

# Periodic Review of History of Art

## Introduction

- 1 An internal review of programmes in the subject area of History of Art was held on 18 February 2015. The members of the Panel were:
  - Mr Nick Beard, Lecturer in the School of Agriculture Policy & Development, University of Reading (*chair*)
  - Professor Sam Smiles, Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture, University of Exeter (*external member, subject specialist*)
  - Dr Amanda Lillie, Lecturer in the Department of History of Art, University of York (*external member, subject specialist*)
  - Mr Tony Macfadyen, Lecturer at the Institute of Education, University of Reading (*internal member*)
  - Dr Calvin Smith, Lecturer in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Reading (*internal member*)
  - Mr Andrew MacKinnon, Part 3 LLB, University of Reading (*student member*)
  - Mrs Georgina Randall, Senior Quality Support Officer (Partnerships), University of Reading, (*secretary*)

The Panel met the following:

- Professor Paul Davies (Director BA and MA programmes)
  - Dr Simon Lee (School Senior Tutor)
  - Professor Clare Robertson (Examinations Officer)
  - Diana Reynolds (Subject Officer)
  - Professor David Stack, Head of Department
  - Professor Patrick Major, Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning
  - Dr Rebecca Rist, School Director of Teaching and Learning
  - Professor Philip Stratton-Lake Head of School
- 2 The Panel met students who represented the following degree programmes:
    - BA History of Art
    - BA History of Art and History
    - BA Art and History of Art
    - BA Italian and History of Art
    - MA History of Art and Architecture

## General observations

- 3 The Panel recognised the circumstances within which the review took place as the provision of History of Art within the University had transferred from the Department of Art to the Department of History on 1 August 2014. In addition, the History of Art

programmes were formally withdrawn from recruitment in Autumn 2014. The History of Art provision at the University will continue to deliver to current students enrolled on programmes and, going forward, contribute at a modular level to undergraduate joint programmes within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The Panel noted the hard work and dedication of staff to ensure the positive and flexible responses to this significant change.

- 4 The Panel recognised that the Department was keenly aware of the potential effect the withdrawal of programmes and relocation of subject area could have on student experience. Staff had clearly made efforts to ensure the student experience and quality of teaching and learning were maintained at a high standard in this context. The dedication of the Department to its students was also reflected in External Examiners' reports.
- 5 The Panel met with a range of students who demonstrated their appreciation for the high quality of teaching they received as well as the personalised academic support provided by members of the Department.

## Academic standards of the programmes

### Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

- 6 In assessing the educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes, the Panel reviewed a range of formal documentation including Programme Specifications, Module Descriptions, Annual Programme Reports, External Examiners' Reports and Students handbooks.
- 7 The Panel found that the programmes met the Quality Assurance Agency subject benchmark statement for History of Art, Architecture and Design and had maintained this level of quality despite the reduced resource now available to serve History of Art teaching. The Panel identified good practice in the refinement of modules to adapt to these circumstances which continued to give students an excellent breadth and depth of modules.
- 8 However, the Panel recognised that the three remaining History of Art members of staff may be put under strain in providing a well-rounded programmes that continued to meet the QAA benchmark as well as maintain a high quality of student experience. To this end, the Panel **recommends** that the staffing resource of the programmes is more closely considered with a detailed, budgeted plan put in place to ensure all modules are suitably covered during the phasing out period. This might include consideration of a clear two year commitment to continue to employ the current sessional lecturer on a part-time basis as it was clear that they were key to the success of the running of the module portfolio underpinning the programmes.

### Curricula and assessment

- 9 The Panel reviewed a sample of marked student assignments and concluded that the assessment methods aligned with other UK Higher Education Institutions. The Panel welcomed the use of a variety of assessment types which had been designed to be directly relevant to the learning outcomes of each module. External Examiner reports further verified achievement of learning outcomes and assessments are appropriate to the award and align to external reference points.

- 10 The Panel noted that the application of ‘visual analysis’ running through the programmes reflected a key facet of the discipline. The Panel hoped to see the continuation of this good practice and **recommend** that the restructuring of the History undergraduate degree programme include the History of Art staff in providing visual analysis teaching.
- 11 The Panel was pleased to note that assessment criteria were clearly communicated to students through the use of module specific assessment coversheets which also allowed markers to demonstrate how the criteria had been met. However, it was unclear how closely the University 15 day turnaround policy was being adhered to and the panel **recommend** that the policy be consistently implemented and that a system to monitor this is put in place as soon as possible.
- 12 To support recommendations, such as that in paragraph 11, the Panel **recommends** that the administration teams are more closely integrated to provide operational support. This should include scope for providing administrative support and monitoring mechanisms for the 15 day turnaround policy for feedback to students.
- 13 Students had welcomed that there had been no change in assessment administrative processes since the merger with History, easing a smooth transition, but did raise a concern over the type of referencing that should be used as there seemed to be a variety of referencing requirements between modules. The students recognised that they had never been penalised for using different types of referencing but would welcome clear guidance on which system should be used. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the Department ensure it is clear which referencing system should be used for each assignment.

### **Use of student management information**

- 14 The Panel was pleased to note the consistently high National Student Survey results for History of Art scoring 90% in 2014. Throughout each programme students are given the opportunity to provide feedback through modular evaluations, the results of which are collated and feed into the Annual Programme Report.
- 15 Since the merger with History in 2014, students have been included and attended the History Student-Staff Liaison committee. Whilst it appeared that student inputs were duly considered both formally and informally, the Panel recognised that a proportion of reaction to students concerns took place outside of meetings and was not recorded. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the recording of feedback from students is formalised. This will further support the high quality relationships with students that were evident through discussions with students.

## Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

### **Teaching and learning**

- 16 The research informed nature of teaching was highlighted as an area of good practice and built upon the interactive nature of lectures. Students particularly enjoyed the delivery of small lectures which encouraged discussion and debate, informed by taught subject matter.

- 17 The Panel noted that the integration of History of Art into the Department of History could present opportunities for sharing of best practice as well as new innovative ways of working. The Panel noted that History of Art staff had already been invited to teach on existing History modules.
- 18 The Panel recognised the Study Trip Abroad module in Part 2 was a particular area of good practice which allowed students to study the subject within an overseas context. Students commented that this module was a key highlight of the programme. The Panel would wish to see the continued subsidy by the University of this trip to ensure all students have the opportunity to partake in the trip as has been the case for previous cohorts. The Panel further **recommend** that the Department of History give due consideration to continuing this module in some form as the Department undergoes restructuring of the undergraduate programme and begins the integration of History of Art into the portfolio.

### **Student admission and progression**

- 19 Both staff and students commented on the close working relationship that was maintained within the Department and it was clear that staff provided a very strong support system for students, offering numerous drop-in sessions for personalised feedback. The Panel **recommends** that in order to enhance this there is a formalisation of tutorial support between students and their assigned tutors which would ensure that students less confident in actively seeking advice or mid-range students also benefit from these support structures.

### **Learning resources**

- 20 As noted in paragraph 8 and 12, some further consideration of personnel is required to maintain the high standard of expertise and administrative support. The Panel note that there is a strong and cohesive team of staff already supporting History of Art students and welcome the integration of this team into the wider Department of History which will help to maintain strong student support.
- 21 The Panel agreed that the level of learning resources available to students was appropriate for students to meet the achievement of the programmes learning outcomes. Students commented that they were impressed by the wider range of resources available to them within the main University library. Students also have access to the slide collection as part of a Resource Room with the Department of History. In the long term it is planned that this collection will be digitised to ensure the longevity of the collection which is vital for the study of visual culture.

### **Employer engagement**

- 22 The Panel recognised the good practice in the delivery of the Prospects for Art Historians module in Part 2. This module caters specifically to the career development needs of History of Art students by developing skills to enhance employability and providing opportunities to meet alumni working in the field. Beyond this specific module, the programmes have been designed to develop a range of transferable skills, such as written and oral communication skills, information handling and problem

solving. Students commented in particular in the confidence they had gained through individual and group seminar presentations which were part of the formal assessment.

- 23 Students are given a further opportunity to interact with industry through the Part 2 module Independent Study with Work Placement. The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education statistics from 2012/13 shows that 100% of graduate were either in employment or further study.

## Enhancement of quality and academic provision

- 24 As noted in Paragraph 8, the burden on the three History of Art members of staff delivering History of Art modules may present issues for these staff to engage in professional development as well as research. The Panel welcomed the department of History's initiative to provide research leave for each member over the coming academic year but **recommends** that the Department remain mindful that their professional development is not overlooked due to resource constraint.

## Main characteristics of the programmes under review

- 25 The Panel considers that all the programmes under review offer students a varied and rich experience, one that the Department were clearly determined to maintain as the programmes are phased out. All the degree programmes offered are highly regarded by students, staff and alumni.

## Conclusions on innovation and good practice

- 26 The Panel commends the following as areas where the Department has particular strengths:
- a) The refinement of the History of Art module portfolio in light of the Departments changing circumstances continued to provide students with excellent breadth and depth of modules.
  - b) The Study Trip Abroad module in Part 2
  - c) The application of visual analysis throughout the programmes
  - d) Research informed teaching and interactive lectures
  - e) The Prospects for Art Historians module which caters to the career development needs of History of Art students
  - f) A supportive working relationship with their students

## Conclusions on quality and standards

- 27 The Panel is assured of the quality and standards of the programmes that have been reviewed, that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes are being achieved by students, and that the programme specifications are appropriate.

## Recommendations

- 28 The Panel recommends to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning in Arts, Humanities and Social Science that the following degree programmes taught by the Department of History should be re-approved until the final cohorts graduate;
- BA History of Art (last intake 2013/14)
  - BA History of Art and English (last intake 2014/15)
  - BA History of Art and History (last intake 2014/15)
  - BA History of Art and Philosophy (last intake 2014/15)
  - MA History of Art and Architecture (last intake 2014/15)

The Panel recommends that the modules provided by the History of Art which contribute to degree programmes delivered by other Departments and Schools be reapproved.

- 29 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.
- 30 The Panel does not consider that any recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.
- 31 The Panel makes the following recommendations to the Department of History:

#### **Advisable**

- a) Staffing resource of the programmes is more closely considered with a detailed, budgeted plan put in place to ensure all modules are suitably covered.
- b) Consideration of inclusion of visual analysis in the restructuring of the History undergraduate degree programme
- c) That the 15 day turnaround policy be consistently adhered to and that a system to monitor this is implemented
- d) Ensure it is clear which referencing system should be used for each assignment and is clearly communicated to students.

#### **Desirable**

- a) The administration teams are more closely integrated to provide operational support.
- b) Formalisation and recording of all feedback provided to students
- c) Consideration of continuing the Study Trip Abroad module in the restructuring of the History undergraduate degree programmes
- d) Formalisation of tutorial support between students and their assigned tutors
- e) That History of Art staff continue to have opportunities for continuing professional development

- 32 The Panel does not have a recommendation to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning in Arts, Humanities and Social Science as to whether any proposal(s) for new degree programmes should be approved as this is not applicable.