

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 25 May 2007

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment -
Report of the Review of Veterinary Medicine held on 17 November
2006**

Mr Jim Craig, Senate Office

May 2007

Review Panel

Professor John Coggins	Convener, Vice-Principal for Life Sciences and Medicine
Dr Frances Barr	External Subject Specialist, University of Bristol
Professor John Briggs	Senate Assessor on Court
Professor Bob Matthew	Learning and Teaching Centre
Professor Jim McKillop	Member of Cognate Department, Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences
Mr Jim Craig	Clerk, Senate Office

A. Introduction

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine is located at Garscube, four miles from Gilmorehill. It occupies several buildings on the estate, including small animal clinic, large animal isolation unit, equine hospital, operating and lecture theatres and other teaching and laboratory facilities. It has an 850 acre commercial farm at Cochno, 15 minutes from Garscube, where there is also a research centre and teaching facilities.

The School was founded in 1862 and gained independent Faculty status in 1969. It was the subject of an internal review in session 1995-96 and a SHEFC Quality Assessment in November 1996, the latter resulting in the conclusion that “overall, the quality of educational provision in Veterinary Medicine at the University of Glasgow was judged to be excellent.”¹ A visitation was conducted in May 2002 by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) on its own behalf and that of the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education, and in the current year a visit from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has resulted in the continuation of accreditation through to 2013.

The Faculty was restructured in 2004 as a single department but with six divisions to facilitate staff development and line management – these divisions corresponding essentially to research themes as follows:

¹ Scottish Higher Education Funding Council – Report of a Quality Assessment in Veterinary Medicine at the University of Glasgow – Edinburgh : HMSO, 1997.

Animal Production and Public Health
Cell Sciences
Companion Animal Sciences
Infection and Immunity
Pathological Sciences
Wellcome Centre for Molecular Parasitology

The Faculty's Self Evaluation Report (SER) was well received by the Review Panel whose members were impressed by the extent to which it evidenced deliberate and critical introspection.

In the course of its visit, the Review Panel met the Dean, Professor Stuart Reid, the Associate Dean, Professor Martin Sullivan in the role of Head of Department, and the Faculty Secretary, Ms Sarah Chiodetto. In addition to meeting three demonstrators, including one research fellow, the Panel met staff in groups comprising new and probationary staff (6), teaching staff (8), quality assurance staff (4) and student support staff (4). It met students and recent graduates in five groups, each intended to provide a range of academic experience.

The Review Panel was aware that the Faculty had recently launched the first of a series of courses leading to the award of the degree Master of Veterinary Public Health which is taught as a distance learning programme. This programme was not discussed in the SER and was addressed only *en passant* by the Panel. The Clerk reported that one, but only one, student had replied to an invitation to comment on the quality of the programme to date, and that this response had been very positive. The review was, therefore, restricted almost exclusively to provision in respect of the BVMS.

B. Overall aims of the Department's provision

It was clear to the Review Panel from its SER that the School was concerned almost exclusively with the preparation of students for careers as veterinary surgeons. It was also apparent, however, that such preparation was not limited to the achievement by those students of accreditation for entry to the profession. The Panel noted with satisfaction the inclusive and forward looking statement of aims which acknowledged the importance of life-long learning and professional development and which reflected the intention on the part of the School to imbue students with both the abilities and personal philosophy that would enable such development to be realised.

C. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision

C.1 Aim

In its SER, the Faculty set its degree programme provision in the context of the aims discussed immediately above and the QAA Benchmark Statement for Veterinary Science. A set of bullet points which were provided in this section were expressed in more passive language than the Review Panel might have anticipated, but these were not found to have been reproduced in other documents and were not explored by the Panel in discussion with staff.

C.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

The Review Panel was referred for statements of Intended Learning Outcomes to the several course information documents. It was disappointing in these sources to note that they were being called 'learning objectives' and tended to be knowledge lists

rather than statements of assessable achievement. At the programme level² the ILOs display little evidence in their drafting of the influence of published guidelines; they consist, in the main, of lists of topics or subjects without any expression of what the student should have achieved by the end of the programme.

