

Internal Periodic Review of: School of Physics and Astronomy UG and PGT

Date of review: March 20 and 21, 2024

Date of 14 week response: October 10, 2024

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 team recommend that the school move forward with plans to develop and deliver the 'transition to mathematics for physics' level 7 course which aimed to close identified gaps in student knowledge and performance. The review team additionally recommend that the school measure and review this initiative to determine its effectiveness in resolving the problem it seeks to address. This might include assessing the impact of key aspects such as the timing of testing and monitoring those cohorts most impacted.	2024/25 Annually Over 4-5 years	The course Transition to University Mathematics for Physics is running this academic year 24/25 for ca 100 students. This course has been designed to address the increasingly diverse range of educational experience that students have on arrival at University, and particularly to help those who need time and space to develop skills in self-regulated learning that are essential for success at degree level. As a new course, it is under ongoing informal internal review, for example, by monitoring which aspects are well-received and less well-received as these are delivered. The course team has been gathering comments through impromptu surveys, asking students to reflect on conversations they had with TAs in the workshops, or to identify the activities that they have seen as most valuable for their learning. The effectiveness of this initiative will be measured and reviewed annually. The School will also monitor the success of the students taking this course for the next 4-5 years.	September 2024
2	The review team recommend that the School develop a position on what 10 and 20 credit courses should look like in order to develop greater consistency across courses and programmes. This should include contact hours and content and assessment volume. The review team also recommend that when the School undertakes the planned curriculum review, that they develop more authentic 20 credit courses, rather than two 10 credit courses merged together, which the School acknowledge added up to greater than 20 credits in terms of content.	Ongoing Ca 2-3 years	This School is reviewing the pre-honours DPT for Mathematical and Theoretical Physics programmes with the view to normalise student workload and create genuine 20 credit courses. The School is monitoring and making changes to normalise workload in all 10 and 20 credit courses by (a) reviewing and prioritising the material, (b) reducing assessment components, and (c) encouraging engagement by enabling completion of coursework components during timetabled hours.	

3	The review team recommend that the School seek to review the volume of assessment, both examination and in-course assessment, across the programmes with a view to both reducing the jeopardy of exams and making in-course assessment weightings more meaningful. This should reduce the total amount of in-course assessment, but make individual pieces of assessment worth more marks.	Ongoing Ca 1-2 years	All Course Organisers were instructed to review the assessment structures in their courses with the view to reduce, diversify and improve the quality of assessments. This academic year 24/25 the School is focusing in particular on Junior Honours cohort, working together with all relevant Course Organisers to (a) reduce the number of summative coursework submissions, making the remaining ones count for more, (b) coordinating the submission deadlines for all degree programmes, (c) encouraging engagement by introducing formative coursework elements completed during timetabled hours, and (d) trial one common non-counting midsemester paper for the yearlong core courses to help with exam preparation. The School is working together with the students to evaluate this approach. Initial feedback highly positive.	
4	The review team recommend that the School review the junior honours year with a view to reducing the overall workload.	Ongoing Ca 1-2 years	All Course Organisers have been tasked to review the material delivered within their courses with the view to rationalise and reduce the overall taught content. Two courses have already submitted change requests to Teaching Committee, which were approved, and the reduced syllabus is being implemented this academic year 24/25. For reducing overall assessment workload, see the response to Recommendation 3.	
5	The team recommend that the School conduct a mapping exercise across the core courses and core programme combinations to review workload and identify clusters of submission times with a view to gaining a greater understanding of overall delivery of provision and its impact on students.	2025/26	This is part of a bigger project that the School is planning to commence spring 2025.	
6	The review team also recommend that the School look to embed different opportunities for formative assessment and feedback in place of some assessed in-course submissions.	ongoing	The School is reviewing Assessment and Feedback across all taught courses with focus on quality of feedback. Embedding formative assessment and feedback in place of assessed in-course submissions is part of the response to Recommendation 3.	
7	The review team recommend that the school use the changes in approach from the IoP to review delivery in terms of the volume of content and investigate opportunities for supporting students to develop skills that would facilitate their development as independent learners.	25/26	The School is planning to take full advantage of the new IoP accreditation criteria for the upcoming curriculum review/CTP implementation. Reducing the volume of content is part of the response to Recommendation 2 and 4.	
8	The review team recommend that the Student Advisors go ahead with plans to use a variety of methods to make the service more visible to students.	24/25	All new students were sent an email from their Student Adviser, prior to the start of the year, making an introduction and signposting to resources. During Welcome Week, all new UG students were offered the opportunity to meet with their SA and listen to informal talks detailing the school's support services. New	September 2024

			<p>UG students were given an address covering student support and the SA/Cohort Lead roles by our Academic Administrator. Returning students and new PGT students were given a similar address by the Head of Student Support.</p> <p>The social lunches, organised by the Student Support Team (SST) together with respective Cohort leads, continue to promote the visibility of the SST. This also reinforces the message that "student support" is something we do for everyone, not just individuals experiencing a period of crisis. The School aims to raise the level of wellbeing of each year group as a whole by giving them an enhanced sense community, by normalising down-time and relaxation, and also by providing in a lowkey way timely information that supports their academic progress. These events are entirely student centered and provide proactive student support.</p> <p>The School has introduced a more visible signage outside the SST office, increasing the visibility and making it more welcoming. The School has also introduced adverts that are displayed on the electronic display boards around the JCMB building with QR codes that for example take students to the SST meeting booking page. These local promotional measures support the information available on the University of Edinburgh website and on the School Wiki pages.</p>	
9	The review team recommend that the School measure the utilisation of the student support service, for example through introducing metrics.	Ongoing 1-2 years	<p>The School's Student Support Team routinely collects student satisfaction data at all our events and by doing it, effectively co-created our entire programme of SST/Cohort lead events for each year group in 2023/24.</p> <p>The School plans to commence student support service data collection. This will initially focus upon case numbers and the main presenting issue. This data collection may be expanded to cover secondary or tertiary presenting complaints and student demographics. The data will be used to observe trends and plan proactive communications with students.</p>	
10	The team recommend that demarcation between the Student and Academic Advisor roles be clearly communicated to students to ensure clarity of roles. The team also recommend that the School monitor the operation of the model over time to measure its effectiveness and to monitor the workload of these roles.	Ongoing	<p>The School is dedicated to deliver outstanding student support with focus on making every student feel actively cared for and building a sense of community. The School Wiki pages contain clear and concise details of the Student Adviser role and the academic support available through the system of Cohort Leads, The Wiki also contains FAQ's and contact details. The Welcome Week presentations, Start of Year Meetings and Meet your Student Adviser meetings all further emphasise and clarify the nature of each role. The School is continuously working to improve</p>	

