

# UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

## Academic Standards Committee - Friday 27 May 2011

### Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of the School of Psychology

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

#### Review Panel:

Professor Frank Coton	Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) (Convener)
Dr Catriona Morrison	University of Leeds (External Subject Specialist)
Mr Florian Weber	Students' Representative Council
Dr Douglas Thomson	School of Engineering (Cognate Member)
Professor Billy Martin	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Cathy Bovill	Learning and Teaching Centre
Mrs Ruth Cole	Senate Office (Clerk)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

- 1.1.1 The School of Psychology is one of seven schools based in the College of Science and Engineering. Psychology has been taught at Glasgow since 1907 and the School currently enjoys a ranking within the UK top 10 both for teaching (NSS) and research.
- 1.1.2 The School is located in a converted tenement building in Hillhead Street which houses most staff and research facilities, and hosts postgraduate and undergraduate teaching from Level 3, as well as tutorials and labs. Other staff and undergraduate teaching laboratories are based at the Boyd Orr Building, and lectures are delivered at several venues across the campus.
- 1.1.3 The previous review of Psychology carried out by the University was the Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) review in 2005.
- 1.1.4 The Self Evaluation Report was prepared by members of the Teaching Management Group, which included student representatives. Input was invited from all staff and student representatives, with the draft document being available to all for comment.
- 1.1.5 The Review Panel considered the SER to be exemplary in its honest and reflective approach, and found that it delivered a comprehensive and engaging account of the School's activities, describing many areas of impressive innovation and good practice. The Panel **commends** the School on this. (*Commendation 1*)

1.1.6 During the one day visit (25 February), the Review Panel met with: the Dean (Learning and Teaching), Professor David Fearn; the newly appointed Head of School, Professor Philippe Schyns; the Depute Head of School, Professor Paddy O'Donnell; and the Director of Teaching, Professor Stephany Biello. The Panel also met with 26 members of staff (including support staff), 7 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), 12 postgraduate taught (PGT) students and 18 undergraduate students.

1.1.7 The School has 32 members of academic staff (31.8 FTE), two temporary teaching assistants (1.5 FTE), hourly paid teaching assistants (3.5 FTE), and a support staff of 10.7 FTE.

1.1.8 Student numbers for Session 2010-11 are as follows:

<b>Students</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Level 1	454	149.8
Level 2	309	101.9
Level 3 (Single)	122	122
Level 3 (Joint)	15	7.5
Level 3 (Designated)	28	28
Honours (Single)	117	117
Honours (Joint)	7	3.5
<b>Undergraduate Total</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>529.7</b>
Postgraduate Taught	19	19
Postgraduate Research*	27	23.9

\*(for information only - research is not covered by the Review)

1.1.9 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the School:

Undergraduate

*MA (Hons) Psychology – Single Hons*

*MA Soc Sci (Hons) Psychology – Single Hons*

*BSc (Hons) Psychology – Single Hons*

*BSc Designated Degree – Psychological Studies*

Postgraduate

*MSc Research Methods of Psychological Science*

*MSc Brain Imaging*

The School contributes to the following *joint* degree programmes offered with other Schools, in a range of subject combinations:

*MA (Hons) Psychology – Joint Hons*

*MA Soc Sci (Hons) Psychology – Joint Hons*

*BSc (Hons) Psychology - Joint Hons*

*MA (Hons) Psychology – special combinations*

The School also contributes to the following teaching to undergraduates:

*Psychology as a subject up to Level 2 in MA, MA Soc Sci and BSc.*

## **2. Overall aims of the School's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan**

The SER clearly set out the overall aims of the School's provision. The Review Panel was satisfied that the aims were appropriate, and reflected the need to meet the requirements of the British Psychological Society while also providing for those who would not go on to a career in Psychology. The Panel **commends** the emphasis given in the aims to the following: independent study, critical thinking, research skills, progression over Levels 1 – 4, employability and meeting the particular needs of the large numbers of students who come from a wide range of backgrounds. (*Commendation 2*)

## **3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience**

### *3.1 Aims*

3.1.1 The School's provision is closely aligned to subject benchmarking and the British Psychological Society's (BPS) requirements. The most recent full BPS accreditation took place in 2004 and was very positive. The Director of Teaching informed the Panel that there had been a recent 'light touch' accreditation, and the next full review was anticipated in 2012.

3.1.2 The Panel noted that the PGT masters programmes conformed to ESRC requirements.

### *3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)*

The Review Panel **commends** the School on the Intended Learning Outcomes for programmes and courses which are all laid out in the relevant programme and course specifications. The Panel was satisfied that these were well written, appropriate, and well aligned to the assessment provision within each programme and course. It also found clear evidence in the SER that the School appreciates the significance of ILOs. (*Commendation 3*)

### *3.3 Assessment, Feedback and Achievement*

#### Assessment

3.3.1 The SER clearly set out the range of assessments used, explaining the progression in demands from Level 1 through to Honours and then postgraduate level. British Psychological Society requirements determine much of the subject matter that must be assessed, and the School is also faced with the challenge of very large student numbers at Level 1 and (to a lesser extent) at Level 2. Within these constraints, the Review Panel was satisfied that the School employs a range of assessments showing progression from assessment of acquired knowledge in the early years to that of critical thinking and analysis in later years. Undergraduate students who met with the Panel mentioned that at the beginning of the Honours programme, they had been offered a helpful explanation of how the nature of the assessment at Honours differed from what they had undertaken previously.

