**ASTON UNIVERSITY**

**LEARNING & TEACHING COMMITTEE**

**OVERVIEW OF PERIODIC REVIEW REPORTS**

**Introduction**

This report is a summary of the University’s Periodic Reviews of taught programmes in academic years 2014-16, during which time seventeen separate reviews were undertaken. The report is set out as follows:

Key Findings

Common Themes

Summary of periods of approval

Good Practice

Continuous Improvement

Summaries by School

**Key Findings**

A number of key findings and common themes have emerged that have really highlighted both the great work of our staff and diversity and variance in our offerings; and also the areas where we can improve, or where we can adopt already well-established good practices.

The key findings are the need for better communication, cross-cohesion of the Schools and institution-wide sharing of good (and bad) practice. It’s fundamental that we recognise good practice and share it accordingly, as well as sharing improvements made, development areas that have been addressed, and how to avoid any form of bad practice that may have already been encountered by a subject area or School.

Whilst it is fully recognised and respected that Schools will have different criteria, or have certain methods that will be bespoke to them, the majority of good (and bad practice) which is highlighted throughout the reports can, and should be, adopted across the institution.

These key findings exist at two levels; at School level, and throughout the institution. The Periodic Reviews highlighted the variety of teaching and assessment, and the delivery of feedback at subject-area level. Where we might exemplify good practice in certain areas or modules, said good practice isn’t always emulated throughout students’ programmes, which ultimately results in a variable student experience.

Communication is key to disseminating good practice, and bad practice, but it doesn’t quite go far enough; embedded and sustainable implementation needs to occur for real change to be affected, and with this comes the second key focus of this report; student engagement.

Student engagement is pivotal to improving standards and ensuring quality enhancement in a rigorous and flexible manner. There are multiple cases of distinctly varying levels of student engagement which yield different results. If we are to get better at consistency in delivery of programmes throughout Schools and the institution, we must first work to close the feedback loop within student representation, as well as within our own areas; academic, administrative, supportive and managerial.

Great work is already underway through the partnership of the University and the Students’ Union in delivering an effective, transparent, and responsive student representation framework, however the above cultural change needs to happen simultaneously with the SRF’s development and natural transformation for this to be a success.

**Common Themes**

A number of common themes emerged through analysis of the various good practice and identified areas for improvement, which are broken down into categories below.

On Teaching, Learning and Assessment, there was both good practice in the variety of teaching and learning, and bad practice via the inconsistency of assessments and feedback; be it through over-assessment or substantial differences between the perceived quality in delivery of one module from another. All round there was a positive recognition of teaching, learning and assessment, ensuring that transitional support into Higher Education is both thorough and complete.

On Staff Commitment, there was consistent recognition of the hard work, dedication, and service offered by staff right from administrative and academic through to supportive and managerial. There is an innovative pragmatism that is eminent in many areas of Aston that has ensured an equally challenging, diverse and pioneering pedagogy despite the ever growing student numbers and demand for flexibility from students and employers.

Conversely, there was a consistent recognition of the need for great investment in staff numbers as there were some cases of Programme Director’s somewhat going it alone, as well as minimal support or administrative staff providing a service level far beyond the acceptable and achievable remit of their current number.

On Placements and Student Employability, there has been a consistent drive to achieve the 100% target of getting students into placements across the University where appropriate, with particular recognition paid to a number of programmes for their continued proactive work in increasing student engagement with the placement.

Curriculum Design was varied throughout the reports, with some strong levels of student and employer engagement embedded in curriculum development and some programmes which still had further progress to make. There is also a clear issue of overassessment and/or failure to adopt the University’s curriculum design principles. A strong student outcome which has arisen from the reports is the effectiveness of curriculum design in equipping students with the skills, experience, and drive to apply themselves across a multitude of areas, and more uniquely, to take on unexpected challenges and overcome obstacles.

Regarding Externality, and linked closely with the Placements and Student Employability, a strong theme emerged concerning employer engagement with curriculum design; from assessment and feedback through to guest speakers and competitions. This was prevalent throughout all the Schools, with proactive pushes to remain responsive to the needs of employers and the changes within the sector economies and the national and international economy as a whole.

