

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Social and Political Sciences (PGT)

Date of review: 23-25 February 2021

Date of 14 week response: 14 September 2021

Date of year on response: 30 August 2022

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	<p>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)</p>	May 2023	<p>The new timeline for Placement-Based Dissertations was implemented first, as these are centrally managed. This included an early project proposal review board in autumn to modify projects and flag up any additional steps needed re: regulatory/legal compliance to students and supervisors in project adverts. A further review board was held in Feb for student-led proposals, and ethics and methods training provided in Creative Learning week (Feb). This worked well: we are refining this process for the coming year to improve it further. We advertised one-to-one writing coaching during July and August to support students when supervisors were likely to be on leave. We will discuss increasing this provision with the new HoS as it has budgetary implications.</p> <p>The allocation of supervisors for these dissertations was also brought forward, as recommended. This found to be a little more problematic: students and staff raised concerns that they were not ready to begin thinking about dissertations whilst preparing assessment work for Semester 2 taught classes. We therefore developed a 'twin track' process where students who were likely to need extra time to clear regulatory/legal steps were 'started off' with supervisors early, and others allocated as soon as programmes could manage it. These allocations tended to fall in the Easter vacation period, which was also not ideal because allocated supervisors were not always available immediately due to a/l or fieldwork.</p>	

			We are now in the process of mapping the timeline for PBD dissertations to see where we can improve – one option might be to make these placements a uniform 8 weeks long, rather than 8-10 weeks, which would make allocating supervisors after the Easter vacs feasible, apart from those identified by boards as requiring CAHSS referral for legal/regulatory reasons. We aim to get the PBD deadline right before attempting to roll it out to other kinds of dissertations, so will keep working on this in 2022/23 before tackling traditional dissertations.	
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 2024	This expectation has been communicated to faculty at Programme Director meetings and at PGT Boards. Proposals for new courses with only a single assessment event were revised to include a second mid-term assessment. Ongoing challenges relating to Covid and exceptionally high levels of Spec Circs students mean that we have not yet carried out a whole School review of the proportion of existing courses which have a (formative or summative) mid-term assessment but will do so in the coming year.	
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>	Dec 2024 (online 2.8.1)	The new Student Voice Policy principles underpins the engagement of students through SSLCs and student forums. In the transitional year of 2021/22, we implemented a TEL-designed online questionnaire (through Qualtrics) for both mid-semester and end-of-semester feedback. Our approach for 2022/23, developed through a short-life working group and discussion in UG/PG Education Committees, will continue with a School-wide survey, which course organisers can opt in to for either mid- or -end-semester (or both), integrating new questions focused on student self-evaluation and reflection. Course Organisers (COs) may choose to use other means/timings of gathering feedback, but must close the feedback loop with students and report on overall trends through BoE course report forms. COs have closed the feedback loop through a variety of means, including video responses, emails, in-class discussion – and overall aggregate trends are shared with heads of subject areas, and through student forums and SSLCs. We note here the additional resource required as a result of the central decision to devolve responsibility for CEQs to Schools.	Completed Dec 2022 (on-campus)

	<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>		<p>Programme reports highlight the value and importance of SSLCs with regards to feedback, governance and quality assurance. While programme reports highlight that student representatives have sometimes struggled to gather feedback from their peers, student reps have utilised a range of methods to stimulate involvement, including surveys and focus groups. On its website, the School has created a dedicated “your voice” page to ensure that all relevant information is easily accessible for our students.</p> <p>The PGT Director reports that: Attendance at SSLC meetings has been strong, including a diverse range of online and on-campus course reps. The PGT Director developed a new colour coded system so student reps could easily check on progress in dealing with the issues raised. They were asked to confirm if they considered the issue resolved before these were ‘greened’. Students reported increased satisfaction with this more structured system. Class meetings were also held in response to any programme-specific issues arising, and issues resolved to students’ satisfaction.</p> <p>The School’s incoming Director of Online Learning and Digital Teaching (beginning 1 Jan 2023) has been made aware of this recommendation. This person was appointed, in part because of their expertise in this area.</p>	
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>		<p>RTC held two methods workshops in Creative Learning week. These had to be restricted because of UCU industrial action. However, we are reviewing this again for 2022/23, with the new RTC Director.</p> <p>A cross-School pilot to improve rapid student referral to writing support is now complete. Data on progress after receiving further support is currently being analysed as these students have now graduated. The number of SPS students taking up this support has soared following changes in communication strategies from 20/30 students p/a to ‘full up’ workshops from the start of S1 2022/23</p>	Completed Dec 2022

