UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL
SUMMARY REPORT

PANEL VISIT: TUESDAY 8 AND WEDNESDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2016

Overall Impressions

Overall, the Panel recognised a School which was committed to delivering a high standard of teaching and learning and maintenance of academic standards. The Panel acknowledged that the School was facing challenging circumstances, although staff were keen and proactive to resolve issues in an efficient manner, and placed the student's interest at the forefront of all decisions and processes implemented.

The Panel **commended** the efforts made by School staff, academic and administrative, amongst whom there was evidence of a keen sense of collegiality and support.

The Panel welcomed the positive response towards the School from undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students.

The Panel observed clear signs of innovative teaching practices and noted exciting developments such as the introduction of the on-line MBA programme, transnational education and the use of the Thomson Reuters Eikon flagship trading floor.

The Panel **commended** the School's engagement with employability skills across all programmes and the strong working relationship with the University Careers Service.

The Panel were concerned with the difficulties currently being faced by the School with staffing levels. The disciplines of Accountancy, Finance and Real Estate and Business Management showed clear signs of resource pressures, requiring investment to bring them back up to their former capacity. The lack of staffing resource meant that the School had little flexibility in dealing with both short-term teaching emergencies and long-term planning. Throughout the two day review, it also became apparent that the disciplines could work much more closely together.

The Panel recognised that the appointment of the new Executive Dean could provide the opportunity to stabilise the situation and allow the School to move forward on a more secure footing.

Notes: The numbering of sections below reflects the numbering of the SED. Some sections of the SED attracted no commendations or recommendations.

Section 1: Range of Provision

1.5 The Panel **recommended** that for the School to be competitive with other Business Schools and retain good staff and students, it was pertinent for the School to re-introduce both the Single Honours Degree in Accountancy and the Single Honours degree in Finance.

1.6 The Panel **commended** the School on its willingness to expand its programmes by offering them in different modes of study, such as the on-line MBA programme and developing plans for transnational education in alternative markets such as Doha.

1.7 The Panel noted that there was a low number of students on some Postgraduate Taught (PGT) programmes and **recommended** that the School undertake a strategic view before approving new programmes.

Section 3: Staffing

3.1 The Panel **recommended** prioritising the School recruitment of professorial staff in Accountancy and Finance and Business Management.

3.2 The Panel noted the appointment of a new Executive Dean to the School and **recommended** that this could be a good opportunity to adopt a more strategic approach and invest in new staff. In addition, it was noted that the School may benefit from undertaking comparisons with other UK Business Schools to identify the extent of resource needed and possible areas of investment.

3.3 The Panel **commended** academic staff for managing heavy workloads in a way that had minimised impact on teaching quality. The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake an urgent review of the workload of all academic staff members, including the need for formal cover for parental leave, and look into health and wellbeing initiatives offered by the University.

3.4 The Panel **recommended** to assist with short-term teaching emergencies, the School could use PhD students to aid in tutorial delivery and this would have a positive impact on their career development, as further documented in section 9.2.

3.6. The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake a review of the staff resource in TNE projects and the impact it has on on-campus programme delivery.

3.7 The Panel **commended** the School for its strong links with industry professionals and embedding their specialist knowledge into the curriculum.

3.8 The Panel **commended** the administrative team on recognising efficient ways to streamline processes to enhance the student experience through involving the University Business Improvement team.

3.9 The Panel **commended** the School on efficient peer-mentoring of new academic staff.

Section 4: School Organisation

4.1 The Panel **recommended** that the [School's] disciplines could work more closely together to help increase innovative practices, course development and to increase staff morale.

4.2 The Panel **commended** the School on its approach towards its organisation of the first year induction session which provided opportunities for current students to assist at the event and receive a certificate for their participation. The Panel **recommended** however that the School look into providing more structured induction programmes for PhD students.

4.3 The Panel was pleased to note that the School operated effective Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC). Students interviewed had reported that they felt their views were taken seriously but changes made by the School were not always well communicated to all students. The Panel **recommended** that the School informs students of the changes that have been implemented in a more efficient way.

Section 5: Course/Programme Design, Accessibility & Approval

5.1 The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake a review of its Accounting and Finance undergraduate and postgraduate programmes being offered and take a strategic view how best they might meet high student demand.

5.2 The Panel **commended** the School on its clear understanding of employability skills and industry requirements through employer input in MSc programmes.

5.3 The Head of Student Support Services commented that student feedback highlighted that access to course material was not always readily available to Business School students with disabilities. The Panel **recommended** that the School seek to rectify this with immediate effect, as further documented in sections 6.5 and 15a.3.

