University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 24 May 2019

Periodic Subject Review: Review of the School of Veterinary Medicine (Undergraduate Provision) held on 18-19th February 2019

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

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Associate Professor Susan Rackard	University College Dublin, External Subject Specialist
Dr Bethan Wood	Senate Assessor on Court
Ms Claire McCormack	Student member
Professor Jeremy Bagg	Dental School, Cognate member
Dr Amanda Pate	Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service
Mrs Ruth Cole	Senate Office, Clerk to the Panel

1. Introduction

1.1.1 The School of Veterinary Medicine is one of three schools in the College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences and is located at the Garscube Campus some four miles to the north of the University's main Gilmorehill Campus.

1.1.2 The review focused on undergraduate provision which consists of the professionally accredited Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (BVMS) and the BSc/MSci Veterinary Biosciences.

1.1.3 The last Periodic Subject Review took place in December 2012 at a time when staff were engaged in intensive work on a substantial redesign of the BVMS curriculum and a new learning and social facility was under construction.

1.1.4 Preparation of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) was led by the Associate Head of School Learning & Teaching with contributions from the BSc programme leads and members of the School Learning and Teaching Committee. Consultation with staff and students focused on the articulation of the School's strengths and weaknesses.

1.1.5 In the course of the visit, the Review Panel met with a number of different groups: Professor Maureen Bain (College Dean, Learning & Teaching), Professor Ewan Cameron (Head of School), Professor Jim Anderson (Associate Head of School Learning & Teaching) and Ms Arlene Macrae (Undergraduate School Manager); as well as a group of 25 key staff. The Panel also held meetings with 34 students (representing both programmes and covering a spread of years), 10 Early Career staff, six demonstrators, 16 members of Professional Support staff, and four Associate Staff. The Panel found it particularly valuable to meet with the wide range of staff groups and such a large number of students.

1.1.6 The Review Panel had the opportunity to tour some of the buildings and facilities of the Vet School including lecture theatres, teaching labs, the clinical skills suite, the Computer Centre, the James Herriot Library, and the Small Animal Hospital. The

Panel was pleased to see some of the facilities of the now completed Mary Stewart Building including an impressive range of social and teaching spaces.

2. Context and Strategy

2.1 Staff

2.1.1 The School has 85 members of academic staff. Contributions to teaching are also made by 25 members of staff from Research Institutes and a number of external/visiting lecturers and Associate Staff. The School has 147 members of Professional Support Staff (covering three categories: Management, Professional & Administrative, Technical & Specialist, and Operational).

2.1.2 For accreditation purposes the School reported an academic staff student ratio of 1 : 6.6 (the minimum permitted for accreditation being 1 : 7.7).

2.1.3 The staff survey conducted in advance of the review indicated a work environment that was stimulating and rewarding. Many responses indicated very heavy workloads which in some cases meant that staff were overwhelmed and frustrated at what they were unable to achieve.

2.2 Students

Undergraduate student numbers (as reported for session 2017-18) were as follows:

BVMS	
Year 1	133
Year 2	133
Year 3	131
Year 4	106
Year 5	111
BSc/MSci Veterinary Biosciences	
Year 1	22
Year 2	18
Year 3	17
Year 4	17
Year 5	2
PGT (not covered in current review)	
MSc	16

2.3 Range of Provision under Review

2.3.1 Undergraduate

- BVMS – 5 year degree
- BSc/MSci Veterinary Biosciences – 4/5 year degree.

2.4 Strategic Approach to Enhancing Learning and Teaching

2.4.1 The SER provided a clear articulation of the School's vision, which aligns with the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy. This vision is student-centred, with teaching at its heart but also emphasising students as partners in developing skills for life-long learning. The recent radical overhaul on the BVMS programme reflected the requirements of the accrediting bodies. While much smaller, the BSc programme has a strong identity of its own and it was clear to the Review Panel that its on-going

curriculum development had been heavily, and positively, influenced by recent experiences on the BVMS. Both programmes perform well on external rankings (first in the UK Complete University Guide 2019 and Times University Guide 2018-19). The School operates in a complex context where for many of the Vet School staff the demands of teaching have to be managed alongside clinical duties. Contributions to teaching are made by staff of the Research Institutes as well as other external contributors. An increasingly competitive employment market for veterinary practitioners is significant in relation to the School's ability to attract and retain staff who are essential to the clinical skills taught provision, and therefore also for the School's ambitions for the future. These factors are explored below.

3. Enhancing the Student Experience

3.1 Admissions, Retention and Success

3.1.1 The SER provided detailed information on the BVMS and BSc student cohorts. The BVMS cohort has an unusual composition when compared with other undergraduate programmes in the University, approximately half the students coming from Scotland and the rest of the UK, and the remainder being international, predominantly from North America. The BSc cohort is largely from Scotland. Both groups are predominantly white and female, and the BVMS cohort is believed to come disproportionately from higher socio-economic groups.

Recruitment

3.1.2 Recruitment and admissions are complex areas for the BVMS programme, involving a wide range of outreach activities as well as selection interviews taking place in North America/Canada and Asia and in Glasgow. Both areas of activity make heavy demands on academic and administrative time.