			<p>the Student Information Wiki and it now has a very clear description of how the University's student support model is implemented in our School. This academic year 24/25 the School established "community Learn groups" for each year group. These are used amongst other things to promote the work of the SST, Cohort Leads and other university support services at crucial times in the academic year explaining to students at point of need, at the appropriate time, who best to interact with.</p> <p>The School will be collecting feedback from students via MS Forms/email questions. This will be supplemented by exploring focus group feedback.</p>	
11	<p>The review team recommend that the School continue its efforts to improve response rates to mid-course feedback and continue to close feedback loops for the feedback that was received</p>	ongoing	<p>Together with student representatives, the School is reviewing the mechanisms for course surveys to try to improve response rates. The School is exploring new initiatives for closing feedback loops, for instance by introducing a standing item on SSLC agenda where Head of School/Director of Teaching shares with the student representatives the outcomes of student feedback, including the summary of these actions in the student newsletter, making use of QR codes posted in common rooms and corridors with updates on issues fixed and changes implemented.</p>	
12	<p>The review team saw evidence of effective training provided to TAs. However, TAs reported that training and induction was variable across cohorts and courses. The review team recommend that the school implement a mechanism to ensure consistent induction to courses and that training includes all key elements, for example, TAs reported training on Gradescope was not provided this academic year.</p>	24/25	<p>The School is continuously developing and improving the TA training. The Gradescope training module developed for 20/21 online teaching has been re-purposed and extended for TA training and it is accessed through a specific TA training Learn course. This component of TA training is now part of the School's standard annual training.</p> <p>The Course Organisers organise course specific training at start of each semester.</p>	September 2024
13	<p>In discussions with student TAs, it was evident that they were not aware of opportunities for development of their teaching outside the School. The review team recommend that the School provide greater visibility and encouragement to engage with training opportunities for teaching such as the Edinburgh Award and HEA Fellowships.</p>	ongoing	<p>The School promotes Edinburgh Teaching Award and HEA Fellowships to all staff and TAs. The Associate Fellowship in HEA is explained and advertised at the PhD induction and there is a link to more information on the TA Wiki page.</p> <p>The School is also collating and sharing information about professional development opportunities to all PGR students by email, through Graduate School SSLC, and via PGR representatives..</p>	September 2025
14	<p>The review team recommend that the timetabling unit prioritise spaces such as computer labs based within the School for local needs.</p>		<p>Response from the TTU: There continue to be challenges with the availability of the teaching estate, particularly for specialist spaces and teaching studio spaces on the King's Buildings campus. Local computer labs, and other local specialist spaces, will be prioritised for School teaching. Local computer labs remain in local control and bookings should be prioritised for School needs. The</p>	

			<p>Timetabling Unit contribute to conversations around the overall campus estate within the Teaching Spaces Oversight Group (TSOG). The challenge in balancing demand for computer lab demand between teaching, student study and examinations has been raised through the group to the Space Advisory Group (SAG). While this relates to wider campus, these constraints impact on local areas. As a result of these discussions and wider work, Estates are collaborating with Schools through a series of workshops. The data gathered over the last 12 months affords a clear understanding of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current footprint and locations per group/school • staffing and student numbers • vision for school or group including anticipated growth • challenges and pressure points • potential opportunities within current spaces to improve environment and user experience <p>The Timetabling Unit would like to develop closer relationships with Schools regarding their timetable delivery. It is our intention to undertake consultation in October and November 2024 to discuss timetable challenges, and to begin building relationships where the TTU understands better the School timetable requirements/delivery patterns. This will support better understanding of challenges around spaces and space prioritisation.</p>	
15	The review team recognised the School's need for greater resources to support teaching and recommend that the School go ahead with plans outlined to increase the number of TAs to support this activity.		The School significantly increased the number of school-funded PhD students beginning in 2024/25, but this still reflects a roughly flat overall number of potential TAs due to falling number of grant-funded students. Sustained investment in school-funded PhD studentships remains a School priority but may be increasingly challenging in the current financial climate.	
16	The review team recommend that the College support applications for post approval for teaching administrators and Student Advisors in light of increased student numbers in the School.		Response from Head of College: We reached a conclusion with SoPA about the posts that were being requested, and in particular the student advisor posts mentioned. We have done that constructively together with the School since we are not able to fund all posts across the School and College currently. In these discussions, it has been very helpful that we were all able to be creative and flexible, finding a solution that supports them in the short to medium term where their situation is particularly challenging at the moment, meaning that we are providing some replacement and also introducing a roving student support role for the whole College who will begin in SoPA but when some	

			members of staff return this role this could support student support teams in other Schools if required.	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	The IPR Summary report is shared with Student Reps and recommendations will be discussed at the SSLC meetings.		
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review			