

# Periodic Review of programmes in the School of Law

## Introduction

- 1 An internal review of programmes in the School of Law was held on 17 and 18 March 2015. The members of the Panel were:
  - Dr Orla Kennedy, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) (Faculty of Life Sciences) (*Chair*)
  - Professor Duncan French, Head of School, Lincoln Law School, University of Lincoln (*external member, subject specialist*)
  - Professor Chris Rodgers, Head of School, Newcastle Law School, Newcastle University (*external member, subject specialist*)
  - Mr David Jabbari, Partner, Parabis Law LLP (*external professional member*)
  - Professor Timothy Duff, Professor of Greek, Department of Classics (*internal member*)
  - Dr Richard McBain, Programme Director, Leadership Organisation and Behaviour, Henley Business School (*internal member*)
  - Mr Thomas Channon, Part 3 BA English Language, University of Reading (*student panel member*)
  - Ms Jennie Chetcuti, Senior Quality Support Officer, Centre for Quality Support and Development (*Secretary*).
- 2 The Panel met the following members of staff:
  - Professor Susan Breau, Head of School
  - Dr Laura Bennett, School Director of Teaching and Learning
  - Dr Stavroula Karapapa, Programme Director, Commercial LLM and acting ICT representative
  - Professor Chris Newdick, Director of Employability
  - Dr David Wilde, Exams Officer
  - Mrs Louise Hague, Senior Tutor
  - Mrs Rachel Horton, Senior Tutor and Disability Officer
  - Mrs Angela Foxon, School Manager
  - Dr Alina Tryfonidou, Head of Postgraduate Taught Programmes
  - Professor Rosemary Auchmuty, Postgraduate Senior Tutor
  - Mrs Val Baker, Teaching Fellow
  - Dr Katja Samuel, Work Experience Programme Co-ordinator
  - Dr Mark Wilde, Programme Director, LLB Law
  - Miss Vicky Barnes, Sessional Lecturer

- Mr Ross Connell, Liaison Librarian, Business and Social Sciences.
- 3 The Panel met current students who represented the following degree programmes:
- LLB Law;
  - LLB Law with Legal Studies in Europe;
  - LLM Advanced Legal Studies;
  - LLM Human Rights;
  - LLM International Commercial Law;
  - LLM International Law;
  - LLM Oil and Gas.
- 4 The Panel met the following recent graduates:
- Ms Hannah Bulley (LLB Law, working for Grant Thornton);
  - Ms Sarah Taylor (LLB Law, working for the Law Commission);
  - Mr Nicholas Villalta (LLB Law, working for Dentons).

It also received a written statement from one other recent graduate, Mr Thomas White (LLB Law, working for Hickman & Rose).

## General observations

- 5 The Review Panel was provided with extensive and well-organised documentation relating to the programmes under review in a timely manner. Requests for further information were responded to quickly and efficiently by the School. The Review Team was also given access to a range of student work during the Review visit.
- 6 The Panel was welcomed by the School and met with a range of teaching and learning and support staff during the Review process. All staff engaged in the discussions in an open and constructive manner. The Panel wishes to express its gratitude to all those who participated in the Review process, and particularly to the School Director of Teaching and Learning (Dr L. Bennett) and Administrative Officer (Mrs R. Pottage).
- 7 The Panel met with a relatively large and representative sample of current students and recent graduates (including international, mature and part-time students but excluding students on either the credit transfer or distance learning programmes). The students and graduates were confident, articulate and fully supportive of the programmes under review and they made a number of constructive suggestions for further improvements to the provision. The Panel wishes to express its thanks to them for their valuable input.
- 8 It was clear to the Panel that there was a strong sense of community across the School at all levels. Students and graduates with whom the Panel met praised the inclusive and highly supportive atmosphere within the School, which extended to prospective, current and past students alike [**Good practice (a)**]. The collegial atmosphere was fostered by the facilities at Foxhill House, including the student and staff common rooms.

## Academic standards of the programmes

## Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

- 9 The Panel was provided with evidence in the form of programme specifications, programme handbooks, module descriptions, External Examiners' reports, annual programme reports and samples of students' work. These, along with discussions with staff and students and the Panel's own deliberations, enabled the Panel to confirm that the academic standards of programmes were being met.
- 10 The Panel confirmed that the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of programmes and their constituent modules were clear and appropriate, set at the appropriate level within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and aligned with published subject benchmarking statements. Aims and learning outcomes were communicated to students in programme specifications and module descriptions, and External Examiners' reports confirmed that aims and outcomes were attained by students.

