

The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review

14 week response report

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Physics & Astronomy PGR Provision

Date of review: 7th & 8th March 2023

Date of 14 week response: 5 September 2023

Date of year on response: 30 May 2024

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>Remit Item 1: SUPA arrangement</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School a) clarifies with SUPA exactly what the requirement is; b) whether the hours undertaken by students need to be formally assessed; and c) clearly communicates the requirements with students and staff.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School reviews its offering through SUPA and, if necessary, improves the available selection to ensure students can undertake technical training that is relevant to their discipline.</p> <p>The review team also recommend that the School explores new ways for the SUPA requirements to be met, such as capitalising on training that students already undertake as part of their development (e.g. teaching assistant, equality, diversity and inclusivity training).</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School review its approach to professional skills training (which may require collaboration with SUPA) and recommend that the School reviews its use of language around professional skills and “soft skills”.</p>	<p>Sept 2023</p> <p>(Oct 2023)</p>	<p>We will continue to mandate 40 hours of taught courses (as is essential for STFC accreditation) but have stopped enforcing a specific SUPA requirement. Courses from the University of Edinburgh, SUPA, and external providers (e.g. summer schools) are now all clearly listed as possible routes to fulfilling the course hours.</p> <p>We have stopped capping non-SUPA courses at 30 hours. A course will be weighted by the hours of lectures – irrespective of the provider. These steps should simplify the message we are trying to communicate and will better provide students with technical training relevant to their discipline.</p> <p>Our communication and language have also been improved in line with the recommendations, particularly with respect to hours and assessment requirements. Our non-technical training is now labelled as “professional skills” in line with SUPA – who are a major provider. We have started to add further course recommendations to the graduate school website, to assist particular interest groups with finding their way to the courses previous students have found useful.</p> <p>(Ongoing: We are exploring whether counting mandatory training (EDI, Ethics) and TA training as Professional Skills causes any problems.)</p>	<p>Sep 2023</p>

2.	<p>Staff/student development The review team recommend that the School reviews its package of support and training available to the PGR community in their role as TAs.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School offers annual reviews to TAs in their capacity as staff members, and also recommend that the School arranges an annual training event to continue to strengthen the skills of the cohort.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School encourage students to undertake the teaching qualification available to them (EdTA).</p> <p>The review team recommend that there is an increased increment to reward the lead TA role in recognition of their additional responsibility.</p>	Sept 2023	<p>We propose to augment TA training with a follow-up session after 4 weeks - after TAs have had a few teaching sessions and have done a bit of marking. Part of the aim would be to determine how the TAs are surviving. This would expedite communication and would also catch late arrivals. We also plan to set-up a Teams channel for discussing specific points and practicalities. A marking only follow-up session is also under consideration for Semester 2.</p> <p>As there are 170 TAs, we believe offering annual reviews to everyone is not practical. An annual review will be offered to “super-TAs” in recognition of their role.</p> <p>From September, returning TAs will be encouraged to turn up for the information session at start of semester - in order to be reminded about pay - and to hear about Edinburgh teaching award (EdTA).</p> <p>We propose to continue to reward senior TAs via hours of effort. It is a challenging HR problem to give incremental points. Interviews and roles are a problem. Fundamentally, senior TAs are not doing a different job. Furthermore, they would quickly hit the pay ceiling. Nonetheless, better communication about claiming appropriate hours is needed, and will be included in the TA resources and training.</p>	
3.	<p>Strategy The review team recommend that the School reviews the accounting of supervision hours in the WAM to ensure it reflects the frequency of contact described to students.</p> <p>The review team recommend the School reviews its staffing strategy to ensure that growth in the PGR population can be properly supported by commensurate growth in academic staff, professional services staff and available estate and resources.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the College processes the recruitment requests of the School in timely manner and ensures the Professional Services team are properly equipped to match the School’s strategic ambitions.</p>	June 2024	<p>In addition to the recommendations of the IPR panel about the School’s WAM, there is also input from the EDI committee. Changing the WAM to better capture diversity related considerations forms part of the School’s Juno Champion strategy. As part of this, the School will be comparing our WAM to those of other Schools.</p> <p>Improving the WAM has not yet begun – but will take place during the next year.</p> <p>A discussion of staffing needs is underway across the School, and with the College leadership. The initial developments have been positive, with more autonomy to be granted to the School hence reducing the timescale and complexity for creating new posts. This will be covered in the year on response.</p>	

