

**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW OF GRADUATE SCHOOL
COLLEGE OF LIFE SCIENCES AND MEDICINE**

SUMMARY REPORT

PANEL VISIT: TUESDAY 10 AND WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2015

This summary is extracted from the full Final Report of the Internal Teaching Review of the Graduate School in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine Graduate School, following the review carried out in February 2015. It includes the Panel's overall impressions of the provision, a record of the Panel's commendations and recommendations, and the Panel's conclusions. Details of the commendations and recommendations can be found in the Final Report.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

The Panel is grateful for the co-operation of staff and students throughout the Internal Teaching Review (ITR), with staff and students providing their opinions openly. The overriding impression of the Panel is that the Graduate School of the College of Life Sciences and Medicine is providing an extremely supportive environment for students. The departments have an open-door policy and students confirmed that staff are always available and approachable. The Graduate School is **commended** for the keen sense of collegiality across the constituent Academic Schools and the shared common goals in respect to the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research. It was clear throughout the ITR process however, the students did not share a sense of belonging to the Graduate School. Many of the recommendations in this report relates to how the Graduate School can address this as well as the responsibilities of staff members particularly postgraduate taught (PGT) programme co-ordinators as well as administrative and technical staff.

A. COMMENDABLE FEATURES (*numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full report*):

3 Staffing

- 3.1 The Panel **commends** the existence of a keen sense of collegiality and a common goal that now exists amongst staff in the Graduate School in respect of the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research.
- 3.1 The Panel **commends** the clear and purposeful leadership of the School and recognised the balanced and not overly prescriptive manner in which the School is organised.
- 3.2 While the Panel **commends** the willingness of PGT programme co-ordinators to undertake various roles in supporting students, the Panel expressed concern at the potential risks this poses to both their workload and pastoral care for students.
- 3.4 The Panel **commends** the efficiency and dedication of the Graduate School administrative staff as well as their positive and enthusiastic attitude.
- 3.4 The Panel was impressed by the cohesiveness of the administrative team evidenced by the strong links achieved between administrative staff from the different constituent Academic Schools. The Panel **commends** the Graduate School for this.

4 School Organisation

- 4.1 The panel **commends** the organisational structure of the School.
- 4.2 The Panel **commends** the progress the Graduate School had made in achieving consistency among the 4 constituent Academic Schools in respect of administration, objectives and policy.
- 4.3 The Panel **commends** the Graduate School for its receptiveness to staff concerns and staff for their commitment to responding to these challenges effectively.

5 Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.1 The Panel noted the development of new taught postgraduate programmes, and the impetus and support for the Academic Schools provided by the Graduate School to set up new programmes. As such, the Graduate School should be **commended** for this.
- 5.2 The Panel **commends** the Graduate School's close engagement with the College Marketing Officer.

6 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.1 The Panel **commends** the quality of teaching and learning in the School.
- 6.2 The Panel **commends** the use of e-learning across the Graduate School, particularly in relation to initiatives such as electronic assignment submission and the electronic rubrics within the virtual learning environment, which supports effective moderation processes between staff.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.4 Students involved in Staff-Student Liaison Committees reported that they felt their views were taken seriously and feedback had been provided as appropriate. The Panel **commends** the Graduate School for this.

9 Training and supervision of research students

- 9.1 The Panel **commends** the Graduate School for the support provided to all PGR students.
- 9.2 The Panel **commends** the implementation of advisors in addition to two supervisors for PGR students to provide both academic and non-academic support.
- 9.4 The Panel **commends** the opportunities available to students to develop generic skills such as communication and transferable skills through courses organised by the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and the Research and Development Unit.
- 9.5 The Panel noted the submission of 6-monthly PGR student progress forms which are reviewed by the Graduate School. The Panel recognised the importance of the forms in identifying and thereafter helping with potential issues relating to a student's progress. Some of the students interviewed remarked on improvements that had been made after the 6-monthly PGR student progress forms. The Graduate School is to be **commended** for this.
- 9.6 The Panel **commends** the provision of the 9-month review as a reliable indicator of student progress.

10 Personal development and employability

- 10.2 The Panel **commends** the Graduate School for encouraging PGR students to seek wider training opportunities externally as evidenced by those students who had attended teacher training opportunities and business courses.

12 Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 The Panel **commends** both administrative and technical staff for their willingness to offer pastoral support to students and their dedication to undertaking these duties.
- 12.3 The Graduate School is to be **commended** for ensuring that a junior PGR supervisor is always paired up with a more experienced one.

13 Student Involvement in Quality Process

- 13.1 The Panel **commends** the commitment of the Graduate School in encouraging student feedback through various informal and formal mechanisms.
- 13.1 The Panel **commends** the Graduate School's responsiveness to student input, as confirmed by the students themselves.

15 Student Support, Retention and Progression

- 15.1 The Panel **commends** the School's overall commitment to student support, as demonstrated by the open door policy exercised by both teaching and administrative staff.

