

The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review

14 week/ response report

Internal Periodic Review of: All Undergraduate provision and Master of Social Work and Advanced Professional Studies

Date of review: 19th and 20th of March 2024

Date of 14 week response: 26th of September 2024

Date of year on response: 6th of June 2025

The review area (School/Deanery/College) 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 (Assessment and Feedback)	<p>The review team recommends that the School must address the student experience and perception of widespread delays in the return of assessment and feedback. The three- week assessment and feedback return dates should be more consistently and visibly advertised and communicated (primarily, albeit not necessarily exclusively, at individual course level) to students than is currently the case.</p> <p>The number of individual instances in which assessment and feedback is not completed and returned to students within three weeks must be significantly reduced, with an aspiration to eradicate these completely. In all circumstances where the three-week turnaround cannot be met, students must be informed of the delay and given a new deadline for return of marks; this should happen prior to the expiry of the standard three-week deadline for return of marks. The communication protocols and processes referred to above must be</p>	<p>Academic year 2024/25</p> <p>To be reviewed at one year response in June 2025 and as part of QA reporting in August 2025</p>	<p>Delays in return of assessment and feedback</p> <p>In 2023/24 we initiated work to ensure that, with some allowed exceptions, all work was marked, moderated and returned to students within three weeks of being submitted. It is worth noting that a) the date of submission is the date at which the “drop box” to which that piece of work has been submitted closes and b) again, there are some exceptions to this expectation, which have been sanctioned by CAHSS. These are as follows: 1) assessed components that are double-marked (dissertation) and summative assessments on very large courses where marking is done by four or more people and the burden of moderation is such that a three-week turnaround would be unachievable without compromising quality assurance. Even with these two exceptions, all students should be provided with a clear and published date by which they may expect the return of marked and moderated assessments, and this date should not exceed four weeks from the date of submission.</p>	

adopted and implemented on a School-wide basis.

The requirement for timely return of marked and moderated work was communicated to Heads of Subject (HoSAs), Directors of Undergraduate Teaching (DUGTs) and Programme Directors (PDs) and Course Organisers (COs) in regular briefings and communications, including in HoSA meetings with Head of School (HoS), to DUGTs and PDs at meetings of SPS Education Committee, and to COs in routine briefings at the start of the academic year and CO Handbook as well as in our regular CO “newsletter”, which the Learning and Teaching Directorate of SPS issues every two weeks. The latter means of communication, which we inaugurated in AY 2023-24 has proved a particularly effective as it is both well-designed, useful for COs who are in the midst of doing their work and seems to have been welcomed by academic staff.

Since AY 2023-24, and in alignment with requests from CAHSS, we regularly audit our attainment of three-week target for the return of marked and moderated assessment and oriented towards achieving the institutional KPI of at least 80% of assessments being returned on time. The results of this audit are discussed by the L&T Directorate (a standing item at weekly meetings) to further refine our messaging and strategy in this area. They are also reported to HoS, and CAHSS, and, from AY 2024-25, will be made a standing item at SPS’ Management Committee. This audit also extends to the quality of communication to students in cases where the return of marked assessments is delayed, with the clear expectation being that COs inform students of any delay to that return.

Underpinned by, and in conjunction with, this audit we have also established, in semester 2 of AY 2023-24 a “Delayed Return of Feedback - Reminder and Escalation Process” designed to

intervene in cases where this target is not being met and to support CO and marking teams to ensure that any delay is brief and that students are fully informed of any delay and are provided with achievable amended deadlines for the return of marked and moderated assessments. This escalation process begins with a reminder to COs, then draws in more senior staff, including HoSAs, School-level Directors and, if the situation is matter of acute concern, HoS. The aim of this process is not only to support COs and marking-teams to ensure the timely return of assessed work, but also to ensure there is a culture-shift by which the timely return of assessed work becomes a matter of care and concern at all levels of the School, from CO to HoS.

We are also collecting data concerning student experience in relation to the timely return of assessments, and the quality of communication in this area, not only through NSS, but by introducing this (in AY 2023-24) as an agenda item of Subject-Area level Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings. In AY 2024-25, we will also look to make better use of aggregate course evaluation data to provide some better insight into this area of concern.

