

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
SCHOOL OF LAW

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW
REPORT

Panel Visit: Tuesday 25 and Wednesday 26 February 2014

Panel:

Professor George M. Coghill	Convener, School of Natural and Computing Sciences
Professor Margaret Cruickshank	School of Medicine and Dentistry
Dr Shane Alcobia-Murphy	School of Language and Literature
Dr Okun Akseli	External Subject Specialist (University of Durham)
Dr David Cabrelli	External Subject Specialist (University of Edinburgh)
Miss Jodie Molyneux	AUSA School Convener for Language and Literature
Miss Emma Hay	Clerk
Miss Clare McWilliams	Minute Secretary
Miss Emma Webb	Observer

The Panel met the following:

Head of School	Ms Anne-Michelle Slater
School Director of Teaching and Learning	Mr Derek Auchie
Undergraduate Course Coordinators (Levels 1 & 2)	Professor Roderick Paisley
	Dr Ian Taggart
	Dr Karen Fullerton
	Dr Tamas Gyrofi
	Mr Adam Perry
Undergraduate Course Coordinators (Levels 3 and 4)	Mr Derek Auchie
	Dr Jonathan Fitchen
	Mr Derek Auchie
	Mr Scott Styles
Teaching Fellows	Dr Mark Igiehon
	Dr Ian Taggart
	Mr Derek Auchie
	Ms Lorna Cromar
Undergraduate Students (Levels 1 & 2)	Mr Matthew Scott
	Ms Anne MacMillan
	Ms Lucy Arthur
	Ms Erin Sculthorpe
	Ms Jasmin Burger
Undergraduate Students (Levels 3 & 4)	Ms Anda Pop
	Ms Christy Ward
	Mr Samir Younes
	Mr Raisul Islam
	Ms Daniele Johnston
School Disability Officer	Ms Sarah Duncan

School Administration	Ms Sarah Duncan Ms Carol Lawie Ms Joanna Kunzlik Ms Carol Davies Ms Jackie Ewen Ms Farida Ali
Probationers	Dr Andrew Simpson Dr Olivia Woolley Dr Colin Mackie Dr Adam Perry Ms Elizabeth Shaw Ms Ilona Cairns
Director of Postgraduate Programmes Postgraduate Teaching Staff	Dr Dirk Hanschel Professor Peter Duff Dr Dirk Hanschel Dr Matyas Bodig Dr Irene Couzigou Dr Patrick Masiyakurima Dr Catherine Ng Mrs Joanna Kunzlik
Director Research and Supervisors	Professor Peter Duff Professor John Paterson Dr Catherine Ng Dr Justin Borg-Barthet Ms Joanna Kunzlik Dr Susan Stokeld
Director of Diploma in Professional Legal Practice	
Postgraduate Students (Taught)	Ms Emma-Louise Brown Ms Lynsey Reid
Postgraduate Students (Research)	Mr Buba Bojang Mr Mohamad Janaby Mr Piti Eiamchamroonlarp

Additional Comments on the Self-Evaluation Document were received from:

Professor Alison Lumsden	Director of Teaching and Learning in the College of Arts and Social Sciences
Dr Lucy Foley	Head of Student Support
Dr Kathleen Shennan	Convener of the Quality Assurance Committee
Mrs Gail Smillie	School IT Relationship Manager
Ms Katja Christie	Deputy Academic Registrar

Overall Impressions

The Law School is one of six schools of the College of Arts and Social Sciences and is located in the Taylor Building.

The Panel noted that the School has been undergoing a period of change. This is in part due to changes enforced by the University as well as changes within the legal sector. Changes enforced by the University include the change to the Academic Year structure, the implementation of Curriculum

Reform and the move from advisers of studies to the roll-out of the Personal Tutoring Scheme. The panel acknowledged the effects of these changes and the challenges they present to the School. The panel noted further change across the legal landscape. Traditionally the majority of LLB graduates have proceeded to complete the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP). Recent cohorts, however, both within the institution and across the subject area as a whole, would indicate that this is a declining trend, one which the School is aware of and is seeking to address in its delivery of programmes.

The Panel **commended** the quality of teaching and learning in the School and expressed confidence in the maintenance of academic standards. The Panel **commended** innovative teaching practices and noted exciting developments such as the introduction of the Degree of Bachelor of Laws with English Law programme; this helped address a gap in the market for students who may wish to qualify to practice in England. The Panel was pleased to note that the idea for the introduction of this programme originated from members of staff from the School of Law as opposed to the School Management Team. The Panel **commended** the School for this.

