

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

SUMMARY REPORT

PANEL VISIT: WEDNESDAY 20 AND THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2013

This summary is extracted from the full report of the Internal Teaching Review of the School of Education following the review carried out in February 2013. It includes the Panel's overall impressions of the provision, a record of the Panel's commendations and recommendations, and the Panel's conclusions.

Overall Impressions

The Panel were grateful for the co-operation of staff, students and external representatives throughout the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) and for their commitment to the ITR process.

The School is to be **commended** for its innovative teaching practices and professional approach and equally for the overriding impression that staff are enthusiastic, dedicated, knowledgeable and highly motivated and that students in general acknowledge this.

Throughout the ITR process it was clear that staffing and workload were major issues that coloured much of the organisation and delivery of teaching, as well as the opportunity for research, particularly for the education programmes. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the School address these issues as a matter of priority.

The Panel noted that the School was in a period of transition, with a new Head of School and new management structure, and that it was hoped by the School that this would result in a new shared vision and direction.

A. COMMENDABLE FEATURES

(Numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full report.)

The Panel **commended** the following aspects of the School's provision:

3 Staffing

3.1 The overriding impression is that staff are enthusiastic, dedicated, knowledgeable and highly motivated, and that students in general acknowledge this. The Panel **commend** the commitment and hard work of the staff in the school.

3.4 The model of visit and assessment of students on placement was not as efficient as it might be. The Panel **commend** staff for their willingness to look at alternative practices that would improve the student experience whilst ensuring quality of provision in a more efficient manner.

4 School Organisation

4.2 The Panel **commend** the appointment of Deputes to key administrative roles as this will allow succession planning and also **commend** the leadership brought to individual programmes as a result of these appointments.

5 Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.1** The Panel **commend** the good communication between the School and the College Director of Teaching and Learning that occurs before changes to teaching provision are made.
- 5.5** The Panel **commend** staff on their 'teacher as role model for teacher' in the ITE programme; however, it is considered that perhaps this culture had led to staff taking on too much work.
- 5.9** Some PGT programmes having staggered starts such that teaching may be delivered several times for a single programme within the year and the Panel **commend** the willingness of staff to redesign these programmes to improve efficiency.

6 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.1** The Panel **commend** the School for their attempts to maintain a professional (vocational) curriculum alongside a demanding academic background.
- 6.2** The distance-learning provision was impressive and the Panel **commend** the staff for their commitment to these students' learning experience.
- 6.5/6.6** Staff emphasised that because of the 'teacher as role model for teacher' approach the feedback was comprehensive. The Panel **commend** the staff for their efforts to provide comprehensive feedback to students.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.1** The Panel **commended** the School for maintaining their full range of programmes in unstable, difficult times.

9 Training and Supervision of Research Students

- 9.7** The Panel **commends** the informal seminar series set up by PG students.
- 9.8** The Panel **commends** the School for their efforts to provide a supportive learning environment for all their PGT distance learning students, who were highly complementary about the support they received throughout their programme.

11 Professional Units and Bodies

- 11.1** The Panel **commends** the School in working closely and harmoniously with professional bodies such as the General Teaching Council Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council and the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development.

13 Student Involvement in the Quality Process

- 13.1** The Panel **commended** the students for their forthright, lively and thoughtful comments.

14 Public Information/Management Information

- 14.1** The Panel **commended** the Head of School for her 'Future Directions' document and her desire to bring a shared vision back to the School.

15 Student Support, Retention and Progression

- 15.1 The Panel **commend** the Library staff who were mentioned on a number of occasions by students on distance-learning programmes and by postgraduate students because of their helpful customer service, knowledge, and excellent induction sessions.

16 Recruitment, Access and Widening Participation

- 16.1 The Panel **commend** the provision of distance learning and part-time courses which help to widen participation and increase the diversity of students undertaking the School's courses.

17 QAA Quality Enhancement Engagement

- 17.1 The Panel **commend** the engagement of the School with previous QAA Enhancement Themes and their contribution to the Centre for Learning and Teaching conferences.

18 Recent Developments

- 18.1 The Panel acknowledge the major changes that are occurring in the Scottish Education system and **commend** the School for their responses to these changes.

19 Quality Enhancement and Good Practice

- 19.1 The Panel **commend** the School's practice in disseminating good practice through regular staff meetings and targeted *fora*, and for its culture of attendance at School meetings.
- 19.2 The Panel **commend** the School's innovative use of technology and distance-learning methodologies and tools.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

(Numbers refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full report.)

The Panel invites the School to consider the recommendations in this section and asks that the Head of School and the Head of College, consulting with colleagues as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each.

The Panel **recommended** to the School:

3 Staffing

- 3.2–3.6 Throughout the ITR process it was clear that staffing and workload were major issues that coloured much of the organisation and delivery of teaching, as well as the opportunity for research. The Panel noted that staff workloads, especially for staff in education, seemed excessively high. It was also noted that there is a large number of programmes, and that at least one programme has an entirely separate syllabus. The Panel **recommend** that the School undertake urgent discussion of strategies to ensure manageable and fair workloads for staff. The Panel **recommend** that the School consider reducing the number of Education programmes, increasing the number of shared courses, and rationalising the models of delivery, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. The School should provide, as part of the 1-year follow-up report, the arguments leading to and justifying their conclusion, whatever that conclusion might be. The

Panel acknowledge that after all sensible and robust efforts have been undertaken to reduce workloads, new staff may need to be recruited.