Moving forward into 2024-25 there is still scope for considerable progress. On the whole we are falling short of the 80% KPI. The infrastructure, in terms of training and routine communication, is in place and this has supported a cultural shift whereby the timely return of feedback is gaining much greater attention as an area of concern at all levels. A key emphasis going forward will be to make better use of routine audit and, in particular, to ensure that “reminder and escalation process” is being adhered to assiduously (which was not always the case in 2023-24). We will also take

			<p>forward work to ensure that all LEARN sites have clear and correct information in relation to the return of marked assessments. There is a routine expectation that COs will communicate (via information of the LEARN site) the dates by which marked and moderated assessments on the course will be returned; however, adherence to this expectation is not (yet) universal and some greater oversight will, it is anticipated, support greater compliance with this expectation.</p> <p>We will also continue with the routine of communication to HoSAs, DUGTs and PDs, and to generate data concerning student experience, including by, once again, making a discussion of assessment and feedback a standing item on SSLCs as well as other student fora (see Student Voice below).</p> <p>Communications to students: From semester 1 2024/25, progress in this area will be communicated to students via subject area SSLCs. In semester 1 school focus will be on ensuring internal processes are fully embedded, and during this time we consider and prepare for other methods and routes to communicate progress to students in Semester 2.</p>	
2 (Assessment and Feedback)	<p>The review team recommends that the School commits to achieving enhanced strategic oversight and planning ability regarding choreography and confirmed sequencing of course assessment deadline planning across its large portfolio of courses. This recommendation is made in significant part to support the achievement of another of this review’s recommendations regarding maximisation of School-wide compliance with returning</p>	<p>For start of semester 2 2025, to implement any possible actions identified from 13th Nov EdCom</p>	<p>This issue has been raised at Education Committee and conversations have taken place with CAHSS to see if there is any mechanism to allow for a broader range of dates for submission, particularly at or after teaching in semester 2. Unfortunately, the structure of the University academic year, including the time between term ending and the vacation periods (especially in semester 2) is brief. Course organisers consider that having deadlines before week 11 does not provide sufficient time for students to digest the</p>	

	<p>feedback within three weeks of assessment submission, as set out in the University's Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities. Such support will stem from enhanced ability to pre-emptively identify potential staff assessment and feedback bottlenecks, most especially, for PGR and GH tutors and demonstrators</p>	<p>discussions or confirm if barriers make a school level solution impractical.</p>	<p>course and work on final assessments. This means that assessment timings tend to congregate around the period immediately before and after the spring vacation. In discussing this situation, it was made clear that we cannot ask students to submit work for assessment during spring vacation and therefore, assuming summative assessments should encompass all the teaching on a course, we are left with a very narrow window to allow for the submission of assessment. Given the wealth of course choice, it is difficult to create a schedule or map assessment deadlines in a useful way.</p> <p>We have no evidence that bottlenecks of assessment create particular challenges for GH tutors as they rarely mark on multiple courses. It should be underscored that generally, in allocating work to tutors, we seek to avoid tutors marking on multiple courses both to control workload but also ensure efficiencies to be gained by a tutor focussing on the syllabus for a single course, rather than multiple courses.</p> <p>A possible approach might be to provide students with support/ guidance on time management.</p> <p>Ways to better sequence course assessments will be a focus for the school's Education Committee. The Education Committee will ask programme directors to look at the assessments for their core courses at honours level and consider whether there may be room for adjustments to timing or types of assessment which may alleviate the bottlenecks of assessments. In particular, we will work with DUGTs and PDs to, at least, improve the quality of oversight of the various deadlines, particularly on compulsory courses with the assumption that some greater quality of visibility will support improve planning and coordination in this area.</p>	
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<p>3 (Assessment and Feedback)</p>	<p>The review team commends the existing, early-stage School-wide introduction of standard grade descriptors and rubrics and student feedback templates for use by all academic staff engaged in assessment and feedback.</p> <p>The review team recommends that the School should build on this by implementing and formally monitoring progress towards fully comprehensive and consistent use of standardised grade descriptor and rubric tools in assessment and feedback by all markers and across all subject areas. In addition to the pedagogical rationale for this recommendation, it is also made in significant part to support the achievement of the recommendation above regarding maximisation of School-wide compliance with three- week assessment and feedback turnaround. Such support will stem from standardisation and streamlining of staff assessment and feedback effort hours. Introducing a more systematic approach will support consistency and should also enhance training for GH tutors.</p>	<p>Academic year 2024/25</p> <p>To be reviewed at one year response in June 2025 and as part of QA reporting in August 2025</p>	<p>Standard Grade Descriptors and Rubrics For academic year 2024-25 the school introduced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refreshed grade descriptors and associated rubrics for our “standard” types of assessments (essays and exams). It should be noted that such grade descriptors and rubrics already existed, but these have been enhanced through a review of best-practice from within SPS and other Schools in CAHSS. These new and improved grade descriptors and associated rubrics will become the standard beginning in semester 2 AY 2024-25.; • a repository of exemplar rubrics and grade descriptors for major non-standard assessments (for example, policy briefs and group presentations). Given the diversity of assessments and learning outcomes associated with assessments, there grade descriptors and rubrics are considered to be a resource, which COs can either use as they are or adapt according to the specific requirements of a given assessment. Again, this resource will be made available to COs beginning in semester 2, AY 2024-25.; • a guidance document on key principles for designing effective marking criteria and rubrics, which was available from the beginning of AY2024-25; • updated standard Learn page templates to provide more information on assessment, including assessment criteria/rubrics and feedback processes, which have been available from the 	
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beginning of AY2024-25 (although further development is required, working in conjunction with TEL team in SPS);