In the course of various meetings with staff, the Review Panel heard reference to student uncertainty as to what was expected of them. Staff spoke of overload within the curriculum while students were reported to have pleaded “tell us what we have to know”. It is the purpose of ILOs that, when well written, they should answer that plea meaningfully, and the Panel **recommended** that their statement in course documents should be revisited and revised in accordance with the advice provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre and the Senate Office.³

C.3 *Assessment*

A very wide range of assessment methods are used in the Faculty, and the Review Panel noted with interest its initiative in introducing Collaborative and Self-Directed Learning Assignments (CLAs and SDLAs). These, for different reasons, were not universally welcomed by the students although those whom the Panel met were not unanimous in their criticism. Some students disliked CLAs because they resented the fact that their own grades might be affected adversely by the performance of other members of their group. Staff responded that students had the remedy to hand in the form of a wholly objective rating, on their own part, of the contribution of each member to the work of the group. It was the view of the Panel that the Faculty was right to encourage collective rather than exclusively individual endeavour, and that in doing so it helped students prepare for future realities. It was suggested, however, that, if it is not already done, consideration might be given to allowing students more control over matters of selection and de-selection in group membership.

A few students reported that they liked the SDLAs but, for the most part, criticism was focussed on a poor effort to reward ratio. The Panel recognised the difficulties inherent in separating generic skills training from hard knowledge acquisition, and of striking an appropriate balance, but concluded that the Faculty was right to employ such instruments, and suggested that consideration be given to increasing the use of SDLAs across the programme as a whole, and the weight of their contribution to overall assessment.

The subject of formative assessment – feedback on student performance - had exercised the Faculty because staff had been criticised in a recent survey⁴ for providing too little during the Year 5 clinical rotations. The Review Panel heard that making recordable judgements was very difficult because of variation in caseload both in and between rotations. The changes in personnel from day to day added to the difficulty of assembling frequent, composite feedback. Members of the Panel were persuaded, however, that students who were having difficulties were identified to course co-ordinators and not left to flounder. It should be noted that this was not an issue which students themselves chose to bring to the attention of the Panel.

C.4 *Curriculum Design and Content*

C.4.1 Reshaping the curriculum

The subject of curriculum development featured strongly in the SER and was, perhaps, the dominant topic in discussions with staff. It was apparent to the Review Panel from

² BVMS Programme Specification – Section 11

³ <http://senate.gla.ac.uk/academic/ilo/index.html>

⁴ AVS/BVA survey referred to in section E below

its reading of the documents provided by the Faculty that staff were not of one view in this matter, and this impression was reinforced on the day of the visit.

The Panel sought, in the first place, clarification of the drivers behind curriculum change, recognising that, although considerable time had elapsed since the last major restructuring, the curriculum had been updated from time to time in the interval. With recent re-accreditation exercises successfully completed, was there not evidence that the Faculty was already delivering exactly what was required? The answer was not necessarily so: the professional bodies were themselves looking for change and expecting it to be implemented.

In this context the Panel noted the inclusion, at the insistence of the AVMA, of a bio-terrorism course. Recent changes included also important initiatives in the development of students' inter-personal communications skills, and formal training in aspects of veterinary practice management. But what was being envisaged was more radical than an adjustment of content – it was both a significant reduction in that proportion of the programme which was delivered in traditionally didactic style, and it was a departure from the design in which a thorough foundation in anatomy, physiology and microbiology is established first for the subsequent support of clinical practice. The new model was characterised by a vertical rather than horizontal arrangement of subjects within the taught programme, this to encourage a more secure accumulation of the knowledge on which practice would be based.

In its meeting with teaching staff the Panel heard the arguments for retaining the traditional architecture cogently argued. There were good pedagogical, ethical and practical reasons why a student should have an understanding of what he or she was dealing with before attempting a clinical intervention.

But there were reasons also for change, and they were advanced persuasively, particularly by the Associate Dean. Those noted by the Panel included:

- The knowledge base has continued to grow and it has become increasingly difficult to determine what must be known in advance, as opposed to learned as required.
- The period of abstract learning is so long that much of what was taught has been forgotten before any opportunity to apply it in practice has been presented. What might be more useful would be an incremental process of knowledge acquisition and application.
- It may be reasonably predicted that the knowledge base on which clinical practice must always depend will continue to grow rapidly and a formal training which recognised this, rather than implied a terminal achievement of competence, ought to be encouraged.
- The profession was moving to an expectation of life-long learning and, from Europe, it was anticipated that continuing professional development will become not so much expected as demanded. Because veterinary surgeons might find a future requirement to submit to a re-accreditation procedure, it was appropriate that, as students, they should prepare for life-long learning, and intrinsic to this was a shift from the passive absorption of information to a more thoughtful pursuit of the means to solve a presenting problem.
- Active, self-directed learning had other advantages, and the shape of the curriculum should encourage students to work with more of a personal development focus, reflecting on their performance and what they had learned from it.
- The present curriculum incorporated too dramatic a change for students stepping up to the clinical final year, and students would be better prepared for

employment in clinical practice if they could begin to acquire clinical experience at an earlier stage.