#### Deadlines for submission of work

- 3.3.2 The undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel expressed the view that assessments were generally well spread out across the year. However, Level 3 students told the Panel that they were experiencing a significant 'bottle-neck' in the second semester, and that semester one had been much less demanding.
- 3.3.3 Staff who met with the Panel responded to this point, noting that to some extent this was an issue of time management for the students as some elements of the work should have been on-going through semester 1 and semester 2. However, it was acknowledged by staff that the issue had been raised previously and discussed with student reps, and that staff could look at ways of both easing the bottle neck and assisting the students with their time management skills.
- 3.3.4 The postgraduate students who met with the Review Panel also raised the issue of the scheduling of assessed work. They found that a lot of work was due in at the same time, and suggested that it would be better to have staggered submission dates rather than one big deadline. Staff advised the Panel that the deadlines were all published at the beginning of the programme and that students could stagger their submissions if they chose to. Again this was perceived to be largely an issue of time management.
- 3.3.5 The Review Panel **recommends** that the School reflect on its schedules for the submission of assessed work, with particular focus on Level 3 semester 2, and consider how best to support students in managing the associated workload. (*Recommendation 1*)

#### Assessment of Groupwork

- 3.3.6 The undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel discussed the issue of the assessment of groupwork. They discussed the different groupwork projects and the way that they were assessed. It was noted that in some cases the projects counted for little but the consensus appeared to be that they were content with this because of the possibility of being in a group in which not all members were fully contributing. Staff explained to the Panel that the Level 3 groupwork is facilitated by a member of staff, that dealing with group members who do not contribute fully was all part of the learning experience, and that staff were available to support groups where problems were experienced.
- 3.3.7 Also in relation to Level 3, a strong view was expressed that the low weighting for the Mini project 2 did not reflect the amount of time devoted by the students to the work (in this case, while the experimental design and collection of data were carried out by a group, the resulting research papers were written individually). At the meeting with staff, the Panel learned that it used to be the case that this project was not given any summative weighting, and that the introduction of the 10% contribution was made partly in response to student feedback. Staff were aware of students tending to spend a disproportionate amount of time on the work, and routinely advised students to bear in mind the weighting. The overall impression formed by the Panel was that students were concerned that any assessment of groupwork should be a fair reflection of their own contribution.

### Feedback on Assessment

- 3.3.8 The SER acknowledged the relatively low scores achieved in relation to feedback in the NSS. ('Feedback on my work has been prompt': 52% (2009) 61% (2010); 'I have received detailed comments on my work': 33% (2009); 51% (2010); 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand': 42% (2009); 52% (2010)) While the figures showed improvement between 2009 and 2010, the Review Panel considered that they still represented a marker of concern. Staff who met with the Panel acknowledged that part of the challenge was to communicate clearly to students that 'feedback' could come in a variety of formats and that it would therefore be provided in a variety of ways, some fairly informal and personal, and some more structured or general to a class as a whole. For Level 3, the School had introduced feedback through use of the Advanced Academic Writing Skills website. While the impact of this had not yet been evaluated, the Panel's impression was that this would prove to be a valuable resource for providing detailed feedback.
- 3.3.9 Staff who met with the Review Panel explained that they focussed on a 'feed-forward' approach, using previous work and draft submissions as the basis for guidance in relation to future submissions. At Level 4, students undertook two major pieces of work, and for both of these feedback was offered on drafts. The Panel **commends** the availability of exemplars of Critical Reviews on the Portal. (*Commendation 4*) The view expressed by staff was that a lot of work was being channelled into the provision of effective and timely feedback, but that it would take some time before the impact of this was reflected in the NSS (which represented the views of only final year students).
- 3.3.10 Postgraduate students who met with the Panel reported that the supervision they had received on their projects was very good. They noted that while they received a mark for their Statistics work there was no accompanying feedback. While acknowledging that staff were accessible and responsive to specific approaches about their work, they said that they would have liked to have received structured feedback on their coursework. They expressed the wish to have something that would 'take them forward'.
- 3.3.11 The Level 3 undergraduate students who met with the Panel referred to the formative exam undertaken at the end of semester 1. They had understood the key purpose of the exam to be to receive feedback on how to improve for the summative exams, but they had been disappointed by the limited nature of the feedback actually provided and how long it took to be returned. It was stated that the nature of the feedback varied depending on the member of staff. Staff who met with the Panel advised that markers were encouraged to give comments but it was recognised that what was provided did vary. The undergraduate students mentioned the helpful feedback that was provided on Statistics, and noted that exercises where students were able to see a range of standards of submissions were useful. Staff who met with the Panel agreed that it would be reasonably straightforward to provide more generic feedback of this nature. Just as the postgraduate students had done, the undergraduate students said that they found lecturers were happy to provide advice when approached, though some said that they would not have thought to make such an approach.

### Return of feedback

- 3.3.12 Staff reported that the aim was to comply with the University's recommended return time of three weeks. Some of the undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel had undertaken a practical exam in December but at the time

of the Panel visit had yet to receive their results. They said they were generally unclear about when work would be returned and they did not understand why it should take as long as it did. Staff explained that there had been a particularly heavy marking burden at the start of semester 2, and that clearer advice should perhaps have been given to students about the length of time it might take to return the work. One student expressed the view that while it did take a long time to receive feedback on essays, he was unlikely to refer to it until he was revising for the examinations so the delay was not significant. Another view was that the feedback was generally returned too close to the exams.

#### General conclusion on feedback

- 3.3.13 Staff who met with the Review Panel acknowledged the need to manage students' expectations in relation to the time taken to provide feedback on submitted work and on what the nature of that feedback would be. They felt that there was a constructive on-going dialogue with students on this issue (e.g. at the staff-student meetings). The Panel concurred with the staff view that it was not practicable simply to provide more and more feedback. The Director of Teaching suggested that a guide could be compiled to explain to students the various forms of feedback, indicating when these would be provided. The Panel **recommends** that such a guide be used as a springboard for on-going discussion with students on the broad issue of feedback, which should explore what other forms of feedback would be most helpful, and to lay out clearly to both staff and students expectations about the nature of feedback that should be provided and in what time frame. (*Recommendation 2*)

#### Achievement

- 3.3.14 The Review Panel formed the view that achievement of students in the School was good, with a healthy rate of first class degrees being awarded and the standard of work produced by undergraduate and postgraduate students being commended by External Examiners.