## Curricula and assessment

### Curricula

- 11 The Panel was satisfied that the undergraduate and taught postgraduate degree programmes were coherent and of appropriate breadth and scope, and that they were informed by relevant professional requirements. All students registered on the LLB programmes were required to pass a number of compulsory modules which comprised the foundation subjects required for the programmes to constitute Qualifying Law Degrees (QLDs). The Panel supported the School's rationale for placing all compulsory modules for the QLD at Parts 1 and 2 and students felt that this structure supported them in acquiring the necessary skills and core knowledge at Parts 1 and 2 to progress towards more independent study and to deal with legal material at a higher level at Part 3.
- 12 The Panel heard that undergraduate students considered Part 2 to be the most challenging year of their programme and it noted a dip in performance at Part 2. The Panel noted that the School had undertaken a wholesale review of its undergraduate programmes, and particularly Part 2 provision, following the last Periodic Review in 2009 in order to facilitate students' learning and performance. The first cohort of students to take the new LLB graduated in 2014 and the Panel advises the School to keep its undergraduate provision (particularly Part 2) under continual review, in light of issues with student satisfaction and progression/attainment.
- 13 On the basis of the evidence available, including External Examiners' reports, and discussions with staff and students, the Panel concluded that the content and design of curricula were informed by recent developments in teaching and learning and the latest scholarship. The Panel supported the expanding range of Part 3 options for the LLB programmes and the opportunity for staff to offer research-led teaching, for example on the History of English Law and Gender and Law modules. However, it **recommends** that the School continue to monitor student demand for optional modules at Part 3 and that it reflect further on the pedagogic rationale of what is offered, bearing in mind links to the LLM provision [**Desirable recommendation (o)**]. The Panel expressed some concern about the use of a ballot system for module allocation at Part 3. However, none of the students or recent graduates whom the Panel met seemed to regard module availability at Part 3 as an issue.
- 14 The Panel noted the increasing prominence of a business-oriented approach and commercial awareness in areas such as banking and capital markets within the legal professions. It welcomed the ongoing development of joint degrees with the Henley

Business School (HBS) and the provision for students on some LLM programmes to take modules offered by HBS. The Panel **recommends** that the School explore further the opportunities for curricula, particularly at undergraduate level, to be more suffused with commercial awareness in areas such as banking and capital markets, drawing on links with HBS, and particularly the ICMA Centre. Evidence from the students and graduates demonstrated that this would be of interest and could become a unique selling point for the School [**Advisable recommendation (a)**].

- 15 The Panel supported the School's plans to enhance postgraduate recruitment including the strategic development/introduction of new programmes such as the LLM/PGDip/PGCert in Global Crisis, Conflict and Disaster Management; however, it expressed concerns regarding what might appear from the outside as programme proliferation and module 'creep'. The Panel noted that the School was in the process of reviewing module provision for its Commercial LLM programmes in an effort to reduce unnecessary duplication of modules within programmes. It **recommends** that the School should use this work as a starting point for a comprehensive review of its postgraduate taught provision to include both on-campus and distance learning programmes [**Advisable recommendation (b)**].
- 16 The Panel was impressed by the School's ambitious plans for international development, including: the introduction of the LLB and two LLM programmes at the University of Reading Malaysia; the development of a BA Law 3+1 degree with Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology (NUIST); the development of a 4+1 law programme to be delivered in India, and the development of a new Double Masters programme with Moscow State University. The Panel wished to commend the global ambition of the School in responding to today's challenges [**Good practice (b)**], but was mindful of the need to balance this ambition with ensuring adequate support for existing provision.

#### Assessment and feedback

- 17 The Panel was pleased to note the use of increasingly diverse assessment methods across the School, particularly at undergraduate level, which were appropriate to the content and learning outcomes. This included assessed essays, exams with pre-seen elements, problem-based learning modules, presentations, group work, on-line exercises and a reflective portfolio on a pro-bono or professional placement experience. Students were generally happy with the methods in use for formative and summative assessments, which they felt contributed to their learning and encouraged them to apply their knowledge in a practical way. Feedback from External Examiners supported the various methods of assessment in use and confirmed that standards achieved by students were appropriate to the award and aligned to external reference points.
- 18 The Panel advises the School to make more explicit to students that what it referred to as 'non-assessed' work constituted a type of formative assessment, and that they could benefit from feedback on this work (see also paragraph 21(i)).
- 19 Discussions with students indicated that they were aware of the generic assessment criteria and also of specific assessment criteria in use for particular modules. Assessment criteria were discussed in lectures at the beginning of the academic year, and then reviewed with students as part of their preparation for exams. The Panel suggested that the School should consider including students in a working group to review existing assessment criteria and present them in a more accessible form.
- 20 Discussions with staff, students and recent graduates highlighted examples of excellent feedback practice, going beyond formal School requirements. A number of

staff held one-to-one meetings with students who had requested additional feedback or support with assessed coursework. Mock exams for Part 3 students were held during Enhancement Week; students were then given generic information/sample answers in a lecture immediately afterwards and asked to self-evaluate their performance. However, the Panel noted a lack of consistency overall in the length and quality of written feedback provided to students which was highlighted in discussions with students, responses to the assessment and feedback questions in the National Student Survey (NSS), and in External Examiners' reports. The Panel considered that this might be partly attributable to the lack of structure in the standardised feedback forms used for essays and dissertations.

