Good Practice Highlighted During Periodic Reviews 2012-13

A note from the Senior Assistant Registrar (Senate and Academic Review)

During the 2012-13 academic session, the outcomes of the following periodic reviews were considered by the Senate (individual assessor reports and departmental responses to reports can be found in the Senate Papers listed below):

Undergraduate:

- BSc Medical Sciences with [option] (Paper Senate/2012/23)
- Earth Science and Engineering (Paper Senate/2012/79)

Research Degree Provision:

- Department of Computing (Paper Senate/2012/24)
- Department of Mathematics (Paper Senate/2012/25)

This paper describes examples of good practice highlighted within the individual reviews.

Undergraduate reviews

1. BSc Medical Sciences with [option]

The BSc in Medical Sciences forms Year 4 of the 6-year MBBS/BSc. It is also taken by the majority of BSc Biomedical Science students as their third and final year and by students intercalating from external medical schools.

The 10-week research projects

The 10-week research projects, although not unique to this programme, were considered to be excellent exemplars of research-led teaching, for both medical students and biomedical sciences students. Recent initiatives include the introduction of a mini-project for specialist option courses, and an exchange link with McGill in addition to one with Tokyo Medical and Dental School.

2. Department of Earth Science and Engineering

ESESIS – a student-facing departmental database

The Earth Science Student Information System (ESESIS) is the Department's course management and e-learning system and is appreciated by both staff and students. This system, written by a member of staff in the Department, manages all aspects of timetables, module selection, record keeping, coursework management, lecture materials etc. It
therefore carries out the functions of a number of other College systems (such as ICIS and Blackboard). The panel was very impressed by this system and suggested that this system (or something similar) could be considered for roll-out to other departments in the College.

Imperial College Rock Library

The Department has generated an “Imperial College Rock Library” e-learning resource which enables students to improve their knowledge of minerals in response to industry requirements for graduates. This is not just used by Imperial students but used around the world at other institutions, which helps improve Imperial College London’s brand.

Academic Tutor

The reviewers highlighted the distinctive nature of the role of the Academic Tutor. This role encompasses five traditional positions: Admissions Tutor, Senior Tutor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Disabilities Officer and Careers Adviser. The excellent interaction of this role with the whole student body was considered to be central to the atmosphere in the Department. However, the reviewers called attention to the associated risk, should the post holder not be able to continue in that role for an extended period for any reason. The formal appointment of deputies for all of these roles was considered essential to underpin this structure.

Excellent management and monitoring of feedback

The review panel highlighted the Department’s feedback procedures as demonstrating good practice. The Department has invested significant time and resource into developing feedback procedures to ensure that feedback is useful and that quality is kept high. The EESIS software greatly aids the management of feedback. The nature of the feedback for coursework is given on EESIS for each module, and feedback is checked for consistency before it is given. If a member of staff is ill it is effectively communicated to the students that their feedback will be late. The Department ensures that it always gives feedback to students about problems identified through SOLE, thus encouraging future participation in surveys. Their overall satisfaction is reflected in their willingness to participate and give very high scores in surveys such as SOLE and NSS.

The Departmental approach to feedback is described here

http://wwwf.imperial.ac.uk/imedia/content/view/2116/how-we-give-ese-students-feedback
1. Department of Computing

Student Experience

The panel was impressed with the Department’s extensive links with industry and its small research groups enabling students to collaborate widely on a range of innovative research areas. Students undertaking interdisciplinary cross-Faculty research are appointed a Computing supervisor as well as a co-supervisor from the other Faculty concerned. The panel cited this as an example of good practice. It was also reported to the panel that all cohorts have a cohort mentor, to ensure that cohort-specific issues are raised and addressed by the Department.

