Good Practice Highlighted During Periodic Reviews 2011-12

A note from the Quality Assurance Administrator

During the 2011-12 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:

- Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (Paper Senate/2011/97);

Research Degree Provision:

- Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (Paper Senate/2011/74)
- Centre for Environmental Policy (Paper Senate/2011/7)
- Former Department of Humanities (Paper Senate/2011/8)
- Department of Materials (Paper Senate/2011/6)

Collaborative Research Degree Provision not Owned by Departments

- Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme (Paper Senate/2011/75)

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

Undergraduate reviews

1. Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Excellent laboratory facilities

The Department was commended by the reviewers for its excellent laboratory facilities. This positive comment was also repeated by students interviewed by the review panel.

The Department’s facilities include the hydrodynamics laboratory which was described by one member of the review panel as the best they had seen in the UK and overseas. The laboratory is an extensive facility which allows for research in wide-ranging areas of fluid mechanics with civil and environmental applications. The laboratory includes facilities for wave and buoyancy research as well as demonstration laboratories which can be used for teaching. Further information on the hydrodynamics laboratory is available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/cvfluidmechanics/facilities

Quality of Research-led teaching

Members of the periodic review panel commented on the high quality of teaching staff. Excellence in teaching quality has contributed to the Department’s highly regarded reputation. The diverse syllabus, complemented by practical elements such as field trips and project work, has also contributed to this.
Details of the syllabus are available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/civilengineering/prospectivestudents/undergraduateadmissions/newsyllabus

Graduate Employability

The inclusion of external industrial practitioners as visiting lecturers on courses, providing opportunity for students to undertake industrial field trips and internships and the Department’s ability to provide learning opportunities for students to develop skills that employers seek, was commented on as good practice by the reviewers.

Further details are available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/civilengineering/prospectivestudents/undergraduateadmissions

Constructionarium Project

The Constructionarium Project allows students to take charge of a construction site for a week long project. During the project students work with a teaching team comprising consulting engineers, Imperial lecturers, alumni, Imperial PhD students and technicians. This was considered good practice by the review panel who also reported that this initiative has been replicated at other institutions.

Further information on the Constructionarium Project can be found at:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/civilengineering/prospectivestudents/undergraduateadmissions/fieldtrips

Third Year Design Project

Industrial input into projects and the scope of projects available to students were viewed as good practice by review panel members. Students present at the review also saw this as a positive element of their course.

Further details on this project can be found at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/civilengineering/prospectivestudents/undergraduateadmissions/individualandgroupprojects

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

The review panel were positive about the use of Undergraduate Teaching Assistants because this scheme allows students to learn from those who have previously studied their course modules. The review panel also commented on the excellent training provided to Undergraduate Teaching Assistants.

End of term report by Personal Tutor

The review panel considered the Department’s requirement for an end of term report by the personal tutor on their tutees’ progress to be an example of good practice (appendix 1). The panel recommended that this practice should be used in other Departments at Imperial.
Research Degree Reviews

1. Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering

Pastoral Care

The high level of pastoral care which contributes to a positive student experience was commended by the review panel. Elements such as the role of mentors allocated to each PhD student and monitoring students’ progress were praised.

Induction Programme

Reviewers noted that an excellent induction programme was in place for all new students. The use of a dedicated postgraduate administrator and research administrator in this process was also cited as good practice.

Detailed information on the induction process is available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/electricalengineering/internal/pgdegrees/postgraduateresearchprogramme/new_student_information

Student Handbook

The handbook, which provides comprehensive information to students was seen as good practice by the review panel.

It was noted that the handbook was also supported by the departmental website. Information provided online for students can be viewed at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/electricalengineering/internal/pgdegrees/postgraduateresearchprogramme

Staff-Student Communication

The review panel found communication in the Department to be excellent, allowing a positive community to be created between staff and students. Staff-student committees were cited as evidence of this. The strong sense of community was seen as underpinning the Department’s success.

The staff-student committee meets once each term and includes representatives from each research group and MSc course, along with the Director of Postgraduate Studies and the Postgraduate Tutor. Further details of the current members of the committee are available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/electricalengineering/internal/pgdegrees/generalinfo/postgraduate_staffstudent_committee
2. Centre for Environmental Policy

Industry Links

The review panel noted the excellent employment and internship opportunities available to students generated through the Centre’s links with government, industry and alumni. Further details on the Centre’s alumni are available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/environmentalpolicy/alumni

‘Buddy’ Scheme
The Centre is currently introducing a ‘buddy’ scheme. This scheme works by placing an experienced research student with a new student to offer guidance and support. The review panel saw this system as an example of good practice but advised that the system needs further organisation to fully reach its potential.

Interdisciplinary research approach

The reviewers cited the Centre’s commitment to interdisciplinary research as good practice. The Centre has many links with other Departments in the College.

Further details on the interdisciplinary nature of research within the Centre can be found at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/environmentalpolicy/research

PhD Student Opinion Survey

The Centre operates its own internal survey independently of the College. The survey is designed and analysed by the Centre’s own PhD students. The review panel highlighted this as an example of good practice and noted that student participation in this survey was higher than in College based internal surveys.

