Periodic Review of Archaeology

Introduction

1. An internal review of degree programmes in Archaeology was held on Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 May 2012. The members of the Panel were:

   Professor Julian Park, Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Life Sciences (Chair)
   Dr Nyree Finlay, University of Glasgow (External member)
   Dr Anthony Sinclair, University of Liverpool (External member)
   Dr Andrew Charlton Perez, School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences
   Mr Alex Slater, VP Academic Affairs, Reading University Students’ Union
   Dr Carol Wagstaff, School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy
   Miss Sally Adams, Sub-Dean, Faculties of Science and Life Sciences (Secretary)

2. The Panel met with the Head of the Department of Archaeology, School Director of Teaching and Learning for Human and Environmental Sciences, Programme Directors for undergraduate and Masters degrees in Archaeology, Co-ordinator for joint degrees in Archaeology, and representatives involved in teaching, admissions, careers and delivery of the Archaeology degree programmes.

3. The Panel met students who represented the following degree programmes:

   - BA Archaeology
   - BSc Archaeology
   - BA Ancient History and Archaeology
   - BA Archaeology & Classical Studies
   - BA Archaeology & History
   - BA Archaeology & History of Art (programme discontinued following 2010-11 intake)
   - BA Archaeology & Italian
   - MA Archaeology
   - MA Medieval Archaeology
   - MA Research Archaeology
   - MSc Geoarchaeology

   The Panel also met with recent graduates.

General observations

4. The Department of Archaeology at Reading is securely within the top tier of Archaeology departments at a national level (having been awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize in 2009 and placed 5th in the most recent Guardian League Table) and the degree programmes offered and the quality of students produced are commensurate with its standing as a leading research department. The students met by the Panel were clearly enthused by their degrees and the opportunities provided for both academic and practical training ‘in the field’. The Panel was impressed by the strong sense of community fostered...
by the Department, the enthusiasm and commitment of its staff, the resources available to support students and the degree to which teaching was informed by research.

The Panel wished to express its gratitude to those who had participated in the review process and commended the Department for the provision of clear and comprehensive documentation prior to the review.

Academic standards of the programmes

Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

5. The Department of Archaeology offers a range of programmes at undergraduate and Masters level that draw on the research strengths of staff and attract students from a diverse range of backgrounds. These programmes follow the national trend of a broad introduction to the discipline and its methods at Part 1, followed by a deeper engagement and specialisation in Parts 2 and 3 that is well rounded in content and method. All students have the opportunity to participate in research-led fieldwork.

Particular strengths of both the BA and BSc programmes include an emphasis on undergraduate research, the development of a broad range of practical analytical skills, and the opportunity to develop professional archaeological skills in an authentic setting. At Masters level, students have the opportunity to specialise yet further, and those taking the MSc Geoarchaeology are encouraged to develop a wide range of scientific archaeological skills.

The Panel agreed that the aims and learning outcomes of the degrees are clear and appropriate, and are clearly communicated to students, staff and Examiners. The intended learning outcomes have been informed by published Subject Benchmarking Statements and by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Reports from External Examiners confirm that the learning outcomes are being attained by students.

Curricula and assessment

6. The Department offers a curriculum that is broad in its chronological and geographical range. This has been further enhanced through new staff appointments. The Department blends international, national and regional perspectives into its archaeology activities in both teaching and research. This offers particular opportunities for students to follow their interests and develop particular specialisms. A full range of assessment types are used and applied effectively and appropriately to the material at hand. Notable strengths include the extensive use of and participation in primary research by undergraduate and Masters students (which the Panel commends as good practice), the breadth and high quality of science provision, the quality of the integration of fieldwork teaching across all levels and through the academic year, and the interaction and development of new Museums-related programmes and teaching.

Good practice: The extensive use of and participation in primary research by students, which fits well with current University enhancement priorities

The Panel noted comments by some External Examiners and recent graduates about a relative lack of numeracy and visual skills training. The graduates who had taken the BA and MA Archaeology in particular felt that they would have benefitted from further training in numeracy and statistical analysis, particularly in preparation for their dissertations. The Panel also felt that such training would be useful to enhance the employability of graduates. Whilst students struggling with these aspects could seek support on an informal basis from staff within the Department, the Panel felt that it would be appropriate to formalise this provision.
The Panel noted that the Department was considering revising its undergraduate teaching to allow more opportunities for students to develop their numeracy and visual skills, through the introduction of a cemetery survey at Part 1 and through practical dissertation workshops covering illustration, basic GIS skills, numeracy and data presentation at Part 3. The dissertation workshops in particular would enable students to analyse ‘real’ data gathered for their dissertations – an approach felt by the Department to be more beneficial than attempting to teach numeracy skills using abstract data. Students taking the MA in Archaeology had the opportunity to take an optional module covering numeracy skills and statistical analysis, although few did so.

