

FLTQC 19 February 2024 (extraordinary)

Monday, 19th February 2024 10:15am

Teams | Faculty of Science Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee

Attendees

Attended

Zoe Burke

Andrew Burrows (Chair)

Sarah Upendra Chandratreya

Susan Crennell

Ffion Gould

Marguerite Hallett (Secretary)

Liz Haynes

Momna Hejmadi

Fabio Nemetz

Sarah Paine

Charareh Pourzand

Philip Rogers

Tony Shardlow

Gan Shermer

Paul Snow

Gitte Sparding

Did Not Attend

Florin Bisset

Zack Lyons

Miranda Yafi

1.0 Welcome and Quorum (3270)

The Chair welcomed members, noted apologies and observed that the meeting was quorate.

2.0 Declaration of Interest (3271)

There were no declarations of any potential conflicts of interest.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (3272)

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 January 2024 (Paper 64).

4.0 Matters Arising (3273)

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

5.0 Chair's Business (3274)

The Chair brought the following matters to the attention of the Committee:

Chair's actions:

- Approval of Department of Life Sciences: Biology and Biochemistry UG CT placement unit description (Paper 65) (approved 8 February 2024).
- Approval of Department of Mathematical Sciences UG CT placement and BSc & MMath Study Year Abroad unit descriptions (Papers 66a-c) (late papers) (approved 12 February 2024).
- Approval of Department of Mathematical Sciences UG CT course changes: removal of Comp Sci optional units (Paper 66d) (late paper) (approved 15 February 2024).

6.0 Education Annual Review and Enhancement (EARE) reports 2023/24 (3275)

The Committee noted that the purpose of the EARE exercise is to identify improvements to the educational experience, develop action plans feeding into planning, and provide quality assurances. It is intended to encourage a conversation about quality and standards in relation to learning and teaching. The 2023/24 review is more comprehensive than previously, encompassing both undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision across two themes: i) student experience and ii) student outcomes.

The Committee agreed that use of the term 'good degree' to describe a 2.1 was inappropriate. Ms G Sparding flagged that this term was used sector-wide.

The Committee approved for recommendation to EQSC EARE reports 2023/24 for the following Departments:

Department of Life Sciences (Paper 66):

Biosciences:

Dr Z Burke highlighted that the NSS results had been generally good for the Biosciences courses. The uplift in scores for Assessment and Feedback was pleasing. This may reflect the decision to retain online examinations and a new approach to providing feedback on examinations; marks and feedback (of first marker and moderator) from Inspira were collated into a spreadsheet which was shared with the External Examiners and students, by candidate number, when results were released. This meant that students were provided with specific feedback on examinations, not just their marks. Some markers provided feedback based on descriptors for the mark boundaries, whereas others gave more specific feedback, e.g. on where students may have lost / gained marks.

Pharmacology:

Dr P Rogers reported that intake varies between 25-40 students. The default for most students is an MPharmacol programme, which has an enhanced placement in Year 3. Students have needed 50% at the end of Year 1 and 60% at the end of Year 2 to remain on the MPharmacol, otherwise they are transferred to BSc Pharmacology with placement. In the past there were too few students on BSc Pharmacology with placement to meet the threshold for counting in the NSS. This year there was a larger BSc Pharmacology cohort which was included in the NSS who were less satisfied than the MPharmacol students; the BSc students completed placements with almost the same assessments as the MPharmacol students, but the assessments did not count towards their degree classifications, and the weightings for the BSc programme are different. Some of the factors that have led to dissatisfaction amongst this cohort will no longer exist as a result of Curriculum Transformation (CT).

Pharmacy:

Dr P Rogers reported that in the 2021 and 2022 NSS, Bath had ranked top for Pharmacy nationally on the basis of high overall satisfaction scores, but these are no longer publicised. The Department has always lagged behind the curve in terms of assessment turnaround; it struggles to adhere to marking deadlines as some assessments are assessed by a number of different staff, and NHS based part-time colleagues may only be contracted to work for Bath 1-2 days per week, so struggle to meet the 3 week marking deadline. Consequently, students may be required to submit coursework before they have received feedback on previous, similar coursework. Establishing a wider pool of staff to mark does not necessarily help because of the associated cross marker moderation required.