- a guidance document on key principles and minimum standards for written feedback, which has been available from the beginning of AY 2024-25.
- updates to moderation forms to include an assessment of feedback standards, which will be in place for the moderation of assessments submitted in semester 1 AY 2024-25.

All of this is supported by the “Assessment and Feedback Hub for SPS Courses” a SharePoint site available to Academic Staff and GH tutors as of the beginning of AY 2024-25.

GH Tutoring

The school has worked with the Director of Tutor Development to incorporate generic marking criteria and the use of rubrics into tutor training. Enhancements in this area were integrated into the training offered to GH tutors at the beginning of AY 2024-25. GH tutors also have access to the SPS “Assessment and Feedback Hub.”

Monitoring progress

Teaching Teams will carry out checks on Learn pages to ensure required sections on rubrics and grade descriptors have been completed. Completion rates will be reported at the Semester 1 Education Committee and to Heads of Subject Area. If return rates are low, the school will work with its committees to set targets and implement strategies to reach those targets. If, on the basis of these checks,

			there are concerns about the kind and quality of information available on the LEARN page, these we will be raised with COs as well as being discussed with HoSA and in Education Committee, with a view to ensuring the required information is available to students in Semester 1, AY 2024-25.	
4 (Tutors and demonstrators)	<p>The review team was of the opinion that the current School recruitment and contracting, line management and staff mentoring and development processes for PGR tutors for the duration of their contributing to the above-noted issues regarding scope for enhancement of assessment and feedback processes and student experience of these.</p> <p>The review team recommends that the School leadership should be supported by College to continue to implement and expand the School's already- existing and productive early-stage enhancements of internal processes relating to PGR tutor recruitment, training and mentoring, and performance management.</p>	<p>Academic year 2024/25</p> <p>To be reviewed at one year response in June 2025 and as part of QA reporting in August 2025</p>	<p>The school has a well-established training offering. We would welcome exploring initiatives related to mentoring and performance management that are scalable to the size of the GH tutor body in the school.</p> <p>College has stated that a working group will be established to cover tutor and demonstrator issues. We hope the working group will cover these issues and look forward to hearing more and contributing to enhancements around these issues</p>	
5 (Tutors and demonstrators)	<p>The review team recommends that the School leadership should be supported by College HR and Finance colleagues to develop a business case around alternative staffing models capable of reforming the School's current structural dependence on a number of PGR and GH tutors and demonstrators so extensive as to potentially complicate successful achievement of the review's priority 1 recommendations on Assessment and Feedback set out within the table of recommendations above.</p>	<p>School level, to be reviewed in Feb 2025 as part of Teaching planning for 2025/26.</p> <p>College to confirm timeline for</p>	<p>In the past two months the school, after discussion with its Management committee, instituted an operational change, agreeing that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GH tutors will not ordinarily mark any student work that counts towards a final degree classification. GH tutors will not ordinarily be available to provide small group teaching on courses with 72 or fewer students <p>Implementing the above has initially resulted in a 10% reduction in the hours that we would have</p>	