- 3.7 The Panel noted that currently the School uses a number of staff on temporary/fixed term contracts and **recommend** that the School consider the effectiveness and sustainability of this practice in relation to ITE.

4 School Organisation

- 4.1 The Panel noted that the high number of School committees may lead to greater workload on staff and **recommend** this is monitored over the next academic year. The Panel also **recommend** that there be clear communication between the different committees and staff in the School to ensure full dissemination of information.

- 4.3 The Panel noted a sense of separateness between the different disciplines in the School. The Panel **recommend** that the School looks into ways to bring the separate disciplines more together.

- 4.4 The Panel noted with concern the closed access policy of MacRobert and **recommend** that a School Office is set up on the ground floor – bringing together administration of Music and Education – and that all floors are opened up to students by removing the swipe-card access.

5 Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.2 The Panel noted the extensive range of undergraduate (UG) and taught postgraduate (PGT) provision and noted with concern that some core courses had to be made elective only as a result of staffing problems. The Panel therefore **recommend** that programme teams audit the number of pathways and programmes which are on offer and in doing so consider reducing the number of electives available to students to ease pressure on staff.

- 5.3 The Panel noted that the current placement requirement of serial time in schools constrains the other courses that students can take. It is **recommended** that when reviewing the ITE programme timetabling issues are considered and attempts are made to bring the timetable more in line with other areas of the University, at least for the first 2 years.

- 5.4 Music students expressed the desire to undertake cross-disciplinary courses, such as Sixth Century Courses but were precluded from doing so because they had music teaching on Wednesday mornings. The Panel **recommend** that the School investigate rearranging teaching to allow uptake of 6CC by music students.

- 5.6 The Panel noted that there was great dissatisfaction amongst students with the Joint degrees, with much repetition of content and courses and the degree not building to an appropriate academic level through the four years. The Panel **recommend** that this is an issue that should be dealt with as a matter of urgency, even if it means providing new lectures and separate classes for the existing students.

6 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.3 The Panel noted with concern that the administrative staff calculated and input marks. The Panel **recommend** the School change its procedures to comply with University policy, which is that academic staff must take responsibility for calculating marks, must supervise marks entry, and must be responsible for how they are presented to examiners and examination meetings.

- 6.4 Students and staff commented on the clash of many of the assessment deadlines. The Panel **recommend** that the timing assessments is considered to ensure there are no clashes.

6.5–6.6 It was commented that marks and feedback on assessments were often late and that there was inconsistency in whether or not students were advised of this. The Panel would hope that the **recommended** rationalisation of programmes and courses would result in marks and feedback being turned around within the University's recommended timelines.

6.7 Preparation for School Experience placements was said to be variable by students. The Panel **recommend** that the School consider the support students receive while on placement in particular having clarity about who they should contact and how.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

7.2–7.4 Given the concerns raised by students about teaching and learning, it may be necessary to have more rigorous checks on when and how concerns that have been raised by students, tutors and externals have been dealt with by Programme teams. The Panel **recommend** that, either through tutors or course handbooks/MyAberdeen, there is explicit and early communication about how students should respond to any issues which arise with courses or on placement, and also **recommend** that the School ensures the information in handbooks is accurate and up to date.

8 Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure

8.2 The Panel **recommend** that the School ensure that contact time, the amount of teaching and the level of assessment all align with University norms.

8.3 The SED gives the impression that the GTC require a one-on-one appointment in order to assess a student. However, GTCS has demonstrated itself to be realistic about new modes of assessment of students on placement. The Panel therefore **recommend** that models of assessment of placement need to move away from the conventional model in which each student is visited individually by one tutor at any geographical location.

9 Training and Supervision of Research Students

9.2 The Panel noted inconsistency in the number of formal supervisory meetings with students, and that the number did not appear to correlate with the College norm. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the College framework is adopted and that this is done consistently across the School.

9.4 The postgraduate research induction seems to be rather informal and inconsistent across the School. The Panel therefore **recommend** a more formal induction common to all research students within the School. In particular, this induction should ensure adequate explanations of funding and clarity as to the taught and doctoral training courses to be followed.

9.5 Not all research topics were tied to expertise in the School and this was a matter students raised. The Panel **recommend** that the School are more hesitant to take on PhD supervision in areas without appropriate expertise in the School.

9.6 Research students felt there was a dichotomy between Education and Music/Elphinstone and those in Music/Elphinstone did not feel part of the School. The Panel **recommend** that the School encourages more communication between the different parts of the School to help resolve this issue.

9.9 **Some** PGT distance-learning students expressed the view that there should be some face-to-face meetings especially at the start of the programme. The Panel **recommends** that face-to-face induction meetings are carried out at the start of each programme or module.