**Recommendations for continuation of programmes**

In total there were thirteen Periodic Reviews and four Short Cycle Reviews held over the 2014-16 academic years, with some containing a number of programmes, the most being the ABS Masters programmes review that considered fourteen MScs. A Short-Cycle Review takes place at an interval of less than the maximum six-years between each Periodic Review and considers in detail, with a re-convened Panel, the progress of the subject area towards meeting the recommendations of the original Periodic Review. A short-cycle review does not consider the full range of issues and evidence considered in a Periodic Review and does not replace a Periodic Review.

All Periodic Reviews recommended approval for a further six-year period, except for the International Foundation Programme which was renewed for four years, MSc Mechanical Engineering (Modelling) and PG programmes in the English subject area (Linguistics, TESOL etc) which were renewed for three years, and PG Psychiatric Pharmacy programmes for one year.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Programme areas reviewed** | **Approved for** | **Date of next review** |
| UG Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry (Short-cycle) | 1 year | 2017/18 |
| BSc Construction Project Management | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| MSc Mechanical Engineering (Modelling) | 3 years | 2017/18 |
| PG Health Psychology programmes | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| UG Maths | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| UG Politics and International Relations | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| International Foundation Year (Short-cycle) | 4 years | 2019/20 |
| UG and PG Law | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| PG Translation Studies | 6 years | 2020/21 |
| UG/PG Computer Science | 6 years | 2021/22 |
| ABS BSc Single Honours:* Business and Management
* International Business and Management
* Accounting for Management
* Economics and Management
* International Business and Economics
* Finance
* Marketing
* Human Resource Management
* Business Computing and IT
 | 6 years | 2021/22 |
| MPharm and PgDip/MSc for Overseas Pharmacists (OSPAP) | 6 years | 2021/22 |
| BEng/MEng Mechanical Engineering, BEng Electromechanical Engineering and BEng Design Engineering | 6 years | 2021/22 |
| UG/PG Sociology and Social Policy programmes  | 6 years | 2021/22 |
| PG English: Linguistics, TESOL etc (Short-cycle) | 3 years | 2018/19 |
| PG Psychiatric Pharmacy (Short-cycle) | 1 year | 2016/17 |
| ABS MSc Programmes* Accounting and Finance
* Business and Management
* Entrepreneurship and International Business
* Finance and Investment
* Human Resource Management and Business
* Information Systems and Business Analysis
* International Business
* Investment Analysis
* Market Research and Consultancy
* Organisational Behaviour
* Social Responsibility and Sustainability
* Strategic Marketing Management
* Strategy and International Business
* Work Psychology and Business
 | 6 years | 2021/22 |

It should be noted that amongst the programmes recommended for six-year approval, several contained provisos, conditions, and/or recommendations for mid-cycle reviews to provide assurance to the Learning and Teaching Committee that required steps for improvement are duly implemented and monitored.

**Good Practice**

Features of good practice were identified in all of the reviews and across a range of areas within the programmes including; pedagogy, administration, student support, placement management, and externality.

Teaching, Learning & Assessment

Examples of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment were identified in **twelve** of the reviews carried out. Examples include:

* The targeted support for students entering the programmes with BTEC qualifications (**ABS UG**)
* The mechanisms established to address variability in teaching quality ( **BEng/MEng Mechanical Engineering, BEng Electromechanical Engineering and BEng Design Engineering Programmes**)
* The Investigative Skills module providing students with a valuable experience of group work (**UG Maths**)
* Teaching of online students is by bespoke provision of slides and audio recordings, geared to the online audience, rather than just using Aston Replay (**MSc Health Psychology**).
* The relationship between the Subject Group and the Computer Science Society who together are making significant progress in student-led enhancement of the programme, as well as providing excellent co-curricular/extra-curricular activities (**UG/PG Computer Science**)
* The accessibility of the latest translation technology, including the provision of training to both staff and students (**MA Translation Studies**)

