Internal Periodic Review
Year on 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: July 19 2023

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. Challenges: Getting sufficient student input on surveys (usually around 25-30% return rates) and ensuring compliance across all courses. YEAR UPDATE: Questionnaires were implemented and circulated to students. Engagement by students was variable, from 0 to 45% response rates, but overall response rates were very low (average approx. 6%). We have set the review of the questionnaires and the responses as an agenda item for our Learning and Teaching Committee Away Day scheduled for August 21 2023. This will be standard practice moving forward.	**Completed: Questionnaires sent to all students for all courses. Last Closing date for all course questionnaires was June 2023. Results will be reviewed at LTC away Day August 2023**
2	The panel **recommends** that the School place a particular emphasis on the review and enhancement of assessment	End of AY 2023/24	a) An assessment sub-committee has been established to examine assessment and feedback across the School, with	Still in Progress: 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. 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.	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. Challenges: Ensuring compliance across all courses, possibility of stifling creativity and generation of authentic assessments that may not map well to a standardised assessment tariff. YEAR UDATE: This is ongoing. A survey on assessment, aligned to the University Assessment and Feedback Priorities and Practices was circulated. We are still awaiting responses. The incoming Director of Teaching has also been leading a group discussing the implementation an assessment tariff focused around "time" as the common unit, with guidelines on how to utilise the tariff. Mapping exercises for Semester 2 of Year 3 have been completed. Further consultation and implementation are still to take place. 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. Challenges: 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. A Course Organisers Teams group has been established to facilitate these discussions. Work is still to be done to ensure compliance – i.e. for all courses to enter assessment deadlines – and clarification of processes for resolving deadline pinch points. 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. YEAR UPDATE: ECMS has been explained in Welcome talks and that will continue. HPOs agreed to discuss ECMS with	survey created and released May 2023. Incoming DoT submitted planning paperwork to LTC for June 2023 meeting. Still in Progress: Teams group established in March 2023 Still in Progress: ECMS discussed in Welcome Talks in September 2022. New Student Support

			model implementation in September 2023 **Completed: All exams for AY 2022/23 completed by June 2023**
		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. YEAR UPDATE: This pilot was successfully completed, with 33% or Semester 1 exams and 50% of Semester 2 exams taking place in-person on computers. In most cases this was successful, but there were limitations that impacted the exams in several courses. Firstly, the lack of sufficiently large computer spaces meant that computer-based exams were not possible for our large Year 1 and Year 2 courses. For courses that had in-person computer-based exams, there were problems with network stability (in one instance leading to paper copies having to be prepared last minute) and computer failures. In semester 1 we were also required to run too many exams at the same time, which lead to confusion for students and invigilators.	
		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 <u>YEAR UPDATE</u>: Discussions were had, but no progress as of July 2023.	Still in Progress: Model moderation forms are still to be developed and approved by LTC
		f) We will return to pre-COVID processes for monitoring and reporting on return of feedback this academic year. YEAR UPATE: Completed	**Completed: Monitoring of all returned marking is compiled in a single spreadsheet and shared with Director of QA in June 2023**

students as part of scheduled activities, but oversight has been limited. With the expansion of the new Student Support Model, this activity will be considered as part of Cohort Lead activities in AY 2023/24.

| 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 2023/24 | 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.
Challenges: 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).
YEAR UPDATE: Due to changes in School IT management staff the further development of the system has been delayed. We have had a temporary replacement for our IT manager who is now also departing. We will seek to renew this development once a permanent IT manager is in place. Additionally, with the start of our new HoS a review of appointment to School management positions was initiated. While this is ongoing, we have undertaken an exercise in developing Job Descriptions for several internal teaching and teaching management roles, which are now available to advertise positions directly to staff.
A minor improvement that was implemented and lead to some gains in efficiency was the development of a Teams channel for the Senior Management team where staffing needs and allocations could be managed jointly by all members (leading to clearer documentation of progress and less duplication of effort). Staff time and availability has been the major limitation to advancing this activity. | Still in Progress: See description of progress |
| 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.
YEAR UPDATE: The review has been completed and recommendations have been passed to relevant Senate committees. There were, from the School's perspective, positive changes to the policy that included limiting the number of self-certified extensions, recognised the need for systems to support students with ongoing support needs (e.g., those with employment and caring responsibilities), and reinstituted higher standards of evidence required for exceptional circumstances. | **Completed: DoT participated in the review with a report completed in May 2023. The final policy is scheduled to be considered in July 2023** |

However, it is not clear how the review groups inputs were incorporated into the Senate Proposal.

Update from APRC

The task group was aware of the impact of the existing Coursework Extensions and Special Circumstances policies on Schools, including Biological Sciences, which was one of a number of motivating factors for APRC to establish the task group. The task group received a strong steer that that implementing changes for 2022/23 should be prioritised and that the review of the coursework extension and special circumstances policies was treated as a critical piece of work. The task group held a total of seven meetings, with work undertaken between these to facilitate the success of the project.

Additionally, two other strands of work took place, the first was a desk-based review of the ESC Service completed in June 2022 and a review of the ESC involving discussions with Schools as set up by the Deputy Secretary, Students in September 2022.

A paper was presented to the 23 March meeting of APRC with the findings and positions reached by the Coursework Extension and Special Circumstances Task Group on the policy, and a summary of the findings of the two ESC Reviews: discussions with Schools throughout 2022/23 and of the service in 2022.

