

PERIODIC REVIEW OF PHILOSOPHY

**Reviewing programmes delivered by the Department
of Philosophy in the School of Humanities**

INTRODUCTION

1 An internal review of programmes in Philosophy was held on 2 and 3 November 2016. The members of the Panel were:

- Professor Matthew Almond, Professor of Chemical Education, School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy (*Chair*)
- Dr Christopher Pulman, Barrister, 1 Gray's Inn Square (*external member, industry*)
- Dr Daniel Came, Lecturer, University of Hull (*external member, subject specialist*)
- Dr Eugen Fischer, Reader in Philosophy, University of East Anglia (*external member, subject specialist*)
- Dr Calvin Smith, Lecturer, School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences (*internal member*)
- Mrs Teresa Wilson, Lecturer, Institute of Education (*internal member*)
- Ms Kenza Kate Cross, Part 3, BSc Animal Science, University of Reading (*Student member*)
- Mr Richard Sandford, Senior Quality Support Officer, Centre for Quality Support and Development (*Secretary*)

2 The Panel met the following:

- Prof Maximilian De Gaynesford (*Head of Department and Part 1 Co-ordinator*)
- Prof John Preston (*Director of Teaching and Learning, and Undergraduate Co-ordinator, Study Abroad Co-ordinator*)
- Mr George Mason (*MRes Co-ordinator*)
- Dr Shalini Sinha (*Senior Tutor*)
- Dr James Andow (*Careers and Placements Officer*)
- Prof Emma Borg (*Director of the Reading Centre for Cognition Research*)
- Dr Luke Elson (*Philosophy Society Liaison Officer*)
- Prof Brad Hooker (*PGR Admissions Tutor*)

- Prof David Oderberg (*Director of Research, eLearning and Resources Officer*)
 - Dr Severin Schroeder (*Examinations Officer*)
 - Dr James Stazicker (*UG Admissions Officer*)
 - Prof Philip Stratton-Lake (*Professor*)
 - Ms Michela Bariselli (*Graduate Teaching Assistant*)
 - Mr Sami Rissanen (*Graduate Teaching Assistant*)
- 3 The Panel met students who represented the following degree programmes:
- BA Philosophy
 - BA History and Philosophy
- 4 The Panel met recent graduates who had graduated from the following degree programmes in 2016:
- BA Philosophy
 - BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- 5 The Review Panel met with a range of staff from across the Department, largely with teaching and learning responsibilities. The staff were fully engaged with the process and made the Panel feel very welcome. The review benefitted from a comprehensive and well-organised Blackboard organisation, and any additional information requested by the Panel was supplied in a timely fashion. The Panel found the resources provided invaluable in their review of the Department's activities. The Panel extends its thanks to the Department for its hospitality and full engagement with the process.
- 6 The Panel was pleased to meet and question current and former students, both at the Undergraduate Philosophy Conference break-out session and the more formal meetings. They found the students to be passionate about their subject and enthusiastic about the opportunities afforded by the Department. The Panel felt that the students and alumni were a credit to the Department and wish to thank them for their valuable input.
- 7 The Panel found that the Department had engaged in critical self-reflection as it embarked on a review of its curriculum (as part of the Philosophy Project), and through its participation in the University's Curriculum Framework pilot project. The Department showed considerable enthusiasm for the Periodic Review and the opportunities it might afford, especially in the review and redesign of Parts 2 and 3 of their provision.
- 8 The Panel noted that the Department operates within a School structure (the School of Humanities), but also benefits from a degree of autonomy within that structure. The Panel noted that the Department's administrative support had changed as a result of the Professional and Administrative Services review conducted by the University.
- 9 The Panel found a strong collegiate atmosphere within the Department, whereby staff and students shared knowledge and expertise freely and openly. The Panel were impressed with the support provided to students and for the mentoring available to Teaching Assistants and other staff members. **[Good practice a]**

ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF THE PROGRAMMES

Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

- 10 The Panel felt that the programmes under review are well established and coherent. The Board noted that the curriculum review as a result of the Philosophy Project had resulted in changes to Part 1 of the curriculum, and changes to Parts 2 and 3 would be forthcoming.
- 11 The Panel was satisfied that the changes to the programmes are in response to market demand and should make the programmes more appealing to prospective students. The programmes draw heavily upon the teaching and research expertise within the School, and where gaps have been identified new staff have been recruited.
- 12 The Panel confirmed that the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programmes are clear, and the learning outcomes are aligned to the aims.
- 13 The Panel was pleased to note that, in general, there is an effective alignment of learning outcomes, coursework and assessment.
- 14 However, the Panel wondered whether the statement of aims and objectives could be helpfully restructured to include a set of transferable and academic skills that the course is intended to develop. This statement could then be used to assess whether skill development in individual modules adds up to the overall skills profile the Department seeks to instil in its students.
- 15 The Panel found the learning outcomes to be properly aligned with the QAA benchmark statement for Philosophy.¹
- 16 The Panel noted that the external examiners are satisfied that aims and learning outcomes are attained.

Curricula and assessment

- 17 The Panel agreed that the Department's programmes cover a comprehensive and appropriate range of topics.
- 18 The Panel was impressed with the range of modules on offer and the inclusion of some particularly innovative teaching contents (eg non-Western and Experimental philosophy). **[Good practice b]**
- 19 The Panel also commends the Department's efforts in redesigning their Part 1 curriculum. The breadth of options available is attractive to students with a wide range of interests and from a range of disciplines.
- 20 The Panel noted that the Department is in the middle of a redesign of its undergraduate offering, with plans to update content and provision in Parts 2 and 3 already underway. The Department indicated that they welcomed the Panel's input and suggestions for the redevelopment of the undergraduate programmes.
- 21 The Panel wondered whether it might be desirable to broaden the compulsory core offering beyond the one existing compulsory module (PP1RA: Reason and Argument). This would help ensure that students are provided with the skills and knowledge necessary to profit from offerings in Part 2. **[Recommendation e(i)]**

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-philosophy-15.pdf

- 22 The Panel noted that there is a large amount of 'housekeeping' that is being administered via the PP1RA module. This includes the dissemination of essential information relating to a range of non-philosophical issues (eg work placements, careers, and academic integrity issues). The Panel recognises that the fact that this module is compulsory makes it an ideal vehicle for communicating key information to all students. However, the Panel believes that it is important that the non-philosophical content be kept to a minimum. The Panel proposes that the Department explores alternative methods (eg electronic communications, newsletters, dedicated seminars) of dissemination of the co-curricular information. The introduction of additional compulsory modules could also help alleviate this burden. **[Recommendation e(ii)]**
- 23 The Panel suggested that the Department might wish to consider ways of ensuring progression across years and increasing coherence across modules, in their redesign of Parts 2 and 3. This could be achieved through a reorganisation of the curriculum based on a systematic review of topical and methodological links between modules, and through the introduction of desirable prerequisites for each modules. **[Recommendation e(iii)]**
- 24 The Panel felt that such a review could inform (a) the assignment of modules to Parts 2 and 3 (through the identification of 'building blocks' and informal prerequisites) and (b) the identification of informal pathways within the Single Honours programmes (eg 'Language and Cognition' or 'Culture and Value' pathways), offering students orientation through the programme, without necessarily dictating a specific pathway. The Panel noted that the Department currently places specific emphasis on the role of the Personal Tutor in helping students select optional modules and identify a pathway through their programme. The use of additional materials (including module handbooks and informal pathways made up of cognate modules) would be a great benefit in this endeavour. **[Recommendation e(iv)]**
- 25 The Panel believed that the review could also help develop more coherence for Joint Honours programmes, by identifying modules that might be specifically recommend to students from certain disciplines and noting what parts of the Philosophy offering would be complementary to the partner discipline.
- 26 The Panel noted an apparent dearth of modules focusing on the History of Philosophy and on Continental Philosophy. The Panel recommends that the Department considers extending coverage in these areas. Introducing students to ideas in Continental and the History of Philosophy will help in the development of their hermeneutic and exegetical skills. The Panel noted that Philosophy is often done by criticising and reinterpreting major text, and by examining issues that arise in the History of Philosophy. Accordingly, a Single Honours programme generally should include, *inter alia*, the ideas and arguments of some of the major philosophers in the history of the subject, encountered in their own writings. **[Recommendation e(v)]**
- 27 The Panel noted that an External Examiner considers that the design and process of assessment enables students to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The External Examiner also verifies that the standards achieved by learners meet the minimum expectations for awards, as measured against the relevant Subject Benchmarking Statement and various levels of the FHEQ.
- 28 The Panel concurs with the External Examiner's assessment and, furthermore, considers the mix of assessment modes presented to students to be well-balanced and appropriate. Student work is assessed via assignments, presentations, classroom tests and the Department is looking to introduce credit-bearing placement activities. The Panel felt that the variety of assessment modes affords the students the opportunity to develop a range of skills. **[Good practice c]**
- 29 However, the Panel noted that Part 1 is operated on a coursework only model. The Panel felt that the Department should consider ways to prepare students for the increased examination content in Parts 2 and 3. The Panel agrees with the Department on the value of both modes of assessment, but considers that the weighting of the coursework at 30% for two essays might be