 Whilst the Panel noted the Department’s plans to enhance numeracy and statistical skills training, it felt that further consideration should be given to student progression in relation to these aspects during their time at Reading. The Department might wish to seek input from the Mathematics Support Centre and Statistical Advisory Service in embedding such training within the curriculum.

 Recommendation (desirable): The Department should give consideration to student progression in relation to numeracy and statistical skills training.

 The Panel noted comments from some students (especially those registered for joint degrees) about the bunching of coursework deadlines, and that this posed particular difficulties for a significant number of students who had to juggle their academic work with outside commitments such as paid employment. The Panel did not agree that this issue could be resolved simply by students managing their time better. The Panel therefore felt that Archaeology should work closely with Departments involved in the delivery of its joint degree programmes to reduce bunching of assessment deadlines, for instance through the development of an assessment matrix / assessment calendar.

 Recommendation (desirable): Archaeology should work closely with Departments involved in the delivery of its joint degree programmes to reduce bunching of assessment deadlines, for instance through the development of an assessment matrix / assessment calendar.

 The Panel noted that External Examiners had praised the quality of feedback provided to students on their work, and that students, through the National Student Survey, had confirmed that such feedback had helped them to improve their performance. The students met by the Panel felt confident in the marking practices of the Department, and indicated that the quality of the feedback they received was generally better than for modules taught by other Schools.

 However, some negative comments had been made, both through the National Student Survey and by the students met by the Panel, about the timeliness of feedback in some instances. Whilst some staff provided feedback quickly, others did not – the students met by the Panel indicated that they did not, in general, receive feedback by the date specified. Particular frustrations were expressed by Masters students about the length of time taken for some staff to provide feedback; other students expressed concerns at having to continually chase feedback from certain members of staff.

 The Panel noted the steps the Department would be seeking to indicate more explicitly to students when they were being given feedback, but agreed that the Department should take further steps over the coming year to review its policies and procedures in relation to feedback to ensure it is provided uniformly to students in a timely manner. The Panel also agreed that this should include a review of mechanisms for advising students when they should expect feedback.

 Recommendation (advisable): Over the coming year, the Department should review its policies and procedures in relation to feedback to ensure that feedback is
provided to students in a timely manner. This should also include a review of mechanisms for advising students when they should expect feedback.

The Panel noted that the Department made use of the School-wide Interactive Assessment Management System (IAMS) for the submission of coursework. This system had been developed by a member of staff in Geography, and enabled students to print-out a unique anonymised coversheet for their work (which they were not allowed to print unless they had already submitted their online module evaluation). Students then handed-in a hard copy of their work to the Department Office where their work was checked against the IAMS database; an email receipt was then sent to the student and the coursework distributed to markers.

The use of IAMS for the submission of coursework had saved the Department time and money, particularly through the automatic generation of anonymised coversheets. The system also ensured that students completed online module evaluation. The Panel raised some concerns, however, that the system was essentially reliant on one member of staff in Geography for technical support; in addition, the anonymised coversheet generated by the system gave an indicative date for the provision of feedback, which was not always realistic or met by staff (which might explain, in part, the comments made by students about staff not providing feedback by the date specified). Given recent upgrades to Blackboard, the Panel agreed that the Department should consider whether Blackboard might serve as an appropriate replacement for IAMS for the submission of coursework.

Recommendation (desirable): The Department should investigate whether, following recent upgrades, Blackboard might serve as an appropriate replacement for IAMS for the submission of coursework.

Use of student management information

7. The Panel was impressed by the Department’s strong performance in successive National Student Surveys, especially when compared to other Schools across the University. The Panel was confident that the Department has a good knowledge of its student cohort, and knows who its competitors are. The Panel was impressed with the Department’s arrangements for the evaluation of modules and degree programmes, and noted that module convenors were required to provide a written response to student module evaluation for discussion by the relevant Board of Studies and for publication on Blackboard.