Staff Commitment

Examples of good practice in the commitment of staff were identified in **fifteen** of the reviews carried out. Examples include:

* The commitment made by staff to returning feedback to final year students within eight days (**BSc Politics with International Relations**)
* The excellent leadership of the Head of Group and Programme Directors (**UG/PG Computer Science**)
* The very good progression rates of students overall; the involvement of the Academic Subject Group in a pilot project to monitor students vulnerable to non-continuation and in a University working group in this area (**UG Sociology**)
* The relationship between staff and students is very positive. Aston Law aims to treat students as individuals, and student feedback indicates that they have succeeded in delivering a personalised approach which is valued (**LLB Law with Management**)
* The programme team promotes relevant internships and mentoring for students to support their development as professional translators (EMT) (**MA Translation Studies**)

Placements and Student Employability

Examples of good practice in Placements and Student Employability were identified in **ten** of the reviews carried out. Examples include:

* the strategic and reflective management of the subject area’s portfolio of programmes, the increase in student numbers and the take up of placement opportunities (**UG Politics with International Relations**)
* The employment focussed design of assessment, ensuring that students had to apply knowledge to real life scenarios (**MSc** **Mechanical Engineering (Modelling)**
* The focus on applied mathematics and student employability is an important strength in the programmes and one resulting in good graduate opportunities (**UG Maths**)
* The experience provided by students forming a translation company (as simulation) and managing an authentic project for an authentic client, which is part of the module The Translation Profession (**PG Translation Studies**)

Curriculum Development and the Impact of Research

Examples of good practice in Curriculum Development and the Impact of Research were identified in **thirteen** of the reviews carried out. Examples include:

* The curriculum succeeds in developing graduates who are able to identify, and respond to, the synergies which exist between business and law, placing the programme in a unique position within legal education (**LLB** **Law with Management)**
* The contribution that doctoral students are making to the delivery of the programmes (**UG Maths**)
* The student induction and Professional Development Programme, the latter also having influenced the choice of some students to study at Aston (**ABS PG**)
* The commitment to CDIO for students as a way of enabling learning by integrating elements of the curriculum and as preparation for the workplace; and also as a philosophy for staff to frame their practice more broadly and to share practice within the University, nationally and internationally (**BEng/MEng Mechanical Engineering, BEng Electromechanical Engineering and BEng Design Engineering Programmes**)

Externality

Examples of good practice in Externality were identified in **nine** of the reviews carried out. Examples include:

* Maximising accrediting body membership, “the external panel member was particularly impressed with the programme having the support of two professional bodies. This was later picked up on by the students as a reason they selected Aston” (**BSc Construction Project Management**)
* The externality of the programmes, with a large number of extra events and visits from employers which enrich the student experience (**ABS PG**)
* The responsiveness of the programme to the economic climate within the sector and the needs of employers (**BSc Construction Project Management**)
* The Pharmacy community at Aston University including academics, students, administrative staff and technicians has created a place where people want to work/study (**MPharm/OSPAP**)

**Continuous Improvement**

Periodic Review and Revalidation aims to promote continuous improvement in the student academic experience and in student outcomes, and to ensure that programmes are achieving the objectives the University has set for them.

Having conducted this review of thirteen Periodic Reviews and four Short Cycle Reviews it has transpired just how important and stringent the process is; ensuring quality and consistency throughout programmes through comprehensive and flexible means of monitoring and reviewing.

The Periodic Review remains imperative to identifying areas of quality enhancement and seeking out areas to develop and innovate pedagogy; as well as dealing with various levels of mismanagement, ineffectiveness and bad practice. These processes have to take place, on a cyclical basis either as part of the standard six year Periodic Review or through a Short Cycle Review to ensure the good practice is identified, allowing this report to act as a catalyst for disseminating said good (and how to avoid bad) practice throughout the wider University.

This process ensures that whilst the four Schools operate differently and independently of one another in many cases; it’s fundamental to development and reflection to have the cross-dimensional processes in place to achieve a pedagogical synergy that benefits students, staff and the institution as a whole.