PGT:

The PTES results were disappointing: While there are 53 students across the Bioscience courses, some courses have too few students enrolled or completing the survey to meet the threshold for counting in the PTES. Also, the PTES comes out at a time when it is difficult for the PGT Bioscience students to participate due to the number of assessments they have at this time of the year. Furthermore, some of the questions are not appropriate for the stage the students are at in their career. The same applies to the MSc Drug Discovery programme.

Risks and concerns:

The Department is large and is still trying to review its teaching as a merged department. The Department is waiting to recruit to several posts, so workload is high.

Student outcomes:

Student outcomes are generally good. The Department has returned to pre-pandemic levels for 1st class classifications and is losing the lower level tail of marks, which indicates that students have not gained an advantage from having online examinations, but it has lifted up the lower end of the scale.

For Pharmacy and Pharmacology, examinations have returned to being in-person. Last year some students struggled with the transition from examinations being online. It is expected that this will be less of an issue this year because students will have had more practice at doing in-person examinations.

The Department will review how it will run examinations in the summer, when it can look at results across the board.

There appears to be a difference in the demographic of students on the Biosciences courses compared to those on Pharmacy and Pharmacology courses. Dr P Rogers reported that the cohort and subgroup sizes are too small to make statistical comparisons. The GPhC wish to see data on outcomes and progression by protected characteristics, but such data is not currently held centrally. Professor M Hejmadi reported that a Data Insights Group is currently creating a dashboard to enable protected characteristics data, e.g. disability, ethnicity, postcode, to be differentiated by faculties and departments, and reviewed for trends, e.g. over the past three years. The work is expected to be complete by March and is focussed on outcomes but there is also work going on with access and completion. Progression is on the list but is not priority currently.

PGT outcomes and retention are generally good but the numbers of students on each course is low, so it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions. There is a University wide push to gain

a better understanding of the needs of PGT students in order to provide them with a greater sense of community.

Summary and action plan:

The Department will:

- Review whether to continue with the split of Biosciences running examinations online and Pharmacy and Pharmacology running examinations in person. Pharmacy and Pharmacology had experienced high levels of collusion and plagiarism with online examinations. Biosciences had not experienced this, partly as a result of changing examination formats to make it less easy for students to collude and plagiarise.
- Review and streamline the resources provided on Moodle, and teach students self-directed learning to help them navigate their way through the content provided, and support them in their transition into the University environment, e.g. through the new CT core skills unit. This is in response to students reporting issues with workload, possibly due to spending too much time on viewing recordings.
- Continue roll out of its CT courses.
- Bring together teaching teams from across its programmes where similar units / content are being delivered, to consolidate teaching and timetable different cohorts together for parts / all of those units.
- Monitor the effect of the e-portfolios implemented in Bioscience and Pharmacy programmes. E-portfolios were introduced a couple of years ago to encourage students to review the feedback they have been given and to use it to inform subsequent assessments.
- Pilot embedding team-based learning in teaching starting 2024/25.
- Recruit to unfilled posts, to reduce the burden on teaching staff.
- Look for further ways to reduce assessment burden, especially in Years 1 and 2, e.g. using auto-marked MCQ and data interpretation type assessments.
- Review how administrative duties are allocated across the merged Department to ensure equitable workload distribution. The Department still exists on the Workload Allocation Management System (WAMS) as 2 separate departments so it is not possible to allocate Bioscience teaching to Pharmacy and Pharmacology staff and vice versa. Dr S Crennell reported that it is possible to push WAMS allocations from one department to another.

Department of Chemistry:

Chemistry (Paper 67):

Student experience:

Dr G Shermer highlighted the mixed NSS results; there were some very high scores (over 90%), e.g. for teaching resources and support, and some that were lower, e.g. for student voice and assessment and feedback.

The Department recognises that assessment and feedback remains an area for improvement. While 65% represents a notable improvement on last year's 52%, the questions were not directly comparable. Improvements had been made to the MChem Final Year Projects and this cohort had the highest scores for assessment and feedback at 70%. The feedback framework and marking criteria created for the MChem students has been rolled out to the rest of the cohorts for this year so improved satisfaction with assessment and feedback is anticipated. The lowest scores were from the MChem with placement students due to their placement year experience; there were issues with staff and the organisation of the placement year. This has been improved for this year, e.g. at the start of the placement, all students and their industrial supervisors were issued with a handbook containing all the assessment details and deadlines, and expectations of them throughout the year. The most poorly scored question related to clarity of the marking criteria. To address this, at the start of the year, Year 3-5 students were provided with a spreadsheet containing all of the deadlines for the year for each of their units and, where possible, links to the marking criteria. This has received positive feedback from students at the SSLC. Another question that received lower scores related to how feedback helps students improve their work. The free text comments indicated that students want mark schemes to past papers. Currently, most units will have possibly 1-2 exam papers that have a mark scheme available on Moodle but, collectively, the Department is not supportive of routinely providing mark schemes. Free text comments about fairness of marking related to online

examinations during Covid; comments from a relatively small group of students may have skewed the results.

