REVIEW OF DEGREES IN ARCHAEOLOGY
SUMMARY REPORT

1. Programmes covered by the Periodic Review

Undergraduate programmes:
BA Archaeology (V400)
BSc Archaeology (F420)
BA Archaeology and Classical Studies (QV84)
BA Archaeology and History (VV14)
BA Archaeology and History of Art and Architecture (VV64)
BA Archaeology and Italian (VR63)
BA Ancient History and Archaeology (VV41)

Taught postgraduate programmes:
MA Archaeology
MA Medieval Archaeology
MSc Geoarchaeology

2. Date of the Periodic Review

The Periodic Review took place on Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 February 2006.

3. Objectives of the Periodic Review

The objectives of the Periodic Review were to:

- Monitor the quality and standards of the degree programmes under Review;
- Enable the Department of Archaeology to evaluate its taught programme provision and in particular to evaluate student achievement of the appropriate academic standards, and the learning opportunities offered to students to support their achievements;
- To enable an independent Panel to review this self-evaluation through consideration of documentation and discussions with staff and students;
- Provide a means by which the Department of Archaeology is able to reflect on the success, development and possible improvement of the taught programmes that they offered;
- Ask fundamental questions about the rationale, structure and resourcing of the programmes under Review;
- Consider the educational aims and objectives of the programmes, and success in meeting these;
- Review teaching, learning and methods of assessment in their contexts;
Consider whether the programmes under Review should continue to run for a further period of up to six years.

4. **Conduct of the Periodic Review**

The Periodic Review was conducted by a Panel chaired by an academic member of the Faculty of Life Sciences, and also comprising two other internal members of academic staff (neither from the School of Human and Environmental Sciences) and two external academic members specialising in Archaeology.

The Panel received a range of documentation in advance of the Review, including the Self Evaluation Document prepared by the Department and also relevant programme specifications. During the Review Visit, the Panel considered other documentation and met relevant staff from the Department and from University service departments. Members of the Panel also met with current students studying a selection of the degree programmes under review; and were given a guided tour of the facilities.

5. **Evidence Base**

In addition to the meetings held with academic staff and current students, the Panel considered a wide range of evidence, including examples of student work with staff feedback, copies of programme handbooks, minutes of relevant committees and statistical data. The Panel was able to see External Examiners' reports for the three previous years. Both this report and those produced by the External Examiners commented on the high levels of student achievement.

The Panel was also able to see the evaluation questionnaires produced by students and the minutes of recent meetings of the termly School Staff Student Committee, which indicated that appropriate action was taken in response to issues raised.

6. **External peer contributors to process**

The external members of the Review Panel were present for the duration of the Periodic Review. External members of the Review Panel were appointed by the Joint Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning for Science and Life Sciences, after considering nominations from the School of Human and Environmental Sciences. The role of these External members was to provide subject expertise and to provide an expert judgement of the validity and appropriateness of the programmes under review.

7. **Overview of the main characteristics of the programmes covered by the review**

The Department operates programmes that are clearly structured and well thought-out and reflect the research excellence and range of expertise of staff. The programmes are current and match well to national benchmarks as well as
offering breadth and flexibility. There is excellent variation in teaching methods at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and the students appreciate the range of learning and assessment modes. The students clearly enjoy and value the degree programmes offered.

There is clear identification of vocational elements in the programmes which means that students intending to follow a professional career in Archaeology are particularly well served. A distinctive feature is the Silchester Field School, which is clearly popular with students. There is an extremely wide range of resources, particularly in scientific archaeology, which permits students to gain distinctive practical skills. There is a high level of information given to students in well-designed and comprehensive student handbooks. The committed and professional body of academic, administrative and technical staff are committed to supporting students in their teaching and learning. An open collegiate atmosphere exists in which students feel welcomed as members of an inclusive community. The Department is responsive to the need for change and keeps both programmes and practice under review.