There was considerable challenge to making changes to improve the policy and difficulty in reaching a clear consensus on a number of matters relating to the policy. Therefore, the Deputy Secretary, Students, agreed to work with the VP Students, plus engagement with Colleges and School to bring together the three strands of work, including the work of the task group, and provide a final report for review and approval. APRC received a paper with a new policy titled Exceptional Circumstances Policy for discussion at an exceptional meeting held on 30 June. The Committee provided feedback on the draft policy, with the updated policy expected to return to APRC for approval at a future meeting.

APRC received the final policy at an exceptional meeting held on 31 July. The Committee did not approve the policy

				as presented. In summary, there is support among the Committee for the general direction of travel of the policy, and reservations among others regarding the policy as presented. There was support among some members for introduction of the policy in 2023 however those members in favour agreed that a decision by consensus was preferable and therefore a vote would not be necessary unless a clear consensus could not be reached. There is consensus across the Committee that the concerns raised regarding the operational elements relating to systems, workload and communications required to support implementation are significant and therefore the Committee agreed that they are not in a position to approve the policy for implementation in 2023.	
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. 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	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 The new Student Support system is now being implemented across all years. There is still serious concern that the ratios of Student Advisers to students will allow the School to provide the support needed for WP students. This will possible result in a deterioration of service for those students as we previously used "specialised" PTs at a 1 to 12 ratio of staff to students (compared to 1:200 for Student Advisers). We will encouraging our WP students to take up opportunities to meet with student advisers at the start of the year. Discussions with College are still ongoing. b) The issue of WP and BAME student data will be taken to the College Education Committee for further action. YEAR UPDATE: Student data of all types continues to be a problem. There has not been a clear path established for improving the extraction or utilisation of those data. 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. YEAR UPDATE: EDI membership for LTC was found, but the staff member retires in September, so a new member will need to be found.	Still in Progress Support for WP (and all students) has transitioned to the New Student Support Model. Still in Progress No new developments have occurred. **Completed: Sept 2022** Renewed Search

	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. YEAR UPDATE: A team of staff has been assembled and has met regularly through AY 2022/23, and will be submitting a PTAS grant in AY 2023/24 to investigate student disengagement to understand why it happens and what interventions might reduce its occurrence.	Still in progress: The DoT is leading the research team of 4 staff members, having identified a route to reach disengaging students.
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 YEAR UPDATE: Sufficient projects were found in AY 2023/24, however, there were still issues in getting sufficient numbers in a timely fashion. Work is ongoing to identify how staff can be encouraged to provide projects on the required time scale. We also anticipate a larger problem in AY 2024/25 as our over-recruited cohort will reach Year 4 and require 50% more projects than usual.	**Completed: Project expectations were circulated to Line managers in Sept 2022, sufficient projects were found in October 2022.**
			b)	This is central to our offering and will continue. YEAR UPDATE: This has continued	**Completed: A broad range of projects continue to be provided.**
			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. YEAR UPDATE: The funding available to staff that host Honours students has been increased to a maximum of £500.	**Completed: Data was collected and while not complete, it did indicate an uplift to £500 which was offered,**

				effective from Nov 2023
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. <u>Challenges:</u> 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. YEAR UPDATE: It was not possible to find suitable times this past AY for Student town Halls, but this will be explored again next year as our new curriculum will have settled into a more predictable rhythm.	Still in progress Fortnightly meetings with representatives continued in Semester 1, but were poorly attended. In discussion with representatives, the discussions were moved to monthly. Identifying a time when staff and students would be available was not possible.
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. YEAR UPDATE: We will be extending the new Student Support System to all students in AY 2023/24. There are still serious concerns around the ratio of student advisers to students, but	Still in progress: The processes are in transition, so providing exact clarity is not possible, but communications will be simplified in AY 2023/24.

			we will monitor the system over the course of the AY. However, there are some additional issues that have developed from the new system, where the existence of Student Advisers (SAs) and Cohort leads (CLs) is still leading to duplication of effort (as students are asking similar questions to CLs and SAs). While an issue, having fewer CLs than PTs means that extensive duplication is potentially being minimised.	
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. YEAR UPDATE: The School has had to restart the tender process, so there has been a significant delay in the development of the new building. However, the new business case has included greater emphasis on quality student spaces, with the potential for a Phase II that would include more social spaces. Additionally, the Nucleus is being utilised by students, with a College group focused on ensuring that students from all Schools in the College see themselves as having an ownership of the Nucleus as a social space.	Still in progress: The business case, which includes UG and PGT teaching space, was been submitted for approval in June 2023. It is still insufficient, but there are plans for a Phase II – which the School would strongly like to see include space for students
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	The Year report will be shared with Student representatives at the LTC Away Day in August, and shared on Student Learn pages for each Year group in AY 2023/24		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review	The successful trial of In-person computer-based exams was a success as it retained positives that students saw from remote exams during COVID (i.e., the ability to type their answers) and staff saw from having clearer structured and written responses. The development of a Student Disengagement Research Team has also been positive.		

| | | While we have yet to review the effectiveness of the Course Questionnaire system that was implemented, it was felt as a positive by the LTC that the questionnaire focused on establishing the learning opportunities for students in our courses rather than the "popularity" of staff and course. |