12 Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1** Many staff expressed concern that promotion prospects were limited, particularly because their workload prevented engagement with research, and it was unclear what was expected of them to be considered for promotion. The Panel **recommended** that the University show parity of esteem for academic leadership and teaching and learning with that of research, particularly in the area of staff promotion.
- 12.2** The panel noted that one new member of staff in Music was given a mentor and a reduced timetable. By contrast those staff inducted for ITE programmes had difficulty resisting pressures to undertake teaching to the detriment of research. The Panel **recommend** the School implement a consistent approach to new staff induction (for teaching fellows as well as lecturers) and ensure consistency between disciplines. The Panel also **recommend** that mentoring should be extended to teaching fellow appointees as well as to lecturing staff.
- 12.3** Staff commented that heavy teaching loads inhibited their ability to carry out research and obtaining PhD by publication. The Panel **recommend** that the School review workloads with a view to enabling staff to enjoy a typical University experience with research/scholarship integral to their professional lives.
- 12.4** The Panel also **recommended** that a managed and structured framework of support was required to help staff move from a mainly teaching role to a research/scholarship/knowledge transfer role.
- 12.5** It is also important that those doing key administrative and management roles receive proper training. Disability Co-ordinators said that they had had no training so far for this role. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the School consider the training given to all those new to administrative or management roles.

13 Student Involvement in the Quality Process

- 13.2** Students expressed a lack of knowledge of who their class representative was and commented that they did not hear of any Staff–Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) outcomes. The Panel **recommend** that the School ensure minutes of the SSLC meetings, highlighting actions from previous meetings, are distributed to students.
- 13.3** Students from one part of the School (Music) seemed more knowledgeable and content with the class representative system compared to students from ITE. The Panel **recommend** that the School adopt a consistent approach to student involvement in quality processes.

14 Public Information/Management Information

- 14.2** As noted in 4.2, the Panel **recommend** the School ensure consistent communications from the various School and College committees to all staff within the School.

15 Student Support, Retention and Progression

- 15.2** The Panel **recommended** Schools make students more aware of the role of Advisers and Personal Professional Advisers in relation to problems regarding courses. Students did not seem to know in what circumstances they should contact their Advisers, nor did the scheme seem to be highly visible to them.
- 15.3** The Panel **recommend** that the whole School adopt an ‘open doors’ policy within a range of hours across the week, as well as the appointment system, to meet with students, as is common in other Schools and some parts of the School of Education, so that students may access their tutors and advisers more readily.

15.4/.5 The Panel noted that staff perception of student problems in comparison to student perceptions are quite different, with the impact of problems students encounter being vastly greater than the impact perceived by staff. It was also noted that taking responsibility for the students' experience and satisfaction of placement did not appear to be fully accepted by the School and that many of the problems occurring whilst on placement were being picked up too late or categorised as 'minor'. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the School revisit its approach to how students are supported through placement and look at a system that picks up problems at an earlier stage.

15.6 Not all students were aware of the MyAberdeen Feedback Logs. The Panel **recommend** that all students be made aware of these and their use encouraged and explained.

20 Impediments to Quality Enhancement

20.1 As mentioned in other sections, the high workload of staff has an impact on various areas of quality enhancement – research and development, support on placement, and advisees and tutors meeting students, for example. As noted above, the Panel therefore **recommended** the urgent appraisal of workloads based on a rationalisation of programmes and courses and the methods in place for location and timing of placements and their assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

The panel recommended **unconditional revalidation**.

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Response

Staffing 3.2-3.7

In response to the initial draft ITR report, the School SMT began work in April to review the existing staffing model with a view to devising manageable and fair workloads for staff. Influencing factors included the University Framework for Academic Excellence, TRAC, and information from CASS regarding overall workload recommendations for academic roles. Initial documentation was shared for full discussion with staff during a whole school forum on 1st March 2013, to identify key principles in moving forward. After assimilation by the SMT and further discussion during the next whole school meeting on 24th May, the final process in arriving at Individual Workload Profiles (IWPs) was identified (full details provided to QAC). A new spreadsheet design was created and tested by Yvonne Bain (Depute) and Anne Shipley (SSAO) which would enable the collection, analysis and reporting of data reflected by the agreed process for IWPs. IWPs are currently being finalised for teaching and administration. In addition research and scholarly activity plans have been requested from all staff. Research themes are embedded within programme developments and the new General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) career long professional learning standard requires that all staff engage in scholarly and research activity.

Review of programmes

- **PGTaught**

An extensive review of PGTaught programmes was already planned prior to the ITR and has progressed well. This process will continue into next session. Analysis has been undertaken by the two new Directors of Postgraduate Studies towards the rationalisation of programmes and courses (full details provided to QAC). External influences such as Donaldson (2010), and the need for a continuum of professional learning for students and teachers throughout their career has underpinned this thinking. In addition, provision for education in settings other than schools has been taken into account. Internally, the review process attempts to respond to the issues raised during the ITR process in February. Review processes have been shared during a whole School Forum as well as through the on-going processes of the School Postgraduate Studies Committee and PGTaught Programme Directors meetings (full details provided to QAC). Further development of alignment and rationalisation is continuing for the following session as students complete programmes of study and provide flexibility for decision making around programme continuance.