#### A grades at Levels 1 and 2

- 3.3.15 The SER highlighted the fact that at Levels 1 and 2 a relatively low proportion of students are awarded A grades. (The Review Panel also noted that few students achieve less than grade 'D' at these levels, which is **commendable**. (*Commendation 5*)) The SER indicated that the School had been aware of the issue of the low number of A grades for some time and had been working to address this. (It had also been raised at the 2005 DPTLA review.) At one of the meetings with undergraduate students it was claimed that the general view of students was that the grade A1 was never awarded.
- 3.3.16 Discussions at the staff meeting explored this issue: while A grades were awarded for individual pieces of work, aggregation of marks from the many contributing assessment components resulted in few overall grade As for courses at Levels 1 and 2. There was an impression that the five secondary bands available worked against the award of high As. Staff told the Panel that discussions had been on-going with markers, with encouragement given to award the highest grades where appropriate. There was an acknowledgement from staff that the grades awarded should appropriately reflect the degree to which the relevant ILOs had been achieved, and that possibly as the School had been gradually moving away from traditional assessment methods, markers' expectations had not always been correctly pitched.
- 3.3.17 Modelling of results from previous years had been undertaken to explore the impact of amending the weighting of different assessment components. There was now a degree of confidence that the application of particular amendments

would help to redress the relatively low number of A grades in the future. Staff also confirmed that locally developed grade descriptors were in place which staff were encouraged to refer to (these were under development at the time of the 2005 DPTLA). The descriptors were also available to students. Students expressed the view that it would be helpful to be able to identify questions on which they had achieved A standard answers, but that individual question scores were not always available to them.

- 3.3.18 The Review Panel **recommends** that the School continue to monitor the proportion of A grades being awarded at Levels 1 and 2, and as part of this monitoring, reflect further on the local grade descriptors and assessment weightings. (*Recommendation 3*)

#### Marking

- 3.3.19 The SER set out the School's marking procedures. At the meeting with staff, it was explained to the Review Panel that double-marking of a sample of Level 4 scripts was felt to be valuable in identifying inconsistencies while not over-burdening markers in view of the tight turnaround time for marks return to Registry. The procedures had been worked out in consultation with the External Examiners. While the Panel was satisfied with the procedures described, it is noted that the publication of a University report on recommended marking practices is imminent.

### *3.4 Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

#### Curriculum development

- 3.4.1 The SER explained the way that the curriculum – and its on-going development – is driven by subject benchmarking and the demands of the British Psychological Society (BPS). The SER noted the lead that the Teaching Management Group takes in developing the curriculum and conducting the appropriate consultations. A strong strand evident to the Review Panel was the awareness of current developments in research, with responsibility for areas of the curriculum being assigned to those with relevant current research interests. The recent reorganisation of Level 4 courses, to draw directly on researchers' interests, was a good illustration of this. When staff met with the Panel, they spoke about their commitment to introducing to the students issues arising from their own research at as early a stage as possible. GTAs who met with the Panel also spoke of sharing with undergraduates issues arising from their research work. They felt strongly that there was a significant value in such exposure for the undergraduates.
- 3.4.2 The Panel saw a willingness in the School to engage students in discussions about the development of the curriculum. The SER mentioned the recent shift in assessment of Level 4 courses, to include an element of coursework. This addressed points raised by both the External Examiner and previous students.
- 3.4.3 The Panel noted that the SER referred to a limit placed by the University on the extent to which continuous assessment could contribute to final degree classifications. The School should note that the Code of Assessment does not in fact include any such limitation.

#### Curriculum planning

- 3.4.4 While the Review Panel saw evidence of good practice in the on-going process of curriculum development, there was less evidence of a vision for the future. This point was raised with the Head of School who told the Panel about a newly formed group, the Subject Management Group, which was to be charged

with reviewing the overall future direction for the subject. Exciting new areas were opening up, particularly in the areas of work covered by the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. Staff in the School were able to see that areas such as neuro-imaging would need be brought into the curriculum at an even earlier stage as the field continued to develop. The potential for bringing an expanding range of material into the Psychology curriculum had been identified as an advantage of the University's new structure, with the School no longer constrained by departmental boundaries as in the past.

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject Management Group work with staff in the School to develop a clear vision for the future of the Psychology curriculum that recognises the core competencies and emerging themes within the discipline and capitalises on the breadth provided through the linkages between the School and the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. (*Recommendation 4*)

#### Progression in curriculum

- 3.4.5 The Review Panel was impressed by the overview taken by the School of their students' progression from entry to graduation, and of the awareness of the need to put in place the building blocks at Level 1 for what would ultimately be required in Level 4 and beyond. The Maxi projects (Level 4) were ambitious and the Panel noted the way that the curriculum appeared to deliver the skills and knowledge necessary for the projects to be completed to a high standard, with some undergraduate work having been considered suitable for publication. At the meeting with postgraduate students, those who had completed their first degree at Glasgow spoke about the value of the Maxi project in preparing them for postgraduate work, and then for those following the 1 + 3 PhD programme, they felt that through the Masters they were able to narrow down the focus for their PhD project. Some identified a smooth progression from Maxi project through to PhD.
- 3.4.6 A problem acknowledged in the SER was the very large number of entrants to Level 1 Psychology, who came with a wide range of backgrounds and prior knowledge of the subject. The undergraduate students who met with the Panel expressed a sense of frustration at the lack of 'real Psychology' particularly at Level 1 where more generic skills were taught. However, those who were in the later stages of their studies could see the importance of those building blocks being put in place for all students. Some of the undergraduates felt that at Level 2 the material had become more interesting, and that by then more of their colleagues were obviously interested in the subject matter and more willing to participate.
- 3.4.7 The undergraduates reflected on the opportunities for making the work at Level 1 more engaging. While the number of labs was limited, one student had found the labs in Level 1 Biology to be more successful in getting students to integrate with each other, despite the fact that the groups in Biology were bigger. This point was put to staff and the Panel was informed that Level 1 labs were currently under review, and that there was recognition among the staff of the value of small group interaction and the aim was to optimise these opportunities at Level 1, though the timetable allowed only a limited number of sessions.



