University of Glasgow

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA)

Review of the Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences: 8 February 2008

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the Department of Geographical and Earth Sciences. Reviews of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) are internal subject reviews focused on the quality of provision as experienced by students. The review looks at the range of programmes, course content, the teaching methods employed, assessment, facilities and much more.

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_104280_en.pdf

Further information about the DPTLA process can be found at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qae/dptla/

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel commends the Department on the successful merger of the Department of Geography & Geomatics with the Division of Earth Sciences and on the strong sense of community amongst its students. Although a number of recommendations have been made, the Panel has no concerns regarding the quality of the Department, its provision or operation.

Key Strengths

- The open and dynamic environment, supportive of change and *enhancement*, fostered by the Department
- Excellent teaching provision given the high level of research currently being undertaken in the Department
- Commitment to student fieldwork
- Enthusiastic and committed teaching staff who have created a close-knit community with strong staff-student relationships

- The Department's concern for, and awareness of, the *employability* of its graduates which it promotes through the curriculum
- Strong industry links
- Ongoing developments in student learning at undergraduate level
- Broad range of provision across Earth Sciences and Geography
- Developmental approach to undergraduate *Graduate Teaching Assistants*
- Excellent efforts in undergraduate recruitment, including the recruitment website, the Recruitment and *Employability* Committee and excellent connections with Secondary Schools in Scotland
- Smooth transition following the merger of the two departments

Areas to be improved or enhanced[1]

1. **Quality of Learning Opportunities**
   a) The concerns of current MSc students, regarding operational issues with their programme, to be addressed as a matter of urgency. [Paragraph 4.7.2]

   NOTE: The Department's Director of Learning, Teaching and Assessment met with the MSc students shortly after the Review to agree an action plan. The Review Panel commends the Department for its prompt and thorough response and anticipates an up-date on the action plan as part of the Department's response to this report.

2. **Assessment, Feedback and Achievement**
   a) The nature and extent of the feedback that will be provided should be communicated clearly to students. [Paragraph 4.3.2]
   b) Dissertation Supervisors should follow agreed procedures on proof reading dissertations and the Department should consider providing further guidelines for staff and students to ensure a consistent approach and expectations. [Paragraph 4.3.4]
   c) Guidance from the *Code of Assessment* Working Group on the use of the full scale available in the *Code of Assessment* should be sought in order to encourage fuller use of the higher grades. [Paragraph 4.3.3]

3. **Curriculum Design, Development and Content**
   a) The benefits of the portfolio approach in Earth Sciences to be explained to students at the recruitment stage, making particular reference to *employability*. [Paragraph 4.4.2]

4. **Student Progression, Retention and Support**
   a) The careers information provided on the website to be expanded to include information on opportunities to study abroad. [Paragraph 4.6.3]
   b) The level of University support provided in relation to students with disabilities to be reviewed. [Paragraph 4.6.5]

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[1] Numbers refer to the paragraphs in the full report that contain the relevant discussion.

5. **Resources**
   a) Faculty to consider the relocation of the Department to a single site in order to address staff concerns regarding communication difficulties and duplication of tasks. [Paragraph 4.8.9]
   b) The effect of the *generic undergraduate regulations* on student numbers and associated *staff student ratios* to be monitored. [Paragraph 4.8.2]
   c) The *workload model*, allocation of work and mentoring practice to be communicated more clearly to new staff. [Paragraph 4.8.4]
   d) A handbook for new staff to be produced detailing all departmental procedures. [Paragraph 4.8.4]
   e) Responsibility for ensuring that IT and software issues are managed and resolved in a timely manner to be allocated to a member of departmental staff. [Paragraph 4.8.6]
   f) Additional training in the use of *MOODLE* to be provided for staff who wish it. [Paragraph 4.8.7]
   g) A *MOODLE* site for staff to share experience and expertise in using the software to be established. [Paragraph 4.8.7]
   h) Additional training for *GTAs* to be explored with the *Learning and Teaching Centre* [Paragraph 4.8.5]

6. **Student Recruitment**
   a) The link from the recruitment web-site to the main Department page to be highlighted to make it easier to find. [Paragraph 4.5.1]

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Code of Assessment

The University's Code of Assessment (implemented 2002-03) is a code of practice designed to provide a fair and rational means of assessing students' performance. It provides instructions to staff on how assessment should be designed and carried out. It sets out verbal descriptions of each of the eight grades from A to H. Students' work is judged against these descriptions in terms of how well they have met the stated intended learning outcomes of the course or other assessed component and the corresponding grade is awarded. A guide to the Code of Assessment for students is available from the Senate Office

Employability

Employability is about more than being able to get a job after University. It is about acknowledging and being able to articulate achievements, understanding and personal attributes that will contribute to success both during, and after, University.

Enhancement

The University has adopted the Quality Assurance Agency's definition of 'enhancement' which is - 'the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities.'

Generic Regulations for Undergraduate or Postgraduate Programmes

Generic regulations describe the common features of all undergraduate programmes and the common features of each type of programme (general, designated, honours, integrated masters or professional). The Generic Regulations are supplemented by specific regulations

for each degree (such as BSc or MA). All regulations are published in the University Calendar. (see Senate Office Website)

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators are students, usually research students, who assist with teaching in the form of tutorials, labs and other activities that are part of undergraduate programmes in the department. They are paid an hourly rate by the University.

Learning and Teaching Centre

The Learning and Teaching Centre is a University Service Department whose role is to "help implement and develop the University's Learning and Teaching strategy, identify, assess and disseminate new developments and good practice which serve to enhance the student learning experience, and will work with colleagues throughout the University to bring about change".

Moodle

Moodle is the University's supported virtual learning environment (VLE).

Staff:Student Ratios

The Staff:Student Ratio describes the number of students to each member of staff, either in the Department, Faculty or University.

Workload Model (Staff)

A workload model is a means of describing the workload of all members of staff and should be used by Departments to ensure that staff workloads are manageable and allocated fairly with different types of work appropriately distributed.