Aston’s Periodic Review process remains a fundamental pillar of continuous improvement; driving effective monitoring and review processes of university programmes with consultancy, collaboration and design at the heart of the process. The diversity in University programmes presents challenges in reflection and transparency when reviewing en masse. They create opportunities for students and staff to contribute effectively and act as change agents in ensuring continuous development throughout the University’s varying pedagogy, structure and dynamic. Periodic reviews provide the necessary tailored indicators of university programmes’ performance and relevance, as well as temperature checking the student experience.

**Summaries by School**

**Aston Business School – Reviews Summary**

ABS had four Periodic Reviews during the past two academic years. These reviews covered the following programmes:

* **Law**
* **ABS UG Programmes**
* **ABS PG**
* **International Foundation Programme**

Multiple programmes were covered in a number of the Periodic reviews, such as ABS Postgraduate (PG), and all programmes within that arena.

Of the four Periodic Reviews, ABS identified good practice in the following:

* **Three** in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
* **Four** in Staff Commitment
* **Two** in Placements and Student Employability
* **Four** in Curriculum Design/Impact of Research
* **Two** in Externality

**Law**

The Panel confirmed the approval of the following programmes for a further six year period:

* **LLB (Hons) Law**
* **LLB (Hons) Law with Management**

The remaining programmes; Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and LLM International Commercial Law; have never run, and the Panel recommended that the University consider a period of validity for new programmes, after which approval for the programme lapses if the programme has not been run (*and subsequently approved and now in place)*

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* The LLB Law with Management curriculum succeeds in developing graduates who are able to identify, and respond to, the synergies which exist between business and law, placing the programme in a unique position within legal education in the UK
* The practical focus and orientation of the programmes position graduates ahead of others in the job market.
* Staff members are committed to providing the best approach to learning, teaching and assessment, have a substantial track record of innovation in pedagogy, and are actively encouraged to work towards HEA fellowship

**Key recommendations** were to (1) consider requesting an exemption from University regulations regarding maximum trailing credits; (2) consider the potential strategic benefits of diversifying from the current exclusively undergraduate-focussed provision in practice; (3) review available resources and study leave for staff and research development.

**Further recommendations** were made concerning the timetabling function and how labour intensive it was, and the need for measures to be put in place to allow students to be able to access any University Library in the UK.

**ABS UG Programmes**

The Panel confirmed the approval of the following programmes for a further six year period.

* **BSc Business and Management**
* **BSc International Business and Management**
* **BSc Accounting for Management**
* **BSc Economics and Management**
* **BSc International Business and Economics**
* **BSc Finance**
* **BSc Marketing**
* **BSc Human Resource Management**
* **BSc Business Computing and IT**

Example of **commendations** and **good practice** were identified:

* a demonstrable capacity for self-evaluation, with Annual Review and Monitoring reports that are informative and self-critical
* teaching staff who have had to adapt programme delivery to greater student numbers, and who are delivering programmes with a variety of teaching practices and innovations
* proactive support staff who expressed a knowledgeable and positive approach to supporting students and the work of the School
* the efforts to involve students and other stakeholders, including an active Advisory Board, in curriculum review

**Key recommendations** were to (1) explore the timeliness of return of marks to students, which in some instances was reported to be outside the University four-week policy, (2) being addressing over-assessment and the rather rigid reliance on exams as a form of assessment.

**Further recommendations** centredon the need to ensure the adequacy of resources, and (to the Learning and Teaching Committee) to look at the effectiveness of the grouping of so many substantive programmes in one Periodic Review.

**ABS PG**

The Panel confirmed the approval of the following programmes for a further six year period.