### PGT provision

3.4.8 The SER highlighted the introduction of taught postgraduate masters provision since the previous review in 2005, with students now taking one of two stand-alone 12 month programmes or following the 1 + 3 PhD route. Numbers were still relatively low, but there were plans for continued expansion: the Review Panel noted that a third PGT programme had been proposed for introduction in 2011-12 and was currently going through the university approval process. The School was also contributing to a third PGT programme delivered in conjunction with the School of Education. The Head of School spoke with the Panel about the future of PGT provision being developed in close liaison with the Neuroscience and Psychology Research Institute.

### Level 4 Options

- 3.4.9 One of the recommendations arising from the DPTLA of the Department of Psychology in 2005 was that the number of optional courses available to Honours students should be increased. The Review Panel **commends** the School for its response to this recommendation, particularly in the degree to which this development has supported the research-teaching linkages. (*Commendation 6*) However, the Panel was concerned that there were now so many Honours options available that some ran with very low student numbers. The Panel noted that this issue had also been raised by the External Examiner. There was concern that inefficiencies in the running of Honours courses might act against the University's priority of developing new Masters level courses. Competing demands could lead to excessive pressure being placed on staff, and ultimately could also lead to the quality of the student experience being undermined.
- 3.4.10 At the meeting with School staff, the Panel raised this issue and were told that the School believed there were many benefits in having a large number of options available: that students appreciated the choice; that staff were able to deliver courses in specialised areas, in which they were conducting cutting edge research (these were often demanding options for the students but the students appeared to appreciate the opportunities); that where teaching was in an academic's area of expertise the burden of delivering the option was not great, as they were familiar with the subject area and the number of teaching hours was low. There was also a view that the specialised options, with close links to current research, were often the most attractive to visiting students. However, staff acknowledged that there could be some scope for rationalisation, and the point was also made that some of the material being delivered at honours had potential to make a valuable contribution to postgraduate teaching.
- 3.4.11 While commending the range and richness of the options available at Level 4, the Panel **recommends** that the School consider carefully the balance of benefits and costs to establish the optimum number and range of honours level course options. (*Recommendation 5*)

### Joint Honours

- 3.4.12 There is a range of possible Joint Honours combinations with Psychology, though the Review Panel noted that this was not given prominence in the SER. The entry requirement to the Psychology element of the degree was the same as for single Honours, namely an average of grade B. The Depute Head of School confirmed that significant numbers were pursuing a Joint Psychology Honours degree. The Panel noted that the actual number of students reported by the School to be studying on joint honours in the current session was 7. It

was explained to the Panel that Joint degree students followed the third year Psychology curriculum over two years and completed the fourth year project. Staff reported that there was not much liaison with the Joint subjects, as there was little flexibility in what Psychology could deliver. While there was a healthy range of different Joint routes, the Panel wondered whether there were other options that could be pursued such as a Joint degree with the Neuroscience area. It was acknowledged that with the developments arising from the creation of the Research Institute it might be timely to explore other possible combinations.

- 3.4.13 The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School explore the possibility of expanding the range of Joint Honours programmes, particularly in light of the developing role of the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. (*Recommendation 6*)

#### Practical teaching

- 3.4.14 The SER explained that practical teaching had been identified by the School as an area that could benefit from review. The recently introduced Committee for the Review of Practical Teaching had been set up in order to facilitate a more integrated approach in the curriculum in relation to practical teaching. The Director of Teaching explained that senior researchers in the School were asked to say in broad terms what research skills were required for the Maxi project and that this information was fed into the curriculum in terms of practical teaching at Levels 1 and 2. Some of the postgraduates who met with the Panel and had undertaken their undergraduate study at Glasgow said that it was the quality of the practical experience during their degree that had persuaded them to continue at Glasgow for the Masters. They recognised the frustration arising from the limits on practical work in the early years of study, but spoke warmly of their experience later on, particularly identifying the supportive attitude of staff in assisting them to identify viable projects.

#### Internationalisation

- 3.4.15 The SER highlighted the challenge of promoting study abroad for Glasgow students in view of the need to fulfil the stringent requirements of the British Psychological Society (BPS). Currently very few students undertake a third year abroad, and students who met with the Review Panel said that they did not feel encouraged to do so. Staff informed the Panel that the School had strong links with institutions in mainland Europe, and that it was possible to tap into these and encourage students to undertake projects in the summer. The suggestion was made that exchanges at Level 2 could be explored, but staff noted that there could be problems in terms of establishing whether students had fulfilled the requirements for entry to Honours. Staff acknowledged that there might be potential for further extending opportunities between years three and four, or even during the senior Honours year (as BPS requirements were primarily addressed during Junior Honours).
- 3.4.16 The Review Panel was sympathetic to the limitations placed on the School by external requirements. However, the Panel **recommends** that the School investigate options for enhancing the opportunities for study abroad. (*Recommendation 7*) The School of Law is similarly restricted by professional accreditation issues yet has a large number of students studying abroad each year. Staff advised the Panel that the BPS was currently undergoing review and that it would be necessary to await the outcome before knowing the extent to which the constraints on opportunities for international study might be affected. There was optimism that the review would in fact result in some

additional flexibility that might alleviate the current difficulties associated with internationalisation.

