

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**Academic Standards Committee - Friday 25 May 2007**

**Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of the Department of Physics held on 23 February 2006**

**Ms Helen Clegg, Clerk to the Review Panel**

**May 2007**

**Conclusions**

The Panel concluded that the Department's provision was of a high quality overall, and in particular wished to commend the Department on the following points:

- its inclusive report to preparing the Self Evaluation Report (Paragraph 2)
- its extremely thorough assessment process and the care given to quality assurance in this area (Paragraph 7)
- the way in which it was supporting the new University Teacher posts (Paragraph 10.2.1)

**Minor Points for Consideration by the Department**

- The Panel wished to draw the Department's attention to several minor points which it may wish to consider:
- Review of the physics component of the 'Physics for Engineers' course, to ensure it retains relevance and does not unnecessarily repeat Advanced Higher material
- The potential of offering an 'Away Weekend' for Physics students in conjunction with the Physics Society
- Provision of careers advice towards the end of Level 2

**Points for Wider Discussion**

The Panel wished to draw attention to several issues that were deemed to be of wider relevance than to the single Department:

- There was still concern over the operation of the Code of Assessment
- Difficulties in contacting some early first year students led to the general conclusion that students should not be considered to be fully registered until they had attended, and contributed to, a certain number of tutorials
- The view was taken that a University-wide policy should be considered regarding sanctions that could be used to discourage non-attendance

- The issue of subject-specific interests required to be raised with the organisers of the New Lecturer Programme

### **Recommendations:**

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report, and summarised below, are made in the spirit of encouragement in order to enhance the already high standards of the Department of Physics & Astronomy. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the corresponding sections of the report, and are ranked in order of priority.

#### *Recommendation 1.*

It was **recommended** that initial investigations be undertaken immediately into making the student Common Room and the IT Suite accessible to students with disabilities (Paragraph 10.2.3)

**Action: Head of Department; Territorial Vice-Principal**

#### *Response: Territorial Vice Principal*

I have requested that Estates and Buildings give us an estimate of the costs of installing disabled access to the student common room and IT Suite.

#### *Response: Head of Department*

Provision of the recommended access routes has been considered a number of times during the year, but each time progress has been frustrated by developments outwith our control.

1. The works required for each of the access routes (a single floor elevator between levels 3 and 4 to access the common room, a fold-away platform lift to access the computer cluster in room 333) were identified early in the year and rough costings made (hardware only).
2. Upon discussing the requirements with Graham Bell (E&B) at the beginning of October, it became apparent that the fund identified by the Vice-Principal for performing Disabled Access work had been virtually spent.
3. A certain amount of Faculty money did become available in January 2007. However following an enquiry by the Faculty secretary, it became apparent that, as E&B were short staffed, there would not be any project management effort available to manage significant projects. Hence the provision of the inter-floor lift, which would require significant building work was ruled out. We will continue to press for this work to be carried out as soon as practicable.
4. E&B have accepted that installation of the fold-away platform to access the computer cluster could be done essentially by a contractor and that it could therefore be completed in the current financial year. However despite a number of follow-up enquiries, nothing has yet been done.

#### *Recommendation 2.*

The Panel **recommended** that the Department take further steps to ensure that more explicit safety guidance be given, in addition to the provision of safety manuals, and ensure that these tightened procedures are strictly followed (Paragraph 10.1.2)

**Action: Head of Department**

*Recommendation 3.*

The Panel **recommended** that the Department devise a means of providing regular feedback to the demonstrator/supervisors on their performance, in order to encourage good practice (Paragraph 10.2.2)

**Action: Head of Department**

*Joint response to Recommendation 2 and 3*

These two recommendations were considered as a pair as they both involved undergraduate laboratory procedures. The first step in meeting the recommendations involved an email reminder, sent by the (new) Head of Department, to Lab Heads detailing the content of these recommendations, with a request to report to the (new) Chair of the Teaching Committee about how the Lab Head proposed to meet these recommendations for the session 2006-07. The response received was judged by the TC Chair and by the HoD to be patchy at best. Hence it was decided to send out a note describing the actions which would be required of Lab Heads throughout the Department to implement the recommendations properly. This paper is based on current best practice, and on suggestions by the TC Chair and by members of the Departmental Management Team, who considered the relevant questions carefully. The revised document is included as [Appendix 1](#) of this response.

By the time the document had been prepared and agreed it had become too late for it to be implemented in the session 2006-07. Hence it will be distributed to the new group of Lab-Heads in May 2007 (who have now been identified) for full implementation in the next session.

*Recommendation 4.*

The Panel **recommended** that the Department's policy on direct entry for holders of Advanced Higher be reviewed (Paragraph 9.1.3)

**Action: Head of Department**

This recommendation has been considered in principle by Teaching Committee and by the Management Team. In principle we are in favour of second year entry for a limited number provided that suitable safeguards and escape routes can be put in place.

However since the DPTLA report was written, a new factor has emerged which is relevant, the foundation of the Kaplan International College. The Faculty of Physical Sciences is a full participant in this programme, and is committed to accepting second year entrants who have been through the KIC in September 2008. However within Physics and Astronomy, it is recognised that the proposed Kaplan Foundation Physics syllabus falls short in several key areas of the regular first year Physics syllabus in the Department. (For Astronomy, there is no material in the Kaplan Foundation Course at all, which creates even more problems.) The current proposal is to deal with these potential shortcomings by introducing approximately 20 credits of conversion material to be taken by Kaplan students in parallel with their P2 course. This new conversion course is currently being developed, with a view to it being taken to the Board of Studies in January 2008, for implementation in the following September.

As we shall be delivering the new conversion course in any case, it gives us the opportunity to offer it also to second year entrants from a UK educational background. This will ease their entry to a programme which is designed to commence at level 1. It has always been our worry that, for all but the very best students, direct entry would

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prove too demanding and that we would end up by disillusioning perfectly viable students. We are now confident that with the new arrangements, we will be better able to accommodate a significant minority of second year entry students. Our response therefore to this recommendation is to implement second year entry from 2008. This has already been included in the latest version of the prospectus.

*Prepared by: Janet Fleming, Senate Office*

*Last modified on: Thursday 10 May 2007*