- 21 The Panel **recommends** that the School adopt a more consistent approach to feedback [**Advisable recommendation (c)**], including:
- (i) the formulation of an assessment and feedback policy which would clearly set out expectations in respect of the provision of individual, face-to-face feedback and the presentation, level, quality and mode of formative and summative feedback. The policy should capture examples of good practice so that they can be adopted across other modules, as appropriate. It should incorporate the existing assessment strategy for undergraduate programmes and sit within an overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy (see paragraph 31 below);
  - (ii) clear articulation of the assessment and feedback strategy at module level in module description forms and alignment to the learning outcomes of the module and overall programme outcomes;
  - (iii) revision of the standard feedback forms for undergraduate and postgraduate essays and dissertations. The School should involve students in this process. The forms should clearly map comments onto the relevant assessment criteria and learning outcomes, thereby providing a clear basis for improving future work. The Panel considered that this should reduce the demand for one-to-one feedback meetings with staff, and therefore make the feedback system more sustainable as student numbers continued to rise.
- 22 The Panel noted the School's concerns in relation to the 15-day turnaround time for feedback which was introduced across the University from 2014-15. The Panel recognised that providing thorough and meaningful feedback within 15 working days would be particularly challenging in light of large cohorts on the LLB, the relatively high student/staff ratio and the School's increased use of sessional lecturers. The Panel emphasised the importance of managing students' expectations. It noted that the School might wish to evaluate its feedback procedures using the University's *Engage in Feedback* audit tool: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/engageinfeedback/Evaluatingfeedbackprovision/efb-EvaluatingFeedbackProvision.aspx> and look at good practice in other discipline areas across the University. The Panel noted that its recommendations in respect of consistency in feedback (paragraph 21) and staffing (paragraphs 39 and 56), alongside future developments in relation to electronic marking and feedback, might help to alleviate the School's concerns.

### Use of student management information

- 23 The Panel was pleased to note that the School made appropriate use of data from a range of sources, including External Examiners' Reports, student evaluations, admissions data, classification data and the NSS/Postgraduate Taught Experience

Survey (PTES). It was clear that the Boards of Studies and Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) gave consideration to relevant datasets and that key issues were addressed in Annual Programme Reports.

- 24 The School noted that PTES data was provided at School level, and so it was not possible to ascertain whether poor satisfaction ratings in particular areas were specific to a particular programme or mode of study, for example distance learning programmes. The Panel **recommends** that the University provide PTES data disaggregated by programme level and by mode of study [**Recommendation to the University (a)**].
- 25 The Panel saw evidence that External Examiners' reports and Annual Programme Reports were made available to student representatives for comment. It was clear to the Panel that the views of External Examiners were taken into account and had informed a number of recent changes, for example the balance of assessment methods within the Company Law module was altered for 2013-14 and a new section was added to the student handbook for 2014-15 which emphasised the importance of detailed research and proofreading.
- 26 The Panel concluded that the School had appropriate mechanisms in place for student representation, including an SSLC which met three times a year and student representation on the undergraduate and postgraduate Boards of Studies, in accordance with University policy. Discussions with current and former students indicated that a variety of methods were used by student representatives for obtaining feedback from the wider student body, including online surveys and Facebook groups. The Panel found evidence that issues raised at SSLC meetings were referred to the relevant members of staff or to the Boards of Studies as appropriate and that responses to, and actions arising from, these issues were reported back to the SSLC.
- 27 The Panel was pleased to note a number of informal methods in place for eliciting student views, including the weekly Public Law coffee mornings and the IP café after Intellectual Property classes [**Good practice (c)**]. Formal module evaluation was largely carried out electronically via Blackboard for undergraduate programmes but response rates were low. Paper questionnaires distributed during classes for (on-campus) LLM programmes obtained a higher response rate; however, analysis of paper questionnaires would be very resource-intensive for larger cohorts. In light of the limited resources available in the School, the Panel **recommends** that the University give further consideration to mechanisms for facilitating electronic module evaluation [**Recommendation to the University (b)**].
- 28 The Panel considered that the School had a robust system in place for reflecting on student module evaluation and making appropriate changes [**Good practice (d)**]. However, discussions with students indicated that they were not always aware of changes that had been made as a result of module evaluation. In addition to the formal mechanisms in place for feeding back the outcomes of review processes, including module evaluation, to the SSLC, the Panel **recommends** that the School explore additional, more dynamic means to ensure that the wider student body is informed of actions taken as a result of module evaluations, thus closing the 'feedback loop' [**Advisable recommendation (d)**].

## Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

## Teaching and learning

- 29 The Panel commends the School's commitment to small group teaching wherever possible, an approach which was valued by staff and students alike [**Good practice (e)**]. Undergraduate students highlighted the value of the regular tutorials which ran alongside large lectures in supporting their learning. Staff also noted the value of tutorials in terms of monitoring student engagement and addressing any potential issues at an early stage. The Panel shared the School's concern, however, that, given the relatively high student/staff ratio and plans to further increase student numbers, there might be risks to the sustainability of small group teaching. The Panel therefore advises the School to consider how best to ensure that small group teaching remains sustainable and, in particular, to consider making increased use of postgraduate research students as teaching assistants (see also paragraph 56 below). The School should give further consideration to increasing interactivity in large group teaching, thereby maintaining the ethos of small group teaching.
- 30 The Panel found evidence of a number of examples of good practice in teaching and learning and considered that these should inform School policy and be disseminated and applied more widely across the School. For example, the Panel considered that the Property Law Research Project module at Part 2, which required students to provide client-centred advice, draft a judgement and work in groups to prepare a public information poster, offered a unique approach to embedding research skills in the curriculum and to promoting student engagement [**Good practice (f)**]. The Panel advises the School to give further consideration to widening this approach to other subject areas in Parts 1 and 2 of the LLB, which might lead to greater student engagement and higher attainment in core modules.
- 31 While the Panel gained a sense that the School's learning and assessment strategies were clear and implemented sensitively and thoroughly, it considered that these could be more effectively articulated in a single, overarching teaching, learning and assessment strategy, which would incorporate the assessment and feedback policy referred to above (paragraph 21) and support the capture and systematisation of best practice across the School [**Advisable recommendation (e)**]. This document should clearly articulate the School's vision and strategy/approach to research-led teaching, students as co-producers, internationalisation of teaching and learning and the student experience (for both home/EU and international students), potential competence-based frameworks and other aspects of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy.
- 32 Within this overarching strategy document, the Panel **recommends** that the School develop an explicit teaching and learning philosophy, with links to both the School's strategic direction and to the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy [**Desirable recommendation (p)**]. This philosophy would inform the selection of methods of teaching and student learning opportunities, including alternative pedagogical approaches such as problem-based learning, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels for both campus-based and distance-learning programmes.
- 33 The Panel noted that the School currently offered two postgraduate programmes via distance learning, and that these were delivered using a variety of methods, including video/audio lectures uploaded to Blackboard, online tutorials and Skype meetings. While supporting the School's commitment to expand its distance learning provision, the Panel **recommends** that the School review the teaching philosophy, delivery methods and support for its distance learning programmes to ensure that: there is an appropriate blend of learning methods and support for students; the experience of learners on this mode of study is comparable to those undertaking the equivalent taught programmes, and that distance learning students are better integrated into the

wider postgraduate taught population [**Advisable recommendation (f)**]. The Panel noted that the University was cognisant of the opportunities presented by distance learning and was investing in this mode of delivery; the School should link up with work already underway in this area.

### Student admission and progression

- 34 The Panel wishes to commend as a particular feature of good practice a number of recent initiatives intended to increase conversion rates, including: the School's extended Visit Day programme, which included a trial law lecture; the call back service whereby undergraduate applicants could discuss life at Reading with current law students, and the opportunity extended to LLM offer-holders to have a personal Skype chat with a member of staff [**Good practice (g)**]. These initiatives had received very positive feedback from applicants.
- 35 The Panel was satisfied that effective arrangements for induction and transition were generally in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The Panel commends in particular the excellent induction and support mechanisms in place for international students, including those students who transfer into Part 2 or Part 3 of the LLB from Taylors University (TU) or Brickfields Asia College in Malaysia [**Good practice (h)**]. This included the Academic Skills and Language for Law Programme which was introduced in 2014-15 for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and the recent appointment of a full time International Student Support Adviser, with a remit to support the academic and cultural induction and integration of undergraduate and taught postgraduate international students. The Panel **recommends** that the School build on this work by giving further consideration to arrangements for induction/transition of distance learning students and by exploring ways to ensure better integration between home and international students [**Desirable recommendation (q)**].
- 36 The Panel noted that students and alumni generally considered themselves very satisfied with the high standard of academic and pastoral support they received from their Personal Tutors and other members of staff. Students spoke warmly of the approachability and helpfulness of a number of Personal Tutors, one describing the personal tutor system as "outstanding", and another remarking that, "I could not rate my personal tutor experience higher" [**Good practice (i)**]. However, the Panel noted from its discussions with current and past students that some tutors appeared to be more engaged than others, and **recommends** that the School remind staff of their responsibilities in regard to the Personal Tutor system and that Personal Tutors provide students with a suggested agenda for each meeting in order to maximise the effectiveness of the system and provide a more consistent student experience [**Advisable recommendation (g)**].
- 37 The Panel shared the School's, and indeed the University's, concern that fewer students within the School graduated with a First Class degree than at other comparable institutions (6.0% vs 11.3% for the sector and 9.7% for the 94 Group in 2013-14), and considerably fewer than across the University, and that this negatively affected the School's position in The Guardian league table. The Panel **recommends** that the School continue work underway to review the comparatively low proportion of First Class degrees, by giving further consideration to:
- (i) performance data: for example, is international students' performance comparable to that of their UK counterparts? Is the performance of widening participation students comparable to that of non-widening participation students?