Widening participation

3.1.3 Outreach work and a fair admissions process are seen to be key to broadening the range of applicants and therefore improving the diversity of the student cohorts and ultimately the profession. The SER noted that in the last four intakes, 101 BVMS students had been accepted to the programme through four different widening participation routes. Of particular note, the School won the Diversity through Education category at the Herald Diversity Awards in 2017, reflecting its involvement in the REACH widening participation programme, which targets schools where many pupils are living in the lowest SIMD40 postcodes. In discussion with different groups of staff, the Review Panel noted genuine determination to offer opportunities to as wide as possible a range of applicants with the potential to become successful veterinary practitioners. Although the School was meeting its targets in this area currently, there was a recognition that there was still much more to be done to make a significant impact on diversifying the profession. A member of staff takes responsibility for advising the widening participation students on an ongoing basis. The Panel acknowledged the benefits that this brought to student support and was pleased to note that progression rates for students who had entered through widening participation routes matched those for the cohort as a whole.

3.1.4 The Review Panel **commends** the School on its widening participation work and support for students recruited this way during their studies. The achievements in this area have already been significant but there is evident ambition to do more.

Progression

3.1.5 Progression rates on both the BVMS and BSc programmes are strong. This was in line with other professional programmes in the College. The rate of transfer of students

from the BSc to other programmes had been an issue in the past but was less of a concern now.

3.2 Equality and Diversity

3.2.1 The SER gave a full account of the extensive on-going work in relation to gender. At the time of the review the School was awaiting the outcome of an application for Athena Swan Silver standard, and in preparing for that application it had set a number of clear objectives. On the BVMS approximately 80% of students were female (mirroring applications), and there was evidence that over the long term females had been performing better than males. This was not out of line with the experience of other vet schools in the UK. The Panel noted that the School was being proactive in seeking ways of addressing these issues in relation to applications, admissions, retention and attainment.

3.2.2 Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy

During meetings with demonstrators and early career staff the Review Panel explored the extent to which there was awareness of the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy. While awareness of the Policy itself appeared limited, it was clear that staff were acting in accordance with the Policy (e.g. teaching materials being made available in advance) and that adjustments for individual students, as required, was regarded as the norm.

3.3 Supporting Students in their Learning

Student wellbeing

3.3.1 Student wellbeing was an important issue for the School. In the veterinary profession there were high rates of depression and anxiety and of suicides. Supporting students through the course of their studies was important and staff noted that this started with establishing personal contact at interview stage. The Head of School noted the excellent commitment of School staff to creating a supportive environment for students and the aspiration to teach students to develop resilience. Peer support schemes were in operation and students who met with the Panel commented on the fact that this helped to normalise the fact that they might need to ask for help.

Advising

3.3.2 Various advising schemes had been in operation at the Vet School. For the BSc students there were six advisors. The students reflected a mixed experience as to whether meetings always took place as frequently as they should though there was an open door policy meaning that they found staff to be accessible.

3.3.3 The BVMS advising system had recently been reviewed with 60 members of staff now acting as advisors. The expectation was that there would be two meetings per session but again an open door policy was in operation. At meetings with the students, the Review Panel heard that on the whole this appeared to work well but the students referred to very heavy staff workloads that sometimes resulted in advising sessions being missed or postponed. Both student groups commented on the close-knit community at Garscube, meaning that staff and students generally knew each other well. Overall, students felt very well supported by all staff and felt confident that there was always someone they could approach where necessary.

3.3.4 At the meeting with key staff the Review Panel heard concerns expressed about the complex demands being made of advisors. For example, students were often seeking support with mental health difficulties or complex financial issues. There could be delays when students were referred to more specialised services and staff were left with concerns about whether they had provided adequate support. The Panel heard that plans were in train for the introduction, on a pilot basis, of specialised counselling

support at Garscube from the beginning of the 2019-20 session. The Review Panel **recommends** that the School reflect carefully on how to encourage and facilitate students' use of this resource (noting the intensive timetabling of teaching during the day) while also promoting complementary resources such as the on-line Big White Wall. Noting that the counselling support was to be introduced on a pilot basis, it would also be important to consider at an early stage how (in conjunction with Student and Academic Services) to evaluate its success.

3.3.5 The Review Panel was pleased to hear about student-led activities such as Feel-good February, which dovetailed with University-led initiatives to support students. The Review Panel **commends** the School for the creation of an environment in which student welfare is promoted and is supported by a range of initiatives delivered by the University, the School, students and the student association.

Cohort identities

3.3.6 In discussion with the different student groups it was clear that both BVMS and BSc have strong programme cohort identities. This is unsurprising given the location of teaching on the Garscube Campus (see also para 4.3.1), and the fact that the BVMS in particular has an intensive and programme-specific timetable. The BSc students reflected on the advantages of being a distinctive cohort at Garscube, with their own designated lecture theatre and facilities and equipment that they believed would not necessarily be available to them if they were based at Gilmorehill.

Graduate Attributes

3.3.7 In the meeting with BSc students there was a discussion of graduate attributes, and the students displayed an impressive understanding of what these were and how their programme promoted their development, particularly through the Professional Development Portfolio. The Review Panel **commends** the School for its work in this area.

Careers

3.3.8 The BSc students told the Review Panel that careers information was made available to them, including information about previous students' destinations. At the staff meeting it was noted that while the BSc in former years might have been seen as an alternative route onto the BVMS, fewer were attempting this now and the list of graduate destinations showed a varied range of destinations with a strong emphasis on veterinary science related careers. The BVMS students mostly progressed into practice but staff noted that efforts were made to ensure that students were aware of other options, with a careers fair being held during BVMS 5 induction week.

3.4   Student Engagement

3.4.1 The Review Panel heard that the Head of School valued the opportunity, once a month along with other senior staff, to meet with groups of students from year 5 of the BVMS to discuss various aspects of their studies. He found these to be highly valuable sessions where the students displayed maturity in their reflections and were able to take an overview of their experiences throughout the programme. The issues raised in these meetings were recorded and then, following further investigations and reflection, a response would be provided to the students. These sessions complemented the discussions on more specific issues that took place at Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings. The Panel noted that all courses also held student focus groups, and students referred to Moodle forums that acted as another useful vehicle for communicating views to staff.