The Panel **commended** the School's engagement with local secondary schools via its outreach pilot scheme, which allows pupils to receive exposure to legal study by attending a level-1 law course. The programme allows pupils exposure to legal study to allow them to form realistic expectations of what a law degree involves and make an informed decision regarding whether it is a suitable degree programme for them. Pupils also develop transferable skills which will help them in the transition from school to University.

The Panel noted that staff enjoyed a keen sense of collegiality and shared a common goal in respect to the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research. School staff were **commended** in this regard. The Panel acknowledged the difficulties the School is facing with staffing levels. The high staff:student ratio is a matter of ongoing concern as it has left the School with little flexibility in dealing with both short-term teaching emergencies and long-term planning. The Panel noted that this represents a constant challenge which has only been heightened by the institution's strategic target to increase postgraduate taught student numbers.

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

Notes: The numbering of sections below reflects the numbering of the self-evaluation document (SED). Some sections of the SED attracted no commendations or recommendations.

Section 1: Range of Provision

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

1.1 The School of Law offers single, joint, or combined honours degree programmes in Law.

Degree of Bachelor of Laws
Degree of Bachelor of Laws and Belgian Law
Degree of Bachelor of Laws and European Legal Studies
Degree of Bachelor of Laws and French Law
Degree of Bachelor of Laws and German Law
Degree of Bachelor of Laws and Spanish Law
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with English Law
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Accountancy
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Economics
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in French Language
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Gaelic Language
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in German Language
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Management Studies
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Music
Degree of Bachelor of Laws with Options in Spanish Language
Degree of Bachelor of Laws (Two Year)

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

1.2 The School offers a range of 16 LL.M (Master of Laws) programmes as well as research degrees through the LL.M and Ph.D.

Degree of Master of Laws in Energy Law
Degree of Master of Laws in Oil and Gas Law with Dissertation
Degree of Master of Laws in Oil and Gas Law with Professional Skills
Degree of Master of Laws in Energy and Environmental Law
Degree of Master of Laws in International Law
Degree of Master of Laws in Public International Law
Degree of Master of Laws in Private International Law
Degree of Master of Laws in International Law and International Relations
Degree of Master of Laws in International Law and Strategic Studies
Degree of Master of Laws in Criminal Justice
Degree of Master of Laws in Human Rights
Degree of Master of Laws in Criminal Justice & Human Rights
Degree of Master of Laws in Human Rights & Criminal Justice
Degree of Master of Laws in International Commercial Law with Dissertation
Degree of Master of Laws in International Commercial Law with Professional Skills
Postgraduate Diploma in International Arbitration

Diploma in Professional Legal Practice

1.3 The Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP) offered by the School is designed to satisfy the Law Society of Scotland's requirements for Professional Education and Training Programme Stage 1 (PEAT1). The School is accredited to offer Trainee Continuing

Professional Development (TCPD), which is part of the Law Society of Scotland's PEAT 2 programme.

Section 2: Aims of Provision

- 2.1 The Panel noted the School's core aim to *'provide a challenging intellectual education for entrants to the legal profession, other areas of employment, and post-graduate programmes.'* [SED:2.1]. The Panel noted from the supporting documentation that this aim is being pursued rigorously and guides all aspects of provision. Furthermore, the Panel noted that the School's aims are consistent with those of the Law Society of Scotland and the University as a whole.

Section 3: Staffing

- 3.1 At the point of submission of the Internal Teaching Review documentation, the School had a staff:student ratio (SSR) of 1.26.6. The Panel recognised the difficulties the School faces with staffing shortages and noted that an increase in staffing levels would make way for significant improvements. For example, it has proved difficult to recruit suitable leaders in the area of oil and gas law which has limited the School's ability to focus on Energy Law, a focus of the Universities' Strategic Investment Plan. The increased popularity of certain LLM programmes and courses has required the School to engage in targeted recruitment so to respond to student demand. Although this has been achieved to some extent, the panel noted that a further increase in staffing levels would allow the School to offer more courses and programmes which enjoy a high student demand. The Panel **recommended** that staffing levels be reviewed by the College.
- 3.2 The Panel **commended** the development of the workload allocation model. The Panel noted the high number of teaching hours undertaken by staff but was reassured that strategies, such as the School's research policy and long-standing sabbatical policy, were being reviewed as a measure to improve this.
- 3.3 The Panel **commended** the efficiency and dedication of the School administrative staff; although a team of only 8 they are well-integrated within the School. The Panel was encouraged by their positive and enthusiastic attitude and noted the large role they played within the School. The Panel did note, however, that the roles of administrative staff were often conflicted between teaching and research. The Panel suggested that the School might wish to clarify roles in this regard.
- 3.4 The Panel noted that an early career research group had ceased to function and is no longer in existence. The Panel recognised that probationary staff seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of such a group reforming and acknowledged that discussions have taken place around reviving this group. The Panel endorses the School's intention to investigate restarting this forum.
- 3.5 The Panel **commended** the School's commitment to having professorial staff teach at undergraduate level, recognising the substantial contribution they make to lecturing the large compulsory courses.

