

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY **INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

SUMMARY REPORT

Panel visit: Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 October 2016

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

The panel recommended **unconditional revalidation** of the provision offered by the School of Psychology, as listed in *Section 1.1* below.

The panel considered the documentation provided by the School of Psychology, by way of Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and associated appendices and conducted a two-day site visit to the School, located in the William Guild Building, King's College. The panel met with a range of staff, academic and administrative, and undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research students. A detailed list of with whom the panel met is attached as *Appendix 1*.

Overall, the panel considered Psychology to be a successful, well-organised and thriving School. The panel **commended** the quality of teaching and learning in the School, expressing confidence in the rigorous maintenance of academic standards. The panel recognised the commitment of the School in ensuring the continual enhancement of teaching and learning provision, noting the implementation of innovative teaching methods and responsive nature of the School to the needs of the student body. The panel **commended** the work of the School in this regard.

The panel **commended** the strong, collegiate atmosphere within the School, apparent amongst all staff and students, and the obvious efforts of all School staff, academic and administrative, to ensuring an excellent student experience. The panel **commended** the articulate and enthusiastic student representatives with whom they met, acknowledging their obvious sense of belonging to the School of Psychology, openness and willingness to share their experiences.

The panel **commended** the School for their reflective and responsive approach throughout the review process, acknowledging their honesty in describing instances where things had not gone well and their willingness to point out where they felt they could improve. Where issues did occur, the panel noted that steps were taken to resolve these quickly, efficiently, and with the best interests of the students in mind at all times.

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

COMMENDATIONS

Section 2: Aims of Provision

- 2.1 The panel **commended** the School for their clear vision in terms of the provision of teaching and for the obvious engagement of all staff with this vision.
- 2.2 The panel **commended** the work of the School in also ensuring students are well-placed to pursue other scientific or professional interests as a result of the transferable skills and knowledge afforded to them during their studies.

Section 3: Staffing

- 3.1 The panel noted the confidence of the school that they were currently compliant with these requirements and **commended** the continual monitoring of staffing levels and inclusion of staffing as a key entry on the School's risk-register.
- 3.5 The panel noted the School's workload model and **commended** its equity and transparency. The panel **commended** the strong, collegiate atmosphere within the School, apparent amongst all staff, and the agreement of 87% of academic staff that they are 'happy with their workload' (*SED section 3 refers*).
- 3.6 The panel **commended** the efficiency and dedication of the School administrative staff, noting the invaluable role they play in the work of the School and in ensuring an excellent student experience. Specifically, the panel **commended** the work undertaken by the School Teaching Technician, his approachability and positive interactions with staff and students. The panel noted with concern, however, the lack of support or backup for this role.

Section 4: School Organisation

- 4.1 The panel **commended** the clear organisation of the School and the key role and transparent work of the Committee structure including, but not limited to, the Teaching Management Group, External Liaison Committee, Ethics Committee, Postgraduate Committee and School Management Group. The panel specifically **commended** the Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning for the evident thoughtful and strategic leadership within the School as a whole and specifically with regards teaching and learning.
- 4.2 The panel acknowledged and **commended** the dedication of all individuals within the School, again noting the strong collegial and committed environment fully involving both research and scholarship staff. The panel **commended** the formal and informal mentoring structures within the School and the awareness of all staff to the help they could seek from their colleagues at any time.
- 4.3 The panel **commended** the strong relationship between the School and its students and the importance placed on their input and feedback. The panel noted School engagement with students in terms of their participation in committees such as the School Teaching and Learning Committee and Staff Student Liaison Committees. The relationship between the two was exemplified to the panel by both the staff and student body.

Section 5: Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.1 The panel **commended** the work of the School in its internal and external processes for the development of new provision and the use of External Examiners and External Liaison Committee in this regard.
- 5.2 The panel **commended** the School's reflective attitude towards reviewing the design of existing programmes and courses and the use of a variety of means, including Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEFs), Staff: Student Liaison Committee meetings, Annual Course Review (ACR) and External Examiners (EE) reports to inform any such review. The panel **commended** student feedback as being a key driver for revision and development.
- 5.3 The panel **commended** the School for the introduction of the Master of Science (MSc) in Psychological Studies conversion programme.
- 5.4 The panel **commended** the work of the School in supporting students with disabilities. The panel acknowledged the processes followed by the School and **commended** the School work undertaken in the school raise awareness of disability provision/support to students.
- 5.5 The panel **commended** the School on its use of technology and social media, including the University's VLE MyAberdeen and Facebook, as a means of communicating with the student body and allowing them to quickly and easily ask questions, provide feedback or receive updates on courses.