There was clear evidence, both from the documentation and meetings with students that the Department responded pro-actively to student feedback and that student views were acted upon. Student representatives sat on Boards of Studies, and issues were actively discussed by, and actions reported back to, the Staff – Student Liaison Committee. Students also had the opportunity to raise issues via the Archaeology Facebook page, to be taken forward by the relevant Course Rep. The Panel suggested that the Department might wish to include student representation on the Teaching Enhancement Group.

Reports from External Examiners confirmed that issues raised by them were addressed by the Department in a very satisfactory manner. External Examiners also commended the Department on providing the opportunity for them to meet confidentially with Finalists during their examination visit and to engage in positive discussion about the students’ degree programmes.

The Panel noted that recent National Student Surveys had highlighted a relative lack of contact hours for degrees in Archaeology compared to other programmes in the sciences, but accepted that contact hours varied significantly between disciplines. A more relevant comparison for the Department to assess would be contact hours compared to competitor Archaeology departments, once the forthcoming Key Information Set (KIS) data had been...
published. The Panel encourages the Department to review contact hours data for competitor institutions in due course.

The Panel noted some concerns raised both through the National Student Survey and during its meeting with students about the management of joint degrees. The Panel was satisfied with the level of informal contact between the Departments involved in the delivery of these degrees, and the appointment of a member of staff in Archaeology to act as joint degree co-ordinator. The Panel was, however, concerned that representatives from the associated Departments did not regularly attend the joint degree Boards of Studies meetings (despite their formal membership). The Panel agreed that such attendance was essential both for Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement purposes, and recommends that the Department takes further steps to encourage regular attendance at Boards of Studies meetings by representatives from joint degree Departments.

Recommendation (necessary): The Department should take further steps to encourage attendance at Boards of Studies meetings by representatives from joint degree Departments

Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

Teaching and learning

8. The Panel was impressed by the range of teaching methods incorporated into the degree programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and commended the Department on the degree to which teaching was informed by research. It was clear that the Department was cohesive, with strong relationships between staff and students across all years; there was a good supportive culture and a strong sense of community within the Department, which the Panel commended as good practice.

Good practice: The strong relationships between staff and students across all years and the good supportive culture and strong sense of community within the Department

The Panel was particularly impressed with the practical field work opportunities provided to students, both through participation in archaeological excavations led by individual members of staff, and through the Silchester field school (which will be discussed in more detail in section 10 below).

The Panel was also impressed with the personal tutorial arrangements in the Department, whereby each Personal Tutor was provided with electronic copies of their tutees’ work (or copies of feedback sheets for modules taught by joint degree Departments). This innovative practice enabled Personal Tutors to identify recurring themes to discuss with their tutees, and gave Personal Tutors a valuable overview of their tutees’ performance which they might not otherwise have, particularly for students taking joint degrees. The Panel wished to commend these arrangements as good practice.

Good practice: The Department’s innovative personal tutorial system, which gives Personal Tutors a valuable overview of their tutees’ performance

The Panel noted some concerns raised by staff about timetabling issues, particularly for joint degrees. Whilst the Department sought to ensure the Timetabling Office was provided with relevant information about which modules should not clash on the timetable, it frequently had to expend considerable resource once the draft timetable had been produced to ensure appropriate timetables for its students. The Panel raised concerns about the consequences of this on staff time, and the potential negative impact on the development of new joint degree programmes. The Panel agreed to raise this as a University-wide issue requiring further consideration.
University-wide issue: The considerable resource expended by the Department to ensure appropriate timetables for its students (particularly for those on joint degrees), and the consequences of this on staff time and the potential negative impact on the development of new joint degree programmes.

The Panel commended the Department on the variety of teaching methods incorporated into the curriculum particularly at Parts 2 and 3, and the extent to which the Department sought to cater for students entering either with or without A-level Archaeology at Part 1. The Panel noted, however, that teaching and assessment at Part 1 relied heavily on ‘traditional’ forms of delivery through lectures, essays etc, and that Part 1 students did not have as much opportunity as students in Parts 2 and 3 to engage in enquiry-based, hands-on archaeology. The Panel felt that an emphasis on such practical teaching at Part 1 could serve as a USP for Archaeology at Reading, building on existing provision.