16 Recruitment, Access and Widening Participation

- 16.2 The Panel acknowledged the University wide priority of increasing PGT and international student numbers. The Panel **commends** the Graduate School's commitment to achieving this as demonstrated by its strong working relationship with the College Marketing Officer.

17 QAA Quality Enhancement Engagements

- 17.1 The Panel **commends** the strong links the Graduate School has with local research institutions and the opportunity this provided for students to work in research-intensive environments.

19 Quality Enhancement and Good Practice

- 19.2 The Panel **commends** the system of advisers for PGR students that was in place across the Graduate School. The Panel recognised this system as one that might be considered by the two other Graduate Schools within the University.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS *(Numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full report):*

3 Staffing

- 3.2 The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School re-evaluate the responsibilities of PGT programme co-ordinators. This was considered to be particularly pressing given the University's aim of increasing PGT student numbers with an emphasis on international students.

- 3.3 The Panel **recommends** that appropriate steps be taken to ensure succession planning was taking place.
- 3.5 The Panel **recommends** that the School pursues avenues for more cohesiveness amongst technical support staff across the constituent Academic Schools in the Graduate School.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The Panel acknowledged the significant changes the Graduate School has recently made to its PGT provision. The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School continue to regularly review the sustainability of its complete portfolio of postgraduate programmes, given the small number of students registered on some programmes.

9 Training and supervision of research students

- 9.1 The Panel heard that some PGR students did not feel adequately prepared for the cultural differences particularly relating to assessment and that more support in preparing students, particularly international students, who are not familiar with University processes would be beneficial. The Panel **recommends** the Graduate School reviews induction processes for international students.
- 9.3 Discussions with the sample of PGR students interviewed demonstrated a variation in the requirement of students to meet with their supervisors. Whilst the Panel acknowledged the lacking of formal requirement to meet with specified frequency does not appear to be problematic currently, problems may potentially arise for students who specific support needs are not met. The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School considers if a policy around required provision of supervision is invoked to ensure that all students receive the necessary support.
- 9.7 The Panel **recommends** that the School re-evaluates its monitoring processes for postgraduate research students in Year 2 to ensure progression is being maintained.
- 9.8 The Panel was made aware that there is no formal Year 4 PhD progress review and **recommends** the Graduate School consider formal monitoring procedures for those students in Year 4 of their PhD.

10 Personal development and employability

- 10.1 The Panel **recommends** the Graduate School pursues opportunities for widening the learning community across the Graduate School.
- 10.2 The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School provides students with collated information on sources of funding to support external activities such as attending conferences and training courses. The Panel was of the view that this may be another way of increasing students' sense of belonging to and engagement with the Graduate School.

12 Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 The Panel noted with concern that not all staff had received training in this respect and **recommends** the Graduate School explores training opportunities for staff in this area to ensure students are receiving appropriate support.
- 12.2 The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School examines how the duties of PGT programme coordinators feeds into promotion processes.

12.3 The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School explores further training opportunities for PGR supervisors.

16 Recruitment, Access and Widening Participation

16.3 The Panel noted that one of the impediments to increasing recruitment is PGT co-ordinators who are limited in their ability to discuss their programmes with prospective students. As per section 3.2, the Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School re-evaluates the workload of PGT programme co-ordinators.

18 Recent Developments

18.1 The Panel acknowledged the work done by the Graduate School in adopting the new University grading system now applicable to all PGT programme assessments. The Panel recognised in particular the efforts of the School Advisory group in determining descriptors for marks as well as producing guidance for course co-ordinators. The Panel also recognise the challenge the School faces in ensuring that staff follows these descriptors. The Panel **recommends** that this be pursued with added impetus.

18.2 The Panel heard that PGT students generally felt supported in their projects, however some did express concern that they did not have enough time to prepare for examinations in conjunction with report writing prior to the Christmas break. The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School review the timing of assessments to determine whether it will be necessary to give more time or whether potential projects may need to be released earlier.

19 Quality Enhancement and Good Practice

19.1 The Panel noted excellent compliance with elements of good practice. The Panel also found however a lack of knowledge among staff concerning what is mandatory and what is simply the result of established good practice within the Graduate School. The Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School ensures understanding of requirements across all courses to ensure practices are maintained.

CONCLUSIONS

The Panel **recommends revalidation** on the condition that the recommendations of all postgraduate taught and research programmes. Where this report makes **recommendations**, the Panel requests that the School provide, as part of its 1-year follow-up report, an overview of what progress has been made, and where the recommendations have not been followed, the Graduate School's arguments leading to and justifying this decision.

The Panel wishes to thank all members of staff within the Graduate School in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine for the work that has gone into producing the ITR documentation and for their commitment to the review process. The Panel also wishes to thank all students and staff who participated in the visit; the visit itself went very well with all sessions comprising of valuable and informal discussions. The Panel was made to feel very welcome.