- 3.4.17 Staff informed the Review Panel that the numbers of students coming from abroad on exchange programmes was low. Typically they would take Level 3 modules, though only a handful came for a full year.

#### Statistics

- 3.4.18 Statistics was identified in the SER as an area with which students had often struggled, and the School had invested extra support at Level 1, and had worked with the staff from the School of Mathematics and Statistics to tailor course 1C (delivered in Level 2) more clearly to Psychology. Staff confirmed to the Panel that the techniques being taught were indeed the techniques that psychologists required. The teaching of Statistics at Masters level was provided by the School. The PGT students who met with the Panel and had also studied at Glasgow as undergraduates reflected on their experience of being taught Minitab at Level 2 then moving on to a different package, SPSS, at a later stage. They noted that it had been difficult switching between the two but that it had been a valuable learning experience and they felt confident now in handling statistics. Undergraduates who met with the Panel singled out the generic feedback that had been provided in relation to the Statistics exam as having been particularly helpful.

### *3.5 Student Recruitment*

- 3.5.1 Psychology attracts large numbers of highly qualified applicants. The School participates in widening participation activities (e.g. taster week for school leavers, information sessions throughout the year) and has a representation of students from a wide range of backgrounds. Undergraduate students are admitted through the Colleges of Arts, Science & Engineering and Social Sciences.
- 3.5.2 The Review Panel explored with the postgraduate students the reasons for their having chosen to come to Glasgow. They spoke about the good experiences that they had had as undergraduates, particularly with their own research projects. Their view was that applicants were attracted by the broad range of research expertise, and that Glasgow graduates might apply elsewhere for postgraduate study only if their particular interest was not represented at Glasgow. Two postgraduates who had not previously studied at Glasgow told the Panel that they had applied because of the reputation of the institution and because of what appeared to be high quality provision. They said that their expectations in this regard had not been disappointed.

### *3.6 Student Progression, Retention and Support*

#### Retention

- 3.6.1 The Review Panel noted that retention within Psychology was generally strong.

#### Progression to Honours

- 3.6.2 The SER noted the limit placed on numbers admitted to Honours. The Depute Head of School explained that of the 300 students studying Psychology at Level 2, some 270 might be expected to wish to progress to Honours, of whom perhaps 230 might be capable of completing the Honours degree. The School would expect to offer some 175 places in order to fill the 130–140 available. This inevitably meant that some students were disappointed. Throughout Level 2 there was some stress for the students in knowing that the entry level for Honours was high: an average of grade B was required. In developing a

degree that was truly research-led, the School was aware that the Honours degree was demanding and was satisfied that the entry requirements were appropriate. Some students who did not enter Honours chose to pursue the designated degree rather than take an Honours degree in another subject.

#### Identity within Psychology

- 3.6.3 The undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel expressed the view that it was not until entry to Honours that they felt that they 'belonged' to Psychology. Some referred to the large lectures and labs in Levels 1 and 2. Another mentioned that it was only at Level 3 that they attended any teaching within the School base at Hillhead Street. One student said that prior to Honours few of her friends were Psychology students. Another alluded to a sense of competition with other students in Level 2 because of the restriction on numbers permitted to enter Honours.
- 3.6.4 Staff who met with the Panel were aware of this issue and spoke about various approaches to addressing it. Much work had been done in developing means of promoting greater cohesion at the lower levels: there was a particular focus on technology, with the Portal being used to promote networking opportunities (forums and blogs) (discussed also at para 3.8.11). While tutorials and labs offered an opportunity for facilitating greater engagement, there were limits to what could be achieved: they were not very frequent at Level 1 and there were some restrictions on the kind of activities that could be undertaken particularly given the range of background knowledge of the students and the need to teach generic skills at the outset. Staff referred to Peer Assisted Learning as an important source of contact and engagement for the students (further discussed at para 5.9 below). The Panel strongly encourages the School to continue its efforts to engender a feeling of belonging to the School amongst students in the early years.
- 3.6.5 The undergraduate students referred to the Reading Party at the beginning of Junior Honours and said that this was where the sense of belonging to Psychology crystallised. They enjoyed both the opportunity to work in a group with other students and staff, and the social aspect of the event. There was a sense of Psychology 'taking off', with subsequent tutorials much more participative. By fourth year, undergraduate students reported to the Panel that they felt fully part of the life of the School with staff providing very good support particularly in relation to their projects. Honours students mentioned to the Panel that students on the designated degree did not attend the Reading Party, and there was a general feeling that this meant they were missing out on a valuable experience. Staff who met the Panel advised that the learning experience offered by the Reading Party did not address key requirements of the designated degree.

#### Support

- 3.6.6 Postgraduate students who met with the Review Panel spoke about the supportive attitude of staff, particularly in the way in which they involved the students in a wide range of activities in the School, not simply those narrowly concerned with their Masters projects. The students spoke of their sense of being given a good introduction to what it was like to be an academic in a research-active School and said that they felt fully integrated into the research groups. Undergraduate students also told the Panel that staff were open and approachable. They appreciated the role of the Psychology Society and found its events interesting. The staff and student cheese and wine evening had been enjoyable and was felt to be an event at which good contacts were established.

### Advising

3.6.7 The SER reflected the School's progress towards increasing the number of advisers. While there was a commitment to increasing the number from 4 to 10, there was some uncertainty amongst staff as to how new advisers were to be supported and when appropriate training would be in place. The Review Panel understands that the University's Student Support and Development Committee is in the process of developing the necessary training, which will be supplemented by on-going support delivered through Moodle.