Section 4: School Organisation

- 4.1 The Panel **commended** the organisational structure of the School and was particularly pleased that students were represented on all main committees. In discussion with undergraduate students, the Panel noted that students felt they were encouraged to express opinions and believed that the School acted on the student feedback received. Students were confident that their views were taken seriously. The Panel **commended** the School for this.
- 4.2 The Panel **commended** the strong sense of cohesion and community across the School. This was evident from discussions with both staff and students with the students noting in particular the approachability of staff and the School's open door policy.
- 4.3 The Panel noted the Teaching and Learning Away Day, recently introduced by the School. The Panel noted this had been viewed positively by staff. The Panel further noted this initiative would be operating on a bi-annual basis with a Research Away Day taking place in intervening years. Given that the School found great value in the initiative the Panel **recommended** that the bi-annual nature of the activity be reviewed.

Section 5: Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.1 The Panel **commended** the breadth of teaching methods and the flexible approach to learning evident within the School.
- 5.2 The Panel **commended** the School for the introduction of the Degree of Bachelor of Laws with English Law degree. This is one of only a few dual opportunities allowing students to complete their training in England and Wales or in Scotland. This initiative was introduced as a result of staff expertise available and with a view to improving student recruitment within the School, particularly from the overseas market. The Panel noted with concern the challenges that have been encountered as a result of implementing this programme, such as the requirement to introduce more courses to adhere to requirements outlined by the Joint Academic Stage Board of the Solicitors Regulation Authority. However, the Panel was pleased to note the popularity of the programme with both prospective and current students.
- 5.3 The Panel noted with concern the level of supervision available to students in relation to dissertations at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level. The Panel noted existing practice at both undergraduate and postgraduate level whereby students have only two meetings with their supervisor both of which take place in the first half-session. The first meeting is designed to determine the dissertation topic and the second is intended to determine a dissertation plan. The Panel was informed that the rationale behind the current supervision level is to give students more academic freedom. While the Panel acknowledged the School's reasoning, students who met with the Panel expressed their displeasure with having such few interactions with their supervisor. The Panel **recommended** that the School revisit supervision provision to ensure that students are receiving appropriate support.
- 5.4 The Panel noted that the School adheres to University procedures in relation to students with disabilities. The Panel was informed that the process runs smoothly with no major issues or problems being reported.

- 5.5 The Panel noted that the School is intending to review the suite of LLM programmes in particular online-learning provision for which there is a high student demand. The Panel identified the strength the School potentially has in offering programmes in relation to the buoyant oil and gas sector by way of its location and links with the industry. However the Panel also acknowledged the difficulties the School has faced in recruiting staff with the necessary expertise. The Panel strongly endorsed the School's intention to review the strategic development of its LLM programmes.

Section 6: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.1 The Panel **commended** the quality of teaching and learning in the School. The Panel noted in particular the students' satisfaction with the organisation and structure of degree programmes. The Panel **commended** the School's use of the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) MyAberdeen which all courses use to support teaching and noted the intense training sessions all new staff receive on how to use this platform. The Panel encouraged the School to continue to use the system to its fullest potential.
- 6.2 The Panel noted the ongoing debate within the School regarding its widespread use of Camtasia lecturing recording software. While the Panel recognised concerns in relation to the impact this tool has on attendance at lectures, the Panel was pleased to hear extremely positive reviews of Camtasia from students and staff alike. The Panel noted the view of some staff members that the recordings have been particularly useful especially for students with disabilities. This view was shared by some of the students who also found Camtasia to be beneficial for revision purposes.