- **UG Programmes**

As the Panel were aware, all Initial Teacher Education Programmes were being accredited on 7th June by the (GTCS). This was an extensive and wide reaching task given the major changes occurring in Scottish Education which the Panel commends. In addition, it was essential that staff play a full part within this process given the extensive involvement of SoE staff involved in UG ITE provision. A whole school developmental process, inviting all staff to be included, has been ongoing since last October and culminated in the approval of the new MA (Hons) Education, revised PGDE and BMus with Honours (Education) by the GTCS with minor conditions (see Appendices 4 and 5 for responses to GTCS). The SoE notes the Panel's comment about a separate syllabus for one course ie BMus. Appendix 4 now demonstrates a secure plan for alignment with the new MA (Hons) and PGDE programmes.

A key feature of the new design was the alignment of the MA4 and PGDE all based at SCQF Level 10. This is an innovative approach for combining these programmes and the GTCS were convinced by the rationale presented. This process will enable a more effective approach to SoE staff workload efficiency. As part of the process of programme design the following strategies and guidelines have been implemented to ensure a more efficient and effective work model of delivery as recommended by the ITR process. This addresses recommendation 8.2 in particular.

- All year 1 and 2 courses have been reviewed to comply with University norms for the number of teaching hours and appropriateness of related assessments.
- Some courses have had credit ratings adjusted which have enabled core courses to be reinstated. These core courses had previously only been available as an elective due to staffing pressures.
- MA3 has been completely redesigned aligning with a 15 or 30 credit model to reflect University norms, replacing large 60 credit courses.
- Aligning the PGDE (Primary and Secondary) and MA4 structure will enable a more effective staffing model for delivery. In future this will include the BMus cohort. It should be noted that the key driver for these changes is based on meeting the needs of the changing education landscape. However such an approach will work towards an improved delivery model.
- A detailed rationalisation of the teaching week has taken place to remove any duplicate teaching and enable some time for flexibility.

As a result of the above processes and based on staffing availability the following programmes have been suspended for the following session.

UG PGDE (Computing)
 UG BA Community Learning and Development
 UG Study Skills
 PG Cert in Plurilingual Education
 PG Cert in Early Years

Resulting issues

ITE Programme Delivery

We have reduced the number of staff on zero hours contracts. However, due to the particular professional demands on our courses, it is necessary to buy in staff on temporary contracts to deliver the main UG ITE programmes, for the following reasons.

- This is partly due to the fact that some of our staff are not GTCS registered and are therefore not approved to teach on these programmes.
- We need to buy in a small number of staff to meet the Government directives relating to priority subjects in our student allocations for which we have no control eg Science/Physics, Gaelic. In our existing staffing complement we have been operating a minimum staffing level for some secondary subjects buying in for the additional complement as required by Government workforce planning.
- We will still require temporary staff for additional primary teaching expertise, despite a rationalisation of the weekly timetable due to the number of workshops required to deliver the MA and PGDE programmes. This year the Government allocated an additional 50 PGDE places which we have to absorb; given the shortages of teachers in schools this is set to increase over the next 3 years. Fluctuating student numbers make forward planning for staffing difficult to anticipate.

Income Generation Conflict

It is an essential requirement for the SoE to contribute towards the CASS funding base, to provide opportunities for staff to engage with scholarly/research activity and to maintain the North East profile in the Scottish Education developing landscape. On this basis, the SoE has obtained funding from Government for new initiatives/projects. We have been successful in securing two major projects: the first, relating to the development of a new distance learning PGDE programme to meet the needs of Highland and Aberdeenshire Local Authorities; the second developing an innovative approach to Interactive learning classrooms with our partner schools. All Government funding is based on working in partnership with our associated Local Authorities and whilst significant in developing opportunities and local profile, will only provide a notional contribution to staffing costs. SoE staff will be required to engage with the Government projects as part of their scholarly/research activity. It should be noted that we were commended by the GTCS for our commitment to technological innovation through such Partnership initiatives.

4 School Organisation

- 4.1 The Panel noted that the high number of School committees may lead to greater workload on staff and **recommend** this is monitored over the next academic year. The Panel also **recommend** that there be clear communication between the different committees and staff in the School to ensure full dissemination of information.

Response

A key priority in the new session will be a review of the effectiveness of each School committee and communication between these Committees. The communication strategy across the school has been, and remains a priority which SMT would wish to address further in the coming session.

- 4.3 The Panel noted a sense of separateness between the different disciplines in the School. The Panel **recommend** that the School looks into ways to bring the separate disciplines more together.

Response

Discussions have already begun which will aim to address the above recommendation. A clear step forward has been in the alignment of the BMus with the new MA Education and a timeline has now been agreed between the school and the GTCS (full details provided to QAC). In addition, staff are involved in cross disciplinary teaching teams where possible. For further info, see the response to 9.9.

- 4.4 The Panel noted with concern the closed access policy of MacRobert and **recommend** that a School Office is set up on the ground floor – bringing together administration of Music and Education – and that all floors are opened up to students by removing the swipe-card access.

Response

The 'perceived' closed access policy of MacRobert is not seen as an issue in the School of Education. The Reception desk at the entrance to the building operates in a similar way to the function of a School Office. It handles queries from students, acts as a conduit between students and staff, directs students/visitors to the relevant areas of the School, i.e. Education, Music, Elphinstone. In terms of the student body the School operates in a different way to other Schools. At postgraduate level, the majority of our degree programmes are delivered on-line or by distance learning; in the PGDE and the honours levels of our undergraduate initial teacher education programmes, students are on placement for blocks of time during their studies. Consequently the mode of communication with staff is by e-mail or by phone. However if a face-to-face meeting is required then access to staff is not an issue at all.