* MSc Accounting & Finance
* MSc Business & Management
* MSc Entrepreneurship & International Business
* MSc Finance & Investment
* MSc Human Resource Management & Business
* MSc Information Systems & Business Analysis
* MSc International Business
* MSc Investment Analysis
* MSc Market Research & Consultancy
* MSc Organisational Behaviour
* MSc Social Responsibility & Sustainability
* MSc Strategic Marketing Management
* MSc Strategy & International Business
* MSc Work Psychology & Business

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* the student induction and Professional Development Programme, the latter also having influenced the choice of some students to study at Aston
* the externality of the programmes, with a large number of extra events and visits from employers which enrich the student experience
* proactive support staff who expressed a knowledgeable and positive approach to supporting students and the work of the School

**Key recommendations** were based on (1) the strategy for online learning and programme delivery; (2) more effective implementation of large scale personal tutoring given the size of the student cohorts in some of the programmes.

**Further recommendations** are again (to the Learning and Teaching Committee) to look at the effectiveness of grouping so many substantive programme in one Periodic review, with additional advisable ones on the review of the programme; communication, staff, curriculum design and assessment strategy.

**International Foundation Programme**

The Panel confirmed the above programme for approval for until 2019/20, given the progress made on the essential recommendations.

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* the changes made to the curriculum, evidencing a more holistic approach to the programme design and which have received positive feedback from the External Advisors involved in the short-cycle review
* the high level of commitment of the new Programme Director

**Key recommendations** were focused on (1) the partnership with Birmingham Metropolitan College; (2) the support and development of staff within Birmingham Metropolitan College; (3) general programme curriculum and assessment design.

**Further recommendations** are based on issues of transparency in marking and the need for the IFP to be on a more secure footing if the future prospects of the programme are to be optimised.

**Engineering and Applied Sciences – Reviews Summary**

EAS had six Periodic Reviews during the past two academic years. These reviews covered the following programmes:

* **UG Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry**
* **BSc Construction Project Management**
* **MSc Mechanical Engineering (Modelling)**
* **UG Maths**
* **UG/PG Computer Science**
* **BEng/MEng Mechanical Engineering, BEng Electromechanical Engineering and BEng Design Engineering**

Multiple programmes were covered in a number of the Periodic reviews.

Of the six Periodic Reviews, EAS identified good practice in the following:

* **Four** in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
* **Five** in Staff Commitment
* **Five** in Placements and Student Employability
* **Three** inCurriculum Design/Impact of Research
* **Four** inExternality

**Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry**

Following the Short-cycle Periodic Review held on 25 March 2015, a steering group was convened by Professor Helen Higson to continue to review progress against the 2012 Periodic Review recommendations, especially those around Chemical Engineering staffing levels and the student experience. In September 2016, this group again reviewed progress and decided that all further monitoring of chemical engineering programmes take place through the University’s Annual Monitoring and Periodic Review processes (with Periodic Review currently scheduled for the 2017/18 academic year, provisionally in Term 2).

**BSc Construction Project Management**

The Panel confirmed the above programme for approval for a further six year period on the proviso that a series of recommendations were adopted and implemented in the timeframe laid out.

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* The approachability of the Programme Team in supporting students in their studies
* The support for placements, which was thought to be of a high standard and useful
* The detail of the assessment briefs, which was strong and very useful for students

**Key recommendations** were to (1) adopt the University’s curriculum design principles throughout the programme; including rationalising the assessment strategies and workload; (2) explore options around expanding and enhancing the externality of the programme.

**Further recommendations** were centred on the structure of the programme and the diet of the modules/their level of weighting, as well as emphasis on the opportunity of reaccreditation to consider whether the diet of modules is appropriate and desirable to current and prospective students and future growth of the programme.

**UG Maths**

The Panel confirmed the following programmes for approval for a further six year period.

* BSc Mathematics
* BSc Business and Mathematics
* BSc Mathematics with Economics
* BSc Mathematics with Computing

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* the efforts made to incorporate the views of employers, through the Advisory Board and feedback from student placements, and to explore innovative practice from other institutions, in the introduction of peer assisted learning for example
* the strategic and reflective management of the subject area’s portfolio of programmes and the increase in student numbers, which has succeeded in keeping the size of tutorial groups to a comparatively low level. The Group is also to be commended for their involvement of students in the on-going development of this strategy
* the contribution that doctoral students are making to the delivery of the programmes

**Key recommendations** are to (1) explore the reasons for disparity in levels of student satisfaction within the NSS; (2) embed policies and procedures to evidence the internal moderation of examinations; (3) share best practice between the University and the Students’ Union on training course representatives.