3.4.2 The various student groups who met with the Review Panel were highly complimentary about the attitude of staff to their learning experience. The common view was that, although it was clear that staff were very stretched, students found them to be

enthusiastic about their subject, approachable, supportive and generous with their time when students requested help, and that concerns that were raised were heard and acted on, and that where the requested action was not possible, an explanation was given. The SER had alluded to some issues in completing feedback loops (given the range of mechanisms for students to provide feedback) but the Panel did not hear from the students that this was a concern.

3.4.3 The Review Panel **commends** the School for staff who are highly committed to supporting the students in their learning experience. This was acknowledged both by students and by senior staff.

3.4.4 The Review Panel also **commends** the School on the commitment of its staff, led by those at senior management level, to meaningful engagement with students. This involved openly welcoming feedback, acting on that feedback, and seeking student views on future developments.

4.   Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

4.1   Learning and Teaching

Curriculum Design

BVMS Curriculum

4.1.1 At the time of the previous review the School had embarked on a radical reform of the BVMS curriculum, driven by the need for students to achieve the skills and attributes as expressed in the RCVS Day One Competencies. The new curriculum was now fully implemented, following a phased introduction. The Review Panel noted that this had been a very demanding period particularly given the logistical challenges of delivering new and old curricula alongside each other.

4.1.2 One of the biggest changes to the BVMS curriculum was a significant expansion in clinical skills teaching. There had been a move to more small group learning and an associated reduction in didactic teaching. This had had a big impact in fourth year, but also there had been a shift in the Foundation Phase (years 1 and 2) away from '-ology' teaching to a more integrated approach using a 'spiral curriculum' where a range of topics and skills were introduced at each stage and were revisited as the programme progressed. Panel discussions with the BVMS students included a reflection on the spiral curriculum, with those nearer the end of their studies saying that they could now see more clearly how everything fitted together.

4.1.3 At the meeting with the Head of School and Associate Head of School the Review Panel heard about the process of curriculum development. Three curriculum phases were identified: Foundation, Clinical and Professional, and key members of staff were appointed to each phase. A collaborative approach was led by the Associate Head of School: three additional posts were created and other members of staff were invited to come forward to lead on key areas from the outset. In this way a range of staff were able to influence the changes. The Head of School reflected on the enthusiasm with which staff embraced this process and the opportunities it offered, though in many cases this had resulted in very heavy workload pressure for staff over a considerable period of time, as reflected in the staff survey.

4.1.4 Practical skills.

The demonstrators and the Associate Staff described to the Review Panel the practical teaching under the new curriculum as being far ahead of what they had received as students. It was acknowledged that time was limited for all students to experience the practical skills in class but Associate Staff noted that some students took the initiative to come in additionally at other times and they were happy to support this where possible. Students recognised the increased emphasis on practical skills, the majority

who met with the Panel expressing the view that this prepared them well for Extra Mural Studies (EMS) and for practice post-graduation compared to peers being educated elsewhere. Some who met the Panel were less confident, feeling that there was insufficient hands-on experience in the Foundation Phase and suggesting that there was too much reliance on EMS for the development of practical skills.

Active learning

4.1.5 At the meeting with the Head of School there was reflection on the active learning that was a key feature of the new BVMS curriculum. Feedback from some students had indicated that they were finding this challenging, and they felt that this style of learning did not suit them (perhaps reflecting a contrast to what they had experienced previously in other educational settings). The demonstrators who met with the Review Panel noted that for some of their sessions, students were expected to have prepared material that was released in advance, and although these materials were of high quality, often it was clear that the students had not prepared. Staff realised the importance of students understanding the reason for this style of teaching (the development of independent learners and the relevance of this to a professional life that required lifelong learning). The Panel discussed with key staff the range of responses from students to this style of learning and it was suggested that those students who had embraced the approach could be used as advocates to other students. For example, some had expressed the position to the Review Panel as 'you get out what you put in' so they understood that to some extent they carried responsibility for their learning. The Panel heard that the BVMS induction programme outlined the approach of developing independent learners and students were carefully introduced to the technology and learning resources that they needed. It was acknowledged that this was a lot for the students to absorb at the start of the programme, and that given the intensive teaching timetable, managing active learning was particularly demanding for them. The Panel **recommends** that, in the context of the different forms of active learning used within the BVMS curriculum, the School reflect on how best to communicate to students the reasons for, and the benefits arising from, this approach, and whether a more staged introduction of active learning would be appropriate.

4.1.6 The Review Panel **commends** the School on the successful delivery of its ambitious new curriculum. It was clear to the Panel that this had been a demanding project requiring vision and leadership, as well as meticulous work in the detail of its delivery, depending for its success on the commitment of School staff across all categories.

Study abroad

4.1.7 Formal study abroad was not currently offered on the BSc Veterinary Biosciences programme. The Review Panel learned that the current curriculum review of third and fourth year (see paragraph 4.1.11) would create a structure allowing study abroad opportunities and that discussions were underway as to how this could be facilitated. There was potential for linking with some of the international contacts already established through the BVMS. The current BSc students who met with the Review Panel were aware of these plans and indicated that they believed this would represent a significant enhancement on the programme.

4.1.8 The structure of the BVMS curriculum was such that formal study abroad was not possible. However, there was a high level of student mobility, largely due to EMS activities and clinical placements, as well as the fact that such a large proportion of the cohort was international.