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 for all taught programmes offered. The Panel noted that External Examiners were re-assured that the School is upholding appropriate academic standards in its programme delivery.
- 7.2 The Panel noted the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) process as being the principal method by which the School reviews its individual courses. The Panel **commended** the School for the positive responses in relation to questions on the form regarding disabilities. The Panel noted with concern the continuing issue of a low rate of returns on SCEF forms, leaving a large proportion of student views unrepresented but did acknowledge that this was an institution-wide issue not specific to the School. Nevertheless the Panel **recommended** the School makes every effort to impress upon students the importance of the SCEF process.
- 7.3 The Panel noted that students are involved in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. The Panel noted that the minutes of these meetings demonstrate how valuable student comments are to the School's teaching and learning provision.

Section 8: Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure

- 8.1 The Panel noted that the degree programmes offered by the School 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 Law Society of Scotland.

Section 9: Training and Supervision of Research Students

- 9.1 The Panel **commended** the School for its supervision of postgraduate research students (PGRs). The Panel met with a group of PGRs who expressed clear student satisfaction with the level of supervision they received and the supportive approach and attitude of PGR supervisors. Students were also appreciative of supervisor feedback which was constructive and timely, in some instances within 48 hours.
- 9.2 The Panel noted the use of the training course LS5067 'Core Skills for Research Students'. This course, which all students are required to attend during their first year of full time research work, develops in students the core skills necessary to complete a successful programme of research in law.

Section 10: Personal Development and Employability

- 10.1 The Panel noted that opportunities to achieve the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (AGAs) were embedded in courses. The Panel noted however that the students who were interviewed seemed unaware or knew little of what AGAs were. While it is clear to the Panel the AGAs were embedded in the curriculum they **recommended** that more thought be put into how to highlight AGAs to students.
- 10.2 The Panel **commended** the School for its impressive approach to employability and the strong links that have been forged with employers. Graduate Destination Data discloses that the School has the second lowest unemployment level of all the Colleges' Schools. This confirms the assertion that programmes within the School are achieving their learning outcomes. Nevertheless the School identified itself that monitoring student destinations could be improved, the Panel was satisfied that this was being addressed.
- 10.3 The panel noted the Clinical Legal Skills course. This allows those students who are working through the Aberdeen Law Project, the School's law clinic, to develop their practical skills by advising members of the public as part of a credit bearing course.

Section 11: Professional Units/Bodies

- 11.1 The Panel **commended** the School on its involvement with the Centre for Academic Development (CAD). The Panel was pleased to note that School staff members had taken advantage of some CAD workshops including training in teaching techniques and the use of specialist software for different teaching purposes.
- 11.2 The Panel noted the School's positive relationships with accrediting bodies in particular the Law Society of Scotland which is the governing body of solicitors in Scotland.
- 11.3 The Panel was pleased to note that two members of staff are Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellows, both having completed the voluntary Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching. The Panel supports the School in continuing to encourage staff to complete this voluntary qualification.

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 The Panel noted the view amongst some staff, teaching fellows in particular, that they were unclear as to the promotion opportunities within the teaching and scholarship role profile.

The Panel acknowledged that this is not an issue unique to the Law School and is aware that it is currently being addressed at Institutional level. However the Panel **recommended** that the School clearly highlights career opportunities to staff. Teaching Fellows remarked that they were limited in terms of opportunities to take on leadership and administrative roles due to the heavy teaching workload they currently have.

- 12.2 The Panel noted the 3 year mentoring system in place for staff on probation. Staff members on probation are allocated to a senior member of academic staff as a mentor who is typically a professor in the relevant area of research. The mentor assists with provision of information about the organisation and operation of the School and assists with any particular academic or organisational problems. The Panel did note with concern however that probationary staff appeared unaware of the School's expectations upon them in relation to, journal submission or publication and course co-ordination for probationary staff. The Panel **recommended** therefore that the School reviews guidelines in relation to training and the targets set for probationary staff.

Section 13: Student Involvement in Quality Processes

- 13.1 The Panel was pleased to note that the School operated effective Staff-Student Liaison Committees and that students had reported that they felt their views were taken seriously and feedback had been provided as appropriate. The Panel **commended** the School for this. However the student reps did feel that additional meetings later on the session would be beneficial should issues arise later on in the course. The Panel **recommended** the School re-evaluate the timing of Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings.

Section 14: Public Information/Management Information

- 14.1 The Panel made no comment on this section of the SED.