5.4 The Panel noted that there needed to be clearer differentiation between the MSc and MRes in Applied Economics. It was evident that the School encouraged the provision of formal training for PhD students, utilising existing modules. However, there appeared to be workload implications for PhD students in their first year if they were required to take a full set of modules. The Panel **recommended** that the School review the workload of MRes Applied Economics students.

5.5 The Panel **recommended** that the School discuss its lack of class representatives with the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA) to see how best to encourage student representative attendance.

5.6 The Panel **commended** the breadth of teaching methods such as the online QMP mock quizzes used in EC1006 (The Economics of Business Society) and video clips used in MS 3055 (New Product and Service Development, now MS3058 (New Venture Development)) and the flexible approach to learning through the on-line MBA programme.

Section 6: Teaching, Learning & Assessment

6.2 The Panel **commended** the School for its early formative assignment feedback provided to first year students at the beginning of the academic year.

6.3 The Panel **commended** the innovative teaching practices within the School, for example, the development of on-line teaching, use of the Thomson Reuters Eikon flagship trading floor and the use of video clips in MS 3055 New Product and Service Development and MS3050 New Venture Creation which provided flexibility for students. In addition, the Panel felt that the alternative ways of teaching combined the use of advanced pedagogy and technology. Furthermore, the Panel noted that a high number of staff within the School have been nominated for the University's Excellence in Teaching Award; the Panel **commended** the staff for their commitment to excellence in teaching.

6.4 The Panel were pleased to hear that the School consulted with industry professionals and had undertaken market research before introducing block teaching within the MBA programme. Nevertheless, the MBA students interviewed had mixed views on whether block teaching provided them with a better learning experience. In addition, the Panel questioned whether the introduction of block teaching was implemented to compensate for staff shortages in the School. The Panel **recommended** that the School take note of the fact that not all students were very supportive of the concept and to consider whether the programme delivers a beneficial teaching and learning experience to students.

6.5 The Panel noted variations in the use of MyAberdeen by academic staff, for example the availability of lecture slides (especially in context of students with disabilities) and recording of lectures. While the Panel recognised concerns in relation to the impact on the attendance at lectures as a result of the availability of

this material, the Panel **recommended** that the School delivered lecture materials to all students in a consistent manner across the School.

6.6 The Panel noted comments made by academic staff on the inconsistencies of marking resulting from the use of two grading systems. The Panel **recommended** that the School closely monitor marking trends and analyse samples of marking to ensure consistency, and to get to the root of this disparity.

6.7 The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake a review of the feedback given to students, both hand written and provided on MyAberdeen, to ensure consistency across the School.

6.8 The University operates one moderation policy as detailed in the Academic Quality Handbook. The Panel noted that the School appeared to be using two moderation policies and thus was undertaking more double marking and moderation. The Panel **recommended** that the School adhere to the official moderation processes in light of the lack of staff resourcing.

Section 7: Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

7.1 The Panel **commended** the School for encouraging other forms of feedback other than SCEF forms. The Panel **recommended** that mid-term feedback questionnaires used in some courses be used more widely across the School to ensure consistency. In addition, the panel **recommended** that the School informs students of the importance and value of the SCEF process.

Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students

9.1 The PhD students who met with the Panel commented that there were clear differences in the student experience across the disciplines. The PhD students felt that there were disparities in particular between the discipline of Economics compared to Accountancy and Finance and Management and Real Estate. It was further noted through discussions with PhD students' outwith Economics, that the main differences in their student experience related to induction, opportunities for training and attending conferences, and developmental teaching opportunities. The Panel **recommended** that the School should share good practice of student experience throughout all disciplines.

9.3 The Panel **recommended** that the School provide more cross disciplinary research opportunities to further PhD students' career progression and enhance their experience. In addition, the Panel **recommended** that the School formally allocated 2 supervisors for all PhD students.

9.4 The Panel **recommended** that the School ensure that new PGR supervisors take the formal training offered by the Centre for Academic Development (CAD).

9.5 The Panel noted that there was no clear feedback mechanism for PhD level students to express their opinions and views to the School. The Panel **recommended** that a way for PhD students to feedback to the School and the student body would be by establishing a Postgraduate Research SSLC.

Section 10: Personal Development and Employability

10.1 The panel **commended** the School for its impressive approach to employability and the strong links that had been forged with employers, as documented in sections 5.2 and 15b.4.

10.2 The Panel **commended** the School for forging good links with employers and providing internship opportunities for students.