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>		<p>Programme reports from 2021/22 noted staff effort and innovation involved in adapting to continuing ‘hybrid’ modes of teaching delivery, in relation to changing government and University guidance. Many programmes have retained and will further develop elements introduced during lockdown – including ‘flipped classrooms’; feedback and ‘feed forward’ videos; online live venues for staff-student interaction; Jupyter notebooks (QM degrees); hybrid placements and placement-based dissertations; remote vivas, examinations and meeting options; and a mix of synchronous and asynchronous elements for Boards of Examiners, amongst others. At the same time, the return of other on-campus activities were welcomed – in particular, in-person tutorials/seminars and cohort-building events. Taking stock of Covid impacts on and lessons for teaching delivery will be a central responsibility of the School’s incoming Director of Online Learning and Digital Teaching (beginning 1 Jan 2023), working with the SPS TEL Team.</p>	Completed Sept 2022
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>		<p>The Deputy Head of School confirms that the CAHSS WAM Project is still in progress and includes an uplift for online delivery.</p> <p>The School’s incoming Director of Online Learning and Digital Teaching (beginning 1 Jan 2023) has been made aware of this recommendation. This person was appointed, in part because of their extensive knowledge of community building in OL programmes.</p>	Completed Sept 2022
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>		<p>The Teaching Services Manager and Head of Student Support and Enhancement have reviewed the student/programme handbooks to ensure that information contained within the general PG Student Handbook 2022/23, issued to all PG SPS students, now meets the PCIM policy.</p>	Completed Sept 2022

	<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>The Acting HoS worked with L&T to develop a set of agreed expectations for dedicated contact time on courses which are co-taught across PGT and UG, as this has been a source of confusion in the past. These new guidelines steered course approval at Boards. The new OL Director has been made aware of this recommendation.</p>	
8	<p>Student support The review team recommends that the University Student Wellbeing Service considers providing a formal Mandarin speaking support officer.</p> <p>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>As a Phase 1 school (early adopter of the new Student Support Model) SPS will use 2022/23 to develop guidance and working practices on how all the new and existing roles interact.</p> <p>As part of the shift to locate academic student support more at programme and course level, the role of Programme Director will be strengthened and the new role of Cohort Lead will be implemented with specific responsibility for welcome, induction and transition, community building and academic support. As per the model, cohorts can be formed based on year of study, stage of degree and can also be more subject and discipline specific.</p> <p>For the academic year 2022/23 the new model will be implemented for incoming on-campus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year 1 PGT students. • Year 1 UG students (including any students repeating year 1) <p>Academic colleagues will not be required to act as personal tutors for these students in 2022/23.</p> <p>The other students (Online and continuing students such as UG years 2-4 and PGT 2021/22 students and year 2s etc.) will retain their Personal Tutors for 2022/23. Implementation for these students is planned for 2023/24.</p> <p><i>NB From 2023/24 the role of Personal Tutor will no longer be required for any students in the University.</i></p>	<p>Completed Aug 2021 (Wellbeing service)</p> <p>Completed Aug 2022 (student support model)</p>

			<p>SPS has introduced the Cohort Lead role (academic staff) and Student Advisers (professional services staff) for all incoming on campus year 1 UG students and Year 1 PGT Students. Additionally, we will introduce a school role of Senior Postgraduate Taught Personal Tutor. The University has hired a Wellbeing Adviser, with whom we will be developing new ways of working to support our students.</p> <p>Personal Tutors will continue to be required for online and continuing students (UG years 2-4, PGT part-time/continuing students). We will also retain the Subject Area Senior Personal Tutor role in 2022/23 and beyond.</p> <p>We will focus on implementing the Cohort Lead role alongside Programme Directors and Directors of Undergraduate Teaching roles where and as they currently exist.</p> <p>School representatives will continue to compare notes on best practice and any problems arising with those in other Schools across the College and beyond via the Directors of Teaching network and CAHSS committees.</p>	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	This report will be an item in the forthcoming PGT SSLC meeting. It will also be published in the PGT SSLC TEAMS channel for comment, and reps have been encouraged to speak with their student constituencies about it.		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review	As detailed in progress boxes above		