The Panel noted that the Department already had plans in place to review its provision at Part 1, seeking to identify small changes which could help develop a stronger sense of community in advance of the Silchester field school, whilst ensuring Part 1 continued to provide the basic grounding in archaeology required for students to specialise in later years. The Panel agreed that, in its review of Part 1, the Department should consider ways in which to ensure students had as much opportunity as possible to undertake enquiry-based archaeology from the very start of their degree.

Recommendation (advisable): In its review of Part 1 provision, the Department should consider ways in which to ensure students have as much opportunity as possible to undertake enquiry-based archaeology from the very start of their degree.

The Panel noted that, whilst the Department had a relatively low staff : student ratio, it had indicated it would experience difficulties in providing more smaller group teaching / practical work at Part 1. The Panel agreed, however, that the Department should give further consideration to mechanisms for allowing more small group teaching at Part 1, which might, for instance, involve more use of PhD students / postdoctoral staff to help facilitate greater provision of enquiry-based learning.

Recommendation (desirable): The Department should give further consideration to mechanisms for allowing more small group teaching at Part 1, which might, for instance, involve more use of PhD students / postdoctoral staff to help facilitate greater provision of enquiry-based learning.

The Panel received details of the number of students registered for each module at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and noted that the number of students on modules seemed relatively low in some instances. The Panel noted, however, that this was not out-of-line with other archaeology departments, but agreed that the Department needed to review modules with perennially low numbers to assess their viability.

The Panel noted that a range of modules were taught to both Masters students and Part 3 students together, albeit with differences in the learning outcomes to differentiate between levels 6 and 7 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The Panel noted that such practice was becoming less common across the sector, and would encourage the Department to consider this issue in its forthcoming review of Masters programmes.

Recommendation (advisable): The Department should consider during its forthcoming review of Masters programmes its practice of teaching modules to both Masters students and Part 3 students in the light of such practice becoming less common across the sector.
Student admission and progression

9. The Panel noted the concerns raised across the sector in relation to the possible impact of the new undergraduate tuition fee regime on recruitment to degrees in Archaeology, and subsequent progression from undergraduate to taught Masters programmes. The Panel was impressed by the active steps being taken by the Department to address the recruitment challenges faced, including re-structuring its admissions process to give prospective undergraduates a good experience at UCAS Visit Days and to ensure that the maximum number visited the Department through interviewing candidates prior to offer (which had led to improvements in conversion rates in other Schools). The Department was also taking steps to better train student helpers in preparation for UCAS Visit Days, to provide artefact handling workshops and other hands-on sessions for prospective students, to involve students in delivering presentations on their experiences at Reading, and to highlight potential career opportunities, along with re-organising Visit Day arrangements for applicants interested in joint degrees.

The Panel also noted the steps taken by the Department to review its suite of degree programmes to ensure they remained attractive to students. Examples included the development of the BA Museum Studies and Archaeology (to be introduced for October 2013 entry), and forthcoming review of Masters programmes to address, in part, reductions in student numbers as a result of the withdrawal of NERC studentship funding for the MSc Geoarchaeology, and to increase overseas student recruitment. The Panel noted the Department’s plans to increase its undergraduate student numbers each year over the next three years, whilst continuing to increase entry standards.

The Panel was impressed by the steps taken by the Department to address recruitment challenges at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and wished to commend this as good practice.

Good practice: The steps taken by the Department to address recruitment challenges at both undergraduate and postgraduate level

The Panel noted that progression rates between Parts at undergraduate level were good, although there had been a slight increase in recent years in the number of joint degree students transferring to single-honours degrees in their second Department. Whilst this was not of particular concern at a University level (indeed, the flexibility to transfer degrees was highlighted to prospective students at Open Days, partly to allay fears among those who had not studied Archaeology before), the Department was keen to reverse this trend. The Panel hoped that a move to more smaller group teaching and enquiry-based learning at Part 1 might encourage students to stay registered in Archaeology.

The Panel was impressed with the number of Archaeology graduates progressing to postgraduate study – the figure at Reading was higher than at other comparable institutions. The Panel noted, however, that the number of Reading Archaeology graduates entering graduate-level employment was relatively low compared to other Schools across the University, as shown in recent Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys. The number was also lower than some Archaeology departments elsewhere.