considered to be disproportionately low. The Panel believes that this might be usefully reviewed in an attempt to find a more balanced weighting (perhaps 40:60 or 50:50). **[Recommendation e(vi)]**

- 30 The Panel felt that a more standardised approach to the design and content of module handbooks would be appropriate. For example, information such as essay titles could be included in all handbooks so that students are aware of expectations at the beginning of the module. **[Recommendation e(vii)]**
- 31 The Panel agreed that it would be desirable for the development of generic research skills to be embedded across the curriculum. This would ensure that all students acquire a deeper level of information literacy, which could otherwise be limited to those students taking a dissertation option. This could be achieved through bibliographical exercises in Part 1, literature reviews (as formative or summative assessments) in Part 2, and then promoting further independence in Part 3 by replacing reading lists with feedback on student-prepared bibliographies (in the early stages of work). **[Recommendation f]**
- 32 The Panel also felt that the Department could help students enhance their numeric skills, in particular statistical reasoning skills, in modules such as 'Experimental Philosophy' (or through the development of new modules focused on the intersection of Philosophy and Social Sciences). The Panel felt that the development of these skills would significantly improve the employability of these students (beyond those wishing to continue their studies in Cognitive Sciences or Social Sciences). **[Recommendation g]**
- 33 The Panel found that feedback (both formative and summative) is given in a number of ways, including seminar discussions, group feedback, one-to-ones, reviews of drafts and the consideration of assignment planning. The Panel were impressed by the Department's wide-spread use of pre-submission feedback. **[Good practice d]**
- 34 The Panel noted that whilst the use of pre-submission feedback is to be commended, it would benefit from a standardised approach. This would help to set student expectations and provide them with similar opportunities. **[Recommendation a]**
- 35 The Panel heard that some students found the management of assessment deadlines to be problematic, especially if working on Joint Honours programmes. The Panel noted that the Department normally sets assignment deadlines towards the end of term, which can lead to a bunching of deadlines for some students. The Panel encourages the Department to investigate whether there could be a better spread of submission deadlines throughout the term. **[Recommendation h]**
- 36 The Panel found that the Department has demonstrated a robust second marking and moderation scheme where members of staff are able to discuss and standardise marking. **[Good practice e]**
- 37 Training is given to new members of staff and the collegiate approach within the Department enables Teaching Assistants to access support from other more experienced members of the team. The Panel found evidence of this in the Department's successful adoption and implementation of step-marking. There is a full use of the marks scheme and the application of step-marking is implemented by all members of the Department. **[Good practice f]**
- 38 The Panel noted that presentations are a regular form of assessment, and that students are routinely marked on the content rather than the presentation skills themselves. It is recommended that the presentation feedback forms/criteria for these assessments are adapted to include feedback on presentation skills. Support and training for presentations could also benefit from a focus on these 'softer' presentation skills, rather than solely focusing on content and structure. **[Recommendation b]**

