

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 27 May 2011

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Responses to Recommendations Arising from the Review of Department of Statistics held on 11 and 12 February 2010

Ms Fiona Dick, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions

Members of the Review Panel enjoyed their visit to the Department of Statistics, where arrangements made for their comfort and the conduct of the meetings were exemplary. The Panel was impressed by the dedication and progressive attitude of staff and graduate teaching assistants within the Department, and with the focus on research-led teaching. The undergraduate students who met with the Panel were enthusiastic and very positive about their learning experience and the sense of community fostered by the Department. A number of recommendations have been made to support staff in enhancing the quality of the student experience and the management of teaching and learning in the Department.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. It is important to note that the majority of these recommendations refer to issues identified by the Department for action either prior to the Review or in the SER. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are not ranked in any particular order.

In light of the restructuring of the University, recommendations have been redirected to the appropriate designates. Please note that the text of the recommendations has not been updated.

University Restructuring

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recognised that it was of paramount importance to maintain the iconic identity of the Department and the Single Honours degree and recommends this be taken into account during the restructuring process to retain a Head of Subject [*paragraph 4.8.1*].

For the attention of: **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**
and **Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering**

Response: School of Mathematics and Statistics

This recommendation has been implemented in full. The last Head of the former Department of Statistics is the current Head of Subject. The Statistics Learning and Teaching Committee continues to work in a very similar way to before, as a sub-committee of the School's Learning and Teaching Committee. The Statistics group has completed a fundamental review and

modernisation of the Single Honours BSc and MSci degrees in Statistics, as well as all Combined Honours programmes.

Response: Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering

This has been implemented; there is a Head of Subject for Statistics.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel, cognisant of the University's goal to be a leader in Research Teaching, recommends the Head of School ensures the active participation of all teaching staff in their areas of research strength, regardless of the structure that might develop as the University reorganises [*paragraph 4.8.2*].

For the attention of: **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**
and **Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering**

Response: School of Mathematics and Statistics

All staff in the Statistics group are members of at least one research theme within the School. The School is committed to aligning the teaching duties of all academic staff with their research interests, as far as possible. In the current session, members of Statistics staff are carrying out a range of duties similar to what they did previously. New courses being created at Honours level, as part of the recently-completed review, and at Master's level, as a result of the proposed introduction of new PGT programmes in Statistics from September 2011, align well to the research interests of the Statistics staff who will teach them.

Response: Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering

I am sure that you will have a positive response on this from the Head of School. As Dean of Learning & Teaching I do not have a role in directing research.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel recommends that further consideration be given to the possibility of expanding provision into the taught postgraduate area with a view to establishing an MSc in Statistics and joint MSc in areas of mutual interest [*paragraph 4.5.4*].

For the attention of: **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**

Response:

Five new PGT programmes in Statistics were recommended for approval by the Board of Studies in February 2011 and are expected to admit students from September 2011. The MSc in Financial Modelling, a joint venture by Statistics, Mathematics, Accounting & Finance and Economics staff, which was going through the final stages of programme approval at the time of the DPTLA, has had about 60 applications from international students for entry next session and there are currently about 20 firm acceptances of places. Members of the Statistics staff are also committed to developing courses for the MSc programme in Applied Population and Statistical Mapping (already approved) and a suite of new programmes in water systems management (currently awaiting final approval by Senate).

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel was impressed with the level and quality of support provided by the Department's administrative support, including two administrators and two secretarial staff, which enhanced academic performance and recommends that this level of support be maintained in the future model of a merged school [*paragraph 4.8.4*].

For the attention of: **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**

Response:

Since the merger, the School of Mathematics and Statistics has had fewer administrative staff than the two departments combined; in particular there are now 1.5 FTE teaching administrators compared with 2.0 FTE prior to the merger. However, a School Office has been created to deal with enquiries, which is staffed continuously throughout the working day. Members of the combined staff have been working hard to learn how to deal with queries from students of both subjects.

Feedback on Assessment

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that the Department continues its plan to review assessment feedback processes and to improve the timescales for and the quality of the feedback provided to students. The Department should seek the support and guidance of the Learning and Teaching Centre at an early stage of its review [*paragraph 4.3.3*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics
and Director, Learning and Teaching Centre

Joint Response: Head of Subject and Head of School

We have kept our feedback processes under review this session. We have paid careful attention to timescales, with a target of returning assessed coursework within one week for some courses and within two weeks for all the rest. These targets, which have been intimated to students in advance, have almost always been met, the only exceptions being a result of staff illness and other special circumstances (e.g. paternity leave). Near the start of session, we inaugurated what we intend to be an annual meeting to brief GTAs on how to provide effective feedback to students.

Response: Director, Learning and Teaching Centre

Dr Mary McCulloch is happy to take forward discussions with Statistics with regard to assessment and feedback. Ideally this should be done in conjunction with the new code of practice concerning assessment.