Research and teaching

4.1.9 At the meetings with the Head of School and with key staff the Review Panel heard about various ways in which teaching was enriched with research. BVMS students were offered the opportunity to carry out a research project, though few took this up. Some fifth year students participated in a journal club as part of their rotation and blue sky lectures were delivered, alerting students to the boundaries of knowledge, with lecturers from the Research Institutes in particular encouraged to incorporate aspects of their own research into teaching. In reality, the vast majority of BVMS graduates would have careers in practice, though the School recognised that it was required to prepare students for a profession that was increasingly promoting evidence-based medicine. Students from both programmes said that they were aware of events within the School relating to on-going research and external opportunities and felt that if they expressed an interest in this they would be encouraged. The BSc students who met with the Panel confirmed that lecturers did frequently refer to their own research. In the second semester of fourth year they completed a 60 credit Honours project with no concurrent teaching and this allowed them to focus on their research for eight weeks.

EMS

4.1.10 EMS (Extra Mural Studies) was an important element of the BVMS programme, with students required to complete 12 weeks pre-clinical and 26 weeks of clinical experience. The School maintained information on a wide range of possible placements, students identified where they would go and then set appropriate ILOs. Reflecting on these placements became a focus at advising meetings. While this was an important component of the programme, students expressed concerns to the Panel regarding the associated costs of travel and accommodation. EMS was currently under review by the RCVS, and at the time of the review it was unclear what the future held in relation to EMS and what impact this might have on the programme.

BSc Curriculum

4.1.11 The BSc programme had also been undergoing a staged review, with the final changes, relating to the Honours years, due to be implemented in session 2019-20. The SER summarised the changes as delivering a 'significant increase in research and practical skills training, employability-associated activities and conservation and field skills-associated content' (p. 36). Many of these developments drew on the experience of curriculum review on the BVMS. The students who met with the Review Panel said that staff had discussed the planned changes with them and they believed that they were positive developments, particularly the increased emphasis on field classes and the restructuring of assessment.

Intended Learning Outcomes

4.1.12 The Review Panel noted that Intended Learning Outcomes were given prominence on both programmes delivered in the School. These were of particular importance on the BVMS where accreditation required clear mapping of outcomes. The BVMS students told the Panel that they felt more confident that they understood 'event' ILOs rather than those applying to a whole course. The BSc students said that ILOs were regularly referred to in teaching and that in the main they understood how ILOs related to assessment.

Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

4.1.13 Moodle and Mahara were both used extensively on the School's undergraduate programmes. The Review Panel found much of the material to be excellent in terms of the comprehensive nature of the content and its presentation, but concluded that there was some lack of clarity as to the distinction between the two platforms. Some of the BVMS students told the Panel that they had difficulty in navigating their way to

the materials they needed. Moodle was used to issue feedback on assessment to students which meant that it could be easily accessed at any time, and feedback on clinical placements in the final year of BVMS was now delivered using a bespoke system. Staff explained that Moodle was focused more on live content and this was refreshed each year, whereas Mahara was predominantly the location for static resources accessible to all years. Staff also indicated that they had acknowledged the need to clarify this distinction and were doing so in new pre-arrival materials. Nonetheless, the Panel **recommends** that the School reflect on the initial induction information provided to students about the resources available through Moodle and Mahara, as well as the live guidance, to best ensure that students make optimum use of the excellent resources, particularly where these materials are intended to facilitate active learning.

IT support

4.1.14 In discussion with the Review Panel, professional support staff referred to pressures they experienced as a result of a lack of IT support based at Garscube. There was an on-going review of IT support in the College but there was a suggestion that the support being sought by students could perhaps be met locally by appropriately trained peers. The Panel **recommends** that the School explore with Information Services the possibility of student intern based front line provision for student IT queries such as the support that will be integral to the new University student service model. Such discussions should be dovetailed with the College review of IT support to ensure a coordinated and holistic provision for the Vet School that reflects developments in the wider University.

4.2 Assessment and Feedback

4.2.1 The SER set out the 'knowledge and application' and 'competency' strands of assessment on the BVMS, reflecting accreditation requirements for the professional degree. A wide range of different assessment methods were in use for the latter, including OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examinations) and DOPS (Directly Observed Practical Skills). On the BSc programme and for the academic aspects of the BVMS a range of assessments were in use, including essays, short answer and data interpretation questions. The SER confirmed that assessment was conducted in compliance with the University's Code of Assessment and Assessment Policy. The Review Panel was pleased to note the statement in the SER that students normally had the opportunity to complete a mode of assessment initially on a formative basis.

4.2.2 The BSc students spoke positively about the range of assessments though reflected that some required a lot of work for a small contribution to the course grade and that there was a heavy load of assessments towards the end of the year, but they were aware that changes were being made for future years. BVMS students told the Review Panel that they felt there was a good balance between written and practical assessments.

4.2.3 In the meeting with key staff there was a discussion regarding the different forms of feedback provided to students. Given the wide range of forms of assessment in use it was important to manage students' expectations as to what feedback it was possible to provide. Staff acknowledged that on clinical assessments more feedback was provided in response to failing assessments because of the importance that students should achieve a pass on each assessment. With the new feedback system that had been developed for the clinical placements in year 5 the form of feedback was more directed which it was anticipated would lead to more consistency.

4.2.4 On the BSc a standard feedback template was in use which allowed students to track their progress over the course of the programme. Engaging with feedback was one of the requirements of their portfolio work.