Swipe access in the MacRobert Building only restricts access to the staff floors, i.e. Floors 5-7. Floors 1-3 are centrally-managed IT and tutorial classrooms and Floor 4 is where the students access the Partnership Unit who look after the student placements and associated queries. See also 15.3.

5 Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.2 The Panel noted the extensive range of undergraduate (UG) and taught postgraduate (PGT) provision and noted with concern that some core courses had to be made elective only as a result of staffing problems. The Panel therefore **recommend** that programme teams audit the number of pathways and programmes which are on offer and in doing so consider reducing the number of electives available to students to ease pressure on staff.
- 5.3 The Panel noted that the current placement requirement of serial time in schools constrains the other courses that students can take. It is **recommended** that when reviewing the ITE programme timetabling issues are considered and attempts are made to bring the timetable more in line with other areas of the University, at least for the first 2 years.

- 5.4** Music students expressed the desire to undertake cross-disciplinary courses, such as Sixth Century Courses but were precluded from doing so because they had music teaching on Wednesday mornings. The Panel **recommend** that the School investigate rearranging teaching to allow uptake of 6CC by music students.

Response

Currently Wednesday mornings are clear of all other teaching, except during the Year 2 second half session where the school experience placement in the education course means that students would be unable to attend 6th Century courses.

The main issue is that the BMus Ed Year 2 students must be involved in enhanced study as well as Music and Education, which is obviously affecting student flexibility. As the BMus (Education) moves towards alignment with MA and PGDE this issue will be resolved.

- 5.6** The Panel noted that there was great dissatisfaction amongst students with the Joint degrees, with much repetition of content and courses and the degree not building to an appropriate academic level through the four years. The Panel **recommend** that this is an issue that should be dealt with as a matter of urgency, even if it means providing new lectures and separate classes for the existing students.

Responses for 5.2, 5.3 and 5.6

In response to 5.2, this has now been resolved as part of the review of programmes as outlined under 3.2-3.6. Extract - Some courses have had credit ratings adjusted which have enabled core courses to be reinstated. These core courses had previously only been available as an elective due to staffing pressures.

In response to 5.3, the review of electives undertaken as part of the reaccreditation and programme design process, have enabled a focused approach to the number of electives the SoE will offer. A key feature has been on enabling student flexibility. To this end, the serial days spent in schools in year 1 have been removed and the success of this, from a student perspective is to be reviewed via SSLCs in the coming session. It should be noted that this was *not welcomed* at the GTCS reaccreditation event and as a result the School has had to negotiate a repositioning of this time to be placed as a block, at the end of second year, following student exams. This resulted in one immediate condition for approval which the SoE has now responded to (full details provided to QAC).

A response to 5.6 was initiated shortly after the initial ITR review event. A meeting took place with the Programme Director for the Joint Degree Programmes to discuss the issues raised. The Programme Director presented a response at the School Learning and Teaching Committee (22 May) (full details provided to QAC). An alternative pathway to enable joint degree students to join the main PGDE cohort was agreed after discussion with the Programme Directors of the Joint Degrees and PGDE programmes, Depute for Quality Enhancement and the existing year 2 students. All students welcomed the decision and are now liaising with both Programme Directors and their corresponding disciplines to manage the practicalities of this process. It should be noted that students will need to begin their respective programmes 4 weeks earlier in line with PGDE but they are keen to do this. The Programme Director for the existing year 3 and 4 joint degrees will liaise with those delivering lectures and workshops to ensure any themes being revisited will be progressive and not repeated.

6 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.3** The Panel noted with concern that the administrative staff calculated and input marks. The Panel **recommend** the School change its procedures to comply with University policy, which is that academic staff must take responsibility for calculating marks, must supervise marks entry, and must be responsible for how they are presented to examiners and examination meetings.

Response

In compliance with University policy, steps have been taken to ensure that entry and final checking of marks for final exam boards are overseen by academic staff.

- 6.4 Students and staff commented on the clash of many of the assessment deadlines. The Panel **recommend** that the timing assessments is considered to ensure there are no clashes.

Response

A review of assessment deadlines across our programmes is planned for the forthcoming session to alleviate clashes.

- 6.5–6.6 It was commented that marks and feedback on assessments were often late and that there was inconsistency in whether or not students were advised of this. The Panel would hope that the **recommended** rationalisation of programmes and courses would result in marks and feedback being turned around within the University's recommended timelines.

Response

The school is aware of minor instances and when this has occurred. Programme Directors along with support staff are now implementing a consistent approach in informing students in such circumstances.

- 6.7 Preparation for School Experience placements was said to be variable by students. The Panel **recommend** that the School consider the support students receive while on placement in particular having clarity about who they should contact and how.

Response

A unified School Experience team will oversee all placements and provide a first point of contact. This will replace a model where different course coordinators become involved. Alignment of the UG programmes will enable consistency of support, documentation, expectations and preparation for School Experience.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.2–7.4 Given the concerns raised by students about teaching and learning, it may be necessary to have more rigorous checks on when and how concerns that have been raised by students, tutors and externals have been dealt with by Programme teams. The Panel **recommend** that, either through tutors or course handbooks/MyAberdeen, there is explicit and early communication about how students should respond to any issues which arise with courses or on placement, and also **recommend** that the School ensures the information in handbooks is accurate and up to date.

