

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Social and Political Science, Postgraduate taught provision

Date of review: 23-25 February 2021

Date of 14 week response: 14 September 2021

Date of year on response:

The School/Subject Area is responsible for reporting on progress with all recommendations, including those remitted to other areas of the University for action.

If any recommendation has been fully addressed please record the action taken and date completed. Any barriers to progress should be highlighted on this report.

Recommendation no	Recommendation	Timescale for completion	Comment on progress towards completion and/or identify barriers to completion	Completion date
1	Dissertation Support The review team recommends that the School adopt a more consistent timescale for dissertation allocation across programmes and consider early allocation of dissertation supervisors to address issues around planning for supervision over the summer months. To ensure equity in staff workload the School should also consider a cap on the number of students allocated to each supervisor. Continuing to explore dissertation topic models, such as introducing faculty-led dissertation topics may also be helpful in equity of allocation. (Section 2.1.3)	August 2022	In order to take 'the weight off' supervision in the summer months, we have identified ways of minimising the most time-consuming (ethical approval) processes, and shifting the 'work' involved in this earlier in the academic year. To achieve towards greater consistency across the School, we have begun by setting a timeline and clear approval processes for Placement Based Dissertations (PBD), which will result in supervisors being identified by late Feb/beginning of March. Our next goal is to bring more 'traditional' dissertations into line with the PBD timeline, which will require the 'buy in' of Programme Directors. To this end, a draft consultation paper has been prepared for a PD meeting on the subject in the autumn. The incentive we can offer to PDs is that School methods and ethical training will be provided in Creative Learning Week in mid-Feb by the RTC, in collaboration with the PGT Director. We anticipate that most programmes will want to make use of this. Our staged approach to methods training and writing support, including over the summer months, is detailed in more detail in response to point 4.	

2	<p>Assessment and feedback The review team recommends that the School Learning and Teaching Directorate ensures consistent formative feedback is provided as set out in the Taught Assessment Regulations. Students need consistent, constructive feedback to develop and improve their skills. A standardised process for providing structured, timely, mid-course assessment and feedback opportunities would support this and is particularly important where a course relies on a single piece of end of course summative assessment. (Section 2.2)</p>	May 2022	The School will review its assessment across PGT and will look to ensure that all courses have at least a low stakes mid-term assessment. Where there is only a single assessment event, Course organisers will be encouraged to offer a mid-term formative feedback event.	
3	<p>Student voice The review team recommends a more active, structured engagement process with students and that the School supports students in engaging with their decision-making processes. The School should ensure that it hears a representative voice reflecting the diversity of the student population. (Section 2.4)</p> <p>The review recommends the School ensures that the online student voice is included in future discussion on the learning environment and planning for programme enhancements. (2.8.1)</p>	December 2021	The School will be highlighting students voice by making it more prominently part of its website as a “your voice” page and ensuring that all courses in LEARN have a link to the relevant webpage. In 21/22 we will be doing more work on “closing the loop” so that we can evidence to students that their voices are heard, including the voices of students on online programmes. The PG rep is an established member of the school’s PG Education committee.	
4	<p>Research Methods Training The review team commends the School for its focus on delivering research methods training and recruiting new posts with research methods expertise. The review team recommends that the School consider taking full advantage of this new expertise in making Research Methods training a compulsory or core element of dissertation training. This training would be a helpful addition to workshops around what makes a good dissertation. The timing of Research Methods training can support cohort community building and provide a common link if dissertations are allocated consistently. (section 2.1.3)</p>	August 2022	<p>In 2021-22, the RTC will roll out a full programme of methods workshops in Creative Learning week (semester 2). If CV19 restrictions permit, many of these will be in person classes. These workshops will operate as ‘trailers’ for the more detailed, sustained courses which the RTC has already created. Given that variation in dissertation timelines will take some time to resolve (see point 1), these have been designed to be student-led, asynchronous and available online throughout the academic year. When we have moved towards greater consistency in dissertation timelines across the School, and when CV19 restrictions no longer create such logistical difficulties, it may be that more of these courses can be held synchronously and/or some sessions could be made compulsory.</p> <p>RTC’s remit focuses on methods training, so they are not able to deliver workshops on how to prepare specific kinds of dissertation</p>	