The Panel noted, however, that the DLHE survey was conducted only 6 months after graduation, and that, particularly in the archaeology sector, graduates might not have secured graduate-level employment by this time. The Panel agreed that it would be beneficial for the Department to track the career destinations of its graduates after this 6-month period, as it was likely the graduate employability figures would be higher than indicated by DLHE. The Department could then use this longitudinal data for marketing purposes and to provide contextual background for KIS. The Panel suggested that the Department might make use of its Facebook site to help track its graduates.
Recommendation (advisable): The Department should ensure it tracks the career destinations of its graduates after the 6-month DLHE survey period.

The Panel was satisfied that, through practical field work and related placements, the Department was preparing students well for employment within the archaeology sector. However, the Panel was less convinced of current arrangements for preparing students for careers in other areas, and noted the comments made by students that the careers module they had taken had presented an unduly negative picture of the availability of careers for Archaeology graduates. The Panel noted, however, that the Department had worked closely with the Student Employment, Experience and Careers Centre (SEECC) to revise its careers module for 2012-13, and would be seeking to better support students in finding placements outside the archaeology sector, and to encourage students to recognise the full range of transferable skills they were acquiring during their degree and to articulate those skills to potential employers.

The Panel was pleased to note the Department’s involvement in the forthcoming School-wide careers fair, and encouraged the Department to continue working with SEECC to provide more generalist careers support to Archaeology students. The Panel also noted that the Department had made use of alumni employed outside the archaeology sector to support careers training for students wishing to pursue alternative careers, and would encourage the Department to make more use of such provision.

Recommendation (advisable): The Department should make more use of alumni employed outside the archaeology sector to support careers training for students wishing to pursue alternative careers.

Learning resources

10. The Panel agreed that an impressive range of facilities and teaching resources are made available to students, from dedicated study space to well-equipped laboratories and teaching collections. Students have ample space for both group teaching and individual and practical study within these facilities. The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS) has had a clear and long-lasting impact upon the Department in this respect.

Particular strengths include the continual enhancement of teaching collections as a result of staff research project materials (including micromorphological thin sections), the provision of dedicated study space facilities for undergraduate and Masters students, the opportunity for students to engage with project placement work deriving from commercial contracts with Quaternary Scientific (QUEST – the Department’s commercial arm), and the hosting by the Department of the Institute for Archaeologists, offering close relations with the professional body for the discipline and opportunities for students to enhance their understanding of professional work practices.

The Panel commends as good practice the range of learning resources to which students have access, and the opportunity for students to engage with project placement work deriving from commercial contracts with QUEST.

Good practice: The range of learning resources to which students have access

The opportunity for students to engage with project placement work deriving from commercial contracts with Quaternary Scientific (QUEST), the Department’s commercial arm.

Perhaps the most notable learning resource to which students have access is the Silchester field school, attendance at which is compulsory for single-honours undergraduate students and optional for joint honours students and those at Masters level. The Panel noted the unanimously positive comments from the students it met about the whole
Silchester ‘experience’, in terms of the practical training provided, the opportunity for students to contribute directly to research, and the sense of community developed during the dig. A number of students in Parts 2 and 3 (and at Masters and PhD level) continued to volunteer at Silchester each year, which was testament to the ongoing warmth felt by students about the field school. The provision of this single-site field school, which had been running since the 1970s and had led to a significant number of research publications, was unique nationally.

The Panel noted, however, that the Silchester field school was due to end in 2015. The Panel was satisfied that the Department was taking appropriate steps to consider a replacement field school (either through the identification of a single-site location or through enhanced provision of excavations elsewhere) and to ensure that the good teaching and learning practice developed at Silchester was not lost in any new arrangement. The Department would be holding a dedicated Away Day in October 2012 to discuss possible replacements for Silchester.

The Panel wished to commend the Department for the provision of the Silchester field school, and to express its support to the Department in its endeavours to find a replacement.

Good practice: The provision of the Silchester field school, which provides an excellent teaching and learning resource for students. The Panel supports the Department in its endeavours to find a replacement for Silchester post-2015

The Panel was also impressed with the range of other excavations available to students (including Mesolithic excavations in the Hebrides, medieval excavations in the Baltic and Lyminge, Kent, prehistoric excavations in the Severn Estuary and so forth), which enabled students to undertake fieldwork directly related to their period of interest.