Section 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.1 The panel **commended** the emphasis within the School on teaching and learning and the dedication of staff from Head of School down to deliver research-led teaching of the highest quality, to engage and inform students. The panel **commended** several examples of good practice across the teaching, learning and assessment methods within the School, including but not limited to those detailed below.
- 6.2 The panel **commended** the School's use of a range of teaching methods including (i) traditional methods, such as lectures, and (ii) innovative methods, such as a 'flipped classroom' where students watch a recorded lecturer before taking part in a workshop-type class, and the subsequent exposure of students to a multifaceted teaching model. The panel noted the positive responses of students to this approach, encompassing a range of student needs and preferred teaching styles. The panel also acknowledged the use of small group teaching across undergraduate and some elements of postgraduate provision. The panel noted mixed feedback from the student body with regards to the success of these and **recommended** the School take forward their own identified action, to clearly express the function of these groups to students.
- 6.3 The panel **commended** the introduction of this innovative teaching and assessment format as a means of encouraging group work but also as an effective means of teaching and assessing very large level 1 classes.
- 6.4 The panel noted the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme operated across levels 1-3 of the undergraduate degree programme. The panel **commended** the programme which, as corroborated by the students with whom the panel met, provides students with academic support from their peers throughout their courses and most commonly at assessment time.

- 6.5 The Panel also **commended** the innovative work of the School to expose level 4 students to applying Psychology within the NHS. The panel noted this course had, following inception, been amended to make use of the 'flipped classroom' technique (*point 6.2 above refers*) to require students to view recordings of a lecture on each topic before attending a teaching session led by Clinicians focusing on case studies within each specialism. The panel **commended** this approach, designed carefully to meet the needs, identified following feedback undertaken, of students. The panel **commended** the open and receptive attitude of the School to amending and aligning course outcomes, teaching methods and assessment. The panel **recommend** the continued review of courses and the implementation of methods such as these, if appropriate.
- 6.6 The panel noted a range of assessment and feedback methods used across the School. The panel specifically **commended** the use of online feedback as a method of returning marks and more detailed feedback on assessment and noted positive responses from students on this. Students specifically noted that they received more detailed feedback when provided online. The panel also noted the use of a feedback video presentation, providing generic feedback at level 1, explaining common mistakes, and how to avoid these in the future. The panel **commended** the School for this innovation.

Section 7: Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The panel **commended** the School on the consistently positive comments and endorsements from External Examiners by way of their feedback throughout the year and annual reports.
- 7.2 The panel **commended** the importance placed by the School on feedback, through official or unofficial mechanisms, from the student body.

Section 8: Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure

- 8.1 The panel **commended** the work of the School in ensuring the degree programmes offered have been designed in accordance with the academic standards required by the University, as set out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the requirements of the BPS.

Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students

- 9.1 The panel **commended** the School for the formal and informal induction and support provided to all postgraduate research students. The panel noted the evident open door policy within the School and the academic and pastoral support provided.
- 9.3 The panel **commended** the support and training provided for PGRs in teaching roles, as evidenced by the PGRs themselves who clearly felt confident in their role as teachers and able to ask for support if and when required.
- 9.4 The panel **commended** the sharing of equipment and facilities for PhD students.

Section 10: Personal Development and Employability

- 10.2 The panel **commended** the commitment of the School to the development of its students at all stages of their studies. The panel noted a clear engagement with employability across the School and embedded within all aspects of provision. The panel **commended** face-to-face

teaching time dedicated to employability, School organised career talks and networking events and a strong working relationship with the University Careers Service.

- 10.3 The panel specifically **commended** the Psychology Internship Programme providing enhanced work-based learning opportunities. Noting its initial set up in 2013, the panel acknowledged the growth of the programme to encompass up to ten internships and **commended** the hard work of the Internship coordinator in the development and successful running of the programme.
- 10.4 The panel **commended** the Postgraduate Employability programme and the delivery of career talks, employability workshops and the Early Careers Forum.

Section 11: Professional Bodies/Units

- 11.1 As is noted above, the panel **commended** the School on their relationship with the BPS and their adherence to BPS requirements.
- 11.2 The panel **commended** the School on their recent achievement of the Athena-SWAN bronze award.

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 The panel noted the evident commitment and reflective attitude of staff across the School, as further detailed in *section 4* above and **commended** the School Management Team for their proactive role in encouraging staff development.
- 12.2 The panel **commended** the School's supportive approach to the induction of new staff, who undergo induction at Institution level by way to the Centre for Academic Development two-day course and by way of induction at School level. The panel **commended** the structure of the internal induction, comprising key topics such as funding, student and welfare.
- 12.3 The panel **commended** the School for their engagement with the University vision to ensure all staff are members of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The panel **commended** the Head of School's lead by example approach to this, himself undertaking the application this year.

Section 13: Student Involvement in Quality Processes

- 13.1 The panel **commended** the evident School responsiveness to student input, as confirmed by the students themselves and referred to throughout.

Section 15: Student Support, Retention and Progression

- 15.2 The panel noted the work of the School in 2012-13 in reviewing its retention policy and **commended** the reflective nature of work undertaken to revise undergraduate courses and assessments to enhance student engagement.
- 15.3 The panel acknowledged the Personal Tutor system and **commended** the School for adopting the scheme and embedding it as successfully as possible within the School.

