Summary of the Periodic Review of the Graduate Institute of Political and International Studies

Programmes covered by the Periodic Review

1. The programmes covered by the Periodic Review were:
   - MA Diplomacy
   - MA European Studies
   - MA EU Politics (with research)
   - MA International Law and World Order
   - MA International Relations
   - MA International Security Studies
   - MA Strategic Studies

Date of the Periodic Review

2. The Panel relied upon paperwork and meetings conducted in April 2008 (at the Periodic Review of Politics and International Relations) in addition to reports from the Chair and Secretary on meetings in March 2009.

Objectives of the Periodic Review

3. The objectives of the Periodic Review were to:
   - Review the effectiveness of the means by which the Graduate Institute of Political and International Studies (GIPIS) manage and assure the academic standards of the degree programmes under Review and the quality of the learning opportunities provided;
   - Enable GIPIS 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 GIPIS 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 GIPIS 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

4 The Periodic Review was conducted by a Panel chaired by the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Social Sciences, with one internal member of academic staff (from the Henley Business School), and one external members of academic staff (from the University of Swansea). The Joint-Faculty Administrative Officer acted as Secretary to the Review Panel.

The Panel considered a range of documentation in advance of the Review, including a Self-Evaluation Document prepared by the School of Politics and International Relations, a copy of the Pathfinder reports, relevant programme specifications, programme handbooks, and External Examiners’ reports. As part of the Review, the Panel considered further documentation and met with staff and current students from GIPIS.

Evidence base

5 The Panel considered a wide range of evidence, including programme specifications, module descriptions, programme handbooks, External Examiners’ reports and the School’s responses, minutes of relevant committee meetings (including the Staff – Student Committees and Boards of Studies meetings), Annual Programme Reports and statistical data. The Panel received feedback from staff and students from the School.

External peer contributors to process

6 An external member of the Review Panel was appointed by the Faculty of Social Sciences Board for Teaching and Learning, after considering nomination from the School of Politics and International relations. The role of this external member 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

7 The Panel found the postgraduate programmes under review to be academically strong, underpinned by the research of members of academic staff and progressively developed student independent learning.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

8 The Panel commends the following as areas where the Department has particular strengths:

1. the way the curricula demonstrate progression in developing subject knowledge and academic skills and help students to become independent learners;
2. the School’s clear and concise programme handbooks and other literature;
3. the teaching and learning innovations introduced by the School, such as team teaching in the MA Contemporary Diplomacy (involving a visiting fellow) and the
introduction of the use of primary source material in seminars on the MA Strategic Studies to promote the benefits of collaborative learning;
4. the School’s study visit to Brussels for all students;
5. the academic and pastoral support provided by staff in the School, particularly the GIPIS secretary; and,
6. its engagement with the Pathfinder process and for the steps it has already taken to enhance the student experience

Conclusions on quality and standards
9 The Panel is assured of the quality and standards of the programmes that have been reviewed and that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes are being obtained by students.

Conclusions on currency and validity of the programmes under Review
10 The Panel agreed that the degree programmes offered by GIPIS, met the stated aims and objectives, and were of appropriate standard and quality. The learning outcomes of the degrees were being met by students. The degrees were closely related to the research interests of academic staff

Recommendations
11 The Panel recommends to the Faculty of Social Sciences that the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years:
   • MA Diplomacy
   • MA European Studies
   • MA EU Politics (with research)
   • MA International Law and World Order
   • MA International Relations
   • MA International Security Studies
   • MA Strategic Studies

There are no issues the Panel requires addressing in making these recommendations. However, as has been noted, there is a series of recommendations that the Panel advises both the University and the School consider and action.

Recommendations for the School
1. the School to rethink how it addresses the balance which needs to be struck between the importance of research projects such as the dissertation in promoting independent scholarship and the need to consider the varied skills set and expectations of the students embarking thereupon;
2. the School checks the validity of its statement on plagiarism in its student handbook;
3. the School review its assessment requirements in line with both making the programme more competitive and addressing the learning outcomes more effectively;

4. the School further systemise its procedures (through its programme boards and School teaching and learning committees) for evaluating learning and teaching;

5. the School should do more to promote the Student/staff committee as an avenue for all students and better publicise who the student representatives are;

6. the School might do more to consider where there is scope within the curriculum for innovation and that changes are provided in the Action Plan to this Review;

7. the School should take forward its plans to demonstrate that its teaching is informed by staff research by enhancing the student experience (as outlined in their Action Plan);

8. the School might consider the introduction of MA (Res) programmes to further demonstrate the research nature of the postgraduate provision;

9. the School needs to extend its positive relationship with the School of Law to be part of the greater student experience. Moreover, such practice might also be extended to departments/schools representing other cognate fields (e.g. history, economics, and philosophy);

10. the School should take forward its plans to addresses the concerns related to admissions (as outlined in their Action Plan);

11. the School is encouraged to develop a baseline of the minimum content to be made available on each of the School’s module on the VLE;

12. the School takes forward its plans to address the decline in students entering graduate level jobs (as outlined in their Action Plan).

Recommendations for the University

1. The Panel believes that the University should ensure that Schools are not overburdened by undergoing such time- and resource-intensive reviews in consecutive years and that, unless demonstrably impossible, postgraduate and undergraduate provision in Schools should be reviewed through the same process at the same time;

2. The Panel notes that that the library’s adequate resourcing, essential to the success of the School’s programmes, be prioritized in university resourcing.