Internal Periodic Review
14-week response report

Internal Periodic Review of: Biological Sciences
Date of review: 14-17 March 2022
Date of 14 week response: October 25 2022
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	The panel **recommends** increased integration of quality assurance practices within School governance as well as within the overall management of learning & teaching.	End of Academic Year 2022/23	Improvements have already been made. While NSS scores have always been discussed annually, the IPR report was also discussed at the School's LTC annual Away Day (August 2022). External examiners reports will be added as an annual standing item on the LTC agenda in November. The LTC has already established a new course evaluation procedure that includes: • Mid-course feedback from all students on the course • End-of-course questionnaire with 4 School mandated questions, 2 course team questions, and 2 student rep questions • Enhanced QA submission to collect data on return of marking and opportunities for staff-student interactivity This will be implemented in Semester 1 2022/23. The questionnaires will be a standing item at the annual committee away day, following minuted consideration of the survey results by the course teams in May/June. <u>Challenges:</u> Getting sufficient student input on surveys (usually around 25-30% return rates) and ensuring compliance across all courses.	
2	The panel **recommends** that the School place a particular emphasis on the review and enhancement of assessment & feedback practices across its taught provision and takes action on the following: a) In line with practice elsewhere, introduce an assessment tariff with guidance for staff and students on expected student effort for assessment. Use this tariff to manage expectations and maintain a shared understanding of expectations.	End of AY 2023/24	a) An assessment sub-committee has been established to examine assessment and feedback across the School, with the aim to developing a tariff system. This will need to be followed by broad consultation and approval. Any changes will have to be in line with University-level changes to Assessment and Feedback guidance that is currently being developed. <u>Challenges:</u> Ensuring compliance across all courses, possibility of stifling creativity and generation of authentic assessments that may not map well to a standardised assessment tariff.	

	b) Increase the practice of mapping assessments across programmes even for honours years & Postgraduate programmes involving electives to identify pinch points. Furthermore, strengthen the mapping of assessments to programme level Learning Outcomes to leverage the potential for streamlined approaches to assessment c) Increase student engagement with and understanding of the Extended Common Marking Scheme, in particular the expectations of the grade bands and marking rubrics where they are used. d) Consider enhancing and optimising the use of technology to support and facilitate assessment & feedback and increasing staff support in this area via additional Learning Technology staff resource. e) Review moderation practices and guidance, benchmarking them across the College, wider University & the sector. f) If feedback is delayed for whatever reason, students must be told prior to the deadline.		b) Year convenors have been empowered to look at assessment across the year. MS Teams will be used to facilitate assessment timeline mapping. Assessment mapping by programme at the pre-Honours level has already been conducted with the new curriculum. Assessment mapping will be discussed at an upcoming Honours Programme Organisers (HPO) meeting (December 2022) to develop a plan of action. <u>Challenges:</u> Student course choices are diverse, even within a programme, so there will necessarily need to be some redundancy in assessments, therefore minimising not eliminating will be the best possible outcome. c) Explanation of the ECMS has been added to Welcome back talks for returning Year 3 and 4 students at the start of the semester. Expanding student engagement with the ECMS will also be discussed at the upcoming HPO meeting. d) The School is piloting a programme to move exams to in-person, computer-based exams this year. We will be moving roughly 25% of our courses to digital exams in the trial. Many coursework assessments moved to computer-based activities during the pandemic, the aim will be to consolidate this change. The School is additionally currently restructuring its IT team to provide more Learning Technology resource to the School. e) Moderation practices will be reviewed at upcoming Learning and Teaching Committee meeting (November 2022) to discuss and agree the implement of a moderation report component to QA practices. <u>Challenges:</u> Ensuring compliance across all courses f) We will return to pre-COVID processes for monitoring and reporting on return of feedback this academic year.	
3	The review panel **recommends** that the School considers the effectiveness of current teaching allocation leadership and practices to make the distribution of teaching workload more equitable across the School. Furthermore the School should consider how the allocation process can be more responsive to unforeseen circumstances such as staff changes.	End of AY 2022/23	A new, bespoke online platform has been developed that will 1) allow staff to see what teaching roles are available and 2) allow course organisers and line managers to enter in this information at any point during the year. Phase 1, the database of teaching roles accessible to all staff (postdoc, fellow and PI), has already been launched and refinements are planned. Phase 2 is being developed to launch in Semester 2 of AY 2022/23. <u>Challenges:</u> At this stage it is unclear how regularly staff will check the database and whether mechanisms to instigate this will be needed. A review and rationalisation of existing roles would be required to improve the distribution of teaching roles. This will	

