Summary of the Periodic Review of History of Art and Architecture

Programmes covered by the Periodic Review

1 The programmes covered by the Periodic Review were:
   - BA History of Art and Architecture
   - BA Ancient History and History of Art
   - BA Archaeology and History of Art
   - BA Art and History of Art
   - BA Classical Studies and History of Art
   - BA Film & Theatre and History of Art
   - BA French and History of Art
   - BA German and History of Art
   - BA Graphic Communication and History of Art
   - BA History of Art and English Literature
   - BA History of Art and History
   - BA History of Art and Philosophy
   - BA Italian and History of Art

Date of the Periodic Review

2 The Periodic Review took place on Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 June 2009.

Objectives of the Periodic Review

3 The objectives of the Periodic Review were to:
   - Review the effectiveness of the means by which History of Art and Architecture manage and assure the academic standards of the degree programmes under Review and the quality of the learning opportunities provided;
   - Enable History of Art and Architecture 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 History of Art and Architecture 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 History of Art and Architecture 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 Arts and Humanities, with two internal members of academic staff (from the School of Arts & Communication Design and the School of Law), and two external members of academic staff (from Goldsmiths, University of London and the University of Sussex). The Joint-Faculty Senior Administrative Officer acted as Secretary to the Review Panel.

The Panel received a range of documentation in advance of the Review, made available on a BlackBoard Organisation site, including a Self-Evaluation Document prepared by the Department, a copy of the Pathfinder report, relevant programme specifications, programme handbooks, and External Examiners’ reports. During the Review visit, the Panel considered extensive further documentation, and met with the majority of staff and current students from the Department, along with recent graduates. The Panel also met with the Liaison Librarian for History of Art and Architecture, Main Library, the Director, Student Services Directorate and the Director, Careers Advisory Service.

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, and examples of student work. The Panel received feedback from staff, students and recent graduates from the School.

External peer contributors to process

6 External members of the Review Panel were appointed by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Board for Teaching and Learning, after considering nominations from the School of Arts & Communication Design. 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

7 The Panel considers that the programmes:

(a) are well-designed and offer an range of choice;
(b) offer students a rich and diverse learning experience;
are well-delivered with a range of teaching, learning and assessment methods and an increased use of IT;

draw clearly on the expertise and research strengths of staff;

provide appropriate opportunities for students to gain subject knowledge and transferable skills.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

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

a) The range of choice and pathways through the degree programmes.

b) The good range of assessment methods deployed in the programmes.

c) The Department’s communication with its students.

d) The effective use of team teaching and creativity to cover distinctive areas.

e) The assessment feedback forms, particularly the development of the assessment matrix.

f) The Study abroad trip and the integration of visits to museums and other works of art

g) The Department’s excellent systems of pastoral care in place, both within the Department itself and the links with Student Services.

h) The Department’s creative use of staff resources.

Conclusions on quality and standards

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

The Panel agreed that the degree programmes offered by the Department, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, met the stated aims and objectives, and were of appropriate standard and quality. The learning outcomes of the degrees were being met by students, and the degrees prepared graduates well for employment. The Department takes active steps to review and enhance its programme provision.

Recommendations

The Panel recommends to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities that all of the degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years.

There are no issues the Panel requires addressing in making these recommendations. However, as has been noted, there are a series of recommendations that the Panel advises the Department to consider and take appropriate action. These recommendations are:
a) The Department needs to actively explore how opportunities for students to develop object based and curatorial expertise can be provided as part of the curriculum.

b) The Department should explore the possibilities of developing a collaborative MA.

c) The Department should address the issues relating to effective links between the different units at Part 1.

d) The visits to galleries or other works of art as part of the curriculum need to be more visible and highlighted as strength of the programme.

e) The Department, in conjunction with the School, needs to consider ways in which the community of taught postgraduate students could be strengthened.

f) The Department needs to review its programme handbook and specifically whether it adheres to the University template.

g) The Department should improve its promotion of the key strengths and distinctive features of its undergraduate provision.

h) The Department should reflect on the quality of its student intake and consider measures that might attract more highly qualified students.

i) The Department should consider participating in University-wide access schemes.

j) Consideration should be given, as part of the development of the MA provision, to how to attract greater numbers of international students perhaps through exploiting or developing relationships with overseas institutions.

k) In continuing its quest to make the visual resource centre more accessible, the Department should join with other interested parties in the University to work on this.

l) The Department must increase its efforts to encourage students to gain work experience whether within a History of Art context or more generally.

m) The Department and the School should review their mechanisms for informing and promoting to students the wider opportunities available to students while studying at Reading (e.g. perhaps making use of the proposed student mentors).

n) The School should explore the feasibility and benefits of developing a School-wide placement scheme, perhaps working with the faculty’s new University Teaching Fellow (Cindy Becker) on ‘Academic placements’.

o) The Department should ensure that the outcomes of its programme review meetings be incorporated into the annual programme reports submitted to the Faculty.

p) The Department ensure that actions taken as result of feedback are fed back to students and that the keys point are highlighted in the annual programme reports.

q) The Department must provide an update on its development plans outlined in the Self-Evaluation Document in their One-Year On report.