			<p>chapters (e.g. lit review, methods), and related forms of writing training (e.g. a ‘how to do a full write through’ workshop could be usefully held in the summer months). We will therefore draw on the SDO, the English Language Education team (ELE), the Institute for Academic Development (IAD), and the PGT Director to design this student support collaboratively. Finally, it is worth noting that student-led online courses and individual writing support is already available to all dissertation students from the SDO and IAD, including over the summer. Information about these resources is included on the Student Support cribsheet prepared by the PGT Director, which is regularly circulated to PDs and PTs. Supervisors will be asked to bring these resources to the attention of their supervisees, in due course.</p>	
5	<p>Learning from hybrid model The review team recommends the School continues to explore learning from hybrid teaching and what enhancements can be further developed and continue to be implemented in the future by both academic and professional services staff. This should include maintaining the enhancements to online material developed over the past year and ensuring it is kept current and relevant (Section 1 and see also paragraph 2.4 in report).</p>	September 2021	<p>As academic year 21/22 continues to involve hybrid/blended delivery, we continue to build on the lessons learned from the previous academic year; further develop our teaching delivery guidelines (working with the Technology Enhanced Learning team); and adapt our processes to a combination of in-person and digital delivery. We have circulated guidance to Course Organisers with regards to re-using and updating online material, to make sure that our digital delivery is both high quality and relevant.</p>	September 2021 (though will be reviewed semesterly)
6	<p>Online programmes and courses The review team recommends that the School ensures the recognition of the effort involved for the online model is included in the Work Allocation Model.</p> <p>The review team recommends the School considers increasing group work for online students as a way of enhancing contact and facilitating connections. The School should also explore ways of enhancing community and a sense of belonging for online programmes. (Section 2.3.1.2)</p>	December 2021	<p>The school is working with the CAHSS WAM project which includes an uplift for development of online materials.</p> <p>The school continues to consider embedding group work for online students into their coursework</p>	
7	<p>Communications The review team recommends that the School ensures consistency of information in handbooks and that staff are aware of the University’s Programme and Course Handbooks Policy. (section 2.3.1.1)</p>	September 2022	<p>In 21/22 School is taking forward a review of programme handbooks with a view to simplifying and standardising common information. 21/22 sees a return to more in-person delivery for campus-based students, and as such this will be more aligned to the information as contained in the learning and teaching activities</p>	

	<p>The review team recommends that, in agreement with students and staff, the School set clear common principles and minimum expectations on contact time. Online students are likely to need more contact points and the School should also take this into account. (Section 2.3.1.3)</p>		<p>listed against the course in CAM and with more activities timetabled.</p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>Student support The review team recommends that the University Student Wellbeing Service considers providing a formal Mandarin speaking support officer. The review team recommends that the School Management Team ensure support is available for staff supporting students, particularly professional services colleagues who should not become the only source of pastoral and wellbeing support for students. (Section 2.3.1.4)</p>		<p>Comment received from Andy Shanks as follows:</p> <p><i>I have discussed and considered the specific recommendation with my team, and here is an update with relevant information:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We do already have people within our services who speak Mandarin and Cantonese</i> • <i>We do already have a diverse group of staff within our services, many of whose first language is not English</i> • <i>We have recently recruited three BAME counsellors.</i> <p><i>We feel that a number of wider points also need to be considered: Having recently recruited to BAME posts, our understanding is that being Mandarin speaking is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and so it may not be straightforward to recruit to such a post if this was the key element (from recent experience with BAME counsellor recruitment).</i></p> <p><i>As Chinese students are the largest single non-white ethnic group in the University it would be challenging to expect one post-holder to meet the need being suggested. There are complex and cultural factors other than language that inhibit Chinese students disclosing mental health issues, and so within the rationale of this recommendation there is also a good argument that Schools should recruit Mandarin-speaking staff to focus on prevention, mental health promotion and early intervention. If we were to pro-actively recruit a Mandarin speaker to one of our teams, this may lead to a more complex discussion where students from other countries/ ethnicities whose first language is not English may request the broad range of mental health support in their own first language, which may be challenging for the University to deliver on.</i></p>	<p>Completed - August 2021</p>

			The school is actively investing in training specifically for those involved in frontline students support. Some of this training has been undertaken in 2021 summer with more planned and budgeted for in 21/22. The school is also carefully watching and awaiting more information on the incoming university level changes to PT and Student support.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	We will write to all outgoing PGT students summarizing the outcomes of the IPR and our response to the above recommendations.		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review			