Section 15a: Student Support, Retention and Progression (part 1)

- 15.1 The Panel **commended** the School's overall commitment to student support, as demonstrated by the open door policy exercised by both teaching and administrative staff. The Panel was pleased to note the high level of satisfaction generally expressed by students in relation to the availability and approachability of all staff.
- 15.2 The Panel noted the School felt that the introduction of the Personal Tutoring scheme had gone smoothly from both a staff and student viewpoint. However, the Panel further noted the School's concerns regarding student attendance at Personal Tutor meetings. The Panel recognised this as being an institutional-wide issue but **recommended** that the School employ a variety of methods to encourage and motivate students to attend meetings; in particular the Panel felt the School could do more to promote the value of Personal Tutor meetings to the student body.
- 15.3 The Panel noted the active student-run Aberdeen University Student Association Law Society as a great tool for helping students to achieve a sense of belonging within the School. Discussions with students pointed to the existence of good and regular communication from the society.

Section 15b: Student Support, Retention and Progression (part 2)

- 15.4 The Panel noted that students were appreciative of the School's use of MyAberdeen. Students particularly appreciated it as it allowed for all necessary information to be found in one place.

Section 16: Recruitment, Access and Widening Participation

- 16.1 The Panel recognised the popularity of the programmes offered by the School and the large number of students they attract. The Panel noted the School's enthusiastic participation in University Open Day and Applicants' Day events where the School gives prospective applicants presentations, a demonstration lecture and guided tours of the Law Library.
- 16.2 The Panel **commended** the School's outreach pilot scheme. The Panel was pleased to see the contributory aspects this has to the local community in that it gives local final-school pupils the opportunity to attend level-one law classes. This gives them exposure to legal study to allow them to form realistic expectations which will allow them to make an informed decision thereafter as to what degree programme is suitable for them. However, given the limited staff resource at the School, the panel was disappointed that pupils who had participated in the programme had chosen to do a law degree at other institutions. The Panel **recommended** that consideration be given to the extension of the initiative from 1 and a half mile radius to a 2 mile radius to include other schools with a view to improving widening participation.

Section 17: QAA Quality Enhancement Engagements

- 17.1 The Panel noted the School's engagement with some of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Enhancement Themes. The Panel recognised the benefit the Curriculum Reform process (CRef) has particularly for those students in level 1 and 2. The Panel was pleased to note that students also shared this view having expressed so in discussions with the Panel.
- 17.2 The Panel noted that a number of compulsory courses for the Degree of Bachelor of Laws are run at level 3. The Panel accepted the position of the School that due to being bound by discipline breadth, to run all compulsory courses in years 1 and 2 would make for a heavy curriculum. The Panel further noted School opinion that courses such as Evidence LS3025 in particular, are best taken after other compulsory courses in previous years.
- 17.3 As outlined in the section 2 of the SED, in line with core courses, all LLB students in years 1-3 have an opportunity to take optional law subjects and/or subjects from a different discipline. The Panel was pleased to note that this has given those students, who do not wish to take on a course from another discipline, the opportunity to take on courses that were introduced as part of the recently implemented Law with English Law degree programme.

Section 18: Recent Developments

- 18.1 The Panel noted the satisfactory implementation of many changes made by the School since it last undertook the Internal Teaching Review. The Panel **commended** the School on the steps they had taken to act upon the majority of points raised by the previous Panel. The Panel appreciated the explanations provided for points which had not yet been addressed. The Panel was grateful for the School having setting out action points for the coming years and **commended** them for this.

Section 19: Quality Enhancement and Good Practice

19.1 The Panel recognised the School's clear commitment to quality enhancement and a number of examples of good practice, combined with evidence of critical self-reflection as contained in the documentation submitted to the Panel. The Panel noted in particular, the approachability of staff and the innovative addition of the Law with English Law programme, providing further curriculum flexibility.

Section 20: Impediments to Quality Enhancement

20.1 The Panel noted the impediments to quality enhancement and good practice as outlined by the Head of School. The panel noted in particular the problems relating to staff:student ratio and **recommended** that these be discussed with the College.

Section 21: Issues for Discussion with External Subject Specialists

21.1 The Panel made no comment on this section of the SED.

Section 22: Other Issues

22.2 The Panel made no comment on this section of the SED.

Section 23: Production and Approval of Self-Evaluation Document

23.1 The Panel thanked the School for the well-presented documentation prepared for the Internal Teaching Review which provided the Panel with a clear perspective of the School's strategy and vision.

Conclusions

The Panel **recommended** unconditional revalidation of all undergraduate, postgraduate taught programmes and the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice.

The Panel wished to thank all members of staff within the School of Law for the work that had gone into producing the ITR documentation and for their commitment to the review process. The Panel also wished to thank all students and staff who participated in the visit; the visit itself went very smoothly and the Panel was made to feel very welcome.

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
SCHOOL OF LAW
2014 INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO PANEL REPORT

The School of Law has considered the 2014 ITR Report, and would offer the following response.