Portfolio

4.2.5 In the new BVMS curriculum 50% of the final year assessment consisted of the Professional Portfolio. On the BSc programme assessment by portfolio was used in relation to PDP, and from 2019-20 this was to become a summative element of assessment on the degree in the final year of study.

4.2.6 The BVMS students who met with the Review Panel expressed some frustration with the demands of the portfolio, being unclear as to its value in relation to their future professional lives and lacking confidence in relation to some aspects such as how to bring in appropriate references to research papers. The view was expressed that future employers were more interested in the RCVS log than in the portfolio. In that context, the Review Panel was particularly struck by the reflections of the Associate Staff on the importance of the professional portfolio, and how, for them, assessing portfolios provided great insight into students' development and ability for self-reflection. The Review Panel considered that these insights could provide a powerful tool in communicating to the students the purpose and value of the portfolio. The Associate staff noted that students expressed to them dissatisfaction with the amount of work that was required in completing the portfolio, and that the students were often surprised at the level of detail provided to them in the marking and feedback. The Panel wondered whether recent graduates from the programme might also be able to provide valuable insight, with the benefit of their subsequent experience in practice.

4.2.7 The Review Panel noted that it was a source of considerable frustration to staff and students that the students' portfolio work on Mahara did not remain available to them after graduation. The Panel **recommends** that this situation be reviewed by IT Services, in consultation with the School and other areas of the University that use portfolio work, to investigate possible means of either facilitating access to the work post-graduation or enhancing the materials available to be downloaded by students prior to graduation.

4.2.8 The BSc students who met with the Panel demonstrated an excellent understanding of how their PDP portfolio prompted reflection on the University's graduate attributes. While there was some variation in the feedback that they received on this work, much of it was excellent. Staff who met with the Panel noted that the BSc students had been closely involved in the development of the portfolio in the curriculum.

4.2.9 The Panel **recommends** that the School consider how best to articulate to BVMS students the value and purpose of the portfolio. This could involve insights from Associate Staff and recent graduates being shared, and also possibly from the BSc students who appeared more comfortable with the portfolio work (though it is recognised that the scale of the undertaking on the BVMS is significantly greater).

4.3   Resources for Learning and Teaching

Learning and Teaching Space

4.3.1 While comments were made during the review visit about the difficulties associated with the remoteness of Garscube from the main campus, the Review Panel also heard reflections on the benefits of being there. These included the attractive campus, the spread of different buildings and facilities (several of which had in recent times been upgraded), and a strong sense of identity for both programme cohorts. The BSc students, in particular, recognised the benefits of having their own facilities such as a lecture theatre and designated equipment. When their teaching was split between Garscube and the main campus this had brought additional travel time and cost burdens. They had appreciated the fact that there had recently been some teaching shared with Life Sciences students from the main campus, introducing 'new faces' into the group. As their timetables were busy both groups of students told the Panel that they were unlikely to go to the main campus e.g. to become involved in University-wide

clubs or societies. Social facilities at the Garscube campus were, however, limited. The BVMS students referred to the number of student societies based at Garscube, which helped promote a strong sense of community though this was also expressed as students feeling that they were studying at 'the Vet School' rather than at 'the University of Glasgow'.

4.4 Engaging and Supporting Staff

Staff involved in Learning and Teaching

4.4.1 Responses to the staff survey indicated a level of dissatisfaction for staff engaged on the Learning, Teaching & Scholarship track in relation to parity of esteem with colleagues on a research track. At the meeting with the Head of School it was acknowledged that the recognition and reward process was more challenging for such staff. At the meetings with key staff and early career staff there was reference to the understanding that teaching in itself was not recognised and that without research promotion was much more difficult. Recent curriculum development had led to collaborative working across a number of different themes, and a number of areas had now been identified as having potential for extremely valuable scholarship. There was a sense of frustration that this potential had not been realised at an earlier stage, but the Panel noted that the process of curriculum development had been so demanding in itself that it was not surprising that there had been something of a lag. Recently there had been moves to embed more scholarly activity within the life of the School, such as the establishment of a scholarship group and a designated area in Moodle. In discussions with key staff it was noted that mentorship for Learning & Teaching staff pursuing promotion could be valuable. This was known to have operated successfully in other areas, e.g. Life Sciences.

4.4.2 The Review Panel **recommends** that the School consolidate its focus on supporting the development of scholarship from recent and on-going curricular developments within the School. The Review Panel heard about a number of areas that could be pursued such as peer teaching (third years working with first years, fourth with second), active learning (perhaps to involve other areas such as the Dental School), and in due course the impact of the counselling support pilot. The School is encouraged to consider the Learning & Teaching Development Fund as a possible source of funding for some of this work, and to consider possible mentorship support for Learning & Teaching staff, as referred to above.

Clinical staff

4.4.3 The 2012 PSR had noted the competing pressures on staff of teaching, research and clinical work. This was an on-going issue particularly as the Vet School was required to ensure that the Small Animal Hospital remained commercially successful. Currently there were particular challenges associated with recruiting and retaining clinical staff as remuneration in private practice was substantially more attractive, and an increasing number of private practices offered specialised and advanced work. The Review Panel asked staff what it was that motivated them to stay at the Vet School and they said that they enjoyed teaching, but heavy workloads meant that finding time for any reflection on, and scholarship around, teaching became more challenging, which to an extent diluted the attraction of an academic career. They highlighted that some areas were under particular pressure (e.g. an oncology post had been vacant for a considerable period) and that intensive blocks of teaching had a big impact on clinical duties. Where staff were spread thin it was inevitable that this could impact on the student experience, despite their best efforts and aspirations. The Panel noted that concerns regarding staff workloads had led to two external reviews in 2017 focusing on clinical demands and the impact of the BVMS curriculum redesign and revised assessment. Some additional staffing had been provided as a result. The Head of School acknowledged that many staff had continued to carry heavy workloads over a

sustained period of time and noted that some key staff retirements were imminent. He indicated that further plans to address these issues were in development.