Research Community

The review panel found there to be an excellent research community. Students cited the regular Friday afternoon discussion forum as an example of good practice because it provided the opportunity to make connections with other students and staff in the Department and to think beyond the box of their own research. The Department’s ‘One Minute Madness’ event (at which students have one minute to explain to the audience what their research is about) was also praised by students present at the review for the same reasons. The Postgraduate Research Quality Committee agreed that other departments in the College should consider developing a similar event to promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

Student Progression and Completion

PhD students are admitted in two cohorts per year, and this gives added structure to the programme, starting with induction, progress milestones and completion. The induction talks and the PhD student handbook were cited as examples of good practice, together with the linking of the early stage assessment with the requirement for students to give open access oral presentations.

Imperial College Computing Student Workshop

The Imperial College Computing Student Workshop, which aims to provide an international forum for doctoral students to discuss a range of topics that are current in computer science research, was cited as an example of good practice. The workshop is organised and run by PhD students of the Department, with printed proceedings including papers submitted by outside persons and groups (see http://iccsw.doc.ic.ac.uk).

Travel Funds

The Department sets aside some funds specifically for the support of research student travel, with priority given to students who are presenting papers at international conferences and workshops. One claim during the PhD studies can be for a training trip, which is attendance at a conference, summer school, or similar event at which the student is not presenting a paper. Details can be found on the Departmental PhD webpage http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/research/phd/phdmatters/
Computing Support

The review panel commended the Departmental policy that all research students have, at the very least, their own desktop PC with appropriate word-processing software, access to printers, archive and back-up facilities, email, and networks. Research students may also borrow a laptop from the Department for a short time, e.g. for giving a presentation at a conference.

2. Department of Mathematics

High regard for research student supervision

The Department maintains a culture that accords a great deal of importance to the quality of PhD supervision, reflected in the time given to identifying suitable research topics, academic staff availability and the induction of students into their research communities at an early stage. The panel cited staff commitment to students as an example of good practice.

Mini Doctoral Training Centres

The review panel commended the creation of mini Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) in active and emerging research areas and the formulation of research programmes around these new areas. The mini DTCs potentially have a valuable role as a template for creating future EPSRC funded DTCs in the Department. However, the panel cautioned that the creation of such DTCs carried a danger of creating a two tier student system, with those outside the DTC feeling isolated and not so well supported. The review panel was pleased to observe that thought is clearly being given to how to avoid this.

Taught Course Centre (TCC) and the London Taught Couse Centre (LTCC) programmes

The Department strongly recommends that all students registered for a PhD should, in their first 2 years, attend 100 hours of assessed postgraduate taught courses. The reviewers highlighted the active participation of the research students in the Taught Course Centre and the London Taught Cause Centre programmes as an example of good practice, offering something of a unique experience for Imperial students.

The LTCC is run by a consortium of universities in the London region and beyond. It offers a programme of one day a week advanced courses in mathematics and statistics for PhD research students in the region, as well as short intensive courses open to students from elsewhere in the UK and Europe. http://www.ltcc.ac.uk/index.php

The TCC is collaboration between the Mathematics Departments at the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Imperial, Oxford and Warwick. http://tcc.maths.ox.ac.uk/

Departmental Seminar Programme

The panel praised the range of seminars and study groups available to students within their research groups, including groups run jointly with other London universities, which helped to establish the sense of being part of an exciting community of fellow mathematicians.

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/mathematics/about/seminars
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document title:</th>
<th>Good Practice Highlighted During Periodic Reviews 2012-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Version:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>October 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document location &amp; file name:</td>
<td>R:\7.Quality Assurance\PolicyUnit\Periodic Review\Periodic Review Reports for the Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsed:</td>
<td>Quality Assurance &amp; Enhancement Committee 08.10.2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective from:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Originator:</td>
<td>Registry Quality Assurance Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact for queries:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sally.baker@imperial.ac.uk">sally.baker@imperial.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross References:</td>
<td>Programme approval and review processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web links:</td>
<td><a href="http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/registry/proceduresandregulations/qualityassurance/approvalandreview">http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/registry/proceduresandregulations/qualityassurance/approvalandreview</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>