Response

See response for 6.7 above. Standard practice within the SoE is to update programme handbooks annually. Given the reaccreditation and alignment of UG programmes all programme handbooks have already been rewritten and follow a consistent approach. A UG Programme Directors team has been established and will continue to meet throughout the session to ensure on-going operational issues can be captured and responded to in a consistent manner.

8 Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure

- 8.2 The Panel **recommend** that the School ensure that contact time, the amount of teaching and the level of assessment all align with University norms.

Response

See 3.7 UG Programmes.

- 8.3** The SED gives the impression that the GTC require a one-on-one appointment in order to assess a student. However, GTCS has demonstrated itself to be realistic about new modes of assessment of students on placement. The Panel therefore **recommend** that models of assessment of placement need to move away from the conventional model in which each student is visited individually by one tutor at any geographical location.

Response to 8.2 and 8.3

As part of the review of the staffing model and reaccreditation processes, all teaching time and assessment levels are aligned with University norms. None-the-less the University's strategic priority to encourage international student recruitment has resulted in courses running with small student numbers. This has been a consequence of early decisions required to offer places to students on Tier 4 visas which we are then obligated to run regardless of uptake.

In response to 8.3 - the GTCS commended the SoE on its successful model of working with Local Authority partners and supporter teachers. The school assesses student performance against the GTCS Standard for Provisional Registration as does the University tutor through an observational visit. Professional development sessions to support teacher assessors are provided by the SoE to ensure consistency. This provides strong evidence from both University and the school to provide fair and equitable student assessment. In addition, there is a University based requirement for those validating programmes to have overall responsibility for the quality and rigor of assessing students on placement.

Where the GTCS has enabled some flexibility is in recognising that a GTCS registered tutor can carry out and assess in either the primary or secondary sector. However, ultimately, as each student needs to be individually assessed, the flexibility which we have focuses on efficiencies of staff time.

In response to both ITR and reaccreditation the following strategies will be implemented for session 2013/14.

- A geographical model will be introduced across the MA. This was already implemented in semester 2 by the PGDE programme as a pilot. This will mean that travelling time will be reduced as tutors will be visiting two or three students in one day. This will enable the Partnership Unit to place more students closer to their home addresses and reduce CASS subsidised student travel costs.
- All GTCS registered staff in the SoE will be required to carry out school visiting.
- Programme Directors will review processes for information exchange between visiting tutors to establish a continuous overview of progression for each student.
- Once the BEd4 is phased out, all students will receive a minimum of one tutor visit per school experience. This is the current approach within the PGDE programme and has proved successful. All students identified as cause for concern in schools receive a second tutor visit agreed by partnership working practices with Local Authorities. For next session, staff will continue to be bought in to cover the minimum number of student visits. However, phasing out of the current BEd4 will result in approximately 100 less school observations and should require fewer bought-in staff in the future. This is dependent on Government student allocations.
- Visiting across sectors will continue to be encouraged. Currently, secondary staff visit primary schools and there is some exchange between secondary tutors across subject areas. In secondary subjects a Principal Teacher would need to be involved in the observation if the tutor is not an expert in that discipline. Schools are less flexible towards visiting tutor credibility if their expertise lies in another sector or subject discipline.

Tensions and challenges

The SMT is aware of the possible tensions and challenges and these will be monitored accordingly.

- Despite the advantages of a geographical model for school visits, in some instances this may lead to student tensions due to changing tutors and a perceived lack of continuity.
- Some SoE staff are concerned at the move away from each student having an ongoing School Experience visiting tutor.
- Due to student allocation of ITE UG numbers by Government on an annual basis it is highly likely these will increase given the current teacher shortages across Scotland.

9 Training and Supervision of Research Students

- 9.2 The Panel noted inconsistency in the number of formal supervisory meetings with students, and that the number did not appear to correlate with the College norm. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the College framework is adopted and that this is done consistently across the School.

Response

In the School of Education in principle we follow the norms for formal supervisory meetings as set out by CASS. There is a monitoring system in place and we will take steps to ensure its rigor. From academic year 2012, Advisors' support sessions, led by the Programme Director and the Director of Research Culture and Support, were introduced. These sessions are held four times a year to share good practice and provide updates.

In addition, the School of Education subscribes to a model of supervision involving supervisory teams which enables new members of staff to familiarise themselves with supervision practices and established procedures.

To ensure all supervisors are aware of the expected requirements for supervision, the Programme Director for Research Degree Programmes discussed this ITR recommendation at a meeting held on 20th June 2013.

- 9.4 The postgraduate research induction seems to be rather informal and inconsistent across the School. The Panel therefore **recommend** a more formal induction common to all research students within the School. In particular, this induction should ensure adequate explanations of funding and clarity as to the taught and doctoral training courses to be followed.

Response

An induction session for new students is provided jointly by the Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees, Programme Directors and the Director of Research Culture and Support respectively in February and October; a member of staff from the library working with Education students is also in attendance. Students are provided with an induction pack which includes the handbook and additional information about funding sources for attending conferences, research seminar sessions, MRes classes and a list of courses for postgraduate students provided by CASS. Library staff are available at induction sessions and offer dedicated workshops for students on how to use information databases and Refworks. In future the Director of Postgraduate Research Degrees will monitor attendance at these events and ensure that any absent students are given an appropriate induction.