- (ii) marking culture: are all markers using the full range of marks, and rewarding excellent work appropriately?
  - (iii) curriculum and assessment design: are there factors in the curriculum or in the methods of assessment which prevent the best students from excelling?  
[Advisable recommendation (h)]
- 38 In relation to 37(i) above, the Panel **recommends** that the University support the School by providing performance data at a more granular level for home/international students and widening participation students [Recommendation to the University (c)].

### Learning resources

- 39 The Panel noted that the School was well supported by a dedicated administrative team. In relation to academic staff, it noted that there appeared to be an uneven distribution in staff allocated to postgraduate versus undergraduate provision. The Panel found no evidence of teaching teams in cognate areas and was concerned about an apparent lack of succession planning in some core areas of the curriculum. This was impacting on the School's ability to meet the 15 day turnaround time. The Panel also expressed a concern that some sessional staff who had not taught on a module appeared to be assisting with marking summative work on some large Part 1 and Part 2 compulsory modules. The Panel **recommends** that, alongside the planned appointments which are included within the School's five-year growth plan, the School review its current workload model and ensure that opportunities are available for staff to teach at all levels and, in particular, that sufficient staff are available to support the teaching and assessment of core modules [Advisable recommendation (i)].
- 40 The Panel noted the sound procedures in place for new staff induction, ongoing staff development and peer review of teaching. It **recommends** that the School develop a plan in relation to engagement with the University's FLAIR (Facilitating Learning and Teaching Achievement and Individual Recognition) framework and the inclusion of teaching and learning excellence in the Performance Development Review process [Advisable recommendation (j)]. This should include provision for sessional staff.
- 41 The Panel noted that the School's location in Foxhill House provided an attractive setting for teaching, study, co-curricular activities and social occasions, and promoted a collegial atmosphere amongst students and staff. However, space limitations meant that the majority of teaching took place in other buildings across the campus and several staff had offices located in other buildings. The Panel noted that this issue would be exacerbated by the planned growth in numbers.
- 42 The previous Periodic Review had commended the School's "dynamic use of Blackboard, both within modules and to inform other elements of the student experience". The Panel noted the School's concern regarding the recent loss of its School-based (and School-funded) full-time IT technician, following the wider restructuring of IT Services across the University. The School had noted the impact of this loss on a number of key aspects of the School's day-to-day activities, including: the development of the School website and use of social media for recruitment and marketing purposes; the operation and further development of electronic module evaluation, and the technical support required for the delivery of distance-learning programmes. The School was concerned about its ability to benefit from recent and future developments in technology-enhanced learning (TEL) without additional support and resources.

- 43 The Panel noted that the University would be rolling out a new resource allocation model which would give Schools greater ownership over budgets, and that this mechanism could be used to support TEL and other student success initiatives. The Panel **recommends** that the School appoint a TEL Champion to oversee the development of a more consistent approach to the use of TEL in its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, linked to the development of a wider teaching, learning and assessment strategy/philosophy (see paragraphs 31 and 32), through appropriate support for academic and support staff, including training [**Advisable recommendation (k)**]. The Panel advises the School to encourage staff attendance at relevant TEL training sessions provided by the Centre for Quality Support and Development and subsequent dissemination of any knowledge/skills gained across the School.
- 44 The Panel was pleased to note that recent improvements in Library provision were beginning to impact positively on the School's NSS results, although issues remained in relation to library resources for the Commercial LLM programmes. The School continued to invest in the acquisition of subject-specific databases to support teaching and research and had recently made a significant investment to ensure that all learning materials for its distance learning programmes were available online.
- 45 The Panel commends the contribution of the Liaison Librarian in supporting students' learning, including teaching legal resource and research skills on a number of undergraduate and postgraduate modules, attendance at the undergraduate Board of Studies and regular visits to the School to meet staff and students [**Good practice (j)**]. The Panel **recommends** that the School consider making further strategic constructive use of the Liaison Librarian in relation to both on-campus and distance learning provision and that it give further consideration to library induction for distance learning students [**Desirable recommendation (r)**].

