



Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of Economics held on 19 and 20 March 2015

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the Subject area of Economics. *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_419594_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/periodicsubjectreview/>

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

It was clear to the Panel that the Subject and School were making efforts to provide excellent teaching and student support, faced with the challenge of a very high *student to staff ratio* and specific issues relating to a large mono-cultural / linguistic cohort at PGT level. The School and Subject were beginning to show a greater commitment to teaching, post-REF, through its revised *Work Load Model* and recruitment strategy. The unusual but necessarily high reliance on ancillary teaching (by *GTAs* and adjunct staff) proved not to be an area of weakness, with the Panel impressed by the commitment of the staff interviewed and the good feedback from students. External dissertation supervision was seen as an exception here and it was felt that there was more work to do to review this and reduce reliance on external staff.

The international character of the Subject (both in terms of staff and students) was seen as both a strength and a potential weakness. Whilst this brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Subject, there was a need to ensure a greater level of consistency across teaching delivery and assessment practice, especially at undergraduate level.

Related to this was a need to create a more integrated 'community' in the Subject through greater staff involvement in student-led networks and initiatives. The limiting factor of social/interactive space, however, mainly beyond the control of the Subject and School, was acknowledged by the Panel.

The Panel concluded that the PGT provision was very good in range and content and reputationally strong in the international market. There was an impression, however, that some undergraduate students had differing expectations about their programmes to those of the Subject and staff. The Subject had clearly responded to the issue of mathematics in the curriculum but beyond this, the Panel believed that there was more scope to vary the curriculum and assessment methods and staff were overly hesitant about academic and logistical constraints. In this respect, innovative use of e-Learning technology as a response to dealing with large class sizes could be further explored by the Subject.

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

1. Supporting Students in their Learning

- The support provided by the School/Subject administrative staff and the initiatives to support the international student body including the work of the College International Student Officer and Mandarin-speaking Mental Health Officer (para. 4.3.2).

2. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

- The acquisition of the Bloomberg terminals as an important ancillary resource for students (para. 5.3.3).
- The School/Subject's understanding of the need to balance research and teaching, exemplified by its recent review of the Work Load Model and its current recruitment strategy (para. 3.1.1).
- The promotion of Economics within the ASBS was a strong brand and its success in attracting excellent researchers and teachers in the field (para. 3.1.1).
- The commitment of the GTAs (para. 5.5.9).

Areas to be improved or enhanced

1. Supporting Students in their Learning

- Review office hours in general and how these are communicated to students and take measures to improve staff – student engagement outside of formal contact time. This should be achieved by helping staff in general to take a more proactive lead in engaging with students outside of formal teaching (para. 4.5.3).
- Provide additional guidance and support for staff with a view to achieving greater consistency in delivery and also consider developing a clearer central policy for how teaching is delivered across the curriculum. Where variation in delivery exists for valid

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

pedagogical reasons, staff should justify this to the Head of Subject and the reasons for variation in teaching delivery should be clearly explained to students (para. 3.2.3).

2. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

- Ensure that its policy on timing of feedback is consistently met across its provision. The Subject should also review the use of *Teleform* to ascertain how far this system is improving the quality of feedback generally. The Subject should fully engage with the external *LEAF Project* in this respect (para. 5.4.5).
- Introduce greater variation in assessment and reduces the reliance on traditional examinations. Greater use of learning technology should be explored as means to introducing more innovative assessments. The Subject should also map individual experiences of assessment across the years of the UG programme and review where variation in assessment needs to be placed in the individual student's 'journey' through the programme (para. 5.4.5).
- That staff more widely engage in new learning and assessment technologies. All staff should use *Moodle* and where necessary, take ownership of those sites. In the longer term, the Subject should investigate learning technology as one avenue for dealing with large student numbers (for example, online formative assessments and *Peer to Peer assessment*, reportedly suggested by the *SSLC*). These investigations may even lead to a '*blended*' learning approach in the future (para. 5.3.3).
- Consider revising the curriculum to add more *Graduate Attributes* in terms of 'soft skills' (e.g. presentation skills and group work) (para. 4.6.2).
- Engage GTAs more in the internal Subject discussions. It should also review GTAs' workload and time allocated to marking, specifically to ascertain if inadequate time to produce feedback is contributing to low student satisfaction on timing and/or quality of feedback (para. 5.5.9).

3. Enhancing the Student Experience

- Better staff engagement with student-led initiatives, building on the networks students have developed themselves as a mechanism to enhance the cohesiveness for the Subject as a community (para. 4.5.2).
- Review dissertation supervision to fully understand the resource requirements and the amount of external supervision that will be required and its possible effects on the student experience. In the longer term, more innovative ideas should be considered to alleviate the labour intensive nature of traditional dissertation supervision, including consideration of alternative types of independent study where academically possible (para. 5.6.2).

4. Context and Strategy

- Consider a longer term strategy in relation to mathematics in the UG degree programme and its recruitment of, in particular, Home students (e.g. should Higher/ A level mathematics be required for admission?). The Subject should also communicate to prospective students better, the mathematical demands of its programmes (para. 5.2.2).
- Engage in the future re-design of the Gilbert Scott building to create interactive space for its students and staff (para. 3.1.5).

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Blended Learning

Use of face-to-face teaching and on-line learning.

Graduate Attributes

[Graduate attributes](#) are the skills, knowledge and qualities or attitudes developed by individuals through their programme of study that they will use to contribute effectively in work or other aspects of society in the future.

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.

LEAF project

“Leading Enhancement in Assessment and Feedback” (LEAF) project which examines collaborative approaches to enhancing efficiency in assessment and feedback to students. This project had been initiated by Universitas 21² and had ran across a number of subjects and institutions, including Edinburgh, Nottingham and Birmingham.

Moodle

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

Peer assessment

A process whereby peers grade assignments or tests based on provided criteria. It is a practice that is considered to improve the students understanding of course materials as well as marking, assessment and feedback procedures.

RAE - Research Assessment Exercise

The Research Assessment Exercise is conducted in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council (other higher education bodies conduct the exercise in other parts of the UK). The primary purpose of the RAE is to produce quality profiles for research activity in institutions. These quality profiles are used to determine the funding for research awarded to the institutions.

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.

² Universitas 21 is a global network of research-intensive universities, working together to foster global citizenship and institutional innovation through research-inspired teaching and learning, providing a strong quality assurance framework to the network’s activities

Staff:Student Ratios (SSRs)

The Staff:Student Ratio describes the number of students to each member of staff, either in the Subject/School, College or University.

Teleform

A scanning system that provides students with on-line feedback on examination performance by providing access to their examination assessment sheet via Moodle.

Workload Model (Staff)

A workload model is a means of describing the workload of all members of staff and should be used by Schools to ensure that staff workloads are manageable and allocated fairly with different types of work appropriately distributed.