		staffing model exploration.	<p>otherwise requested in our GH JRBC for 24/25. And we anticipate further reductions in 25/26.</p> <p>We look forward to discussion and support from College in exploring other staffing models. Update from College contributing to this item is welcome.</p>	
6 (Resources and staffing)	<p>The review team recommends that the College Management Group should support the School to liaise and cooperate with the relevant partner Schools (most of which sit within the College or Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) to plan and resource support for cohort and community-building initiatives and events specifically targeted at joint degree students. This recommendation would also support the School's chosen subject-specific remit item on community and belonging.</p>	School action for 2024/25 academic session	<p>No update from School required, recommendation is for College Management Group</p> <p>Student Advice and Support team will ensure that all students enrolled in degree programmes where our school is the second named are included in communications. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing clear numbers and details of these students in respective subject areas. • Setting up and developing email lists to facilitate easy communication throughout the academic year. • Designating a clear academic contact for these students. • Continuously working to extend activities to include these students, particularly focusing on areas such as careers and skills development <p>College Response</p> <p>CAHSS has established a new Student Life Committee, which will have oversight of the operation of the student support model, as well as various non-academic/extra-curricular aspects of student life, across the College. This committee will incorporate the Directors of Students from each of our Schools, together with other senior colleagues. It is intended that the remit of this Committee will include such matters as cohort building and sense of belonging, and that Directors of Students will bring to the</p>	

			<p>Committee any issues that impact on their ability to deliver the model for their joint degree students. The Committee will first meet in September 2024.</p>	
<p>7(Student voice)</p>	<p>The review team commends the School's existing recognition of the value of enhancing learning and teaching through the instigation of a strategic, enhancement-related, fixed-term working group and small projects culture. This relatively recent addition to School working culture also provides opportunities for staff professional development and career progression. The review team recommends that the School should build further on this by designing student voice and partnership-led working groups and small project initiatives that recruit and involve student members from the outset. There may also be opportunities for student internships to support this, similar to the structure of the School's Student Development Office (SDO)-convened Widening Participation (WP) group discussed later in this report.</p>	<p>Over current academic year (long term 12 – 18 months)</p>	<p>Learning and Teaching directorate to develop and implement a strategy to have student involvement in future and current working groups/ small projects.</p> <p>As of September 2024, the School has created a "Student Life" committee, whose membership is drawn from Subject Areas, the Student Advice and Support Team, The Student Development Office and the Learning and Teaching Directorate. It should also be noted that, in part to begin addressing the very issue raised in this report (and to set example for other school- and subject-area level committees concerned with learning, teaching and student experience), there are four student representatives on this committee, including a representative from our Peer-Assisted-Learning scheme (PALs), one of our WP "champions", and our two SPS student representatives (UG and PG). This committee will support several "task and finish" groups relating to matters of student voice and inclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The former WP working group, will become a task and finish group with a remit to develop a WP strategy for SPS. Both WP champions will be members of this group. • Making use of the SPS "small projects" initiative, we may also consider (although this requires some further discussion) a task and finish group relating to the inclusion and experience of students from East Asia studying in SPS. Again, this task and finish group would include student members. 	<p>Student Life committee set up completed, Sept 2024</p>

