Summary of the Periodic Review of Environmental Science and Geography

Programmes covered by the Periodic Review

The programmes covered by the Periodic Review were:

*Undergraduate programmes:*
  - BSc Environmental Science (F851)
  - BSc Environmental Science with professional experience (F852)
  - BSc Human and Physical Geography (F841)
  - BSc Physical Geography (F840)
  - BSc Human Geography (L722)
  - BSc Geography and Economics (Regional Science) (LL17)

*Taught postgraduate programmes:*
  - MSc Research (Human Geography)
  - MSc Soils and Environmental Pollution

Date of the Periodic Review

The Periodic Review took place on Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 April 2008.

Objectives of the Periodic Review

The objectives of the Periodic Review were to:

- Review the effectiveness of the means by which Schools manage and assure the academic standards of the degree programmes under Review and the quality of the learning opportunities provided;
- Enable Environmental Science and Geography to consider how they might enhance their portfolio of taught programmes and the learning experience of their students, and to consider the effectiveness of their approach;
- Consider the future plans of the Environmental Science and Geography for their taught programmes
- Enable an independent Panel to review this self-evaluation through consideration of documentation and discussions with staff and students;
- Provide a means by which Environmental Science and Geography were able to reflect on the success, enhancement and future development of the taught programmes that they offered;
- Identify examples of good and effective practice;
- Consider whether the programmes under Review should continue to run for a further or initial period of up to six years, as appropriate;
Conduct of the Periodic Review

The Review Panel was composed of four staff from different Schools within the University and two external subject-specialists from UK Higher Education Institutions. The Panel received a Self Evaluation Document, programme handbooks and other relevant materials in advance of the Review. A number of meetings took place over the two-day period to address the variety of different areas covered by the Review.

Evidence base

The Panel was able to draw on a variety of evidence including External Examiners' reports, feedback from staff and students, and an extensive range of material including examples of coursework, examples of examination questions and answers, module and programme descriptions and dissertations.

External peer contributors to process

The two external members of the Panel were asked to pay particular attention to the curricula and assessment components of the review. External members of the Review Panel were appointed by the Faculty of Science Board for Teaching and Learning, 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.

Overview of the main characteristics of the programmes covered by the Review

The Panel was impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and the overall quality of the student experience. The programmes were well conceived, developing both academic and transferable skills in the students and offered opportunities for students to engage with research. The students whom the Panel met were strongly supportive of the education they were receiving and the facilities and support provided.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

The Panel was impressed by the following examples of good practice:

- The range of curriculum innovations at module level which have demonstrated the School's willingness to adopt novel approaches. Examples include the Team Project (Geography), the use of Video in Assessment (Geography) and the Environmental Issues module (Environmental Science).
• Strong links with practice and employer involvement in Environmental Science, in particular within the MSc in Soils and Environmental Pollution.

• The supportive, approachable and accessible staff in both Departments supported by the on-line appointment system.

• The development of an applied skills module at Part 1 Geography (Geographical Techniques) which builds generic skills embedded in a Geography context.

• The robust and rigorous approach to special needs and health and safety.

• The high quality IT and map resources which underpin the curriculum.

• Transparent and robust quality assurance systems for tracking and reviewing both modules and programmes.

• The use of a student Chair for the student staff liaison committee in Geography.

Conclusions on quality and standards

The Panel concluded that:

• that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes were clear and appropriate and were being obtained by students, although awareness of such outcomes might be enhanced by developing clearer routes through the geography undergraduate programmes in particular.

• that quality and standards were in general being achieved; and

• that the programme specifications were being delivered.

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 the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years:

**Undergraduate programmes:**
BSc Environmental Science (F851)
BSc Environmental Science with professional experience (F852)
BSc Human and Physical Geography (F841)
BSc Physical Geography (F840)
BSc Human Geography (L722)
BSc Geography and Economics (Regional Science) (LL17)

**Taught postgraduate programmes:**
MSc Research (Human Geography)
MSc Soils and Environmental Pollution
Recommendations

The Panel considers it **advisable** that the Departments (or School):

1. Review the programme handbooks to ensure that these are communicating the distinctive qualities of the programmes, other programme information relevant to the student’s Part, and the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategies used by the Departments in a clear and accessible manner.

2. Ensure that as modules are revised and updated that these changes are clearly aligned to the learning outcomes articulated in the programme specifications.

3. The Panel valued the flexibility within the programmes, but recommends that the School/Departments develop a clear understanding of the pathways or routes through the programmes in order to ensure that students are making informed and appropriate choices as they move from Part to Part. A clear mapping of pre-requisites and co-requisites would aid this process.

4. Building on the work to increase the number of students achieving a first class degree in Geography, the Department is encouraged to further reflect on the potential underlying causes. Issues to consider may include ensuring that feedback is given in both a timely manner and at an appropriate stage in the academic year, reviewing and embedding the assessment criteria to ensure that there is a common understanding amongst students and teach staff, reviewing the moderation process to ensure that students are not being disadvantaged and continuing to encourage staff to mark within the full range.

5. The Environmental Science team should review the guidance and support given to students who are considering taking the year in industry in order to ensure that the students are supported and therefore able to take full advantage of the opportunities this programme presents.

The Panel considers it **desirable** that the Department:

6. Noting the tailoring of the Career Management Skills (CMS) module for Geography students, the Department should consider ways in which they might highlight employment opportunities for students at all levels, to enable students to make informed academic and career choices.

7. Building on the existing quality assurance processes at the operational level, the School should consider:
   a. how it might streamline these process to avoid duplication.
   b. ensure that there is consistency in approach particularly where policies impact the student experience (e.g. assessment load).
   c. how it might further exploit the information available in order that it can take a strategic overview of the student experience in order to inform the future priorities for action.
8. The School should consider ways to take a more proactive approach to staff development and dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning across the Departments.

Summary of actions taken in response to the Review

[To be added once the Subject Provider's Action Plan has been produced and subsequently over-written one year later, to provide details of the Subject Provider's ‘follow-up’ report]