4.	<p>Remit Item 2: Diverse Recruitment The review team support the practice of anonymised recruitment, and recommend that the School examine if this is achieving its aims, and if so, refine and roll-out this practice across institutes.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School work with other Schools within the College to consider outreach opportunities across related subject areas.</p>	Apr 2024	<p>The EDI committee hosted a summer intern who worked with the IfA coordinator to analyse the IfA PGR admissions data. She reported to the EDI committee in August. The primary recommendation is to continue monitoring the outcomes of this new anonymised recruitment approach, with as-yet insufficient data available to make any definitive conclusions. We will repeat this study after future recruitment rounds.</p> <p>Towards the end of last academic year, a paper on engagement (including outreach) was brought to the College Strategy and Management Committee. Part of this discussion was around the balance between School and College in different areas of engagement. Work on turning this discussion in to strategy and delivery is now being undertaken, with leadership shared between the College Office and professional services across the Schools. The results will be reported in the year on response.</p>	
5.	<p>Pastoral Care / Student Support The review team recommend that the School develops its pastoral care arrangement and continues it formally beyond the first year.</p> <p>The review team also had some suggestions to improve the mechanism, including improved signposting of pastoral care.</p>	May 2024	<p>Pastoral interviews are mandatory for first year PhD students in semester 2. After a discussion with students at the SSLC in June 2023 – we propose to offer pastoral interviews to every student every year. Individual offers having been made, the students will then need to opt-in by responding to their invitation.</p> <p>An additional contribution has been added to the PhD induction day (Sep 4) to cover student welfare and the pastoral care role. This will include presentations from the Student Welfare Office on available resources and events, and a brief talk from a current member of the pastoral care team giving information on the interview. We propose that this becomes standard for the induction day.</p>	
6.	<p>Student Voice The review team recommend that the School seek to remind students of the formal channels of feedback available to them, such as the SSLC.</p> <p>The review team recommend that the School should allow for a form of anonymous reporting to encourage students to come forward if they are experiencing</p>	Dec 2023	<p>We are looking to better embed the SSLC – particularly with the new intake – ahead of our December meeting.</p> <p>To begin with we will immediately promote the anonymous reporting route that is already available via Edinburgh University Student Association. A more local effort will be considered in consultation with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee.</p>	

	issues with their supervisor and have concerns about how to address this.			
7.	<p>Resources/Estate The review team recommend that the Estates team work with the School, especially as refurbishment work is carried out at the Royal Observatory, to ensure that available space is optimised and any short-medium term pressures can be offset with access to other areas of the campus and/or facilities so that students are not negatively affected</p> <p>The review team recommend that the Hybrid Working project team consult with the School and College to better understand and meet the requirement for virtual meeting space now that hybrid working is commonplace.</p>	Mar 2024	<p>We have initiated discussions with PhD coordinators across the School to identify pressure areas for PhD student offices and spaces. Some actions are already ongoing, for example upgrading JCMB 3305 (PhD student office for Particle Physics Experiment) to increase capacity and improve facilities. This process will continue for the next six months in collaboration with other relevant entities within the School and University.</p> <p>A new PhD student & Staff common room has recently been made available (4200), with the final touches now being added.</p> <p>We will have a handful of “pods” installed in JCMB for online meetings for PhD students during the coming year. Such facilities already exist in the Royal Observatory.</p>	
8.	<p>Availability of Information The review team recommend that the School reviews and updates programme material and student information on its webpages and handbooks to ensure it is accurate and properly signposted.</p>	Sept 2023 / ongoing	<p>We are making every effort to ensure all information is complete and up to date for the incoming cohort.</p> <p>As part of this effort, the new Director of the Graduate School has recently reviewed all pages and documents in the Graduate School Web site, with updates made where necessary.</p>	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	The results and recommendations of the review were discussed during the June 2023 SSLC meeting, with particular focus on the TA duties / feedback, on course requirements, and on pastoral interviews.		