SUMMARY OF THE PERIODIC REVIEW OF DEGREES IN REAL ESTATE AND PLANNING

1. Degree Programmes Reviewed
   - BSc Land Management
   - BSc Investment and Finance in Property
   - BSc Land Management with MSc/Diploma Urban Planning and Development
   - MSc/Diploma Urban Planning and Development
   - MPhil Environmental Planning and Development
   - MSc Town and Country Planning

2. The Periodic Review took place on 1 and 2 December 2003.

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 Real Estate and Planning to evaluate its taught programme provision, particularly student achievement of the appropriate academic standards, and the learning opportunities offered to students
   - 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 Real Estate and Planning was able to reflect on the success, development and possible improvement of its taught programmes
   - Ask fundamental questions about the rationale, structure and resourcing of the programmes under review
   - Consider the educational aims and objectives of the programmes
   - 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 the Director of Teaching and Learning of the Faculties of Life Sciences and of Science, and also comprising two other internal members of academic staff (neither from the Department of Real Estate and Planning), the Sub-Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, and two external academic members specialising in Real Estate and Planning.

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

5. Evidence Base

In addition to the meetings held with staff, students, and graduates, 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, as well as the Department’s responses which were contained in Annual Programme Reports, and the results of the most recent (November 2003) accreditation visit by the Royal Town Planning Institute.

6. External peer contributors to the process

The external members of the Review Panel were present for the duration of the Periodic Review. The Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning for Economic and Social Sciences appointed the external members, after considering nominations from the Department of Real Estate and Planning. The role of these external members was to provide subject expertise and 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 Panel considered that the Department was mature and experienced, yet remained forward looking and dynamic in its ethos and operation. It is seen as a leading provider for this type of programme in the sector.

Students who are currently on the degrees, as well as the graduates whom the panel met, provided very positive feedback regarding their experience of the programmes and relevance to the world of work. They commented favourably on the distinctive identity and design of the curriculum, and the edge they give Reading graduates in employment.

All the programmes under review comply with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements (Town & Country Planning and Building & Surveying). In addition the programmes meet the educational requirements of the two lead professional bodies in the field: the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The programmes exhibit a distinctive focus on practical application, as evidenced through a strong commitment to project work, informed by research and consultancy.

8. Conclusions on innovation and good practice

Examples of good practice identified included:

- The ‘foundation-application-specialisation’ programme structure, which enables students to obtain a broad base of knowledge and skills from which to move into one of five more specialist areas
- The emphasis on group project work, which allows students to apply what they have learned to practical problems they may experience in their professional life
The Induction Week Case Study and the ‘Doing Land Management’ module, which were both considered to help establish group cohesion and enthusiasm for the subject

• The Department Resource Centre, an ideal facility to support students in their project reports

• The excellent introductory page to the handbooks for the BSc programmes

• The instigation of a Teaching Strategy Group as a forum for reflecting on and developing programmes

9. Conclusions on quality and standards

The Review Panel concluded that:

• The learning outcomes of the programmes were being met, and the modules making up the degree programmes were generally relevant and of a high standard

• Teaching and learning methods and resources were used in ways that helped students achieve the intended learning outcomes

• Students were exposed to a rich selection of formative and summative assessments, many of which are designed to build and assess relevant professional skills.

• There was clarity in structure and the mapping of teaching and learning strategies to intended learning outcomes at undergraduate level, although this was not so uniformly achieved in postgraduate programmes, which were nevertheless of a high standard

• The Department had well-established procedures for reporting quality management matters, particularly the annual programme reports, and student progression and examination results and External Examiners’ reports indicated that there are few problems with quality management

• The quality of teaching and learning was regularly assessed through peer review and student evaluation

10. Conclusions on currency and validity of programmes under review

The Review Panel concluded that the programmes under review remained current and valid and recommended that all programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years.

11. Summary of recommendations

The Review Panel considered it advisable that:

• The Department considered the scheduling of the part-time MSc to lower some of the associated barriers to more effective learning

• The Faculty consider a mechanism to deal effectively with recurring problems with modules delivered by other providers
• Actions taken as a result of the last meeting be formally reported to the next Staff-Student Committee

The Review Panel suggested that the department might like to consider:

• Ensuring that handbooks reflected appropriately differentiated learning outcomes and assessments for the modules with shared teaching between Master’s and undergraduate students
• The University’s verbal class descriptions be more widely used and available to students

12. Summary of actions taken in response to the Review

• The Department reviewed the scheduling of the part-time MSc, with a view to lowering some of the associated barriers to more effective learning.

• The Department reviewed its procedures for reporting back to the Staff-Student Committee action taken since its previous meeting.

• The Department reviewed the content of its course handbooks in line with the recommendations of the Panel.