- 39 The Panel found that the Department complies with the 15 day turnaround period for feedback, and that markers use a variety of marking methods (online and hard copies). However, the feedback form is used universally and this requires markers to offer positive comments as well as giving suggestions for improvement. The form might be more effective if it were adapted to remove 'poor/acceptable/good' grading descriptors and replacing them with clearer ones, perhaps even aligning with the degree classification system. **[Recommendation c]**
- 40 The Panel considered that the increased expectation relating to academic standards from Part to Part could be more consistently communicated to students. Whilst it is acknowledged that this may be conveyed in seminars, the Panel felt that students may benefit from this information being imparted via other avenues. This might mean that module handbooks should be updated to contain such information as a matter of course, thus enabling students to identify and meet the expectations around the difference between a Part 1 65% and a part 2 65%. Students will need to be issued with clear guidance around the increased expectations regarding the quality of work in Parts 2 and 3. There is a particular concern about the necessary scaffolding to the level of independence in Part 3. This could be achieved through increased clarification of assessments and assessment criteria within handbooks so that all students are aware of the increasing expectation as they enter Parts 2 and 3. **[Recommendation i]**

Use of student management information

- 41 The Panel found that the School makes efficient use of student management information data in planning and carrying out its programmes. The data is sourced from *inter alia* SPELT data packs, external examiner reports, NSS data and student evaluations. The Panel noted that the Department acts appropriately on this information.
- 42 The Panel found good examples of the use of such information at several places during its review. The Department clearly reflects on the performance of its students, and this was most evident in its considerations on, and planning for, a revised curriculum.
- 43 There are concerns within the subject of Philosophy (and not just at the University of Reading) that the gender balance seen amongst undergraduate cohorts is not maintained going forward through Masters degrees and on to Doctoral degrees, where there is a clear preponderance of male students. The Department is clearly aware of this issue, which is not an easy one to address as the underlying factors are clearly complex.
- 44 The Panel felt that monitoring of student management information would be key to the ongoing monitoring of both Postgraduate provision and the Philosophy, Politics and Economics programme (see also 59–60 below). Such activities should include, but not be limited to the progression of students across key demographic categories both through UG programmes and beyond UG programmes into Masters and Doctoral programmes.
- 45 All finalists are encouraged to complete the NSS and the Panel noted that the Department consistently achieves over 90% for 'overall satisfaction'. However, the Department recognises that there have been shortcomings with regards assessment and feedback highlighted by the NSS and has undertaken several initiatives to address these (including providing pre-submission feedback to students), which have resulted in an increase from 71% to 81% in the past year.
- 46 The Panel heard that results from the PTES survey were not available owing to the small size of the cohorts involved. Instead, the Department relies upon the informal nature of staff-student interactions (ie reliance on seminar teaching) to garner feedback and report back improvements.
- 47 The Panel noted that detailed consideration had been given to student feedback gathered via the NSS and module evaluations. The results (including qualitative responses) have been considered as part of the Philosophy Project (alongside feedback gathered in Focus Groups for that Project).