8. Conclusions on innovation and good practice

Examples of good practice:

- The Skills Map, helping students to see opportunities for their own development in transferable skills, and where these are assessed within the different elements of the programme;
- The high level and quality of feedback given to students at all levels of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, particularly the use of seminars at Part 1 to provide feedback to students;
- The forms for the collection of student feedback on modules and staff reflection on the module as well as statistical analysis;
- The reflective nature of the peer review of teaching and the particular non-standard form used;
- The availability and operation of the laboratory and other facilities in the Department and the School, exemplary, both in facilities and access to them;
- The field schools, particularly that at Silchester, clearly engaging students in a wide range of field and analytical skills;
- Development of an inclusive attitude to students with special needs particularly with respect to field-work;
- The operation of the Student-Staff Committee, which includes a student chairing meetings. The invitation of the Library Representative to Student-Staff Committee meetings is an example of good practice which might be considered for wider adoption throughout the University.
- The development of a paper clearly describing School committees and reporting structures.
9. **Conclusions on quality and standards**

The Review Panel concluded:

- that the intended learning outcomes of the degree programmes were generally clear and appropriate and were being attained by students.
- that quality and standards were being achieved;
- that the programme specifications were being delivered;
- that Department clearly devotes care in teaching and supporting students and in ensuring that staff are widely available to students to consult;
- the Department is responsive to change and keeps the programmes under regular review;
- that the field classes are clearly very successful generally and helpful in delivering skills; and
- that there is an excellent variety of assessment methods and learning opportunities.

10. **Conclusions on currency and validity of the programmes under Review**

The Panel therefore **recommends** to the Joint Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning for the Faculties of Life Sciences and of Science that, subject to the programme team addressing the issues shown below, the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years:

*Undergraduate programmes:*
- BA Archaeology (V400)
- BSc Archaeology (F420)
- BA Archaeology and Classical Studies (QV84)
- BA Archaeology and History (VV14)
- BA Archaeology and History of Art and Architecture (VV64)
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*Taught postgraduate programmes:*
- MA Archaeology
- MA Medieval Archaeology
- MSc Geoarchaeology

11. **Recommendations**

The Panel deemed the following to be **Desirable:**

- Modify the assessment for the Silchester field school to better reflect its pedagogical success, e.g. by encouraging/guiding the students to be more evaluative rather than merely descriptive in their outputs such as the diary.
- Reflect on the structure and content of the Professional Skills module, in particular the articulation of the CMS contribution.
- Reflect on how the distinctiveness of the Reading undergraduate programme is articulated and, in particular, whether the Department wishes to characterise its courses as distinctive in the area of theory. Although there is application of
theory at Part 3 it is not sufficiently compulsory nor apparently sufficiently concentrated to be seen as distinctive.

- Reflect on the balance of elements at Part 2, in particular whether the 10-credit Archaeological Thought module should attract a higher credit rating.
- Consider whether to offer more Joint Honours degrees with Science programmes and whether further developments in MSc Geoarchaeology provision are possible, given the distinctive profile of Reading in the field, in order to attract additional EU and overseas students.
- Continue to review the data on marking for different modules that is now available, and to evaluate the causes for the differences between average marks for different modules.
- Keep in mind the issues of liaison with departments which collaborate in joint undergraduate programmes.

12. Summary of actions taken in response to the Review

- We will encourage the students to be more evaluative in their diaries this year, and we will look in more detail at the overall assessment in advance of the 2007 Field School. The latter course of action will be the responsibility of the Department’s Teaching Group in collaboration with the Assistant Director of the Field School;

- The Professional Skills in Archaeology module is subject to the same process of annual evaluation (in the light of student and staff evaluations) as all other modules, and this will continue to be the case. As part of this evaluation process, it has already been re-titled ‘Professional Careers in Archaeology’. In addition the convenor always meets with the Careers Advisory Service (CAS) in the Spring Term to discuss their contribution in the light of feedback from the previous year and any revisions to the module made by the Department. He is also meeting with CAS during the Summer to talk about the structure of the CAS contribution next year. Finally the convenor is attending a lunchtime workshop of the CETL for CCMS on the provision of Careers Management Skills;

- We have always considered that one of the distinctive attributes of the Reading undergraduate programmes is that they combine theory with practice and there is no one theoretical agenda. Our teaching is also informed by a wide range of research activity, as befits a top-rated department of archaeology. Our teaching of theory is at a basic level in Part 2, within the Archaeological Thought module, and it is then left to individual staff to deal with theoretical issues within the contexts of their own Part 3 modules. This fits with our ideas of progression and with the linkage of theory and practice. The extent to which Archaeological Thought should be a compulsory module for Joint as well as Single Honours students, and the credit weighting that it should have, are issues which we have discussed before and to which we will return in our Board of Studies in 2006-07;
• Reviews of the data on marking are built into our annual examinations procedures: for example, we collect and analyse data on the performance of joint and single subject students, as well as progression from Parts 2-3 and differences in performance according to different pathways through our degrees