			<p>Allied to this work, SPS will create a task and finish group, which reports to the Student Life Committee, Education Committee and finally Management Committee, specifically to develop a strategy for enhancing student voice in SPS. This strategy will be delivered in the Spring of 2025, with full implementation to take place in academic year 2025-26. Indicative areas to be addressed by this task and finish group area: 1) enhancing, and making better use of, course-level student feedback, 2) ensuring that subject area level “staff student liaison” committees are lively and effective forums by which the student voice can inform the enhancement of learning, teaching and student experience at the subject area level; 3) greatly enhancing student representation and voice on subject area and school committees and working groups with a concern for learning, teaching and student experience; 4) developing models of recognition and reward for students who are participating in discussions and work towards enhancing learning, teaching and student experience in SPS (internships are one model, there are others). This high-level task and finish group will be led by the Director of Students in SPS.</p>	
8 (Student voice)	<p>The review team also heard about and discussed with colleagues other, comparably laudable and important small project and working group initiatives where student voice was either absent or was included later in the process, such as recent EDI and decolonising the curriculum-related activities. The review team recommends that students are involved within all School Learning and Teaching-related fixed-term small project and working group initiatives from the outset in future, to ensure that the student voice is integral to discussion and ultimate decision- making within such</p>	Over current academic year (long term 12 – 18 months)	<p>To be considered along with of recommendation 7. See detail above.</p> <p>As stated, we will ensure the involvement of students in any task and finish groups (aka working groups) addressing learning, teaching and student experience, including the high-level group developing a strategy to enhance student voice.</p> <p>The Student Development Office’s (SDOs) commitment to supporting student led initiatives is ongoing and funds are ringfenced to enable this activity. Working with our Subject Area</p>	

	<p>initiatives. The review team also noted that the Student Development Office are currently seeking opportunities for student-led activity and for directing students to ongoing initiatives: the School is encouraged to actively promote these facts and opportunities to all staff and students, both in the period immediately following this report's publication and also longer term.</p>		<p>Cohort Leads, Programme Directors as well as the Student Advisors, the leadership in the SDO, working with the Learning and Teaching Directorate, will look to actively promote this scheme.</p> <p>As suggested above, the newly inaugurated Student Life Committee, should provide an important forum to discuss, coordinate and support work in this area.</p>	
9 (Curriculum and employability)	<p>The School is encouraged to ensure students understand the skills they are gaining throughout their programme of study. The review team recommends that the School reviews its portfolio of core courses across all subject areas. Most specifically, in relation to student feedback received during the review team visit, the portfolio review should focus on potential ways to ensure and enhance effective explanation and communication of the relevance of all core and compulsory courses to the students taking these. In order to establish a more comprehensively shared understanding between students and staff of programme structure there needs to be explicit communication of the intended learning outcomes, graduate attributes and skills students will gain all from core and compulsory components of their programmes.</p>	<p>Initial work for portfolio review to be completed Dec 2024</p> <p>Ongoing work over next three years (depending on major/minor programme changes identified) and in line with developments under CTP.</p>	<p>UG portfolio course review is anticipated to conclude in December 2024. There will be a focus on efficiency and strategies to ensure clear explanation to students of the relevance of core and compulsory courses as well as overview to ensure explicit communication of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> intended learning outcomes, graduate attributes skills students will gain all from core and compulsory components of their programmes <p>This area of work is closely connected to the planned changes which will be required by the roll out of the Curriculum Transformation project (CTP), particularly at program level. In the meantime, we will keep these issues under review and consider whether there are mechanisms for this information (which is already held in CCAM) to be carried over onto a more visible part of course Learn sites so that is more easily accessible for students.</p>	
10 Student voice (closing the feedback loop)	<p>The review team recommends that the School implements both existing and, where necessary, new enhanced mechanisms to ensure clear and widely visible communication and explanation, to students and staff alike, of where specific enhancement-related action has been taken in response to student feedback received</p>	<p>Course evaluations – initial changes implemented for 2024/25 academic year. To be</p>	<p>In their annual quality reports, programme directors drew attention to the low response rate to individual course midpoint and end of course evaluation surveys and the difficulty this presents in relation to providing feedback on feedback. To address this issue at the start of academic year 2024/25 we have made some revisions to the standard evaluation template for individual</p>	<p>Course evaluations – initial changes implemented for 2024/25 academic year.</p>