QUALITY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE PROGRAMMES

Teaching and learning

- 48 The Panel noted that the Department makes great use of Teaching Assistants to support seminars and other learning activities. Teaching Assistants are well integrated and attend teaching workshops to equip them with the required skills for delivering sessions. They also benefit from the support of senior colleagues and attendance at lectures. **[Good practice g]**
- 49 The Panel heard that there is a strong guest speaker programme, and that staff (internal and external) regularly participate in speaker sessions arranged by the student Philosophy Society. The Panel was pleased to note good student engagement with these activities, and with the Undergraduate Research Conference. **[Good practice h]**
- 50 The Panel felt that the Department has a clear strength in research-led teaching. The Department seems to have found ways to manage research and teaching commitments; this can be a tricky balancing act when key members of staff take research leave.
- 51 Whilst the Department's teaching benefits from the strong influence of the research interests of staff it has also led to an imbalance whereby topics outside of the Western Analytic Tradition have been neglected. This is something that the recommendations of the Philosophy Project seeks to address and the Department has already made appointments of staff whose research interest fall outside of the Western Analytic Tradition.
- 52 The Department makes regular use of the University's UROP scheme and considers it to be a good way to introduce interested students into the world of research.
- 53 The Panel noted and commended the Department's use of multimedia in preparing learning materials for students. The Department has provided podcasts (including readings of set texts), video content, and is exploring the use of audio and video feedback as part of the PEAR/EMA project.
- 54 The Panel felt that students were appropriately engaged with their learning, and that the use of weekly seminars was key in fostering this sense of engagement. **[Good practice i]**
- 55 The Panel also heard that students found staff to be very approachable and felt that they could ask for advice and support outside of teaching sessions.
- 56 The Panel heard that student experience of lectures and seminars was generally positive, with many commenting that they enjoyed and appreciated the discursive nature of the activities, which enabled them to explore and generate new ideas in a supportive and suitably critical environment.
- 57 The Panel felt that with the larger cohort of students (with a wider range of backgrounds and attainment levels) there may be a need to review module content and teaching methods. The Panel felt reassured that the Department is in a strong position to meet the challenges posed by teaching a larger cohort. However, the Panel would recommend the Department monitors the situation in order to ensure that there is no drop in standards and that provision is accessible to the entire cohort. **[Recommendation j]**
- 58 The Panel noted the Department's use of intensive small group teaching for the postgraduate courses. It was felt that the students appreciated this mode of study, in addition to the opportunity to attend level 6 lectures if they wish.
- 59 The Panel considered the future of taught postgraduate provision within the Department, noting the benefits to be had from small cohorts and the Department's dedication to delivering the next

generation of research students. However, the Department should be mindful of the fact that continuing low numbers may become untenable. **[Recommendation k]**

- 60 The Panel also considered the Philosophy, Politics and Economics programme, noting that numbers had been low (but had significantly improved in 2016/7) and that there had been issues in managing and supporting students on the programme. The Panel noted that some students had progressed through the programme with little or no desire to engage with the Economics elements. The Panel noted that managing a Joint programme between two Departments is a difficult task, and that adding a third compounds these issues. **[Recommendation l]**

Student admission and progression

- 61 The Panel felt that the entry tariffs were well-considered and reflected the Department's position within the market. The Panel noted that the Philosophy Project had considered the Department's position in the market, especially in relation to identified competitor institutions.
- 62 The Panel was impressed by the positive impact of the Philosophy Project upon undergraduate recruitment. The Department saw its undergraduate student numbers rise to approximately 50% above target in 2016/7 (see also 57). The Panel noted that this increase in cohort size for 2016/7 coincides with an overall reduction in the mean UCAS tariff.
- 63 The Panel heard that the review of Part 1 curriculum and assessment (as part of the Philosophy Project) has seen a proliferation of additional optional modules (partly as a recruitment tool). The large number of optional modules means that there is a high degree of personal customization available within the programmes. Although there is clear information about each programme available to students by level of study, there is a need for additional support at key points in the student journey.
- 64 The Panel was pleased by the Department's use of module taster sessions to militate against some of the issues around the high degree of optionality found in the programme. They felt that these helped to provide additional guidance and orientation throughout the programme. **[Good practice j]**
- 65 The Panel found that the progression criteria were clearly stated and advertised within the Programme Specification documentation. However, with the planned changes to the programme the Panel noted that the Programme Specifications would need to be reviewed and undergo further development. **[Recommendation e(viii)]**
- 66 The Panel found evidence that the full range of marks were being deployed in an appropriate manner to reward student attainment (see also 37 above).
- 67 The Panel felt that the Schools use of the ASK clinic in supporting students with essay preparation, and the signposting of other support (eg Study Advice) has had a positive impact on student outcomes.
- 68 The Panel noted that in a small number of cases there appeared to be some inconsistencies with how the work of students with Specific Learning Disabilities were being graded. The Panel felt that this might be owing to misunderstanding around the use of Green Stickers and the adjustments that needed to be made in light of their application. The Panel felt that the Department should ensure that reasonable adjustments are being implemented in a consistently fair and transparent manner, in line with University policy (see also 95 below).
- 69 The Panel noted the Department's reliance on the compulsory Part 1 Module PP1RA (Reason and Argument) for the delivery of careers education (see also 22 above). The Panel felt that there were other opportunities available for the delivery of careers advice and learning, and heard that the Department would explore these as part of the Curriculum Framework.