### Employer engagement

- 46 The Panel considered that, in general, the School had in place very effective mechanisms both for equipping students with the skills necessary for employment in the legal (and non-legal) professions, and for engagement with employers. As was evidenced in discussions with staff, students and recent graduates, there was a strong atmosphere of 'employability' in the School suggesting a high level of awareness by students of their options for employment after University [**Good practice (k)**]. The Panel noted evidence that undergraduate and postgraduate students were well prepared for employment, both in terms of finding employment and enhancing their position within current employment. The Panel considered that the international nature of the LLM programmes, existing and potential links with ICMA and the Henley Business School, and the geographical proximity of the School to London as the world's pre-eminent legal services market would help to prepare students for the global workplace.
- 47 The Panel was supportive of the School's development of a work experience scheme and its considerable efforts to secure ring-fenced placements for students. It **recommends** that the School work more closely with the Careers, Placement and Experience Centre in order to fully realise the potential of the scheme and to build more placement opportunities into the curriculum, in line with University policy [**Advisable recommendation (l)**]. The Panel also advises the School to explore possibilities for more formal evaluation of the extent to which the firms offering placements have made offers of employment, with a view to improving this mechanism for boosting employability.

- 48 The Panel noted that the weekly programme of Careers Sessions organised by the School and involving external speakers (often Reading alumni) working in both legal and non-legal professions, was highly valued by students and directly useful in assisting their employability. It noted the wide variety of co-curricular opportunities provided by the School to acquire client interviewing, advocacy and negotiation skills from the broad range of Pro Bono activities on offer, such as Street Law, and the formal mooting and negotiation programmes. The Panel noted that student demand for mooting opportunities greatly exceeded supply and that internal moots were largely organised by current students with other competing commitments. The Panel **recommends** that the School increase staff and alumni support for, and therefore capacity of, the mooting programme, since it built vital skills of value to all students, regardless of career destination [**Desirable recommendation (s)**].
- 49 The Panel welcomed the School's effective use of alumni and, more generally, the strong level of liaison with those in the legal profession, particularly through the regular Careers Sessions. It identified as a particular feature of good practice the provision of practitioner viewpoints on subjects in the core curriculum, through the use of the School's Fellow in Legal Services and his colleagues in The Head Partnership, as a particularly valuable form of direct liaison with the professions with a strong pedagogical value. Students observed that this helped them to see the way in which academic law became modified by practical, commercial considerations [**Good practice (l)**].
- 50 However, the Panel noted that there did not appear to be a formal mechanism for forming intelligent views about changes to roles in the legal sector, the market for legal services and, more generally, commercial opportunities outside law, and using this information to inform curriculum design/review and the design of employability initiatives. The Panel **recommends** more formal engagement with, and strengthening of, the employer and alumni network [**Desirable recommendation (t)**] through:
- (i) further extending, where possible, practice-led teaching arrangements;
  - (ii) exploring the creation of an alumni career mentoring network;
  - (iii) extending the good work already underway to build stronger institutional linkage with a number of the leading London law firms, perhaps organising meetings in the City of London to assist with this;
  - (iv) the appointment of an Employer Advisory Board or other structure that would formalise input from employers and alumni in the legal and non-legal professions in a more structured way and enable the School to benefit directly from insights into the legal market and wider commercial market and fuse these with insights emerging from ICMA and HBS.

Ideally this would lead to a more formal strategy on employability that would embed the careers initiatives more formally, both within the curriculum and in established co-curricular programmes.

## Enhancement of quality and academic provision

- 51 The Panel was pleased to note that the School demonstrated a high concern for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning on its programmes, as evidenced for example by the process of annual module and programme review. As noted elsewhere in this Report, the School was engaged in regularly reviewing its

programme offering in order to meet changing demands, including the recent wholesale review of undergraduate programmes.