From June 2013, all students and supervisors have been formally encouraged to adopt the Researcher Development Framework as a means to progressively assess students' development, identify needs and appropriate forms of support.

- 9.5 Not all research topics were tied to expertise in the School and this was a matter students raised. The Panel **recommend** that the School are more hesitant to take on PhD supervision in areas without appropriate expertise in the School.

Response

Steps are taken to ensure that all students benefit from appropriate supervision. An agreement between Heads of School at College level enables more effective communication between Schools with a view to generating co-supervisory arrangements and/or allocating students to members of staff with relevant expertise. There is an increase in the number of CASS co-supervisions. We undertake to ensure that all students will have access to an expert in their field –accessing this expertise may take different forms.

- 9.6 Research students felt there was a dichotomy between Education and Music/Elphinstone and those in Music/Elphinstone did not feel part of the School. The Panel **recommend** that the School encourages more communication between the different parts of the School to help resolve this issue.

Response

Since the reorganisation of the School of Education starting in September 2012, there have been changes to the infrastructure and to communication lines. There are regular monthly meetings between the heads of all the constituent parts of the School of Education and some Music staff have moved to offices on floors where many colleagues are from Education. This is working well. Staff from Elphinstone and Music are members of Education's Teaching and Learning Committees, Research Committee and Partnership Forum. During the next academic year, the Head of School will also visit the other units and attend a selection of their meetings.

In order to facilitate and strengthen the research links between Education, Music and Elphinstone, a meeting is planned with the Directors of the Research Degree Programme, the Head of Music and the Director of the Elphinstone Institute. The meeting has the purpose of identifying common issues affecting postgraduate students across the School of Education and pooling resources together to support students. This will be discussed at the next School of Education Research Committee. Regular follow up meetings will be organised and fed through the School Research Committee.

In 2013-2014, we plan to reinstate the staff Research Conference which brings together all three units of assessment (REF) and celebrates the cross disciplinary in our School. Research students will be invited to this event.

- 9.9 **Some** PGT distance-learning students expressed the view that there should be some face-to-face meetings especially at the start of the programme. The Panel **recommends** that face-to-face induction meetings are carried out at the start of each programme or module.

Response

A face to face induction session for MRes students at a distance is now provided. For other PGT programmes, this depends on the nature of the programme and members of the group. Some programmes are distinctive by their nature of being distributed and using the technical tools made available through the VLE – hence it is unnecessary to have a face to face induction. Virtual induction processes that these programmes use makes full use of the interactive classroom in My Aberdeen or other digital interactive media such as skype. The School is a leader in technology to enhance distance learning programmes. There are also the financial and time constraints of bringing students from far off places to the University of Aberdeen which need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, face to face induction where appropriate and applicable is planned; in other programmes this takes place virtually. Student responses to induction will be monitored next session through the SSLC processes.

12 Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 Many staff expressed concern that promotion prospects were limited, particularly because their workload prevented engagement with research, and it was unclear what was expected of them to be considered for promotion. The Panel **recommended** that the University show parity of esteem for academic leadership and teaching and learning with that of research, particularly in the area of staff promotion.

Response

See 3.7 Staffing. From October 2013, all staff will have a Research and Scholarship Plan which will link into the mentoring system but which also be used to guide appraisal meetings and other decisions made about individual members of staff. In this way, individuals can plan out their research and scholarly activity over a three year period and support their career trajectories and future plans. It will also enable school level decisions to be made in a more meaningful way

- 12.2** The panel noted that one new member of staff in Music was given a mentor and a reduced timetable. By contrast those staff inducted for ITE programmes had difficulty resisting pressures to undertake teaching to the detriment of research. The Panel **recommend** the School implement a consistent approach to new staff induction (for teaching fellows as well as lecturers) and ensure consistency between disciplines. The Panel also **recommend** that mentoring should be extended to teaching fellow appointees as well as to lecturing staff.

Response

All staff are about to be offered Research and Scholarship mentoring from October 2013.

At the time the Panel met there were already preliminary preparations underway for a more formal mentoring and support structure. Since the panel met a cohort of research and scholarship mentors has been identified and a formal training session on mentoring, led by Susan McLennan from HR, took place on Tuesday 4th June. The research and scholarship mentoring scheme covers all staff and will be formally launched on Friday 11th October at a Research and Scholarship day in the School to which all staff are expected to attend.

- 12.3** Staff commented that heavy teaching loads inhibited their ability to carry out research and obtaining PhD by publication. The Panel **recommend** that the School review workloads with a view to enabling staff to enjoy a typical University experience with research/scholarship integral to their professional lives.

Response

See 3.7 Staffing. See also 12.1 Staff Research and Scholarship plans and 12.2 for Mentoring.

- 12.4** The Panel also **recommended** that a managed and structured framework of support was required to help staff move from a mainly teaching role to a research/scholarship/knowledge transfer role.