- 70 The Panel was pleased that the Department has instigated a policy of allowing placement opportunities in Part 2, and is looking for ways to develop these. These, coupled with the existing Study Abroad opportunities, should help enhance student employability.
- 71 The Panel noted that students are encouraged to explore the possibility of continuing their studies. However, the Panel would encourage the Department to reflect on the gender breakdown of its student population at key transition points to identify what can be done to address loss within the talent pipeline. Engagement with the Equality Challenge Unit's expanded gender equality charter mark would help with this task (see also 43 above).
- 72 The Panel noted that the Department's progression and retention rates are in line with University guidelines.

Learning resources

- 73 The Panel felt that the Department benefits from a good mix of staff with a wide range of interests and expertise. The Teaching Assistants play an important role in the delivery of the programmes and the marking and assessment of student work.
- 74 The Panel recognised that the impacts of recent changes to administrative support within the University were still being measured and assessed. The Department has reported that, in the early post-PAS period, additional administrative burdens being placed upon them. The Panel felt that it was unclear whether these were "teething problems" or indicative of more systemic issues. The Panel suggested that the University should continue to monitor issues arising from the implementation of PAS. **[Recommendation p]**
- 75 The Panel was impressed with the facilities available to students, especially the dedicated resource room in room 73 of HumSS. The room is used for quiet study, seminars, guest speaker events, and houses an extensive library of philosophical works (which are complementary to the Main Library's holdings).
- 76 The Panel noted that students had welcomed the recent move to online-only submission of coursework.
- 77 The Panel felt that students would benefit from additional opportunities to use Turnitin in a more formative manner, perhaps through instruction on the interpretation of Turnitin reports, or by being allowed to submit draft or test pieces of work. **[Recommendation d]**
- 78 Students praised the alacrity with which the Department had adopted the Talis software for the collation and dissemination of reading lists.
- 79 The Panel was impressed by the Department's full and innovative use of e-learning resources. Of particular note is the use Blackboard for providing students with relevant podcasts, videos etc (see also 53 above). **[Good practice k]**
- 80 The Panel felt that the Department would benefit from the sharing of best practice in the area of Technology Enhanced Learning to ensure that all faculty are making best use of the tools and resources available to them. **[Recommendation m]**

Employer engagement

- 81 The Panel recognised that the employability of Philosophy graduates from the University of Reading is dependent upon a number of external factors. These include the research reputation of the Philosophy Department and public perception of the difficulty and value of Philosophy degrees.

- 82 The Panel heard that students regularly access support from the Careers Centre and benefit from the employment advice that they offer.
- 83 The Panel noted the Department has an obviously friendly and collegiate atmosphere and the students report that they find the members of the faculty to be accessible and willing to provide careers advice. Undergraduates and alumni informed the Panel that staff had been helpful and supportive in providing practical and independent advice about whether to pursue further study in Philosophy or an academic career (and how this might be best achieved).
- 84 The Panel noted that the Department's engagement with University schemes such as ASK and UROP provided students with the opportunity to experience research-focused activities outside of the curriculum, and that engagement with the STaR Mentors scheme helped students develop interpersonal and pastoral skills. Additionally, the Department is exploring developing a work placement scheme which might lead to the award of course credits (similar to the Professional Track initiative in the School of Literature and Languages). **[Good practice l]**
- 85 The Panel felt that a renewed focus on the development of the soft skills students acquire as part of delivering presentations would benefit student employability (see also 38 above).
- 86 The Panel believes that the Department would benefit from better links with the Alumni Office. This could provide better insights into common career paths for Reading Philosophy graduates, which could profitably be shared with current students. The Alumni Office could also provide opportunities for Alumni events and the development of links with industry and professional contacts who can provide support and advice to students. **[Recommendation n]**
- 87 The Panel heard how the Department is looking to enhance take-up of the Year Abroad option. This should give students the chance to broaden their education and experiences and thus make them more employable. The Panel felt that the Department has an impressive range of Study Abroad partners. The issues of student engagement with Study Abroad are felt to be institutional rather than through a scarcity of opportunities. Students spoke highly of the opportunity and recognised the benefits of experiencing a more diverse range of modules in fresh educational and cultural context. **[Good practice m]**
- 88 The Panel noted that the redesign of the curriculum (as part of the Philosophy Project and the Curriculum Framework) should see a renewed focus on employability within the programmes. It is hoped that this might see exposure to employability concerns extend beyond its current home in the compulsory Part 1 module 'Reason and Argument'.

ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY AND ACADEMIC PROVISION

- 89 The Panel noted that staff within the Department are actively engaged with the University's drive for all staff to achieve a 'teaching qualification'.
- 90 The Panel noted that Department staff meet regularly, both formally and informally, to share experiences and best practice. The Panel found that this learning is two-way, with senior staff learning from their more junior colleagues and vice-versa. The Panel were encouraged by the Department's commitment to Teaching and Learning and its drive to develop a strong Teaching and Learning ethos. **[Good practice n]**
- 91 The Panel heard that there is a dedicated regular training activity for Teaching Assistants. This helps in their development and provides them with key support. The Panel heard that these sessions are used to disseminate best practice and policy-related matters. **[Good practice o]**

- 92 The Panel noted that 'peer review' takes places within the Department, but this can be on a rather 'ad hoc' basis. These activities can tend to be sparsely distributed over time, with some teachers being regularly peer reviewed, while it appears that a small number of staff may not have been peer-reviewed for a number of years.
- 93 The Panel was pleased to note that the Department has actively engaged students in its curriculum review (as part of the Philosophy Project) and continues to benefit from a robust and frank exchange of views with their students.
- 94 The Panel found a clear audit trail between, for example, external examiners reports and student feedback and actions which the Department has undertaken. This was evidenced, for example, through minutes of staff committee meetings. The internal arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and enhancing academic programmes and modules are clearly effective and we found several examples of good practice across the Department which are listed within this report. It is clear that there is a strong collegiate atmosphere within the Department and also clear that the Department is striving to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning provision wherever possible.
- 95 Whilst adherence to University policy and procedure is generally robust and thorough, there are isolated incidents of misinterpretation or misapplication. For example, the Panel found a case of the misapplication of the processes to be followed in the event of identified plagiarism, some limited understanding of the consequences of the application of Green Stickers to work, and a lack of consistency in the application of Peer Review. The Panel felt that these issues were not systemic or endemic, but rather symptomatic of a lack of a more thorough-going direction at a School level. The Panel would encourage the School to identify ways in which to ensure the clear and correct dissemination of University policy and confirm its consistent application. The creation of clear chains of command would aid both the School and its constituent Departments in ensuring compliance with University Policies. **[Recommendation o]**

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROGRAMMES UNDER REVIEW

- 96 The Department provides a rich and rewarding student experience, where students can engage with ideas from across a broad spectrum of philosophical traditions. The Department is moving away from solely delivering programmes based in the Western Analytic Tradition of Philosophy and is striving towards a new curriculum which is, through its breadth and levels of optionality, appealing to students from within and outside the discipline.
- 97 The Department is very keen to address areas of potential weakness and will take bold steps to remedy issues. It is fully engaged with the Curriculum Framework and is undergoing a period of change, through a thorough overhaul of its undergraduate provision. The staff are dedicated to their subject and to their students and provide research-informed teaching for their programmes.

CONCLUSIONS ON INNOVATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

- 98 The Panel identified the following as representing particularly good practice:
- Collegiate atmosphere within the Department, which encourages strong links between students and staff.
 - Innovative curriculum design.

- c) Well-balanced mix of assessment modes, providing students with the opportunity to develop a range of skills.
- d) The Department-wide adoption of 'pre-submission feedback'.
- e) Robust mechanisms for second marking and moderation of student work.
- f) Willingness to use the full mark scheme and application of Step-marking.
- g) Use of Teaching Assistants for the delivery of content at Part 1 and beyond.
- h) Student engagement with co- and extra-curricular activities, including Visiting Speaker and the Undergraduate Research conference.
- i) Use of weekly seminars to ensure student engagement and participation.
- j) Use of taster sessions to introduce students to optional modules.
- k) Use of eLearning, including screencasts, blogs and videos in delivering programmes and feedback.
- l) Engagement with university initiatives, such as ASK Advisors, STAR Mentors and the UROP Scheme.
- m) Impressive range of partner institutions providing Study Abroad opportunities for students.
- n) Staff are fully engaged with the development of a strong Teaching and Learning ethos.
- o) Commitment to the development of Teaching Assistants and the training and support that they receive.