4.4.4 The clinical skills being developed by students appeared to be a distinctive and highly valued feature of the new curriculum, but the Review Panel recognised that clinical training depends heavily on the Small Animal Hospital, and that there are changes in the wider profession and in the HE sector, that place the current operational model under considerable pressure. Indeed this is acknowledged as a strategic risk within the SER itself. The remit of PSR does not extend to address the business model per se or the timescale in which it might be reviewed; this is a matter for the School, College and University more broadly. The Panel did consider, however, that a more sustainable arrangement is needed as a matter of priority if the clinical component of the undergraduate degree programmes offered is to be secure in the longer term and less vulnerable to the staffing changes and associated pressures that are experienced at present.

Professional Support Staff

4.4.5 The Review Panel was pleased to have the opportunity of a dedicated meeting with a group of 16 professional support staff. The Panel heard that the curriculum changes on the BVMS programme had brought benefits in terms of supporting learning and teaching, particularly in the way that technology was being harnessed (e.g. provision of feedback to students through online portals). The comment was made, however, that teaching staff were not always familiar with the technology and asked for support staff to help rather than becoming familiar with systems themselves. In particular, last minute requests for help were disruptive. The group spoke about a number of pilot projects that they had been involved in. They were committed to developing the best means of supporting students but noted that this brought additional workload, which had been difficult to manage especially around assessment times. The staff told the Panel that the IT infrastructure was at times unreliable. In addition there were a number of administrative tasks which were unduly labour intensive to complete particularly in relation to registration and enrolment and to timetabling, despite the fact that little other than Vet School teaching was timetabled on the Garscube campus. On the BVMS programme there was a particular issue in that year 5 started in May (rather than September) requiring enrolment to be carried out manually because the registration period did not formally open in MyCampus until August. This was the source of considerable frustration. The Review Panel **recommends** that the difficulties associated with enrolments that fall outwith standard semester times and the roll-over of timetabling at Garscube be explored with the Digital Experience unit.

4.4.6 The staff survey highlighted the pressure felt by professional support staff. This was also alluded to in comments made by teaching staff to the effect that insufficient administrative support was available. Increasing student numbers had inevitably brought increasing work. Other pressure points were identified, such as having a gap of several months when only three out of the intended four technicians were in post. Some administrative posts had also seen a high turnover which brought disruption and additional work. Some frustration was also expressed about what were perceived to be limited channels of communication with senior management and a lack of clarity regarding staff grading.

4.4.7 The Head of School acknowledged the pivotal role of support staff in managing the complex teaching arrangements, particularly in the BVMS clinical phase where large numbers of staff were involved in the delivery of teaching. Students spoke warmly about the role of professional support staff, with one comment being that they were willing 'to move heaven and earth' to find solutions when problems arose. The students were aware that administrative staff were stretched, commenting on the noticeable impact when someone was absent. The Review Panel formed the view that

this was a group of staff highly dedicated to supporting the student experience, willing to take on new ways of working and embracing advances brought by technology but who were also highly stretched and struggling with morale. In the current PSR round the School of Engineering was commended for the administrative support provided by its teaching unit. The Panel **recommends** that the Vet School meet with staff from that unit with a view to the sharing of best practice.

Early career staff

4.4.8 The early career staff who met with the Review Panel said that they enjoyed teaching but considered that workloads were heavy, with insufficient protected time. In particular (as noted elsewhere), clinical responsibilities meant that time for study on the PGCAP or any other CPD, or for taking on the additional responsibilities required for promotion was very limited. They said that they were not always aware of how objectives were set, and felt completion of the Early Career Development Programme was an ever-present pressure. Work on the PGCAP was often completed out of normal working hours, which was a challenge, particularly for those with caring responsibilities.

4.4.9 The early career staff found the PGCAP interesting and they enjoyed meeting staff from other parts of the University. Disappointment was expressed at the University's membership of the Higher Education Academy having lapsed, meaning that PGCAP was no longer accredited. The time required to attend PGCAP sessions (as well as any other training sessions) at Gilmorehill was a major disincentive. Public transport from Garscube was limited and, for those with a parking permit, arrangements for parking at Gilmorehill had recently become more complex. The staff very much appreciated any training or development delivered at Garscube, and would welcome more on-line provision being made available.

4.4.10 The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaise with LEADS in the first instance, to review the way that staff are supported to engage with training events at Gilmorehill, in particular to explore ways of supporting online participation. The other issues raised in this section of the report do not lend themselves readily to specific recommendations. Therefore, the Panel **recommends** that the PSR Convener raise the ECDP and PGCAP feedback with the ECDP Programme Director (Professor Murray Pittock) and with the Director of LEADS in order that the feedback is acted on appropriately through the ECDP Champions in the Colleges and other appropriate ECDP committees as part of the wider governance of the ECDP programme. The Panel also **recommends** that the review of PSR that is currently underway within Academic Services give consideration to how issues relating to broader University initiatives (such as ECDP), that don't lend themselves to specific recommendations that ASC might follow up on, could be more meaningfully recorded and addressed in future.