The Panel noted that the Department had almost double the average University proportion of students with declared disabilities. The Panel was impressed with the strong national profile developed by the Department in addressing issues of disability within archaeological fieldwork, and noted that staff within the Department had secured funding to lead the Inclusive Accessible Archaeology project (developing toolkits for all students to assess their own physical and cognitive abilities and transferable skills related to participation in archaeological fieldwork), and funding from English Heritage to produce guidelines to inform the profession about attitudes and employees’ rights and employers’ responsibilities in relation to fieldwork participation. The Panel commends the Department for its efforts in this area.

Good practice: The national profile developed by the Department in addressing issues of disability within archaeological fieldwork

The Panel noted that use of Blackboard to support modules was generally good across the Department, although there were significant differences in some cases between the amount of material available through Blackboard. The Panel suggests that the Department should consider how best to share good practice in relation to Blackboard use, including whether to set a threshold for minimum content.

Recommendation (desirable): The Department should consider how best to share good practice in relation to Blackboard use across the Department, including whether to set a threshold for minimum content

The Panel noted that some concerns had been expressed through the National Student Survey about a lack of resources in the Library, but also noted recent acquisitions of materials in relation to Near-Eastern Archaeology, and the steps taken by the Department to make certain key texts available through Blackboard. The Panel also noted the forthcoming significant increase in investment in the Library at a University level.
The Panel felt that the concerns expressed by students about Library resources (and other central resources in general) might be more as a result of students not being aware of the facilities available, rather than a shortage of facilities per se. The Panel suggests that the Department does all it can to ensure students are aware of, and make appropriate use of, University-level services such as the Library, SEECC and Maths Support Centre.

Employer engagement

11. The Panel noted the links between the Department and potential employers such as English Heritage, Oxford Archaeology, Wessex Archaeology, QUEST and the Museum of English Rural Life, and that such employers were invited to give talks to students about possible career opportunities. The Panel felt, however, that the Department could develop better links with employers outside the archaeology sector, which might help improve the careers support provided to students wishing to pursue alternative careers. The Panel suggests that the Department should use the forthcoming School-wide careers fair to liaise with such employers, and to start to build such wider relationships. The Department might also wish to seek support from SEECC in identifying potential employers in other sectors.

Recommendation (desirable): The Department should use the forthcoming School-wide careers fair to better liaise with employers outside the archaeology sector, and to start to build such wider relationships.

The Panel discussed whether the Department should be encouraged to establish an employer advisory board (as such boards were in place in other Schools), but recognised that this might not be appropriate given that archaeological organisations had not been particularly keen in the past to engage with HE institutions in this way.

Enhancement of quality and academic provision

12. The Panel was impressed by the steps taken by the Department to enhance its academic provision, through discussion at Boards of Studies meetings and the Teaching Enhancement Group. Staff were encouraged to develop novel ways of teaching and to evolve module content; a number of staff had recently submitted bids for funding from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) to support such activities. Staff were also facilitated in taking research leave, which they could use for the purposes of developing their teaching.

The Panel noted, however, that although the terms of reference of the Teaching Enhancement Group (TEG) included highlighting good practice to staff across the School, there did not appear to be much evidence of this in the relevant minutes (in fact, the TEG appeared to be more concerned with resolving issues as they arose). The Panel, whilst recognising the benefits of the TEG, felt it could be used more effectively as a vehicle to share good practice across the Department, and recommends that the Department considers how best to achieve this.

Recommendation (desirable): The Department should consider how the Teaching Enhancement Group might be used more effectively as a vehicle to share good practice across the Department.

The Panel would also suggest that the Department gives thought to developing a formal Departmental strategy for teaching development. One area of focus might, for instance, be the use of alternative technology to support learning, such as the development of a Departmental research blog aimed at undergraduate and Masters students to allow members of staff to describe their recent research activities.
The Panel was impressed with the steps taken by the Department to review its provision, through the introduction of the BA Museum Studies and Archaeology, and through plans to revitalise its Masters programmes. The Panel noted the exciting opportunities for content to be developed as a result of new staff appointments through the University-wide Academic Investment Project, and the desire by the Department to foster more School-wide provision through developing joint programmes with the Department of Geography and Environmental Science.

Whilst supportive of the Department’s focus on re-development of its Masters programmes (through the development of a School-wide Masters programme in environmental change and society, development of the material culture aspects of the MA Medieval Archaeology to make the programme more distinctive (and more attractive to applicants from North America in particular), development of an MA in Roman Archaeology and so forth), the Panel suggests strongly that the Department should undertake a clear market analysis before setting-up new degrees, and that it makes full use of central support in conducting such an analysis.