CONCLUSIONS ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS

99 The Panel has concluded that the quality and standards of the programmes reviewed are appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS ON NEW DEGREE PROGRAMME PROPOSALS

100 The Panel received no submissions with regards to new programme proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

101 The Panel recommends to the University Programmes Board that the following degree programmes taught by the Department of Philosophy are re-approved to run for a further six years:

- BA Ethics, Value and Philosophy
- BA Philosophy
- BA Philosophy and Classical Studies
- BA Philosophy and English Literature
- BA Philosophy and International Relations
- BA Philosophy and Politics
- BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics
- MRes Philosophy

102 The report will categorise any issues as follows, in order of priority:

- Those areas where the Review Team believes it is **necessary** for action to be taken urgently to safeguard the standard of provision;
 - Those areas where it is **advisable** that the issues be addressed as soon as possible;
 - Those areas where it is **desirable** that the issue be addressed over a longer time span.
- 103 The Panel has made the following recommendations which must be addressed as a condition of re-approval:

The Panel makes the following recommendations to the Department:

Necessary

There were no necessary recommendations.

Advisable

- a. Continue to share best practice around pre-submission feedback, with a view to producing a standard model for use across the Department.
- b. Review practice around the training and assessment presentation in order to ensure that students are provided with opportunities to further enhance their 'soft' presentation skills.
- c. Further develop the feedback forms to map against degree classifications rather than the more opaque 'Poor, Acceptable and Good' classifications.
- d. Provide students with more opportunities for the formative use of Turnitin.

Desirable

- e. In the redesign of Parts 2 and 3 of the programme:
 - (i.) Consider the introduction of further compulsory modules;
 - (ii.) Consider how best to deliver non-course content;
 - (iii.) Review prerequisites and how they might be best highlighted to students;
 - (iv.) Investigate the possibility of highlighting pathways through the programme;
 - (v.) Find ways to give students further exposure to the History of Philosophy and Continental Philosophy;
 - (vi.) Give careful consideration to assessment weighting (especially in light of the fact that Part 1 students will not have been exposed to examinations);
 - (vii.) Introduce standard templates for module handbooks; and,
 - (viii.) Review and further develop the Programme Specifications.
- f. Consider how best to inculcate information literacy (ie research skills) in those students who do not undertake the dissertation option.
- g. Investigate the possibility of introducing students to numeric skills in modules such as 'Experimental Philosophy'.
- h. Look at the timing of assessment deadlines and consider whether they could be better distributed.
- i. Provide students with clear guidance as to the increased expectations regarding the quality of work in Parts 2 and 3.
- j. Monitor the delivery of programmes and modules in light of larger groups and mixed ability teaching.
- k. Continue to monitor Taught Postgraduate provision.
- l. In collaboration with partner Schools, continue to monitor the Philosophy, Politics and Economics programme.

- m. Continue to share best practice in IT and TEL to ensure that all staff are equipped and aware of the latest technologies and practices.
- n. Work with Alumni relations to source and disseminate information on and possible career paths to students.

The Panel also makes the following recommendation to the **School**:

Advisable

- o. Devise effective 'chains of command' within the School (possibly through reviewing T&L Leadership structures), in order to ensure that staff and students are more aware of University policies and procedures, including (but not limited to):
 - i. Issues around plagiarism;
 - ii. Use of green stickers; and,
 - iii. Peer observation practices.

The Panel also makes the following recommendations to the **University**:

Advisable

- p. Continue to monitor the impacts of the structural re-organisations post-PAS
- 104 The Panel does not have a recommendation to the University Programmes Board as to whether any proposal(s) for new degree programmes should be approved, as this is not applicable.