The Department scored 68% for student voice which is slightly lower than the sector benchmark. Dissatisfaction appeared to relate to how clear it was that student feedback on the course had been acted upon. To address this the Department has publicised better the QA51 responses and is considering establishing Year 1 and Year 2 forums, similar to the Final Year forum that already exists, in addition to the SSLC, to encourage students to engage with giving feedback to the department.

Student outcomes:

Continuation rates have declined over 2020/21 and 2021/22 due to higher than usual suspensions and withdrawals as a result of Covid effects, e.g. students struggling with online learning, lack of cohort feel, and the impact of teacher assessed grades. It is anticipated that some of these effects will be reversed in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

The Department has returned to pre-pandemic levels in terms of the number of 2.1 and 1st class classifications it awards. While the number of Firsts awarded in Chemistry appears to be lower than elsewhere in the Faculty, when combining 1st and 2.1 classifications together, the Department is largely in line with the rest of the Faculty. The External Examiners have suggested that the Department could be slightly more generous in marking, particularly the Final Year projects. Consequently, the Department has made some changes to the project marking criteria to encourage assessors to award high marks where they are warranted.

There were no obvious trends relating to ethnicity, domicile and disability given the small numbers, but it did appear that the number of female students achieving Firsts had declined over the last 3-4 years, whereas the number of Firsts awarded to males had stayed the same, with the result that the Department now has almost equitable numbers of Firsts awarded to females and males. This trend will be kept under review going forwards.

Graduate prospect rates are broadly similar to where they have been in the past and show an upward trend from 2017.

Summary and action plan:

The Department will:

- Strengthen staff expertise in analytical chemistry.
- Explore different ways to manage and run labs, using examples from Chemistry departments in other institutions, e.g. having academic members of staff who are solely responsible for the labs to reduce the load of delivery and marking from colleagues, improve teaching efficiency and provide a small group of staff who are dedicated to improving the lab experience of students across the year groups.
- Ensure assessment deadlines and marking criteria are clearly signposted, particularly to placement students.
- Ensure that all students know when the QA51 responses are available on Moodle and that these are discussed by the SSLC.
- Promote the open SSLC and OUEs more strongly.
- Continue to track continuation rates and attainment based on gender.

Natural Sciences (Paper 68):

Student experience:

Dr S Crennell reported that timetabling this year has been particularly poor. Chemistry and Physics lectures were timetabled against each other, despite this combination being a common choice for Nat Sci students. Dr S Crennell flagged that there are now only 7 combinations in Year 1 compared to 35 previously. To mitigate the timetabling problems a spreadsheet of clashes was posted on the Nat Sci Moodle page and suggestions were made of the teaching events students should attend, e.g. practical sessions. Convenors of units where there were clashes were notified to ensure that the Nat Sci students were supported, e.g. with lecture recordings. The Semester 1 clash report was received late, in Week 3 or 4, this year but was received earlier in Semester 2. It is anticipated that timetabling will be better next year because the timetabling team will be more familiar with the programme structure. Dr Z Burke reported that Nat Sci sessions will be timetabled first next year, with Biosciences added afterwards. The External Examiner noted that students did not feel part of a student community and that Environmental Science was a weaker area of cohesiveness. Given Nat Sci is taught in different

departments, it is challenging to create a Nat Sci cohort identity. As part of CT, an interdisciplinary thread was incorporated throughout the Nat Sci programmes, and the number of activities in Welcome Week were increased. A careers session was run in November with alumni to help students market themselves to improve their graduate prospects. Nat Sci hoodies have also been subsidised for a visible sign of inclusion in Year 1. A convenor for the Environmental Science stream was appointed to advise on the units and cohesiveness. Environmental / sustainability teaching will be discussed with Engineering, who have a Masters course in sustainability, to identify possible synergies in units. A Nat Sci Hub was also created in the foyer of 3 South, although there are no longer Nat Sci staff offices in 3 South. All the departments who teach Nat Sci students have managed to improve the NSS scores of the Nat Sci students by up to 25% this year, which is pleasing. Only 35 students completed the NSS, which is less than half of the graduating cohort.