- 52 The Panel saw clear evidence that the School pursued an active policy of staff development, including an annual Teaching and Learning Away Day attended by all teaching staff which addressed recent teaching and related issues and included talks by invited guests on matters impacting upon teaching and learning and the student experience.
- 53 While the Panel found evidence of students being asked for feedback on specific issues via the SSLC, it considered that the School could do more to encourage student engagement in curriculum development and enhancements to teaching and learning. The Panel **recommends** that the School encourage the involvement and engagement of students in the development of approaches to teaching and learning, for example by seeking their feedback in the development of new modules or programmes and the associated methods of teaching and learning [**Advisable recommendation (m)**].
- 54 The Panel did not see evidence of a teaching and learning committee which reported formally to the Boards of Studies on a regular basis. Therefore, the Panel **recommends** that the School develop a formal Teaching and Learning Enhancement Group, with membership from the teaching teams and from the student body, which would meet at least once each term and could be used as a tool to drive forward the teaching, learning and assessment strategy referred to in paragraph 31 [**Advisable recommendation (n)**].
- 55 The Panel noted that numbers of postgraduate research students (PGRs) in the School were relatively low and therefore their involvement in teaching was limited. It **recommends** that the School explore ways to support the development of the postgraduate research community, both in terms of numbers and academic skills. This should include an exploration of the provision of scholarships to fund PGRs with a commitment to teaching and learning/graduate teaching assistants to support core teaching and to grow the academic community [**Desirable recommendation (u)**]. This could reduce the School's need for sessional staff. The Panel also **recommends** that PGR students are encouraged to take advantage of the University training opportunities provided, most notably the *Preparing to teach* programme [**Desirable recommendation (v)**].

## Main characteristics of the programmes under review

- 56 The Panel considers that the programmes under review offer an intellectually challenging curriculum which enables students to develop their understanding of both core and more specialised areas of the discipline and to progress towards independent, higher-level study. The programmes are underpinned by a strong sense of community, a high standard of academic and pastoral support and robust quality assurance and enhancement procedures. They are complemented by a wide variety of co-curricular opportunities which help students to gain a range of skills useful in employment in the legal and non-legal professions.

## Conclusions on innovation and good practice

- 57 The Panel identifies the following areas as representing particularly good practice:
- a) the inclusive and highly supportive atmosphere within the School, which extends to prospective, current and past students alike;

- b) the global ambition of the School in responding to today's challenges;
- c) the informal methods in place for eliciting student views, including the weekly Public Law coffee mornings and the IP café after Intellectual Property classes;
- d) the robust system in place for reflecting on student module evaluation and making appropriate changes;
- e) the School's commitment to small group teaching wherever possible, an approach which is valued by staff and students alike;
- f) the Property Law Research Project module at Part 2, which offers a unique approach to embedding research skills in the curriculum and to promoting student engagement;
- g) the various recent initiatives intended to increase conversion rates, including: the School's extended Visit Day programme, which included a trial law lecture; the call back service whereby undergraduate applicants could discuss life at Reading with current law students, and the opportunity extended to LLM offer-holders to have a personal Skype chat with a member of staff;
- h) the excellent induction and support mechanisms in place for international students, including those students who transfer into Part 2 or Part 3 of the LLB from Taylors University (TU) or Brickfields Asia College in Malaysia;
- i) the high standard of academic and pastoral support received from a number of Personal Tutors and other members of staff;
- j) the contribution of the Liaison Librarian in supporting students' learning;
- k) the strong atmosphere of 'employability' in the School, suggesting a high level of awareness by students of their options for employment after University;
- l) the provision of practitioner viewpoints on subjects in the core curriculum, through the use of the School's Fellow in Legal Services, as a particularly valuable form of direct liaison with the professions with a strong pedagogical value.

## Conclusions on quality and standards

- 58 The Review 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 obtained by students, and that the programme specifications are appropriate.

## Recommendations

- 59 The Panel **recommends** to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science that the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years or, in the case of joint programmes, until the Periodic Review of the other discipline:
- LLB Law
  - LLB Law (students from Brickfields Asia College)
  - LLB Law (students from Taylor's University)
  - LLB Law with Legal Studies in Europe
  - LLB in Legal Studies

- LLM Advanced Legal Studies
- LLM Human Rights
- LLM Intellectual Property Law and Management
- LLM International Banking Law
- LLM International Commercial Law
- LLM International Corporate Finance
- LLM International Corporate Law by Distance Learning
- LLM International Financial Regulation
- LLM International Law
- LLM Law and Economics
- MSc Law and Economics
- LLM Oil and Gas
- LLM Oil and Gas by Distance Learning
- MSc Oil and Gas
- MRes Law
- MRes Law and Society
- MA (Res) Legal History.

60 The Panel does not consider that any recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.

61 The Panel has identified the following actions which it **recommends** the University addresses:

**Desirable actions [University]:**

- a) the University provide PTES data disaggregated by programme level and by mode of study;
- b) the University give further consideration to mechanisms for facilitating electronic module evaluation;
- c) the University support the work underway by the School to review the comparatively low proportion of First Class degrees by providing performance data at a more granular level for home/international students and widening participation students.

