

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - 9 October 2009

DPTLA Reviews 2008-09: Summary of Good Practice/Key Strengths

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this summary is to identify from DPTLA Review reports in session 2008-09 any significant themes in relation to good practice/key strengths and any good practice/key strengths that may be worthy of further dissemination across the University.

Those key strengths in **boxed** text below in Sections 3, 4 and 5 have been highlighted for consideration as being worthy of further dissemination. The following abbreviations are used to refer to particular reviews:

ARCH	= Archaeology
MATH	= Mathematics
ELAN	= English Language
SLIT	= Scottish Literature
MENG	= Mechanical Engineering
CHEM	= Chemistry
ELIT	= English Literature

2. Summary

As in previous years, the good practice/key strengths have been summarised under three broad headings: teaching, learning and assessment; student-related; and resource-related.

The themes emerging from these broad headings are:

- The variety of activities, services and materials aimed at providing pastoral support and support for learning for students;
- Student experience and enhancement of learning environment;
- Enthusiasm, commitment and quality of teaching staff including Graduate Teaching Assistants;
- Areas of good practices in assessment, balancing the fact that assessment practices are one of the stronger themes arising from DPTLA recommendations;
- Assuring and enhancing the quality of the Student Learning Experience;
- The increasing efforts being made by departments to include Employability, Personal Development Planning, and transferable skills in the curriculum.

The topics recommended for further dissemination fall predominantly under the following areas: support for learning, employability and student engagement.

3. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

3.1 The Range of Provision

- The breadth of courses in the honours provision, and the emphasis on pre-1800 literature giving the Department a distinctive “trademark” (ELIT)
- Wide ranging and challenging suite of degree programmes offered (CHEM)

3.2 Quality of Teaching

- The high standard and commitment of GTAs (ARCH)
- The Interactive Teaching Units: problem solving group exercises worked from real life industrial/environmental cases, facilitated by staff members and involving a high level of student participation (CHEM)
- Highly motivated, supportive Graduate Teaching Assistants willing to contribute expertise and enthusiasm to the Department (MATH)
- Provision of high quality teaching at all levels, by staff who are committed to their students and enthusiastic in their teaching (MATH)

3.3 Research-Led Teaching

- Courses related to staff research interests thus ensuring a clear linkage between research and teaching (ARCH)
- Enthusiasm for research and teaching – the latter, notably, from Level 1 upwards - as complementary components of academic life (ELAN)
- Alignment of departmental research interests with undergraduate teaching (MATH)
- The uniqueness of the Department and its international reputation for high quality research (SLIT)

3.4 Support for learning

- The perspective and coverage of the Departments course handbooks which included, for example:
 - excellent guidance on how to avoid plagiarism, including examples
 - well explained referencing (ARCH)

- The refresher course on referencing at the start of the Junior Honours Year (ARCH)
- The week-long induction session at the start of the Junior Honours year (ARCH)
- Science Fundamentals 1X and 1Y courses: providing access for non-traditional students to degree programmes in biological subjects (CHEM)

- Support for masters programmes which blur the distinction between taught and research strands of postgraduate work, this resulting in cohorts of satisfied and enthusiastic MLitt students as well as a rich stream of doctoral candidates (ELAN)

- Valued and effective tutorial provision (MENG)

- The quality of support provided to students and the individual attention given when required, particularly where students are experiencing difficulty (SLIT)

3.5 Assessment

- The introduction of a system of mitigation categories which provide valuable shorthand for indicating the nature and severity of a problem to the Examination Board whilst at the same time maintaining confidentiality (ARCH)
- The overall range and variety of assessment methods which allowed students the potential to excel in a variety of different ways (ARCH)
- The 6-day turn-around period on homework for First Year students (MATH)
- On-line system of examination papers (MATH)
- '100%' assessment tests which were considered to be a good example of assessment for learning and highly valued by students (MENG)
- The emphasis placed on raising awareness of plagiarism issues amongst students (SLIT)

3.6 Employability, Personal Development Planning and Transferable Skills

- Opportunities for Senior Honours students to compete for funded trainee supervisor positions at the Field School (ARCH)
- The Department's concern for, and awareness of employability of its graduates, which it promotes through the work placements, including the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) scheme, and through its strong links with potential employers (CHEM)
- Encouragement and support of professional development of graduate attributes, through first year membership of Royal Society of Chemistry for Level 3 students and participation by students on the Frontiers of Chemistry course, which had resulted in publications of undergraduate work in research journals (CHEM)
- The full accreditation of all programmes by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) that contributes to the employability of graduates (MENG)
- Excellent levels of consultation with industry by means of the Industrial Liaison Committee ensuring relevance of programmes is maintained (MENG)

3.7 Quality Assurance and Enhancement

- An honest and reflective approach to review as demonstrated in the inclusive approach taken to the preparation of an exemplary Self Evaluation Report (ARCH)
- The annual Teaching Review meeting (ARCH)
- The involvement of GTAs in Level 1 curriculum review (ARCH)
- Commitment to the delivery of an undergraduate programme in English Language, English Linguistics and Philology in accordance with QAA benchmarks and the Department's traditional strengths, and complementing the work of cognate departments in SESLL (ELAN)
- The consultation process employed in preparing the Self Evaluation Report (MENG)

