance career progression and that a full record is kept of these meetings [paragraph 4.8.2]
- Develop a system of feedback and other support mechanisms for *Graduate Teaching Assistants* to enable their career development [paragraph 4.8.1]

4. Quality Assurance/Enhancement

- Review *Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)* for all programmes and courses, ensuring that they encompass development of knowledge, intellectual skills and transferable and/or key skills and that assessment criteria match the developed ILOs such that the attainment [*paragraph 4.2.2*]
- Review *Programme Specifications* to ensure that each one is distinctive to the programme, and contains the relevant information for all available degree pathways [*paragraph 4.1.1*]

5. Recruitment

- Continue to investigate strategies to increase international student recruitment together with the Research Institutes aided by advice and support from Recruitment and International Office [*paragraph 4.5.1*]

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Contractual teaching obligation

Teaching duties identified as part of job remit.

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators are students, usually research students, who assist with teaching in the form of tutorials, labs and other activities that are part of undergraduate programmes in the subject/school. They are paid an hourly rate by the University.

Induction

Induction is a series of events planned by the University, Colleges, Schools, Subjects and the Student's Representative Council to welcome new students and provide them with information to prepare them for their studies and the forthcoming year at University. Events usually take place during the first week of the academic year.

Intended Learning Outcomes or ILOs

Intended Learning Outcomes or ILOs describe what all students should be able to do or demonstrate, in terms of particular knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes when they successfully complete the course or programme that the ILOs relate to.

Moodle

Moodle is the University's supported Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Peerwise

Peerwise enables online submission of students' work which provided a very specific peer review functionality that requires students to compose multiple choice questions based on their course.

Periodic Subject Review or PSR

The University has a six yearly cycle of review of the Subjects/Schools within it. The PSR is one of the main ways by which the University assures itself of the quality of the provision delivered by Subjects/Schools.

Postgraduate Taught or PGT

Postgraduate Taught refers to taught programmes at postgraduate level, usually Masters.

Probationary Staff

Lecturers/Teachers, on appointment are required to serve a period of probation to ensure that a new lecturer/teacher has an opportunity of familiarising him or herself with the academic environment; it also provides the University with an opportunity of ensuring that the lecturer/teacher is capable of undertaking the work for which he or she has been employed.

Programme Specifications

Programme specifications are documents that aim to provide the core factual information about a programme of study to a range of stakeholders, including students or potential students, e.g. Level of award, number of credits, programme aims, intended learning outcomes, etc.

Recruitment and International Office (RIO)

The Recruitment and International Office (RIO) provides applicants, parents and teachers with a single point of contact for information and advice on the range of programmes available at the University of Glasgow. The Service also develops, implements, co-ordinates and monitors widening participation initiatives within the University and with other partners. The Recruitment and International Office (RIO) is situated in the Fraser Building.

Research-led Teaching

Research-led Teaching can mean different things in different disciplines. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the ways that the current research of staff can positively influence and support student learning and promote the development of research skills and attributes in students.

Staff:Student Liaison Committee or SSLCs

Staff:Student Liaison Committees are Subject/School committees which provide a formal opportunity for Student Representatives to discuss matters with, and give feedback to their subject area.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework or SCQF

The SCQF assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond. It does this by making the overall system of qualifications e.g. HNDs, Highers and Degrees equivalent to an [SCQF Levels](#)/credit point.