Succession Management

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that longer term succession management planning should take account of the national shortage of statisticians and bring forward plans for the appointment of the replacement Chair of Statistics [*paragraph 4.8.5*].

For the attention of: **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**
and **Head of College of Science and Engineering**

Response: School of Mathematics and Statistics

The Chair of Statistics has been advertised and it is hoped to fill the post this summer (possibly before the retirement date of the incumbent).

Response: Head of College of Science and Engineering

The post referred to in recommendation 6 is one of the 23 leadership posts currently being advertised by the University so I think I've progressed my action as far as I can. If there are suitable applicants we will make an appointment. I have authorised a start at the earliest mutually convenient date.

Work Placements

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that the Department continues to develop the variety of work placement activities available for students, which draw on the research strengths of the Department, enhance learning and employability and enrich the student learning environment [*paragraph 4.4.3*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**

Joint Response: Head of Subject and Head of School

In the past year, we have continued our dialogue with colleagues in industry, commerce and public bodies with a view to enhancing opportunities for summer placements and internships. We have also been pursuing our goal of creating an MSci in Statistics with Work Placement; thanks to a very positive response from a bank and a clinical trials company, we expect to be able to introduce this degree for a small number of students entering third year in September 2012. Within the revised Combined Honours programme with Mathematics, students have the option of taking part in the Ambassadors programme through their final Honours project.

Internationalisation

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel recommends that the Department continues to progress internationalisation plans in the promotion, support and facilitation of outgoing student mobility, which would include consideration of the viability and appropriateness of shorter term study abroad [*paragraph 4.7.4*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Mathematics and Statistics**

Joint Response: Head of Subject and Head of School

This session, we were very pleased to welcome to Glasgow the first 5 students from the University of Bologna on our Double Degree programme, as well as the usual variety of incoming ERASMUS exchange students. The presence of the Bologna students gave a substantial boost to our efforts to publicise the opportunity for Glasgow students to spend their third year in Bologna on the same degree programme, and 7 students are actively pursuing this option (with advice from our colleagues in RIO).

Probationary Training

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that there be detailed discussion at College level and with colleagues in Learning and Teaching Centre, to consider the relative merits of and recognition of more specific and suitable probationer training for Statistics staff, to replace certain aspects of the generic New Lecturer and Teacher Programme [*paragraph 4.8.8*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering**
and **Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre**

Response: Head of Subject

We understand that the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme is being reviewed centrally as a result of similar comments from a variety of disciplines.

Response: Dean (Learning and Teaching), College of Science and Engineering

This is an issue that I do not believe is specific to Statistics. L&T business at College level has, up to now, been dominated by all the issues associated with restructuring and the massive push to develop new PGT provision. I shall ensure that this is on the agenda for the College L&T committee, aiming to seek opportunities for provision that is better tailored for Science & Engineering.

Response: Director of Learning and Teaching Centre

In 2006-7 a complete review of the New Lecturer and Teacher programme was undertaken and a redesign to the programme implemented. The new programme started in 2008. This redesign changed the focus of the assessments to directly link into the disciplinary context of the academic participants as well as refocusing the second year to be discipline-oriented and encouraging participants to opt into relevant HEA subject centre workshops (which counted towards completion of the programme). A similar recommendation came through in the Maths DPTLA in 2008-09 and a follow up meeting was held with the then Head of Department to clarify what is provided on the NLTP and also to discuss the tensions between the need for centrally provided support and development concerning learning and teaching and discipline specific needs. It was recognized at that point that there is now a substantial discipline-orientation in

year 2 of the programme. It is also recognized by the Learning and Teaching Centre that formal discipline specific learning, teaching and assessment development was being strengthened and supplemented through the HEA subject centres and that this resource is no longer available. As the impact of this loss becomes clearer, the NLTP team will review provision currently being offered and will look particularly at how the CPD series in the Learning and Teaching Centre could be developed to include discipline-clustered workshops.

Computer Laboratories

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel recommends that the Department liaises with the Mathematics Information Technology Committee, in a review of shared resources to maximise student access to the computer laboratories; this meets increasing demand, particularly for students undertaking research [*paragraph 4.8.12*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Response:

In Session 2009-10, there was a short-term problem with access to computer labs for Honours Statistics students. This problem had been ameliorated by actions taken by the Department of Statistics even before the DPTLA review. As a result of the merger of Mathematics and Statistics, it has been possible to carry out a more fundamental review of how the PC labs are allocated to classes. The Honours Statistics classes now have sole use of a 40-seater laboratory which meets their requirements for carrying out coursework and projects; work is about to be undertaken to further increase the capacity of this laboratory in anticipation of larger numbers of students in final-year Statistics in Session 2011-12. All Statistics students (as well as Mathematics students) at all levels also have open access to three well-equipped, modern computing laboratories when they are not being used for teaching.