In general terms, from the School's perspective, the event was very successful and useful. The School produced a detailed Quality Enhancement Action Plan as part of the process. This will assist in the implementation of teaching and learning priorities and policies over the period 2014-2019. The panel members were very constructive, reasonable and friendly during all meetings with staff members and students. The commendations are appreciated and offer encouragement for the School in many areas, while the recommendations provide a basis for improvement in certain School of Law practices.

The Report process has had a wider, positive impact. The Law Society of Scotland (LSS) has recently confirmed reaccreditation of the LLB, LLB(Hons) and DPLP programmes for a further five years. The ITR documentation and process was (along with Annual LSS Reporting) instrumental in securing this outcome in the absence of a prolonged LSS re-accreditation process. Indeed, the LSS has confirmed that, in future, their re-accreditation cycle will mirror the ITR cycle for all Scottish universities. Aberdeen University is the first university to have been re-accredited in this way, leading the field for all other law schools in this new professional accreditation process. Further, the initial validation of the Law with English Law programme by the Joint Academic Standards Board (JASB) of England and Wales remains valid until the completion of the next ITR. Copies of the ITR submission and report were sent to the JASB and were positively received.

A number of points from the School's Action Plan are already being taken forward, while others will follow in subsequent academic sessions.

Each of the panel's recommendations will be addressed. It is anticipated that there will be progress across a number of these recommendations (as many as possible) by the next reporting date in July 2015.

Recommendation 1

Section 3: Staffing

3.1 At the point of submission of the Internal Teaching Review documentation, the School had a staff:student ratio (SSR) of 1.26.6. The Panel recognised the difficulties the School faces with staffing shortages and noted that an increase in staffing levels would make way for significant improvements. The increased popularity of certain LLM programmes and courses has required the School to engage in targeted recruitment so to respond to student demand. Although this has been achieved to some extent, the panel noted that a further increase in staffing levels

would allow the School to offer more courses and programmes which enjoy a high student demand. The Panel **recommended** that staffing levels be reviewed by the College.

School Response to recommendation 1

The School welcomes this recommendation, and the College has been asked to consider the staffing levels in the School. Indeed, this is something which is constantly under review in discussions between the School and College. Two new online postgraduate programmes have been proposed. Efforts continue to be made to secure an increase in postgraduate taught numbers. A decrease in undergraduate admissions for September 2014 (which the School hopes is a temporary decrease – see below on admissions further) will be offset by recent staff reductions coupled with the proposed new postgraduate programmes (should their launch be approved) alongside an increase in postgraduate recruitment for 2014-15.

Recommendation 2

Section 5: Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

5.3 The Panel noted with concern the level of supervision available to students in relation to dissertations at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level. The Panel noted existing practice at both undergraduate and postgraduate level whereby students have only two meetings with their supervisor both of which take place in the first half-session. The first meeting is designed to determine the dissertation topic and the second is intended to determine a dissertation plan. The Panel was informed that the rationale behind the current supervision level is to give students more academic freedom. While the Panel acknowledged the School's reasoning, students who met with the Panel expressed their displeasure with having such few interactions with their supervisor. The Panel **recommended** that the School revisit supervision provision to ensure that students are receiving appropriate support.

School Response to recommendation 2

This is again a welcome recommendation as it provides an opportunity to review dissertation supervision levels. This review will be carried out by the School's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) beginning at the first meeting during session 2014-15. This is the appropriate committee for this review, not least due to its student membership. The School will report back on this review in the July 2015 update.

Recommendation 3

Section 7: Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

7.2 The Panel noted with concern the continuing issue of a low rate of returns on SCEF forms, leaving a large proportion of student views unrepresented but did acknowledge that this was an institution-wide issue not specific to the School. Nevertheless the Panel **recommended** the School makes every effort to impress upon students the importance of the SCEF process.

School Response to recommendation 3

The low rate of return of SCEF forms is an issue which the School is keen to tackle. During academic year 2013-14, the LTC began considering the composition and length of the form with a view to amending and reducing the School-level questions, in response to students reporting to the committee that the task of answering the same (and sometimes only marginally applicable) questions for each course can be a disincentive to completion. The Committee will consider how the form can be streamlined to make completion less time consuming and onerous. The Committee (again in response to student feedback) will consider the timing of release of SCEF forms, to ensure that these are not issued during busy spells as this has been reported as a further disincentive to completion. Induction events will be run for all years from September 2014 (formerly, they were only available to UG Year 1 and PG students). The importance of the completion of SCEF forms will be stressed during these events. Further, the School will keep open informal channels for feedback, such as the annual focus group meeting and informal contact between course coordinators and student representatives during the academic year. The purpose and importance of SCEF forms is emphasised in the Student Handbooks, and students receive regular reminders for completion. The School will report back in July 2015 on the LTC work in this area and on any change in response rate.