### Employability / Careers

- 3.6.8 The Review Panel found evidence of employability being given a high profile in the School's programmes (e.g. participation in the former Science Faculties pilot employability project, employability workshops for Level 1 and 2 students, Professional Skills/Career Skills courses at Level 3, and careers sessions at Level 4). The Panel's view was that Glasgow Psychology graduates would be equipped with a strong profile of skills to support them in their pursuit of diverse career paths.
- 3.6.9 Postgraduate students told the Panel that while there was no significant formal coverage of careers/employability within their programme, they were content that they were able to have useful discussions with their supervisors and other staff about their future direction. The students told the Panel that they were due to attend a presentation from the Careers Service that afternoon. Some of the students also referred to useful contact from the Careers Service that was on-going since their time as undergraduates at Glasgow. Of those who met the Panel the majority aspired to a career in academia.
- 3.6.10 The Honours students who met with the Panel discussed the portfolio that they completed as part of the Professional Skills course. Most of the students felt that this incorporated a valuable exercise involving self-reflection, which would be of help in preparing for their future careers and job applications, whether these were to be in Psychology or in other areas. Another view was represented, which was that the portfolio counted too highly in the overall Honours assessment and that some of the material required for the portfolio was unnecessarily personal. Despite these contrasting views, there was a strong consensus that the careers section of the course was valuable.

### *3.7 The Quality of Learning Opportunities*

The students who met with the Review Panel expressed satisfaction with the quality of their learning opportunities and their experiences as students of Psychology. The enthusiasm for their subject was evident. The Panel noted that in the 2010 and 2009 National Student Surveys, the positive response to the statement 'Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course' was 97% and 93% respectively. (The Director of Teaching noted that the score in 2010 had for the first time included students on the designated degree.) The Panel **commends** the School on this achievement. (*Commendation 7*)

### *3.8 Resources for Learning and Teaching*

#### Student:Staff Ratio

3.8.1 The Review Panel noted the British Psychological Society's requirement for the Student:Staff ratio not to exceed 1:20. While the ratio was currently comfortably below this ceiling (1:16.92), the Panel was concerned that in the current tight financial situation, minor changes in staffing could bring this ratio under pressure and risk the loss of accreditation. Staff acknowledged to the

Panel that this was a concern particularly in view of the loss of posts that had occurred through restructuring. However, this had been brought to the attention of the College, and the Head of School was confident that the College understood the seriousness of the issue and was prepared to address this. It was also anticipated that in future years there would be scope for increasing the degree to which staff from the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology contributed to the staff count regarding teaching.

#### Graduate Teaching Assistants

- 3.8.2 The Review Panel met with seven Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). They confirmed that they had all attended the statutory training for GTAs. The normal practice was for GTAs to act as demonstrators in labs for one year before being employed as tutors for Levels 1 and 2. There were specific members of staff who supported them in their work. The GTAs all considered their workloads manageable and some stated that they felt they would be able to take on more work if it was available.
- 3.8.3 The GTAs did not undertake marking other than in relation to assessing one group presentation, for which they completed a feedback form at the time. They were provided with guidelines on how to do this.
- 3.8.4 The GTAs said that they felt supported in their work: when helping in labs, they were able to find staff members if they required assistance. For tutorials they were supplied with relevant materials in advance, though were allowed considerable flexibility in how to deliver the tutorial. The Panel discussed with the GTAs their different approaches to promoting interactive tutorials. The Panel found the GTAs to be enthusiastic about their work and to have a range of interesting strategies for working with the different groups of students. The GTAs appreciated the continuity that came with working with the same tutorial group throughout the year, and spoke about their early nervousness quickly having been replaced by confidence as they settled into their roles.
- 3.8.5 The GTAs told the Panel that they felt supported by each other, that they kept in touch through meetings and with the aid of a designated e-mail list. They were encouraged by their supervisors to undertake GTA work and they reported feeling integrated into the activities of the School as a whole. The GTAs who met with the Panel were shortly to receive formal evaluation of their work.
- 3.8.6 The Panel **commends** both the positive approach of the GTAs and the School's efforts to integrate and support this group. (*Commendation 8*)

#### Probationary Staff

- 3.8.7 There are currently no probationary staff in the School.

#### Physical resources

- 3.8.8 The SER described the broad range of facilities available to the School. Lectures take place in many locations across the University, and staff reported to the Review Panel frustration at recurring problems such as lecture halls being at the wrong temperature or missing essential facilities such as batteries for hand-held IT equipment. There was a sense of lack of ownership of these problems because of the rooms being spread across many different parts of the campus. In some cases staff found the janitorial support to be very efficient in resolving problems, but in others where no help could be accessed quickly, large parts of teaching sessions could be wasted.

- 3.8.9 The School benefits from a wide range of laboratories, including brain imaging facilities which are open to students at Levels 3 and 4. While not all students would use all the facilities during the course of their studies, they all have the opportunity to experience working in at least one specialist lab.
- 3.8.10 The postgraduate students who met with the Review Panel reported satisfaction with the facilities available in the School, contrasting this with less extensive facilities that appeared to be available at other Universities that they had visited. They particularly commented on the research facilities, such as those concerned with brain imaging techniques. They also confirmed to the Panel that they were able to access computing facilities as required.

#### Moodle/Portal

- 3.8.11 Psychology makes limited use of Moodle. The School's own on-line content management system, the student Portal, is used for the posting of relevant academic materials and supporting information, and for hosting forums and networking activities. Although there is relatively limited use of Moodle, the Review Panel was impressed by those materials that were available there: in particular the Panel's view was that the Level 1 material on Plagiarism was excellent. All lectures at Levels 1 to 3, and many at Level 4, were available as podcasts via the student Portal. There was much evidence of **commendable** innovation in communication with and amongst students using the Portal (Commendation 9). The majority of material was available on the Portal. Staff explained that the use of the Portal stemmed from its flexibility and ease of use. The Panel was concerned that the use of two systems could be the source of confusion. However, the undergraduate students who met with the Panel confirmed that this was not the case: they found it easy to access relevant materials and appreciated the range of forums.