**Further recommendations** are that they explore the degree classification profile in comparison to the University’s benchmark institutions and that there is consideration of the staff: student ratio, which to the external members of the review panel appeared low in comparison to that in other research-led University mathematics departments.

**Computer Science**

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* The relationship between the Subject Group and the Computer Science Society who together are making significant progress in student-led enhancement of the programme, as well as providing excellent co-curricular/extra-curricular activities.
* The excellent support given to distance learners and the support given to them outside of ‘normal hours’
* The utilisation of the Student Software Company for enhancing the student experience

**Key recommendations** were to (1) conduct a programme level review of modules and approaches to assessment and feedback and the variability/weighting of modules; (2) (to the University) to provide assistance in developing the relationship with ABS to enhance the management of Joint Honours programmes.

**Further recommendations** were to consider a strategic approach to recruitment of teaching led staff, to support current teaching load demands; to ensure all IT provision used by support staff is sufficient and up-to-date; to revisit the strategy to engage all students from the beginning of their programmes and (to the University) to consider recognising subject specific employability and enrichment activity in the Diploma Supplement.

 **BEng/MEng Mechanical Engineering, BEng Electromechanical Engineering and BEng Design Engineering**

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* the combining of the roles of final year project supervisor and Personal Tutor for Final year students
* The commitment to CDIO for students as a way of enabling learning by integrating elements of the curriculum and as preparation for the workplace; and also as a philosophy for staff to frame their practice more broadly and to share practice within the University, nationally and internationally
* the Friday breakfast meetings, held by staff to share practice and develop pedagogy

**Key recommendations** were to (1) conduct a programme level review of modules and approaches to assessment and feedback and the variability/weighting of modules; (2) to provide a progress report on addressing the requirements of the recent IMechE accreditation to the Panel Chair.

**Further recommendations** were to develop a report on effectiveness of implementing the Aston Student Engagement Strategy to improve student representation and engagement at programme level, to draw up an action plan to explore ways of increasing take up of placements, and improving progression rates.

**Languages and Social Sciences – Reviews Summary**

LSS had four Periodic Reviews during the past two academic years. These reviews covered the following programmes:

* **UG Politics with International Relations**
* **PG Translation Studies**
* **UG and PG Sociology**
* **PG English (Linguistics, TESOL etc)**

Multiple programmes were covered in a number of the Periodic reviews, such as the English Subject Area, and all programmes within that arena.

Of the four Periodic Reviews, LSS identified good practice in the following:

* **Two** in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
* **Three** inStaff Commitment
* **Two** in Placements and Student Employability
* **Three** inCurriculum Design/Impact of Research
* **Two** in Externality

**Politics with International Relations**

The Panel confirmed that the following programmes should be approved for a further six-year period.

* BSc Politics with International Relations (Major/Minor))
* Politics (Half Subject)
* International Relations (Half Subject)
* BSc Business and Politics (Joint Honours)
* BSc Business and International Relations (Joint Honours)
* BSc Politics and Economics (Joint Honours)

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* a research-led curriculum with many additional optional activities that reflect those interests and enrich the student experience
* the number of electives in the final year, although the team may wish to consider the sustainability of such a range of choice as student numbers increase
* the commitment made by staff to returning feedback to final year students within eight days
* Administrative staff who expressed a knowledgeable and positive approach to supporting students and the work of the department

**Key recommendations** are (1) greater clarity around issues arising from student feedback, through various fora and who has responsibility for taking such items forward and feeding back to students on the action taken; (2) that the University and Students’ Union take a more proactive role in improving communication between students and their representatives, and share of best practice on training of course representatives.