Recommendation 4

Section 10: Personal Development and Employability

10.1 The Panel noted that opportunities to achieve the Aberdeen Graduate Attributes (AGAs) were embedded in courses. The Panel noted however that the students who were interviewed seemed unaware or knew little of what AGAs were. While it is clear to the Panel the AGAs were embedded in the curriculum they **recommended** that more thought be put into how to highlight AGAs to students.

School Response to recommendation 4

The School recognises the need to highlight the AGAs to students. An issue is the applicability of the AGA wording to the studies and career aspirations of students. This will be improved by the development of subject specific rubrics for law students. This is a project to be undertaken by the LTC chair, in conjunction with the Careers Service and the LTC. This is likely to be actioned in academic year 2015-16, given the other LTC priorities which exist. In the meantime, all academic staff will receive Personal Tutor training, and that training will emphasise the need for PTs to draw the attention of tutees to the AGAs and to highlight their importance. Further, an online resource for students is being developed at University level (in conjunction with the Careers Service) and the School is committed to promoting that resource to students, once it becomes available.

Recommendation 5

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

12.1 The Panel noted the view amongst some staff, teaching fellows in particular, that they were unclear as to the promotion opportunities within the teaching and scholarship role profile. The

Panel acknowledged that this is not an issue unique to the Law School and is aware that it is currently being addressed at Institutional level. However the Panel **recommended** that the School clearly highlights career opportunities to staff.

School Response to recommendation 5

The Head of School will meet with colleagues in the Human Resources department with a view to formulating guidance to assist in explaining (to Teaching Fellows in particular) the nature, scope and content of the teaching and scholarship role profile. This guidance will be formulated with a view to encouraging promotion applications. In addition, promotion opportunities and aspirations are discussed with each member of staff on an annual basis (during the Annual Review process), with a view to constructing workload and role composition in order to encourage teaching scholarship activity. Members of staff are encouraged to apply to the School's teaching budget for teaching related conferences and other expenses, and Teaching Fellows can participate in opportunities to exchange ideas through the University's Teaching Fellows Network, all of which will continue. The School will report back to the panel on this in July 2015.

Recommendation 6

Section 12: Staff Training and Educational Development

12.2 The Panel noted the 3 year mentoring system in place for staff on probation. Staff members on probation are allocated to a senior member of academic staff as a mentor who is typically a professor in the relevant area of research. The mentor assists with provision of information about the organisation and operation of the School and assists with any particular academic or organisational problems. The Panel did note with concern however that probationary staff appeared unaware of the School's expectations upon them in relation to, journal submission or publication and course co-ordination for probationary staff. The Panel **recommended** therefore that the School reviews guidelines in relation to training and the targets set for probationary staff.

School Response to recommendation 6

The Head of School will, in conjunction with all probationer mentors, review the School's expectations of probationers (on both teaching and research activity). This review will aim to consider whether (and, if so, to what extent) guidance available to probationary staff on how to successfully navigate the probationary period can be improved. A new Staff Handbook has been prepared for academic session 2014-15. That Handbook will be regularly updated and contains information across a range of practical and policy areas affecting the running of the School. That Handbook contains information relating to the probationary period, and this will be revisited following the review to be undertaken by the Head of School. The School will report back on this review in the July 2015 report.

Recommendation 7

Section 13: Student Involvement in Quality Processes

13.1 The Panel was pleased to note that the School operated effective Staff-Student Liaison Committees and that students had reported that they felt their views were taken seriously and feedback had been provided as appropriate. However the student reps did feel that additional meetings later on the session would be beneficial should issues arise later on in the course. The Panel **recommended** the School re-evaluate the timing of Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings.

School Response to recommendation 7

It appears that the student representatives have misunderstood the purpose of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). That Committee deals primarily with SCEF reports and the course coordinator's responses on these, with a view to collecting and reporting on feedback from students each semester. Students can bring any issues to the attention of their class representatives at any time during the academic year. The SSLC can meet at any time, at the request of any committee member (including student representatives). More pertinently class representatives may contact the chair of the LTC to report any issues, and the LTC chair can raise issues with Committee members either by e-mail (with a view to taking Chair's action) or at the next LTC meeting (if it is scheduled in the near future). Student representatives are also invited to School-wide meetings. The School will emphasise these processes to students during induction. An associated problem is securing the attendance of a majority of class representatives at School-wide, LTC and Staff-Student Liaison meetings. Where attendance is not good, the chances of student concerns coming to the School's attention are diminished. In the event that attendance levels of class representatives remains low during academic year 2015-16, this issue will be taken up with AUSA.