Staff and teaching quality

It was noted by the review panel that teaching staff are internationally respected in their field of research. The review panel commented that this has resulted in the Centre’s ability to attract high calibre students.

3. Department of Humanities

Excellent research facilities

The research facilities that were viewed by the review panel were excellent. The use of the Science Museum’s library for research students in the Science Communication and Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine groups was reported by the panel as an example of good practice.

Monitoring student progression and providing feedback

Monitoring student progression and the feedback provided to students was positively commented on by the review panel. Research students interviewed by the panel confirmed their satisfaction with supervisory arrangements. Students also commented on the
accessibility of research supervisors and quick response times in terms of feedback and responses to issues raised. The panel noted that results of student surveys also supported this.

Seminar programme

The use of the seminar programme was commented on by the review panel as good practice, allowing students to come into contact with many experts in their field. Further details of seminars presented are shown at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/humanities/eventsresearchseminars

4. Department of Materials

Staff-student communication

The review panel commented on the excellent communication between staff and students. It was reported that expectations from the Department on students throughout their studies were made clear to the student cohort at an early opportunity and conveyed both through personal contact with tutors and in the handbook.

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/materials/research/phdopportunities

Pastoral and administrative support

The level of pastoral and administrative support was praised. The review panel were confident that students were fully aware of who they should contact for support and there was good communication between staff and students.

Admissions procedures

The review panel praised the Department’s admissions procedures. The rigorous procedures ensure a high calibre of students are admitted onto the programme. Further details on the admissions process are shown at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/materials/research/phdopportunities/howtoapply

The review panel also commented favourably on student induction.

Student community

The review panel commented positively on the strong student community within the Department. Various events are held to create a positive student community which is further supported by the annual Postgraduate Research Day. Further details on the Postgraduate Research Day are available at the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/materials/news/pgresearchday

Interdisciplinary study

Positive comments were made by the panel regarding the interdisciplinary nature of studies within the Department. It was reported that the Department encourages a strong interdisciplinary culture, with student involvement in a variety of external centres including
the London Nanotechnology Centre. Further details of interdisciplinary partners are shown in the following link:

http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/materials/research/researchcentres

Academic environment

The review panel cited a number of factors which have contributed to an excellent research environment. These are the creation of research groups; transferable skills training; student activities such as seminars and poster competitions; and the expectation that students will attend international conferences as well as publish their own work.

Collaborative Research Degree Provision not Owned by Departments

1. Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme (MIDP)

Student support received from Imperial College

The support received by MIDP students from the International Office, Academic Lead and Imperial College supervisors was considered excellent by the review panel.

The review panel also stated that improvements to the monitoring of the course had been made since the appointment of the Academic Lead and cited this appointment as good practice.

Induction process at Imperial College

The induction process that took place at Imperial for MIDP students was commended by the review panel. Students present at the review confirmed to the panel that they were confident in finding information they needed as a result of the excellent information provided to them during induction. Particular praise was given to the role of the International Office in the induction process.
Appendix 1: Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Imperial College

First Year Undergraduate Autumn Term Report

NOTES: This form must be completed, printed, signed and then passed to your Personal Tutor, who will probably wish to discuss the report with you before adding their own signature. The signed report must then be submitted, as hard copy, via the coursework boxes on level 2, by the Friday of the Second Week of the Spring Term. Please read the notes at the end for guidance.

NAME:

E-MAIL ADDRESS:

PERSONAL TUTOR:

Number of Meetings with Personal Tutor in Autumn Term:

Health or Other Problems¹:

Academic Progress²:

Professional and Personal Development³:
Extra Curricular Activities 4:

Please tick the box if you have completed SOLE.

Student’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: _________

Tutor’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: _________
GUIDANCE NOTES:

The notes are merely suggestions, in most cases, for things you may wish to include on your Term Report; the list is by no means exhaustive. Only those points printed in bold in Note 1 are compulsory.

1. **Have you had any health problems? Have they caused difficulties with attending College or completing your work?** It is not obligatory that you report the nature of any such problems here if you would prefer not to pass this information on via this report. However, you should indicate that problems exist and to whom these were reported. Please remember that for absences of more than a week due to illness, a medical certificate is required. All absence due to illness, however long, should be reported to your Personal Tutor and to Anna Hikel, and the dates noted on this report.

2. Have you submitted all your coursework on time? If not, how late have you been? What were the reasons? Do you feel you are coping with the work or do you have any problems? What action have you taken to address these problems? Is there any subject that has caused you particular difficulties? How did you feel that you have done in the progress tests? Have you had any coursework marks back? How did you do?

3. Did you work in Civil Engineering over the previous summer? Have you attended any lectures other than those on your timetable at College? Have you become involved in CivSoc? Have you been charting and planning your personal development, for example using the Imperial College Employability scheme?

4. Are you involved in any College clubs or societies? Do you play sports? Are you a musician? Do you have a hobby? Do you participate in any voluntary work?