	<p>through mechanisms such as (but not exclusively limited to) course evaluation surveys and student-staff liaison committees. The same point applies to all future instances where the School, or a component part of it, deems that specific enhancement- related actions are unnecessary, undesirable and/or impossible to implement. Design and implementation of a School-wide standardised approach to such communications may support ensuring consistency and effectiveness across all subject areas. Such enhanced closing of the feedback loop could support both increased levels and enhanced forms of student engagement with feedback processes and mechanisms.</p>	<p>reviewed April 2025 as part of School QA reporting.</p> <p>Work on ‘closing the feedback loop’ initial you said we did project to be completed for week 5 semester 1. Collaborate with Student Reps to refine and enhance this process continuously. A progress report will be included in the June 1-year report.</p>	<p>courses. Course organisers are expected to use this or to develop bespoke evaluations. Given the problem with low response rates, course organisers will be encouraged to ask students to complete these evaluations in class. Course organisers will then be encouraged to provide feedback to students either through Learn sites or other class-wide communications. During 2024/25 we will implement feedback and “closing the loop” process by introducing templates for SSLCs, standardising how we communicate how feedback is used, or why it may not be actionable. By collaborating with subject areas and representatives, we will create a living log of ongoing reflections with work starting in semester 1 2024 and continuing beyond. This concern will also fall within the remit of the task and finish group which will be developing a strategy, translated into recommendations for concrete actions, relating to student voice. Please also see response provided to item 7 (student voice).</p>	
<p>11 (Student support)</p>	<p>The review team recommends that the School undertakes a systematic sense-check (between academic staff, professional services staff and students) regarding those different communities’ sometimes divergent respective senses of how successful implementation of the new student support model and academic cohort lead systems has so far proved to be within the School. The School should, for example, be well-placed to input to the forthcoming Senate Quality Assurance Committee evaluation of the new student support model, to share learning and good practice at the appropriate time, through the Head of School</p>	<p>Ongoing work during 2024/25 update provided on progress as part of June 1 year on report</p>	<p>On the basis, of a report completed by the outgoing Director of Students (to be submitted to Management Committee October 2024) there is clearly a requirement to better understand the diversity of experience in this area, where some staff and students are reporting very positive developments in relation to the Student Support Model (SSM) and others less so.</p> <p>It is clear from this report that the area of concern lies less with the work of Student Advisors, whose work, particularly in relation to supporting students who may be struggling with their studies due to health or personal issues, is much-praised, and more so with the role of Cohort Leads, the coordination and value of cohort- and</p>	<p>Student Life committee set up completed</p>

community-building activities and the quality of academic support that students are receiving from cohort leads and other members of academic staff (COs etc.).

Further reflection, evaluation and review in relation to these areas of concern will be taken forward in 2024-25, building on some of the recommendations of the aforementioned report. Amongst other things, this report suggests that cohort- and community-activities are more successful if timetabled and more closely integrated into degree programmes (and so in this sense more clearly “academic” or aligned to employability agendas). It also suggests that the cohort- and community-building activities would benefit from greater coordination and oversight at the School and, particularly, Subject Area levels.

Moving forward into AY 2024-25 the Director of Students will work closely with the Student Development Manager and Head of Student Support and Experience, as well as other colleagues in the Teaching and Learning Directorate, to create an infrastructure that would allow for cohort- and community-building events to be proposed, coordinated and evaluated in a more routine and visible manner, and to have this work underpinned by clear, but adaptable, metrics of success which will allow for a better appreciation on the return on investment (including the investment of staff time) and the quality of student experience. This work will enable SPS to make a substantive, evidence-based contribution to higher-level evaluations of the SSM, while also informing local improvement efforts in this area.

This work will be supported by the SPS Student Life Committee, which has been brought into being in 2024-25. More generally, a more robust

		<p>approach to having student voice inform our understanding of effective approaches to enhancing student experience and meaningful (in the context of academic and career aspirations) cohort- and community-building activities, will enhance work in this area (see Student Voice above).</p> <p>Drawing on empirical evidence concerning the success of cohort- and community-building activities and a more granular appreciation of the student experience of academic support in SPS, the Director of Students will produce another reflective report, with recommendations for improvement, to be submitted to Management Committee in the summer of 2025.</p>	
	Please report on steps taken to feedback to students on the outcomes of the review	Initial report has been shared with the School UG rep through their membership of the Education Committee. Further communications, including the responses in this document, will be shared with the student body through Staff Student Liaison Committees	
For Year on response only	Any examples of a positive change as a result of the review		