**Further recommendations** were mainly on the development of best practice in providing students with feedback on their assessed work, reconsideration of core and elective modules and the further internationalisation of the curriculum

**Translation Studies**

The Panel confirmed that the following programmes should be renewed for a further six year period:

* MA in Translation in a European Context
* MA in Translation Studies
* MA in TESOL and Translation Studies

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* The subject has a coherent philosophy and identity which is consistently adhered to both in the staff team, and in what is offered to students
* The role of professional translators in delivering a curriculum which has a clear focus on employability
* The experience provided by students forming a translation company (as simulation) and managing an authentic project for an authentic client, which is part of the module The Translation Profession (LIM015)

**Key recommendations** were made to Translation Studies concerning (1) Quality Assurance to be applied consistently across all modules, in particular peer observation of sessional tutors and QA for TESOL modules; (2) also that all students should experience compulsory assessment of translation technology.

**Further recommendations** were made regarding the marketing of the programmes and their key strengths, as well as investigating a range of development options.

**Sociology**

The Panel confirmed the following programmes for approval for a further six year period:

* BSc Sociology
* BSc Sociology and Social Policy
* BSc International Relations and Sociology
* BSc Politics and Sociology
* BSc Sociology and English Language
* BSc Business and Sociology
* BSc Sociology and French
* BSc Sociology and Spanish
* BSc International Relations and Social Policy
* BSc English Language and Social Policy
* BSc Politics and Social Policy
* BSc Business Management and Social Policy
* MA Social Research and Social Change
* MA Public Policy and Social Change

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* The enthusiastic and thoughtful staff and the useful reflective commentary provided
* The satisfaction of students, as evidenced by the NSS scores and by the comments of students who met with the panel
* The very good progression rates of students overall; the involvement of the Academic Subject Group in a pilot project to monitor students vulnerable to non-continuation and in a University working group in this area;

**Key recommendations** focused around (1) ensuring the programme specifications were independent of each other in their goals, aims and student outcomes; (2) reviewing programme level modules to remove duplication, ensure consistency in workload and assessment; (3) reviewing web presence and marketing materials to make sure the programmes were advertising their distinctiveness and their strengths.

**Further recommendations** were based on developing strategies and planning a trajectory for the next 5 years, with a focus on continued increasing uptake of placement opportunities with the programmes alongside Careers + Placements as well as providing more opportunities for formative assessment and moving to a more modern, electronic marking system. Additionally, to review the effectiveness of implementing the Personal Tutoring policy in line with the student engagement strategy.

**PG English Subject Area**

The Panel recommended that the programmes be approved for three more years until 2018/19, to bring them back onto the standard six year cycle for Periodic Reviews.

* **MSc Applied Linguistics**
* **MSc Forensic Linguistics**
* **MSc Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages**
* **MSc Educational Management in TESOL**
* **MSc Teaching English for Specific Purposes**
* **MSc Teaching English to Young Learners**
* **MA Applied Linguistics**
* **MA Forensic Linguistics**
* **MA TESOL**

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* Staff are generally helpful when approached
* The administrative structure has been overhauled and seems to be much better placed to oversee the quality of the programmes going forward
* Student progression is much better monitored than it was in 2013. The LSS Exams team are able to run reports prior to exam boards showing the current status of all students.

**The Panel concluded that the recommendations had been adequately addressed, with the following exception:**

* The Programme Team should provide better evidence of their processes for consideration of student feedback (and module reflections), external examiners’ reports and annual review of programmes by recording discussion of these matters more comprehensively at subject group (ASG) and staff-student consultative committee (SSCC) or by holding more formal programme meetings with detailed and properly dated minutes.
* **Further recommendations** are to submit an action plan referencing the recommendations of this short cycle review to LTC annually until the next periodic review, and provide better orientation and guidance for students, particularly the distance learning students; to adopt a consistent and standardised approach to module enrolment, coursework submission, marking and feedback; (to the School) to review the evidencing of quality processes and tracking of decisions through the School committee structure.

**Life and Health Sciences – Reviews Summary**

LHS had three Periodic Reviews during the past two academic years. These reviews covered the following programmes:

* **Postgraduate Certificate in Psychiatric Therapeutics**
* **Postgraduate Certificate in Psychiatric Pharmacy**
* **Postgraduate Diploma in Psychiatric Pharmacy**
* **MSc in Psychiatric Pharmacy Practice**
* **MPharm and OSPAP**
* **MSc Health Psychology (on campus)**
* **MSc Health Psychology (online)**
* **MSc Cognitive Neuroscience**

There were some common themes that emerged throughout the School, and many areas of good practice that can and should be rolled out throughout the School, and the wider University.