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

12.1 In discussions with staff, the Panel **commended** the School's supportive approach to the induction of probationary members of staff and peer-mentoring.

12.2 The Panel noted that the School planned to increase its proportion of staff with the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching and Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The Panel **commended** this aspiration but acknowledged that this would require more staff effort to complete the necessary requirements at a time when staff are already stretched. The Panel **recommended** that staff be given some protected time to complete this teaching qualification.

12.3 The Panel noted that academic staff in the School had raised concerns about the level of funding to support teaching and research activities. This included restrictions on software, external engagement and attending conferences. The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake a review of investment allocated to supporting teaching and research activities.

12.4 The Panel **recommended** that the School undertake a review of the workload of academic staff and ensure that sufficient time is allocated for research activities.

12.5 The Panel noted that academic and administrative staff were keen to develop knowledge on mental health issues and counselling to provide support and guidance to students within the School. The Panel **recommended** that the School look into appropriate training courses provided at the University.

Section 13: Student Involvement in Quality Processes

13.1 The Panel **commended** the School's responsiveness to student input through SCEF forms and SSLC meetings, as confirmed by the students interviewed. Nevertheless, the Panel noted that PhD students required a clear feedback mechanism to express their opinions and views to the School and a way forward would be through establishing a Postgraduate Research SSLC as documented in 9.3.

Section 15a: Student Support, Retention and Progression

15a.1 The Panel noted that the School was making progress with retention rates through piloting a scheme for first year Accounting and Finance undergraduate students. It was noted that the Programme Leader for first year Accounting and Finance contacted and met C6 first year students to investigate personal circumstances that may lead to potential retention issues. The School felt that the personal touch and early engagement was very effective with students and helped to identify problematic issues and provide sufficient support. The Panel **commended** that the School was looking at ways to improve its retention rate and contacting students from an early onset but **recommended** that the process be implemented in all disciplines.

15a.2 The Panel **commended** the School for its method of personal tutor allocation, for example, by matching students in accordance to their primary discipline. The Panel understood the rationale for allocating one personal tutor for all SCNU students, as this would provide a single point of contact with some knowledge of the issues faced by these students, but it was thought that this may limit the integration of SCNU students into the main body of students. The Panel therefore **recommended** the School considers other means to help direct entry students to integrate into the School and the Discipline.

15a.3 The Panel noted that the School could provide better course material accessibility to students with disabilities. The administrative staff made slides and lecture notes available to students who had provisions and commented that students with disabilities were able to collect course material from the School office. The Panel **recommended** that the School look into providing course material on MyAberdeen for all students, as further documented in sections 5.3 and 6.5.

Section 15b: Student Support, Retention and Progression

15b.1 The Panel was pleased to **commend** an evident commitment to student support demonstrated throughout the review; in the review documentation and in discussions with both staff and students.

15b.3 The Panel noted the continuing issue of a low rate of returns on SCEF forms, but **commended** the School for actively seeking new ways of improving student feedback through forming student focus groups to gain a better insight on how to improve the current system.

15b.4 The Panel **commended** the School on its engagement with employability skills across all programmes.

Section 16: Recruitment Access and Widening Participation

16.1 The Panel recognised the progress made by the School on new teaching initiatives such as the on-line MBA programme and delivering in-country teaching through the SCNU programme. The Panel **commended** the School's academic staff who showed commitment in travelling to China twice a year to deliver an intensive programme.

16.2 The Panel **recommended** that the School monitor SCNU students' grade profiles to see whether further transition activities or other support mechanisms needed to be implemented to address this disparity.

16.3 The Panel noted that the School was experiencing difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of students for its PGT programmes. The Panel **recommended** that the School strategically review its programmes and employ a full time School Marketing Officer to develop a comprehensive and logical marketing strategy to promote its PGT programmes.

Section 17: SFC Quality Enhancement Engagements

17.1 The Panel noted School membership of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Scotland's Enhancement Themes Steering Committee for the First Year Experience and Student Transitions Enhancement Themes but **recommended** the School more actively ensures that good practice shared at such events or organisations be brought back and integrated to the School's teaching and learning practices.

Section 19: Quality Enhancement and Good Practice

19.1 The Panel noted several areas of good practice within the School as highlighted in this report and as listed by the School in their SED. However, the Panel noted that these areas of good practice tended to be discipline-specific and there seemed to be limited cross-fertilisation of ideas across the School as a whole. The Panel therefore **recommended** that the disciplines could work more closely together and share best practice.