Response

Changing staff roles from Teaching Fellow to Lecturer is one which is articulated in CASS promotion procedures. Staff who decide to transfer to Lecturer posts, will normally be required to have a PhD and to have some academic publications. For some members of staff in Education who will certainly be professionally experienced and well qualified, the change to a more academic route is not automatic due to the role definitions set out by CASS and the wider university. We hope that the introduction of the Research and Scholarship Plan (see 12.2) will take account of the necessary experiences and qualifications and will support staff in planning ahead depending on individual circumstances.

- 12.5** It is also important that those doing key administrative and management roles receive proper training. Disability Co-ordinators said that they had had no training so far for this role. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the School consider the training given to all those new to administrative or management roles.

Response

The Head of School and Senior School Administrator will liaise with CASS about suitable further training for those in key administrative and management roles. It is normal practice for disability co-ordinators to receive training. One member of staff undertook the role mid way through the session. However, training will be provided next session. Any issues of support relating to student disability are discussed fully with the University Disability Coordinator and Student Learning Support Services for individual learning needs.

13 Student Involvement in the Quality Process

13.2 Students expressed a lack of knowledge of who their class representative was and commented that they did not hear of any Staff–Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) outcomes. The Panel **recommend** that the School ensure minutes of the SSLC meetings, highlighting actions from previous meetings, are distributed to students.

13.3 Students from one part of the School (Music) seemed more knowledgeable and content with the class representative system compared to students from ITE. The Panel **recommend** that the School adopt a consistent approach to student involvement in quality processes.

Response 13.2-13.3

This has been discussed with the School of Education student representative who carries out an excellent service for both students and liaison with staff. It should be noted that the representative can clearly demonstrate, at times, a lack of responsiveness from class reps and plans to try to address this in the coming session. The SoE will support the student representative in any way possible to ensure consistency. All SSLC minutes and actions are available in MyAberdeen.

14 Public Information/Management Information

14.2 As noted in 4.2, the Panel **recommend** the School ensure consistent communications from the various School and College committees to all staff within the School.

Response

All minutes from the School Learning and Teaching Committee (UG), Postgraduate Studies Committee, and Research Committee are available on the School Sharepoint Intranet. The School will endeavour to remind staff of this facility. See 4.1.

15 Student Support, Retention and Progression

15.2 The Panel **recommended** Schools make students more aware of the role of Advisers and Personal Professional Advisers in relation to problems regarding courses. Students did not seem to know in what circumstances they should contact their Advisers, nor did the scheme seem to be highly visible to them.

Response

The PPA system is well embedded within the current BEd and will continue within the MA until the Personal Tutor system is established. The PPA follows an on-going process of tutors meeting with their PPA group at regular intervals during each session and across all 4 years of their programme. However, a different model operates for the one year PGDE programme, which provides support via Professional Studies and School Experience tutors. It is possible that such students would not be familiar with the term “advisers” due to the different model of support for that programme.

- 15.3** The Panel **recommend** that the whole School adopt an 'open doors' policy within a range of hours across the week, as well as the appointment system, to meet with students, as is common in other Schools and some parts of the School of Education, so that students may access their tutors and advisers more readily.

Response

Within MacRobert, floors 1–4 are completely open. Floor 4 houses the Partnership Unit which operates as a first point of contact for all school placement issues relating to placement and travel expenses. Within Education, it is common for our students to be on placement and therefore electronic contact through email and MyAberdeen alerts are a key method of communication. Students within the building can access staff through reception and see staff almost immediately. Alternatively, the most common way for students to access support is through email to a tutor. Tutors respond quickly to such emails, given that this is the main communication tool. Tutors also carry out school visiting on different programmes and it may well be that the tutor is not in the building when classes for another programme are taking place, hence the electronic contact. If a student matter is urgent every effort is made, via Reception or the Partnership Unit, to contact a member of staff to provide guidance and support, even if the main adviser/tutor is not available. See also 4.4.

- 15.4/5** The Panel noted that staff perception of student problems in comparison to student perceptions are quite different, with the impact of problems students encounter being vastly greater than the impact perceived by staff. It was also noted that taking responsibility for the students' experience and satisfaction of placement did not appear to be fully accepted by the School and that many of the problems occurring whilst on placement were being picked up too late or categorised as 'minor'. The Panel therefore **recommend** that the School revisit its approach to how students are supported through placement and look at a system that picks up problems at an earlier stage.

Response

See response to 6.7.

- 15.6** Not all students were aware of the MyAberdeen Feedback Logs. The Panel **recommend** that all students be made aware of these and their use encouraged and explained.

Response

This will be actioned for the coming session, through the regular UG Programme Directors operational meetings.

20 Impediments to Quality Enhancement

- 20.1** As mentioned in other sections, the high workload of staff has an impact on various areas of quality enhancement – research and development, support on placement, and advisees and tutors meeting students, for example. As noted above, the Panel therefore **recommended** the urgent appraisal of workloads based on a rationalisation of programmes and courses and the methods in place for location and timing of placements and their assessment.

Response

See response for 8.2 and 8.3. In addition a deliberate feature in the programme design of the new MA and PGDE has been to ensure that the student visiting placements do not overlap and that there is sufficient time

between each for tutors visiting on both. In the second semester, for example, the two week visiting period for the MA happens 6 weeks before the two week visiting period for the PGDE.

CONCLUSIONS

The panel recommended **unconditional revalidation**.