Of the three Periodic Reviews, LHS had identified good practice in the following:

* **Three** in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
* **Three** inStaff Commitment
* **One** in Placements and Student Employability
* **Three** inCurriculum Design/Impact of Research
* **One** in Externality

**PGT Psychiatric Pharmacy**

A short-cycle review was conducted for all postgraduate taught programmes within the Psychiatric Pharmacy arena.

The summary of the findings indicated that there has been considerable progress in addressing recommendations of the October 2013 Periodic Review, but that there was still work to do, ergo there should be further progress to achieve the recommendations, with an eye to review via another short cycle review in a year’s time.

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* offering unique programmes of value to students and the wider community;
* their commitment to the delivery of the programmes;
* the progress made since the previous review in engagement with practitioners and the update of the curriculum content.

**Key recommendations** were made on (1) agreeing and articulating a strategy which can inform recruitment, curriculum design and assessment and feedback; (2) commissioning market research to support the strategy; (3) providing a Student Handbook for all levels of the programme.

**MPharm and OSPAP**

A full Periodic Review of MPharm and OSPAP was conducted and found the programmes should be renewed for another six years, with the option to conduct the next review in line with any forthcoming GPhC accreditation that might happen before the cycle is complete; at the Programme Team’s discretion.

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* Innovative new delivery methods of Teaching and Learning, such as ‘Non-Lectures’ where students are given full access to appropriate materials (including last year’s lecture recordings), and contact time is then devised to be more interactive and engaging.
* *Aston Prescription Learning Environment*; an e-learning multiplatform software designed to aid both delivery and assessment in the pharmacy field.
* On curriculum development; the review panel were impressed with the programme team’s efforts of embedding integration throughout the programme.
* The strong reputational benefit Aston Pharmacy School brings to the University.
* Although there is no official placement option integrated into the MPharm programme, the Careers +Placements Team have confirmed that employability is embedded in to the programme from the beginning, including a first year peer-assessed lecture “Becoming a Professional Pharmacist”

**Key recommendations** were made to the School concerning (1) a critical level of administrative and support staff vacancies and resultant under-resourcing of the Programme; (2) the University’s need to support the Aston Pharmacy School in growing its visibility as a School, to protect and enhance its reputation in a challenging market.

**Further recommendations** were made regarding the sharing of best practice within the group to ensure students receive a consistently high level student experience, that all staff are made aware of NSS strategies, considering moving final year exams earlier so that any students who fail can re-sit in June, protecting students from losing the pre-registration places, and that the subject areas work with CLIPP to consider the University’s curriculum design principles and how they might fit with the accrediting body.

**MSc Health Psychology (on-line and on campus versions) and MSc Cognitive Neuroscience**

A full Periodic Review was conducted and all three programmes considered were recommended for renewal for a further six years.

Examples of **commendations** and **good practice** identified:

* the students who met with the panel reported high levels of satisfaction with teaching quality and support from staff;
* the curricula are well balanced, coherent and relevant;
* teaching of online students is by bespoke provision of slides and audio recordings, geared to the online audience, rather than just using Aston Replay

**Key recommendations** were (1) centred on the identification and development of the needs and requirements for distance learners through the MSc Health Psychology (online) (2) concerning better embedded employability and careers knowledge and skills (including progression to research) into the MSc Cognitive Neuroscience curriculum; (3) improved student involvement in Annual Review, programme design and discussion of responses to External Examiners’ reports (4) on reviewing the impact of induction activities and contact with personal tutors .

**Further recommendations** were focused around communication between the Programme Team for MSc Health Psychology (online) and the student cohorts in order to help students to get to know staff better and to engage with one another.

***End of Report***

***Report compiled by Jordan James Kirkwood – 11/01/2017***