Demonstrators

4.4.11 The Review Panel met with a small group of demonstrators who performed a number of different roles including teaching, running labs, and supporting OSCEs. They had all completed the statutory training where required and said that they felt well prepared for their work, with relevant materials being made available to them in good time and a framework and clear criteria being provided for assessed work. They noted that they were not always aware of exactly where students were in the BVMS curriculum and therefore might be unsure about the level of detail with which students would have covered certain topics. However, their view was that this was not a significant problem as they adapted to what the students told them or other staff would be on-hand to clarify the situation on request. The relevant ILOs were reflected in the materials provided for the students. The demonstrators told the Panel that they felt they were given excellent support by School staff but also that they were given a

degree of freedom in the way that they carried out their teaching. The group said that they enjoyed their work and were proud to be supporting the next generation of veterinarians, and that the School staff made them feel that their contribution was highly valued.

4.4.12 The demonstrators raised their frustration at having to comply with what seemed like excessive administrative requirements in relation to their contracts. For example, this involved having to repeatedly submit their passports for checking. They were under the impression that the same complex arrangements did not apply to similar work undertaken by colleagues in other parts of the University.

4.4.13 The Review Panel noted a number of issues relating to Human Resources which were having a significant impact on School staff. These included delay in the recruitment of staff and administrative complexity associated with on-going demonstrator contracts. The Panel **recommends** that guidance on best practice in these matters be explored with MVLS College HR, and with the School of Life Sciences, which the Panel understands to have recently reviewed recruitment practices.

Associate Staff

4.4.14 The Review Panel was pleased to meet with a small group of Associate Staff. These were experienced practitioners who contributed to the BVMS programme in various ways (e.g. assessment of OSCEs or DOPS, and development and assessment of the professional portfolio). They told the Panel that they felt well prepared for and supported in their various roles and very much enjoyed their work. Their enthusiasm was striking and they spoke with great insight about their roles, and the value to students of learning from people with rich experience of veterinary practice, and being able to provide advice and support that was a little more removed from the full-time School staff. They spoke about the importance of introducing reflective observations from their own practice (e.g. making mistakes, not remembering everything but knowing where to look it up).

4.4.15 In relation to their work in assessing professional portfolios they felt particularly well supported and they participated in calibration meetings before assessment began and then had intermediate and final reflections, with particularly careful attention being given to the weaker portfolios. Similarly with OSCEs, during the assessment there were opportunities to reflect on how the assessments were operating and what constituted a fail. For those involved in DOPs, they were required to provide feedback to students at the time of the assessment. Although initially they had been unsure about the level of feedback required, they now felt confident in this work.

4.4.16 The Review Panel **commends** the School for its training and support of both Associate Staff and demonstrators and **recommends** that the School consider (within the bounds of available funding) how to make optimum use of such a valuable resource on the BVMS programme, emphasising the 'authentic' value of their insights as experienced practitioners.

5. Academic Standards

5.1.1 The Review Panel was satisfied that, at undergraduate level, the School of Veterinary Medicine operated a comprehensive approach to reviewing and maintaining academic standards, satisfying the requirements of the relevant accrediting bodies as well as the University.

Currency and Validity of Programmes

5.1.2 The Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that, at the time of the Review, the undergraduate programmes offered by the School were

current and valid in the light of developing knowledge and practice within the subject area.

Conclusion

The Review Panel concluded that the Vet School was a vibrant and innovative learning community, benefiting from close working relationships between staff and students, and delivering two highly regarded undergraduate degree programmes. The Panel welcomed the open and constructive approach adopted by the School in the course of the review, with many students and different groups of staff taking the opportunity to contribute. The School was operating in a challenging context, needing to meet the considerable demands of accreditation and complex teaching arrangements while also managing the commercial pressures associated with the Small Animal Hospital. The Panel recognised the importance now of a time for consolidation and evaluation following the period of intense curriculum change, mindful of the considerable on-going pressures around teaching and assessment.

Summary of Commendations and Recommendations

The Review Panel commends the School on the following, which are listed **in order of appearance** in this report:

Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** the School on its widening participation work and support for students recruited this way during their studies. The achievements in this area have already been significant but there is evident ambition to do more.

[Paragraph 3.1.4]

Commendation 2

The Review Panel **commends** the School for the creation of an environment in which student welfare is promoted and is supported by a range of initiatives delivered by the University, the School, students and the student association.

[Paragraph 3.3.5]

Commendation 3

In the meeting with BSc students there was a discussion of graduate attributes, and the students displayed an impressive understanding of what these were and how their programme promoted their development, particularly through the Professional Development Portfolio. The Review Panel **commends** the School for its work in this area.

[Paragraph 3.3.7]

Commendation 4

The Review Panel **commends** the School for staff who are highly committed to supporting the students in their learning experience. This was acknowledged both by students and by senior staff.

[Paragraph 3.4.3]

Commendation 5

The Review Panel **commends** the School on the commitment of its staff, led by those at senior management level, to meaningful engagement with students. This involved openly welcoming feedback, acting on that feedback, and seeking student views on future developments.

[Paragraph 3.4.4]

Commendation 6

The Review Panel **commends** the School on the successful delivery of its ambitious new BVMS curriculum. It was clear to the Panel that this had been a demanding project requiring vision and leadership, as well as meticulous work in the detail of its delivery, depending for its success on the commitment of School staff across all categories.

[Paragraph 4.1.6]

Commendation 7

The Review Panel **commends** the School for its training and support of both Associate Staff and demonstrators. [Paragraph 4.4.16]

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support the School in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are grouped together by the areas for improvement/enhancement and are ranked in order of priority within each section.