Recommendation 8

Section 15a: Student Support, Retention and Progression (part 1)

15.2 The Panel noted the School felt that the introduction of the Personal Tutoring scheme had gone smoothly from both a staff and student viewpoint. However, the Panel further noted the School's concerns regarding student attendance at Personal Tutor meetings. The Panel recognised this as being an institutional-wide issue but **recommended** that the School employ a variety of methods to encourage and motivate students to attend meetings; in particular the Panel felt the School could do more to promote the value of Personal Tutor meetings to the student body.

School Response to recommendation 8

The importance of attendance at Personal Tutor meetings will be strongly stressed during induction events for all students. As is suggested by the recommendation, this will be done from the point of view of the value these meetings hold for the students.

The School has opted to hold individual, initial PT meetings between staff members and all tutees during Freshers' Week 2014. The importance of continued attendance will be emphasised there. This will continue to be supplemented by attendance reports from PTs to the Senior Personal Tutor, who will continue to monitor attendance with a view to supporting PTs in their efforts to encourage engagement in the process.

Recommendation 9

Section 16: Recruitment, Access and Widening Participation

16.2 The Panel was pleased to see the contributory aspects of the School's outreach pilot scheme to the local community in that it gives local final-school pupils the opportunity to attend level-one law classes. This gives them exposure to legal study to allow them to form realistic expectations which will allow them to make an informed decision thereafter as to what degree programme is suitable for them. However, given the limited staff resource at the School, the panel was disappointed that pupils who had participated in the programme had chosen to do a law degree at other institutions. The Panel **recommended** that consideration be given to the extension of the initiative from 1 and a half mile radius to a 2 mile radius to include other schools with a view to improving widening participation.

School Response to recommendation 9

The scope of the School's outreach pilot scheme will be reviewed as part of a wider undergraduate admissions review to be undertaken by the School in the spring of 2015. This review will be undertaken in order to consider the School's engagement in promotional activities for all prospective undergraduate law programmes, but with particular emphasis on Home/EU applicants, given the drop in those numbers for session 2014-15 (and depending on the 2015-16 application numbers, which will be apparent by mid-January 2015). Following this review, the outreach project (in its current or in expanded form) may be a key part of any admissions strategy for the future. Again, the School expects to report back on this question in July 2015.

Recommendation 10

Section 20: Impediments to Quality Enhancement

20.1 The Panel noted the impediments to quality enhancement and good practice as outlined by the Head of School. The panel noted in particular the problems relating to staff:student ratio and **recommended** that these be discussed with the College.

School Response to recommendation 10

As indicated above, discussions between the School and College around the staff:student ratio for the School continue.

School of Law

29th August 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW FINAL REPORT OF THE PANEL
AND SCHOOL RESPONSE**

Date: 02 September 2014

School: School of Law, College of Arts and Social Sciences

ATTACHED:

Final Report

School Response

Other please specify: N/A

OUTCOME OF PANEL VISIT:

Revalidation Recommended

Revalidation Not Recommended

Other please specify: _____

QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE RESPONSE:

The Committee would like to extend their thanks to the Head of School, Director of Teaching and the School as a whole for the response provided to the ITR report. The Committee were very grateful for the responses provided.

The Committee noted the school to be very good and vibrant but noted concern over the staffing levels reported, reiterating the calls to the College for increased staffing as detailed within the report. The Committee, in particular, acknowledged the issue of dissertation supervision as raised by the ITR panel. The Committee were encouraged by plans to consider the issue in the school's action plan.

The Committee were encouraged to note that copies of the ITR submission documentation and report were useful in the Law Society reaccreditation process.

The Committee were encouraged to note that the School are considering ways to increase SCEF completion and will be interested to see what effect this has.

Overall, the Committee were encouraged by the report provided and look forward to the one year follow up report.

Date: 21 October 2014

School's One-year Follow-up Due: 1 September 2015

School Response Received:	29 August 2014
Submitted to QAC:	02 September 2014
Considered by QAC:	24 September 2014
QAC Response forwarded to School:	22 October 2014
Webpages updated:	22 October 2014