



Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of the School of Life Sciences held on 2 and 3 March 2017

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* (PSR) 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_549193_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

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

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel observed a dedicated and hard-working School that strived to provide the best learning and teaching environment for its students. The Panel was impressed by the quality of the students it met with, who clearly recognised the support provided to them and its aim of ensuring an excellent student experience. The Panel recognised the complexity of the College structure and the pressure to cover a diverse range of teaching and research, and the challenges faced by the School within this. However, establishing a clear vision and strategy for future shape aligned with the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences (MVLS) plans, should alleviate this pressure. The School of Life Sciences was under new management who were committed to enhancing the School's position and creating a strong School identity with a new learning and teaching strategy developed and underway. The Head of School was clearly committed to enhancing the staff experience as well as the student experience. The School should give attention to the provision of collaborative provision and the opportunities this provides to enhance *internationalisation* and *study abroad* opportunities thus enhancing the student experience further.

Commendations, Key Strengths and Good Practice¹

Commendations are presented separately from examples of good practice, with the former being used to identify innovative and exemplary activities for wider dissemination.

Enhancing the Student Experience: Supporting Students in their Learning

- Extended *induction* beyond fresher's week [3.1.2].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

- Innovative use of its *Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (Moodle)* which had become the main source of information and communication for all students. [Paragraph 4.1.9]

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Assessment and Feedback

- The evidence based data driven approach to understanding and improving assessment practice across the School [4.2.1].

The Review Panel identified the following key strengths and areas of good practice.

Enhancing the Student Experience: Supporting Students in their Learning

- Participation on the *Higher Education Academy (HEA) What Works* project which resulted in enhancement of student support [3.1.3];
- The support coordinated with Disability Services [3.2.2].

Enhancing the Student Experience: Student Engagement

- The holistic approach taken to analyse course evaluation data to enhance student learning [3.4.1].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Assessment and Feedback

- The harmonisation of Level 4 projects [4.2.3];
- The introduction of low stakes assessment in early stages and the associated provision of *summative feedback* [4.2.4];
- The students were exposed to a standard range of assessment types but included feedforward *formative assessment* followed by *summative assessment* in several courses. This should be enhanced by the work undertaken by the new *Assessment and Feedback Working Group* [4.2.5];
- The statistically-evidenced *moderation of marking* [4.2.9].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Curriculum Design and Development

- The consultative approach to the redesign of Level 2 [4.1.1].

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

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

- The *Molecular Methods App*, in using digital support resources, delivering material in a way that the digitally aware student cohort would appreciate and engage with [4.1.11]

Areas to be improved or enhanced

The Review Panel made a number of recommendations where it identified opportunities for further enhancement.

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Study Abroad

- Clarification of where *study abroad* opportunities can be undertaken and provision of sufficient support [2.5.2]
- Development of an *internationalisation strategy* that provides more effective study abroad opportunities for students and also create scope for collaborative provision and articulation pathways [6.1].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Assessment and Feedback

- That degree classification should be based on performance in Years 3 and 4 and on a more diverse range of assessment methods [4.2.7].

Enhancing the Student Experience: Employability and Graduate Attributes

- Embedding *employability* throughout the curriculum, ensuring that destinations other than academic pathways are clearly highlighted to students, which might include the establishment of an Industrial Liaison Committee [2.2.5];
- Exploration of the provision of other *placement* experiences that do not have a research focus [2.2.4].

Enhancing the Student Experience: Supporting Students in their Learning

- The Management Team address the issue of staff not complying with the requirement to provide lecture slides [4.1.9].

Enhancing the Student Experience: Equality and Diversity

- The Management Team ensure remaining staff undertake the compulsory University *Equality and Diversity* training as soon as possible [3.2.3].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Engaging and Supporting Staff

- A review of processes to ensure all *Graduate Teaching Assistants* (GTA) receive statutory training as required by the University and that they are appropriately supported by the School in the delivery of their roles [4.4.7];
- Provision of an *induction* programme for new staff ensuring expectations, roles and responsibilities, both within the School and in the wider context, were clearly transparent [4.4.1];

- Transparency of workload modelling for all staff, ensuring time was allocated for early career staff development and participation on the *Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice* (PGCAP) [4.4.2].