Main characteristics of the programmes under review

13. The degree programmes offered by the Department of Archaeology cover appropriate content that is broad in its chronological and geographical range. Students at Part 1 are taught basic aspects of archaeology, giving them a good grounding to specialise in later Parts. Students are encouraged to become involved in research at an early stage (not least through the Silchester field school), and the current research interests of staff inform teaching. A notable strength of the programmes includes the degree to which students engage in practical work through the Silchester field school, excavations elsewhere and hands-on work in the lab. There is a strong sense of community within the Department; the Panel was impressed by the enthusiasm shown by both staff and students in teaching and learning activities.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

14. The Panel commends the Department on the following examples of good practice:

(a) The extensive use of and participation in primary research by students, which fits well with current University enhancement priorities;

(b) The strong relationships between staff and students across all years and the good supportive culture and strong sense of community within the Department;

(c) The Department’s innovative personal tutorial system, which gives Personal Tutors a valuable overview of their tutees’ performance;

(d) The steps taken by the Department to address recruitment challenges at both undergraduate and postgraduate level;

(e) The range of learning resources to which students have access;

(f) The opportunity for students to engage with project placement work deriving from commercial contracts with Quaternary Scientific (QUEST), the Department’s commercial arm;
(g) The provision of the Silchester field school, which provides an excellent teaching and learning resource for students. The Panel supports the Department in its endeavours to find a replacement for Silchester post-2015;

(h) The national profile developed by the Department in addressing issues of disability within archaeological fieldwork

Conclusions on quality and standards

15. The Panel agreed that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes are being obtained by students, that appropriate quality and standards are being achieved, and that the programme specifications for the degrees are appropriate.

Conclusions on new degree programme proposals

16. Not applicable

Recommendations

17. The Panel recommends to the Joint Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning in Science and Life Sciences that the following degree programmes be re-approved for a further six years:

- BA Archaeology
- BSc Archaeology
- BA Ancient History and Archaeology
- BA Archaeology & Classical Studies
- BA Archaeology & History
- BA Archaeology & Italian
- MA Archaeology
- MA Medieval Archaeology
- MA Research Archaeology
- MSc Geoarchaeology

18. The Panel recommends that the following issues should be addressed by the Department:

Necessary

(a) The Department should take further steps to encourage attendance at Boards of Studies meetings by representatives from joint degree Departments

Advisable

(a) Over the coming year, the Department should review its policies and procedures in relation to feedback to ensure that feedback is provided to students in a timely manner. This should also include a review of mechanisms for advising students when they should expect feedback;

(b) In its review of Part 1 provision, the Department should consider ways in which to ensure students have as much opportunity as possible to undertake enquiry-based archaeology from the very start of their degree;
(c) The Department should consider during its forthcoming review of Masters programmes its practice of teaching modules to both Masters students and Part 3 students in the light of such practice becoming less common across the sector;

(d) The Department should ensure it tracks the career destinations of its graduates after the 6-month DLHE survey period;

(e) The Department should make more use of alumni employed outside the archaeology sector to support careers training for students wishing to pursue alternative careers

Desirable

(a) The Department should give consideration to student progression in relation to numeracy and statistical skills training;

(b) Archaeology should work closely with Departments involved in the delivery of its joint degree programmes to reduce bunching of assessment deadlines, for instance through the development of an assessment matrix / assessment calendar;

(c) The Department should investigate whether, following recent upgrades, Blackboard might serve as an appropriate replacement for IAMS for the submission of coursework;

(d) The Department should give further consideration to mechanisms for allowing more small group teaching at Part 1, which might, for instance, involve more use of PhD students / postdoctoral staff to help facilitate greater provision of enquiry-based learning;

(e) The Department should consider how best to share good practice in relation to Blackboard use across the Department, including whether to set a threshold for minimum content;

(f) The Department should use the forthcoming School-wide careers fair to better liaise with employers outside the archaeology sector, and to start to build such wider relationships;

(g) The Department should consider how the Teaching Enhancement Group might be used more effectively as a vehicle to share good practice across the Department

The Panel identified the following University-wide issues requiring further consideration:

(a) The considerable resource expended by the Department to ensure appropriate timetables for its students (particularly for those on joint degrees), and the consequences of this on staff time and the potential negative impact on the development of new joint degree programmes