			require a considerable increase in effort during the transition (staff will have to prepare new activities).	
4	The panel **recommends** that the challenges the School is facing as a result of levels of approved extensions be taken into consideration by the current review of the Extensions & Special Circumstances policy.	AY 2022/23	The DoT has volunteered to join the University committee that is reviewing the extensions and special circumstances policy to ensure that the School's perspectives on this are taken into consideration in future policy.	
		The group have held two meetings to date, and are expected to hold a further two meetings by January 2023. A final report to be presented to APRC in March 2023.	Update from Olivia Hayes in Academic Services. A Task Group to review Coursework Extension and Special Circumstances Policies was approved by APRC in May 2022. The task group was set up in response to feedback received from Schools and Colleges on the high-volume of approved coursework extensions and to urgent concerns regarding the sustainability of existing policies. In setting up the task group, APRC reflected on the challenges that the existing policies present, and this is reflected in the remit of the group. The task group are to review the University-wide policies on coursework extensions and special circumstances for taught courses. They are looking to amend the existing policies to ensure they provide supportive and appropriate outcomes for students, and make efficient and proportionate use of staff time. The task group has representation from across the University, with equal representation across Colleges. Colleges were asked to consider breadth of student type and experience in nominating their representatives. The group are expected to propose revisions to the policies and regulations relating to coursework extensions and special circumstances.	
5	The panel **recommends** that the School continues its commitment to improving accessibility, inclusivity and widening participation and takes the following actions: a) In consultation with the University Widening Participation team explore the investment needed to make improvements in the support offered to widening participation students. This should include consideration of a Widening Participation Officer role at School level, as well as identifying further resourcing and funding requirements needed to enhance engagement with this student group.	End of AY 2025/26	a) Widening Participation is being considered as part of the Student Support that is provided within the School and local resource for Widening Participation will be included in College strategic planning discussion in the upcoming University planning round b) The issue of WP and BAME student data will be taken to the College Education Committee for further action. c) EDI representation for the LTC has been sought. Two members of the BTO are now on the EDI. They will report back to an LTC member, or will be asked to attend if there is a requirement.	

	b) In collaboration with the College of Science & Engineering, continue to engage with the University's current work to improve the quality and accessibility of student data and its effective use at all levels within the School. This should include involvement in College led working groups and engagement with the University level data task group and its outputs. c) Improve formal connectivity between the School's Equality Diversity & Inclusion Committee and the management of Learning & Teaching by reinstating a standing member of the EDI Committee on the Learning & Teaching Committee. d) Build upon the small research project into widening participation student disengagement by connecting with others across the University who have conducted research in this area, and consider applying for relevant funding to support this work for example the University Principal's Teaching Award Scheme.		d) A proposal will be taken to our Biology Education Research Group to seek volunteers to carry forward this research. We will seek collaborators from other Schools through the Experienced Teachers Network. Challenges: Finding someone with appropriate time to be able to lead this research project. Finding sufficient disengaged students to be able to make reliable conclusions – as disengaged students are for obvious reasons difficult to contact and/or persuade to participate.	
6	The panel **recommends** the School takes the following actions with regards to student projects: a) the introduction of a mandatory minimum number of projects to be proposed by all academic staff, b) continuation of a diverse offer including non-lab-based options, c) a review of student project financing as this appears to be problematic and a potential barrier to project proposal.	End of AY 2023/2024	a) New guidance has already been introduced that included a minimum number of projects Challenges: It is still to be widely communicated and there is not a clear mechanism for ensuring compliance b) This is central to our offering and will continue c) An initial review has been conducted, and the School has increased the financial support associated with UG student projects. We aim to collect more data on project costs to ensure that the new financial support is appropriate Challenges: Collection of data on actual project costs has been limited.	
7	The panel **recommends** that the School consider the feedback the panel received from student representatives as part of their upcoming Student Voice review, and explores how best to help students see the actions being taken and have greater understanding of the context they sit in.	End of AY 2023/24	With the below barriers in mind, we will continue with existing practice and add "All Student Town Hall" meetings with the DoT to improve the visibility of student input. Challenges: We already run fortnightly discussions will all programme representatives and report on outcomes and changes via our Year group VLE pages. These highlight demonstrable changes made, but it does not seem to reach the larger student body.	
8	The panel **recommends** better and more consistent integration of technical staff in teaching planning and design, and increased representation for this group in relevant School governance mechanisms.	Start of AY 2022/23	Technical representation has been added to the School Learning and Teaching committee.	September 2022

9	The review team **recommends** that the School: • clarify the student support structure with students to improve consistency and avoid duplication of effort when dealing with student cases • consider whether a review is needed for the process of submitting and recording enquiries as well a guidance for colleagues regarding who responds to what.	End of AY 2024/25	We have implemented the University's new model for our new incoming students, and will be reviewing this and expanding its implementation to all students in AY 2023/24, which will require further review and refinement. We have however, instituted within the School that all new incoming students will have a Student Adviser as the single point of contact for all enquires. <u>Challenges:</u> The model is still uncertain due to changes directed from the University-wide Student Support Implementation project, so there are factors out with our control. The number of students allocated to each Student Adviser (120) is already overwhelming. The proposed figure of 200 is not appropriate. There is no resilience in the system for absent Advisers, as a caseload of this size cannot be easily transferred to others.	
10	The panel **recommends** that the Head of School works with the University's Director of Estate Management and the College of Science & Engineering to address the estate concerns relating to the delayed Darwin Building renovation and access to adequate School specific social space.	End of AY 2025/26	Construction of a new 'Nucleus' building at Kings Buildings will be completed shortly. This will contain social space for use by SBS UG/PGT students, as well as CSE UG/PGT students, and will be available for use by Semester 2 22/23. The School has additionally been invited to submit an outline business case to the University's Estates Committee for the New Darwin building. We are unsure at present if funding for this will allow for UG social space but at a minimum we hope to improve the lab space available for UG honours project work. We are also carrying forward fruitful discussions with the School's UG programme representative on the topic. Challenges: Space on the Kings Building campus is very tight, including all SBS buildings, and University financing has tightened considerably – meaning there are limited opportunities to create new spaces or repurpose existing spaces without direct negative impact to core activities for the School.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	We will do so through our SSLC and via our Year LEARN pages		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review			