Context and Strategy: Strategic Approach to Enhancing Learning and Teaching

- Formulation of a clear strategy for the future shape of the degree portfolio including how teaching within the portfolio will be delivered [2.4.1];
- Continuing to strengthen the working relationship with the Research Institutes in relation to teaching resources [2.4.6];
- Reconsideration of both the groupings of degree programmes and the associated committee structures with a view to developing more consistency and coherence of approach across the School [2.4.3].

Academic Standards

- A review of processes for providing feedback to external examiners to ensure that the assessment feedback loop is closed, which might include reducing the number of *External Examiners* to provide greater consistency across programmes [5.2.2].

Glossary

Assessment and Feedback Working Group (AFWG)

The Assessment and Feedback Working Group has the primary aim of making a step change in our approach to assessment and feedback to improve our practice, as evidenced by Periodic Subject Review reports and other mechanisms, and substantially improve the student experience of assessment and feedback, as measured by the *National Student Survey* (NSS) in particular. The group will use an evidence-based approach to understand and improve current practice and behaviours. It will draw on best practice from both within the University and from across the Higher Education sector and facilitate adoption of this practice within the University.

Employability

Employability is about more than being able to get a job after University. It is about acknowledging and being able to demonstrate achievements, understanding and personal attributes that will contribute to success both during, and after, University.

Equality and Diversity Unit or EDU

The Equality and Diversity Unit is responsible for promoting and embedding all aspects of equality and diversity by creating policies and action plans for the University community. The University has a statutory responsibility for complying with a range of equalities legislation, currently covering six strands of equality, including: age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

External Examiner

External Examiners are appointed by the University Court on the recommendation of Senate based on advice from the relevant School. The role of External Examiner is a very important part of quality enhancement and assurance to maintain academic standards at the appropriate level and to ensure that student performance is properly judged.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment refers to assessed work where feedback is given to help the student improve their learning and their performance. The work may or may not contribute to the student's final grade for the course.

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.

Higher Education Academy (HEA) What Works

HEA is an independent non-profit organisation committed to world-class teaching in higher education that works in partnership with institutions and individuals in higher education supporting student success to collaborate, and share teaching strategies and practice. The 'What Works' initiative is a student retention and success change programme, focused on identifying and implementing whole-institutional approaches to improve student retention and success which showed that 1) effective interventions have an academic purpose relevant to all students and are delivered in the mainstream, facilitating collaboration between students and

staff and 2) interventions are most successful when ongoing, and as part of a programme of measures featuring the monitoring and follow-up of engagement by individual students.

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.

Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a key strategic priority for the University. The University's Internationalisation Strategy contains six interconnected themes aimed at enhancing the global reach and reputation of the University (student experience, research and knowledge transfer, partnerships, alumni, local engagement and staff). The University's web pages contain a range of resources and guidance to support staff in achieving the University's [Internationalisation Strategy](#). This includes information for students and staff engaged in international initiatives, international staff working in Glasgow and staff working overseas.

Moderation or Double Marking/Second Marking

Moderation or Double/Second marking describes the process of where assessments are marked a second time and the two marks compared. The purpose is to ensure the marks awarded are fair, reliable and consistent. The second marking may be done 'blind' or 'seen' and may be done on all of the class's work or on just a sample. Where the markers agree, the marks are confirmed or verified; where they disagree the marks are moderated or changed either by agreement between the two markers or by a third person.

Molecular Methods App

Molecular Methods is an app to compliment a series of webinars produced for the School of Life Sciences' Molecular methods course. More details are available on the University Website at: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/mvls/digitaleducation/casestudies/#/molecularmethodsproject>

Moodle

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

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.

PG CAP

The Academic Development Unit provides two credit bearing programmes for academic members of staff: the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) and the MEd in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (online).

Study abroad

Study abroad is a term that is often used to refer to several programmes that offer opportunities for students to study in a European University, or one further afield, for a term, semester or year as part of their undergraduate degree programme. (The University's "Study Abroad Programme" is specifically for designed for visiting students who elect to come to the University of Glasgow.)

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment refers to assessed work that contributes to the final grade for the course/programme. Summative assessments may include an element of formative assessment.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

A virtual learning environment (VLE) in educational technology is a Web-based platform for the digital aspects of courses of study, usually within educational institutions. VLEs typically allow participants to: be organised into cohorts, groups and roles; present resources, activities and interactions within a course structure; provide for the different stages of assessment; report on participation; and have some level of integration with other institutional systems.