Section 16: Recruitment Access and Widening Participation

- 16.2 The panel also noted the recruitments of postgraduate students and, in particular, **commended** the School for the significant increase in the number of students admitted to the new MSc in Psychological Studies.
- 16.3 The panel **commended** the School for their commitment to recruitment activities and, in particular, widening participation.
- 16.4 The panel **commended** the work of the School in developing a successful Facebook page for applicants who hold offers to study at Aberdeen.

Section 18: Recent Developments

- 18.1 The panel noted several recent developments within the School since last undergoing ITR in 2011 and highlighted many areas of good practice (see throughout). The panel **commended** the School on the steps they had taken to act upon the majority of points raised by the previous panel.

Conclusions

The panel recommended **unconditional revalidation** of the provision offered by the School of Psychology, as listed in *section 1.1* above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 3: Staffing

- 3.3 The panel acknowledged the commitment of the School to teaching and learning and **recommended** that Scholarship/Teaching staff continue to receive support for progression and promotion, backed up by a transparent workload model.
- 3.4 The panel noted the makeup of the School in terms of age and gender, acknowledging staff as predominantly young. The panel noted the stability such a young staff profile can provide, but did also recognise the concerns of the School in that they remain reliant on small grouping of senior academic staff for management roles. The panel echoed the views of the School that steps should be taken to give increasing responsibility to newly promoted staff. The panel further **recommended** to both School and Centre that consideration be given to the recruitment of senior staff.
- 3.6 The panel acknowledged that this issue had been raised as part of the 2011 ITR and again **recommended** that thought be given to the consequences of the absence of the Technician and that provisions be put in place to address this issue.

Section 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.5 The panel commended the open and receptive attitude of the School to amending and aligning course outcomes, teaching methods and assessment. The panel **recommended** the continued review of courses and the implementation of methods such as these, if appropriate.
- 6.6 The panel also noted the use of a feedback video presentation, providing generic feedback at level 1, explaining common mistakes, and how to avoid these in the future. The panel commended the School for this innovation and **recommended** that these methods be used across more courses.
- 6.7 The panel noted that discussions are ongoing within the University's Committee structure to review the requirements of Enhanced Study. The panel **recommended** that the School feed into these discussions where possible.

Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students

- 9.2 As further detailed in *section 10*, the panel **recommended** the extension and development of the Postgraduate Employability Programme.

Section 10: Personal Development and Employability

- 10.1 The panel noted that following the implementation of Curriculum Reform opportunities to achieve the University's Graduate Attributes (GAs) were embedded in courses. Feedback from the student body, however, suggested that information obtained by way of the online Professional Development course (PD1001) may provide too much information, too early on in their studies. The panel **recommended** to the Careers Service that the timing of this course be reviewed.

- 10.3 The panel acknowledged that there are steps to introduce a University wide courses recognising and awarding credit for work-based learning such as this. The panel **recommended** that School continue to work closely with the Centre to allow for the internship programme to hopefully be extended and for more students to undertake this opportunity.
- 10.4 The panel commended the Postgraduate Employability programme and the delivery of career talks, employability workshops and the Early Careers Forum. The panel **recommended**, however, that this be extended and developed to engage and focus all Postgraduate students, some of who may be unaware of the correlation between the opportunity to attend these events and employability.

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.4 The panel noted a level of commitment to CPD activities. The panel **recommended** that such a commitment be extended to ensure all staff have the opportunity to attend relevant courses, such as the two-day course run by the Centre for Academic Development (CAD).

Section 15: Student Support, Retention and Progression

- 15.2 The panel noted varying approaches to contacting students across levels 1 to 4, including direct email contact following a missed laboratory class at level 1 and invitation to attend a meeting with the Level Coordinator and Director of Teaching and Learning at following the non-submission of coursework at level 3. The panel commended the efforts of the School in this regard and **recommended** that the success of these approaches be analysed and, if appropriate, extended.
- 15.3 The panel noted the recent announcement of changes to the scheme which should allow for the development of the scheme on a school by school basis. The panel **recommended** that the School take steps to develop the scheme and raise the profile of personal tutors following this announcement.
- 15.6 The panel noted concerns raised by students about the difficulties experienced in selecting an honours project. The panel **recommended** that the School ensure a transparent and fair means of determining project is in place to avoid stress and confusion.
- 15.7 The panel noted concern that the progression route from Master of Research (MRes) to PhD is not clear. The panel acknowledged recent changes to the progression route, however, **recommended** that the two routes be clearly defined, that material is not duplicated and that these be carefully and clearly expressed to students.

Section 16: Recruitment Access and Widening Participation

- 16.1 The panel noted the issues experienced by the School, and across the University as a whole, in recruiting overseas and RUK students, in addition to concerns regarding the recruitment of Home/EU and non-home EU students in light of Britain's exit from the European Union. The panel **recommended** that the School continue to work with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (SRAS) in navigating these issues.