Curriculum

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommends that, in the context of the different forms of active learning used within the BVMS curriculum, the School reflect on how best to communicate to students the reasons for, and the benefits arising from, this approach, and whether a more staged introduction of active learning would be appropriate. [Paragraph 4.1.5]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Recommendation 2

The Panel **recommends** that the School consider how best to articulate to BVMS students the value and purpose of the portfolio. This could involve insights from Associate Staff and recent graduates being shared, and also possibly from the BSc students who appeared more comfortable with the portfolio work than the BVMS students (though it is recognised that the scale of the undertaking on the BVMS is significantly greater). [Paragraph 4.2.9]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Learning and Teaching Resources

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel formed the view that the professional support staff were highly dedicated to supporting the student experience, willing to take on new ways of working and embracing advances brought by technology but who were also highly stretched and struggling with morale. In the current PSR round the School of Engineering was commended for the administrative support provided by its teaching unit. The Panel **recommends** that the Vet School meet with staff from that unit with a view to the sharing of best practice. [Paragraph 4.4.7]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Recommendation 4

In discussion with the Review Panel, professional support staff referred to pressures they experienced as a result of a lack of IT support based at Garscube. There was an on-going review of IT support in the College but there was a suggestion that the support being sought by students could perhaps be met locally by appropriately trained peers. The Panel **recommends** that the School explore with Information Services the possibility of student intern based front line provision for student IT queries such as the support that will be integral to the new University student service model. Such discussions should be dovetailed with the College review of IT support to ensure a coordinated and holistic provision for the Vet School that reflects developments in the wider University. [Paragraph 4.1.14]

For the attention of: The Head of School

For information: Director of IT Services; Vice Principal and Head of College

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel noted that it was a source of considerable frustration to staff and students that the students' portfolio work on Mahara did not remain available to them after graduation. The Panel **recommends** that this situation be reviewed by IT Services, in consultation with the School and other areas of the University that use portfolio work, to investigate possible means of either facilitating access to the work post-graduation or enhancing the materials available to be downloaded by students prior to graduation. [Paragraph 4.2.7]

For the attention of: Director of IT Services

For information: The Head of School

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the difficulties associated with enrolments that fall outwith standard semester times and the roll-over of timetabling at Garscube be explored with the Digital Experience Unit. [Paragraph 4.4.5]

For the attention of: The Assistant Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching)

For information: The Head of School; Director of Digital Experience Unit

Recommendation 7

The Panel **recommends** that the School reflect on the initial induction information provided to students about the resources available through Moodle and Mahara, as well as the live guidance, to best ensure that students make optimum use of the excellent resources, particularly where these materials are intended to facilitate active learning. [Paragraph 4.1.13]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Recommendation 8

Following on from the commendation of the School for its training and support of both Associate Staff and demonstrators, the Review Panel **recommends** that the School consider (within the bounds of available funding) how to make optimum use of such a valuable resource on the BVMS programme, emphasising the 'authentic' value of their insights as experienced practitioners. [Paragraph 4.4.16]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Support

Recommendation 9

The Panel heard that plans were in train for the introduction, on a pilot basis, of specialised counselling support at Garscube from the beginning of the 2019-20 session. The Review Panel **recommends** that the School reflect carefully on how to encourage and facilitate students' use of this resource (noting the intensive timetabling of teaching during the day) while also promoting complementary resources such as the on-line Big White Wall. Noting that the counselling support was to be introduced on a pilot basis, it would also be important to consider at an early stage how (in conjunction with Student and Academic Services) to evaluate its success. [Paragraph 3.3.4]

For the attention of: The Head of School

For information: Executive Director of Student & Academic Services

Staff Support and Development

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School consolidate its focus on supporting the development of scholarship from recent and on-going curricular developments within the School. The Review Panel heard about a number of areas that could be pursued such as peer teaching (third years working with first years, fourth with second), active learning (perhaps to involve other areas such as the Dental School), and in due course the impact of the counselling support pilot. The School is encouraged to consider the Learning and Teaching Development Fund as a possible source of funding for some of this work, and to consider possible mentorship support for Learning & Teaching staff such as is known to have operated successfully in other areas (e.g. Life Sciences). [Paragraph 4.4.2]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaise with LEADS in the first instance, to review the way that staff are supported to engage with training events at Gilmorehill, in particular to explore ways of supporting online participation. [Paragraph 4.4.10]

For the attention of: The Head of School

For information: Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service

Recommendation 12

A number of issues were raised in relation to the ECDP and PGCAP that do not lend themselves readily to specific recommendations. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the PSR Convener raise this feedback with the ECDP Programme Director (Professor Murray Pittock) and with the Director of LEADS in order that it is acted on appropriately through the ECDP Champions in the Colleges and other appropriate ECDP committees as part of the wider governance of the ECDP programme. [Paragraph 4.4.10]

For the attention of: The Assistant Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching)

For information: The Head of School

Recommendation 13

The Panel recommends that the review of PSR that is currently underway within Academic Services give consideration to how issues relating to broader University initiatives (such as ECDP), that don't lend themselves to specific recommendations that ASC might follow up on, could be more meaningfully recorded and addressed in future. [Paragraph 4.4.10]

For the attention of: Senate Office

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel noted a number of issues relating to Human Resources which were having a significant impact on School staff. These included delay in the recruitment of staff and administrative complexity associated with on-going demonstrator contracts. The Panel **recommends** that guidance on best practice in these matters be explored with MVLS College HR, and with the School of Life Sciences, which the Panel understands to have recently reviewed recruitment practices. [Paragraphs 4.4.6 and 4.4.13]

For the attention of: The Head of School

For information: MVLS College HR