#### Student Handbooks

- 3.8.12 The Review Panel found the student handbooks on the whole to be clear. Postgraduate students who met with the Panel said that there had been some confusion with two versions of a handbook being issued with different submission deadlines published. It was also suggested that the handbooks might contain more information about whether specific courses would run, and on how to select from the options available. The Panel noted that the weighting accorded to an assessment component (Levels 1, 2 and D) was not always stated together with the description of that component. The overall breakdown of weightings between components was set out elsewhere, and the Panel's view was that it would be clearer to give the weighting in both places.

## **4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards**

### Benchmarking and Accreditation

- 4.1 As noted elsewhere in this report, the School carefully observes the requirements of British Psychological Society accreditation and subject benchmarking.

### External Examiners

- 4.2 The Review Panel noted the External Examiners' reports to be almost entirely positive, with commendation particularly for the research-led nature of programmes and the quality of assessment and coursework. Both MSc programmes were highly rated by the External Examiners.

- 4.3 Issues raised by the External Examiners are covered elsewhere in this report (e.g. low rate of award of A grades, discussed at para 3.3.15).

## 5. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

- 5.1 The Review Panel was satisfied that the School has appropriate Quality Assurance procedures in place and found evidence that the policies were applied effectively. The Panel also concluded that there was a culture of supporting and enhancing the student experience within the School. There were a number of impressive initiatives, such as Peer Assisted Learning, Learning and Teaching seminars, use of Interviewer software in Level 3, summer placements, the Advanced Academic Writing website, and the use of technology such as blogs, podcasts and online resources. The School appeared to have an innovative approach to the particular challenges faced in the teaching of Psychology (large student numbers in the early years and the wide range of backgrounds and knowledge of new entrants).

### Staff-Student Liaison Committee

- 5.2 The SER did not highlight the activities of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) though these were evident from the documentation provided to the Review Panel. The Panel noted that student attendance tended to be relatively low in comparison to the number of staff present. In response to this point, staff observed that there could be difficulties in finding a convenient time for meetings given that students belonged to three different Colleges. A Level 2 rep who met with the Panel said that she rarely received any response when e-mailing her colleagues for issues to bring to meetings. The general view of undergraduates who met with the Panel was that it was more common for issues to be identified through personal contacts. It was also mentioned that there was an active Facebook group, where students were likely to express their opinions.
- 5.3 The Panel found limited evidence of issues raised at SSLC meetings being reported on at subsequent meetings, though it appeared that such issues were in fact referred for consideration to other fora within the School. It was evident that students are involved in many different ways in the School, such as through membership on the Teaching Management Group, and in this way responses to issues were likely to be provided though not necessarily within the same forum as that in which they had initially been raised. Staff advised the Panel that there were a number of ways in which feedback from students was invited and responded to. For example, the Portal included 'student moan' pages, where issues were raised and responses posted. These stayed available for students' information from year to year.
- 5.4 While recognising that the School has a number of effective means of inviting and responding to student feedback, the Panel **recommends** that, for clarity, the School ensure that issues raised at Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings are reported on at subsequent meetings. (*Recommendation 8*)

### Annual monitoring

- 5.5 The Review Panel **commends** the annual monitoring reports at Levels 3, 4 and M for their very informative nature and for demonstrating a reflective approach. (*Commendation 10*) The view reported to the Panel by staff was that this arose from the focus recently placed on these levels, and that the intention was to apply the same focus to Levels 1 and 2, which would then be reflected in the annual monitoring reports. Currently responses to annual monitoring at Levels



1 and 2 were collated and considered by the Teaching Management Group. Summaries of the issues were then provided to Staff meetings and the SSLC. The Exams and Quality Assurance Officer also collated information on areas of good practice identified through annual monitoring. The Teaching Management Group was a key forum for this, and all class tutors are members. The Panel **recommends** that staff use the excellent reports from Levels 3, 4 and M to inform the approach adopted in Level 1 and 2 annual monitoring reports in the future. (*Recommendation 9*)

- 5.6 On the whole student feedback was positive, though it was striking that responses for a small number of courses were more critical, particularly for some Honours options. Staff noted that these courses had been presented for the first time last year and innovative teaching methods had been employed, which were currently under review. The Level 3 Mini project had received poor feedback, and this year the School had focussed on this in particular in an attempt to enhance the student experience of the groupwork.
- 5.7 PGT students who met with the Review Panel confirmed that there was a PG rep who could attend meetings with staff, and they also said that they were sometimes approached directly for feedback, for instance in relation to the proposed introduction of a new programme, but they did not think that they were systematically consulted on their experiences of their courses. The students expressed the view that it would not be difficult to raise issues of concern and that they would expect staff to respond constructively. At the meeting with staff the Panel relayed this information. Staff advised the Panel that small informal feedback sessions were held though these were not particularly well attended. A new generic questionnaire was to be introduced this year. Level 3 and Level 4 undergraduates who met with the Panel said that they were regularly asked for feedback on their courses, and that they appreciated the opportunity to give an honest appraisal, though they had the impression that not many people responded. Level 1 and Level 2 students gave the impression that they were not asked for detailed feedback but only for rather general information.
- 5.8 Staff acknowledged to the Review Panel that rates of return for questionnaires were low – which resonated with the impression of a lack of engagement with this form of feedback given by the undergraduate students – though efforts were being made this year to prompt students to complete the feedback, and the response rates appeared to be improving.