62 The Panel has identified the following actions which it **recommends** the School addresses:

**Advisable actions:**

- a) explore further the opportunities for curricula, particularly at undergraduate level, to be more suffused with commercial awareness in areas such as banking and capital markets, drawing on links with HBS, and particularly the ICMA Centre;
- b) use work already underway as a starting point for a comprehensive review of postgraduate taught provision, to include both on-campus and distance learning programmes;
- c) adopt a more consistent approach to feedback, including:

- (i) the formulation of an assessment and feedback policy;
  - (ii) clear articulation of the assessment and feedback strategy at module level in module description forms and alignment to the learning outcomes of the module and overall programme outcomes;
  - (iii) revision of the standard feedback forms for undergraduate and postgraduate essays and dissertations;
- d) explore additional, more dynamic means to ensure that the wider student body is informed of actions taken as a result of module evaluations, thus closing the 'feedback loop';
  - e) formulate a single, overarching teaching, learning and assessment strategy, which would incorporate the assessment and feedback policy (Recommendation c(i)) and support the capture and systematisation of best practice across the School. This document should clearly articulate the School's vision and strategy/approach to research-led teaching, students as co-producers, internationalisation of teaching and learning and the student experience (for both home/EU and international students), potential competence-based frameworks and other aspects of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy;
  - f) review the teaching philosophy, delivery methods and support for its distance learning programmes to ensure that: there is an appropriate blend of learning methods and support for students; the experience of learners on this mode of study is comparable to those undertaking the equivalent taught programmes, and that distance learning students are better integrated into the wider postgraduate taught population;
  - g) remind staff of their responsibilities in regard to the Personal Tutor system. Personal Tutors should provide students with a suggested agenda for each meeting to maximise the effectiveness of the system and provide a more consistent student experience;
  - h) continue work underway to review the comparatively low proportion of First Class degrees by giving further consideration to performance data, marking culture and curriculum and assessment design;
  - i) review the School's current workload model and ensure that opportunities are available for staff to teach at all levels and, in particular, that sufficient staff are available to support the teaching and assessment of core modules;
  - j) develop a plan in relation to engagement with the University's FLAIR (Facilitating Learning and Teaching Achievement and Individual Recognition) framework and the inclusion of teaching and learning excellence in the Performance Development Review process. This should include provision for sessional staff;
  - k) appoint a TEL Champion to oversee the development of a more consistent approach to the use of TEL in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, linked to the development of a wider teaching, learning and assessment strategy/philosophy, through appropriate support for academic and support staff, including training;
  - l) work more closely with the Careers, Placement and Experience Centre in order to fully realise the potential of the work experience scheme and to build more placement opportunities into the curriculum, in line with University policy;
  - m) encourage the involvement and engagement of students in the development of approaches to teaching and learning, for example by seeking their feedback in the

development of new modules or programmes and the associated methods of teaching and learning;

- n) develop a formal Teaching and Learning Enhancement Group, with membership from the teaching teams and from the student body, which would meet at least once each term and could be used as a tool to drive forward the teaching, learning and assessment strategy (Recommendation e);

**Desirable actions:**

- o) continue to monitor student demand for optional modules at Part 3 and reflect further on the pedagogic rationale of what is offered, bearing in mind links to the LLM provision;
- p) develop an explicit teaching and learning philosophy, with links to both the School's strategic direction and to the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy;
- q) build on the existing induction and support mechanisms in place for international students by giving further consideration to arrangements for induction/transition of distance learning students and by exploring ways to ensure better integration between home and international students;
- r) consider making further strategic constructive use of the Liaison Librarian in relation to both on-campus and distance learning provision, and give further consideration to library induction for distance learning students;
- s) increase staff and alumni support for, and therefore capacity of, the mooted programme;
- t) develop more formal engagement with, and strengthening of, the employer and alumni network through:
  - (i) further extending, where possible, practice-led teaching arrangements;
  - (ii) exploring the creation of an alumni career mentoring network;
  - (iii) extending the good work already underway to build stronger institutional linkage with a number of the leading London law firms, perhaps organising meetings in the City of London to assist with this;
  - (iv) the appointment of an Employer Advisory Board or other structure that would formalise input from employers and alumni in the legal and non-legal professions in a more structured way and enable the School to benefit directly from insights into the legal market and wider commercial market and fuse these with insights emerging from ICMA and HBS;
- u) explore ways to support the development of the postgraduate research community, both in terms of numbers and academic skills. This should include an exploration of the provision of scholarships to fund PGRs with a commitment to teaching and learning/graduate teaching assistants to support core teaching and to grow the academic community;
- v) encourage PGR students to take advantage of the University training opportunities provided, most notably the *Preparing to teach* programme.