Student outcomes:

Students continue to have strong outcomes. 3 students have not continued their studies in both of the last 2 years; this is higher than pre-Covid so will be monitored but is a small number. Degree attainment remains above the Faculty average, and probably reflects the higher entry tariff for the Nat Sci cohort.

The proportion of 2.1s attained by Nat Sci students has been decreasing gradually, reflecting the decline in the Faculty average. The percentage of Firsts has increased in the last year but because the Nat Sci cohort has decreased over the last few years, the actual number has remained the same.

The lower proportion of Nat Sci BAME and disabled students may be a consequence of the higher entry tariff, but the degree outcomes show no significant difference for these groups, i.e. those who do come to study Nat Sci achieve to their full potential. The promotional material has been reviewed to try and ensure that it is balanced and representative.

Summary and action plan:

- Apply for reaccreditation, although the Society for Natural Sciences' accreditation criteria were taken into account when devising the CT courses.
- Appoint replacement(s) for a member of the Environment stream staff who is retiring.
- Discuss environmental science synergies with Engineering.

Department of Computer Science (Paper 69):

NSS:

Dr F Nemetz reported that UG NSS results were generally strong. Although the Assessment theme scored lower (69%), it had improved on the previous year. Timely feedback is the biggest issue. Strategies have been put in place to improve this and when CT reaches higher years the effect of rationalised assessment should be seen. Scores for student voice were high (84%); there is a strong community of engaged students who sees the Department respond to their feedback. The Department tries to make the learning resources developed for the online courses available to the on-campus students which expands the range of tools students can access. The recent large increase in student intake caused timetabling issues for Year 1, and this will cascade to higher years in the future. Admissions have put in place strategies to reduce the student intake this year.

PTES:

The PTES results suggest that the on-campus students are more satisfied than the online students. The main issue is assessment and feedback. Last year there were a lower number of students, which helped with many aspects of provision, whereas this year there are 50% more students. The Department has worked hard this year to improve the sense of community for PGT students, e.g. by understanding better their motivations, their expectations, and their perception of the Department and University.

This year was the first time PTES ran for online PGT and Degree Apprenticeships. Many of the questions were not appropriate, e.g. about student community and on-campus resources. Also, the PTES was sent to 800 online students, whereas it should have been sent only to the students who have reached the dissertation stage. Of the 800 students, approx. 10% completed the PTES, i.e. 80 online students, which made a significant contribution to the overall results. The online courses will not be part of the PTES next year. Feedback will instead be obtained

from online students in a more targeted way. The Degree Apprenticeship course scored 100% overall satisfaction. The Ofsted visit that took place last week was positive.

Student experience:

All examinations are now in-person. The Department runs a mock examination to give students experience of sitting in-person examinations and the associated requirements, and reduce anxiety amongst those more used to sitting online examinations. The Department has introduced a coursework brief/specification standardisation template to ensure greater consistency across units and modes of delivery. Students have already fed back that this helps them to know where to find information, e.g. marking criteria.

Student outcomes:

There are high continuation rates for undergraduate students. With regard to the number of 2.1 and 1st class classifications awarded, the Department has returned to pre-pandemic levels and is exceeding the Faculty average. Undergraduates have strong outcomes for employability and further study.

In 2023, 22% of PGT students were awarded a Distinction, which is lower than in previous years. 71% were awarded either Merit or Distinction in 2023, which is comparable to outcomes in 2019 and 2022. 90% of the Department's UK domiciled PGT students progress to highly skilled employment or graduate level further study, which is high.

Demographic data:

160 students in the Department identify as BAME, and of those 20 identify as Black. The percentage of BAME students is higher in the Department than it is in the total University population, but the percentage of disabled students is lower.

Action plan:

The Department will:

- Improve marking criteria using coursework specifications, and make clear how coursework will be marked.
- Improve sense of community for on-campus PGT students, e.g. through skills and social sessions and developing the new PGT computer lab (replacement for the lab in 2 South).
- Allocate a member of staff to redevelop the materials for online units for the next intake, prioritising units with the lowest student feedback scores.
- Recruit 6-7 new members of staff.