- Examples of good practice in seeking ongoing dialogue and feedback with students using Moodle (MENG)

4. Student related

4.1 Student experience and Learning environment

- The quality of the Field School experience both academically and as a training exercise (ARCH)
- The effectiveness of the Department's Progress Committees (ARCH)
- Inclusive attitude towards students which has stimulated their appetite for learning and generated an unusual degree of loyalty and affection (ELAN)
- The departmental ethos of collegiality, energy and enthusiasm under the effective leadership of the Head of Department (ELIT)
- The high levels of student attendance and retention (ELIT)
- The extra curricular provision (ELIT)
- The commitment of staff to improving the student experience (MENG)
- The attention and responsiveness of the Department to students (MENG)
- Cohort Activity Days (MENG)
- The Arran trip which brought together undergraduate and postgraduate students, and inspired progression to postgraduate study and research (SLIT)

4.2 Student engagement

- The success of podcasting in enhancing student participation in lectures, as a revision and 'catch up' resource and as a resource to support the teaching preparation of GTAs (ARCH)
- Excellent support initiatives for students aimed at enhancing the students' learning experience and encouraging retention of students less well prepared to study mathematics (MATH)
- Consideration and support for initiatives aimed at improving retention (MENG)

4.3 Student support

- The quality of staff support provided to both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and to Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) (ARCH)
- The active involvement of staff in assisting students to source fieldwork and funding opportunities (ARCH)
- Exemplary feedback on staff support as confirmed by students who met with the Panel and 2008-09 NSS feedback of final year students (CHEM)
- Commitment to student support at the level of the individual student (ELAN)
- The assistance and support given to students applying for further study or research funding (SLIT)

4.4 Recruitment

- The level of contact and support provided to applicants prior to entry (ELIT)

- The recent development of a number of postgraduate taught programmes and the successful recruitment of students to them (MENG)
- The committed approach to schools recruitment and the activities undertaken to further this (SLIT)

5. Resource related

5.1 Staff

- Approachable and helpful staff (ARCH)
- Mutuality among staff which in its formal presentation is revealed in 'pairing' to cover teaching commitments but informally presents in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere which students at all levels find liberating and enabling (ELAN)

The formal GTA interviews and level of support provided for GTAs (ELIT)

- Shadowing of senior staff by more junior staff (MATH)
- The approachability and enthusiasm of staff and GTAs which was reported to inspire and excite student interest for the subject (SLIT)

5.2 Learning Resources

- Dedicated accommodation in respect of the departmental library, study space and common room (MATH)
- Collaborations with other institutions and departments and the willingness to extend these and embark on new initiatives (MENG)

6. Recommendation to Academic Standards Committee

6.1 Academic Standards Committee is **invited to consider and confirm** whether those items of good practice/key strengths highlighted in bold text in Sections 3, 4 and 5, and summarised below, are worthy of wider dissemination across the University:

- The Interactive Teaching Units: problem-solving group exercises worked from real life industrial/environmental cases, facilitated by staff members and involving a high level of student participation (CHEM)
- The perspective and coverage of the Departments course handbooks which included, for example:
 - excellent guidance on how to avoid plagiarism, including examples
 - well explained referencing (ARCH)
- The refresher course on referencing at the start of the Junior Honours Year (ARCH)
- Support for masters programmes which blur the distinction between taught and research strands of postgraduate work, this resulting in cohorts of satisfied and enthusiastic MLitt students as well as a rich stream of doctoral candidates (ELAN)

- Valued and effective tutorial provision (MENG)
- The introduction of a system of mitigation categories which provide valuable shorthand for indicating the nature and severity of a problem to the Examination Board whilst at the same time maintaining confidentiality (ARCH)
- '100%' assessment tests which were considered to be a good example of assessment for learning and highly valued by students (MENG)
- The Department's concern for, and awareness of employability of its graduates, which it promotes through the work placements, including the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) scheme, and through its strong links with potential employers (CHEM)
- Encouragement and support of professional development of graduate attributes, through first year membership of Royal Society of Chemistry for Level 3 students and participation by students on the Frontiers of Chemistry course, which had resulted in publications of undergraduate work in research journals (CHEM)
- The involvement of GTAs in Level 1 curriculum review (ARCH)
- Examples of good practice in seeking ongoing dialogue and feedback with students using Moodle (MENG)
- Inclusive attitude towards students which has stimulated their appetite for learning and generated an unusual degree of loyalty and affection (ELIT)
- The success of podcasting in enhancing student participation in lectures, as a revision and 'catch up' resource and as a resource to support the teaching preparation of GTAs (ARCH)
- Excellent support initiatives for students aimed at enhancing the students' learning experience and encouraging retention of students less well prepared to study mathematics (MATH)
- Consideration and support for initiatives aimed at improving retention (MENG)
- Exemplary feedback on staff support as confirmed by students who met with the Panel and 2008-09 NSS feedback of final year students (CHEM)
- The level of contact and support provided to applicants prior to entry (ELIT)
- The formal GTA interviews and level of support provided for GTAs (ELIT)

6.2 If considered appropriate, further information on the highlighted items will be sought from the departments concerned and circulated to heads of departments along with the contact details for the staff responsible. Thereafter, the information will be published on the Senate Office website and drawn to the attention of the Learning & Teaching Centre where any potential for possible contribution to other developments can be coordinated.