#### Peer Assisted Learning

- 5.9 The Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) programme was introduced in 2003-04. Small student groups are led by senior undergraduates in exploring a range of topics, with one of the key aims being to establish the habit of peer discussion. Staff confirmed to the Panel that the PAL scheme had been evaluated, and that this had suggested the introduction of more sessions. These appeared to be popular at Levels 1 and 2, though by Level 3 the view was that students were more likely to form their own study groups. Some of the PGT students who met with the Panel had acted as facilitators in the PAL scheme, and they reported having found this a beneficial experience, not just in terms of 'teaching' but in terms of consolidating their own knowledge. Undergraduate students also described to the Panel their experiences of participating in PAL and all spoke positively about it. The Review Panel **commends** the School on its PAL initiative. (*Commendation 11*)
- 5.10 The Review Panel asked staff whether the School had considered the introduction of 'parenting' schemes. Staff indicated that while such schemes

may have benefits, they were aware of a risk of overburdening Honours students with such responsibilities.

#### Summer scholarships

- 5.11 The SER highlighted the summer scholarships run by the School and supported by a range of organisations. These appear to offer a rich introduction to the research environment. Undergraduate students meeting with the Panel mentioned these schemes and confirmed that staff encouraged them to take up the opportunities and that those who had done so had found them to be highly beneficial. While they were not credited, the scholarships provided very valuable experience which could be incorporated into the Employability portfolio. The Panel **commends** the School on this initiative. (*Commendation 12*)

## **6. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching**

### **Commendations**

The Review Panel commends the School on the following, which are listed in order of appearance in this report:

#### *Commendation 1*

The SER, which the Review Panel considered to be exemplary in its honest and reflective approach, delivering a comprehensive and engaging account of the School's activities, and describing many areas of impressive innovation and good practice. [para 1.1.5]

#### *Commendation 2*

The emphasis given in the School's aims to: independent study, critical thinking, research skills, progression over Levels 1 – 4, employability and meeting the particular needs of the large numbers of students who came from a wide range of backgrounds. [para 2]

#### *Commendation 3*

The Intended Learning Outcomes for programmes and courses, which are all laid out in the relevant programme and course specifications. The Panel found these to be well written, appropriate, and well aligned to the assessment provision within each programme and course. The Panel also found clear evidence in the SER that the School appreciates the significance of ILOs. [para 3.2]

#### *Commendation 4*

The availability of exemplars of Level 4 Critical Reviews. [para 3.3.9]

#### *Commendation 5*

The low proportion of grades at less than D achieved by students in Levels 1 and 2. [para 3.3.15]

#### *Commendation 6*

The School's response to the recommendation in the 2005 DPTLA concerning increasing the range of Honours level optional courses, particularly in the degree to which this development has supported research-teaching linkages. [para 3.4.9]

#### *Commendation 7*

NSS results showing 97% (2009) and 93% (2010) satisfaction rates. [para 3.7]

*Commendation 8*

The positive approach of GTAs, and the School's efforts to integrate and support this group. [para 3.8.6]

*Commendation 9*

Innovation in communication with and amongst students, evidenced on the student Portal, and excellent material on Plagiarism for Level 1 on Moodle [para 3.8.11]

*Commendation 10*

Informative and reflective annual monitoring reports at Levels 3, 4 and M. [para 5.5]

*Commendation 11 and 12*

Initiatives enhancing the student learning experiences such as peer assisted learning and summer scholarships [paras 5.9 and 5.11]

**Recommendations**

A number of recommendations have been made, many of which concern areas that the School had itself highlighted for further development prior to the review or in the SER.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are listed in the order of appearance in this report.

*Recommendation 1*

The Review Panel recommends that the School reflect on its schedules for the submission of assessed work, with particular focus on Level 3 semester 2, and consider how best to support students in managing the associated workload. [para 3.3.5]

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 2*

The Panel recommends that the School compile a guide explaining the various forms of assessment feedback, indicating when such feedback should be provided. The Panel also recommends that, using the guide as a springboard for on-going discussion with students, the School investigate what other forms of feedback would be most helpful and laying out clearly to staff and students expectations about the nature of feedback that should be provided and in what time frame. [para 3.3.13]

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 3*

The Review Panel recommends that the School continue to monitor the proportion of A grades being awarded at Levels 1 and 2, and as part of this monitoring, reflect further on the local grade descriptors and assessment weightings. *[para 3.3.18]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 4*

The Panel recommends that the Subject Management Group work with staff in the School to develop a clear vision for the future of the Psychology curriculum that recognises the core competencies and emerging themes within the discipline and capitalises on the breadth provided through the linkages between the School and the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. *[para 3.4.4]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 5*

While commending the richness of the optional courses available at Level 4, the Panel recommends that the School consider carefully the balance of benefits and costs to establish the optimum number and range of options. *[para 3.4.11]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 6*

The Panel recommends that the School explore the possibility of expanding the range of Joint Honours programmes, particularly in light of the developing role of the Research Institute of Neuroscience and Psychology. *[para 3.4.13]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 7*

Within the context of limitations placed on the School by British Psychological Society requirements, the Panel recommends that the School investigate options for enhancing the opportunities for study abroad. *[para 3.4.16]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 8*

While recognising that the School has a number of effective means of initiating and responding to student feedback, the Panel recommends that, for clarity, the School ensure that issues raised at staff-student liaison committee meetings are reported on at subsequent meetings. *[para 5.4]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**

*Recommendation 9*

The Panel recommends that staff use the excellent reports from Levels 3, 4 and M to inform the approach adopted in Level 1 and 2 annual monitoring reports in the future. *[para 5.5]*

For the attention of: **Head of School**