Department of Mathematical Sciences (Paper 70):

NSS:

Professor T Shardlow reported that NSS results were good; 89% for teaching, which was high compared to the sector. The lower scores were for assessment (76%) and student voice (75%), although these exceeded the benchmark. To address the assessment issue, the Department has presented feedback differently and improved coversheets for coursework. MMath students showed high levels of satisfaction (98% for teaching). The Chair observed that the Department provides worked, detailed answers to all its past examination papers (following the best way to answer the question as taught in lectures). Professor T Shardlow highlighted that the NSS scores have been increasing in a linear rate over the past 5-6 years. 5-6 years ago, the Department was near the bottom of the sector league table, but is now returning to a more respectable position. Professor T Shardlow commented that, up until now, the Department had viewed the student voice score as a University score, but now realised that it needs to be reviewed from a Department perspective.

PTES:

The PTES results are good (94% for teaching), but PGT numbers are small; there were 9 respondents from a cohort of 18 for PTES and there are 8 students on 1 MSc this year. The Department is in the process of growing its portfolio of MSc programmes to increase the PGT cohort.

Student experience:

The Department is currently dealing with CT transition issues that have arisen, e.g. unavailability of Year 2 options in Year 3, and a reduction in options provided by other departments more generally.

Online teaching has been high, e.g. a cohort of students in Semester 1, Year 2 had 25% of their

teaching online (i.e. 1 contact hour of 4 in every unit was online), despite the University target of 10%. This will be reviewed in the next round of timetabling to try and bring the proportion of online teaching closer to the University expectation across all cohorts.

Student outcomes:

Changing continuation rates are likely due to the no detriment policy which made it easier to continue in, or resit, Year 1. This will normalise over time, with the end of such policies and as Covid side-effects pass through the system. The percentage of Firsts has returned to pre-Covid levels with the return to in-person examinations.

Demographic data:

Numbers of disabled and BAME students are small, so it is difficult to discern strong patterns from the data. There is no difference in continuation between BAME and White students, but some difference between disabled and non-disabled students. Disabled students achieved proportionally fewer Firsts and 2.1s in 2018/19, but this difference had disappeared by 2020/21. 2022/23 appeared to be an anomalous year, possibly due to Covid, in which male students performed less well. The attainment gap between BAME and White students has narrowed.

UG graduate prospects:

The Department is ranked 4th in the Times league tables for graduate prospects, up from 14th 4 years ago.

Summary and action plan:

The Department has now developed staff and student facing information for the transition and CT years.

The Department will:

- Work with timetabling to try and reduce the use of online teaching.
- The Department recently got Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA) accreditation approved and is working towards Royal Statistical Society (RSS) accreditation.

In response to the Dean's comments, Professor T Shardlow explained that while the budget pressures coming through are understood, the Department makes a lot of use of student tutors for Years 1 and 2. This has been key to the way the Department delivers units and is a cost-effective way of delivering teaching. The Department would therefore welcome a discussion about this before any reduction in tutoring takes place.

Department of Physics (Paper 71):

NSS:

Dr P Snow reported that assessment remains an area for improvement, which will be addressed with some of the good practice arising from this meeting. The Department is discussing with the SSLC how to improve the low score relating to how often teaching staff make the subject engaging. The Nat Sci sub-cohort gave higher scores for this question. The Department will improve satisfaction with student voice by publicising to students what the Department has changed in response to feedback and flagging when QA51 responses are available. The Department has been successful in increasing response rates to OUEs, especially for this year's Year 1. The Department will also remind staff what they need to tell students at the start of units.

Student outcomes:

Continuation rates have declined. A breakdown of this data indicates that this may be due to students not being fully prepared for University. This seems to be a trend across the Faculty. The Department has seen a fall in the numbers of Firsts being awarded over the past 3 years, which are lower than the Faculty and University comparator group. The Department attributes this largely to the return to in-person examinations, and will keep it under review.

Student experience:

The Department has a high student to staff ratio. There is also a demographic bulge in teaching only staff which will need to be reviewed as part of departmental planning. An early DLTQC and Teaching Away Day will be held in September to refocus staff back on teaching before Freshers' Week.

Demographic data:

Disabled and BAME student numbers are small; it would be helpful if a significance test could be done with the data.

The Chair thanked the DoTs for their EAREs, analysis and reflections. The Chair flagged that student voice and the importance of closing the feedback loop seem to be a common theme for departments to address, whether or not student feedback can be acted upon.

7.0 Any Other Business (3276)

There was none.