Curriculum change is clearly not being driven by student demand – each year the places available are filled without difficulty by well qualified applicants, and the students have perhaps tended to be more traditional than radical in their expectations of provision. But some comments expressed to the Panel suggested that at least some of the changes proposed would be very welcome. One student indicated that a more gradual transition to the work of Year 5 would have been appreciated while another complained that the only animals seen in Years 3 and 4 were dead ones.

It was the view of the Review Panel that the gap between those who were seeking a major overhaul of the curriculum and those who opposed radical change was capable of being bridged. The Panel was left in no doubt that the advocates of change wished to retain provision of a secure knowledge base for clinical practice, and in the final meeting of the day the Dean emphasised that, although he wished to see established some training in clinical skills at an early stage, he did not envisage any reduction in the academic rigour of the degree programme. On neither side of the debate is there any illusion that curriculum content may simply continue to grow. From time to time, pruning, and sometimes drastic pruning, will be inevitable. The problem of what to cut out is therefore a shared and ongoing problem.

The Review Panel, having considered the arguments presented to it, **recommended** that the Curriculum Working Group which had been set up within the Faculty should, as a matter of urgency, seek to translate the principles driving reform into sound and workable proposals while, as far as possible, addressing the concerns of colleagues who did not share the same enthusiasm for change. In keeping with this recommendation it suggested that members of the Curriculum Working Group might seek the advice of colleagues at the Dental School where similar principles determined the design of a new curriculum in the recent past. At the same time, acknowledging that “what we assess is what students learn,” it was suggested that the Working Group might like to seek advice from the Learning and Teaching Centre.

C.4.2 Extra mural studies

To some extent the final bullet point above is broadly recognised in the existence of the extra-mural studies (EMS) programme. Students told the Panel that EMS was an essential part of the curriculum and that, in terms of students learning what they needed to know, “a lot was left to EMS”. The Review Panel recognised the difficulty, however, that ‘extra-mural’ meant extra-mural and not all students were able to benefit from a placement in a clinical practice. Opportunities in the right geographic location did not always exist, and some students on EMS placement accepted laboratory work which provided a different range of experience.

The students who spoke to the Review Panel had most to say, however, about the variation in quality of EMS placements and, in some, students found that they simply did not get enough to do. Discussing these comments, staff acknowledged that provision could be patchy, particularly in respect of farms, and indicated that poor reports could result in students not being referred to those placements again. The Panel recognised that this was a difficult area over which the Faculty had little control, and suggested that the discussion of curriculum reform take account of students’ variable experience of EMS.

In discussion with undergraduates, members of the Review Panel were told that some vet schools provided their students with lists of procedures that they could ‘tick off’ on placement as they encountered them. The Panel was satisfied, however, with the response of staff that all course documentation at Glasgow reproduced the ‘Day 1

Competencies' published by the RCVS, and that this should meet the students' requirements.

C.4.3 Tracking

In his opening session with the Review Panel, the Associate Dean made the point that all students followed the same broad-based curriculum without compromising their competence. Students did, however, almost incidentally refer to a measure of tracking in Year 5 between equine studies and farm animals. It was interesting to note that even the very limited degree of specialisation that this involved was viewed without particular favour because staff teaching on one side of the division were reported to regard students who had made the 'wrong' choice as having no interest in their speciality. Some students rather resented this, and some resented having to make the choice in the first place. The Panel suggested that these considerations might also be borne in mind by the Curriculum Working Group.

C.4.4 Masters programmes

As already noted (Section A), the Review Panel had been made aware of the Faculty having recently established a taught distance learning masters programme in veterinary public health (MVPH). It became clear to the Panel in the course of its meetings with staff that any further expansion of postgraduate teaching would visit an increased and intolerable load on staff who were already overstretched. While the Panel recognised the attractiveness, in strategic terms, of the Faculty cooperating with Medicine and IBLS in the development of programmes in such areas as virology and cancer research, it agreed that its report should note that, while highly desirable, new masters programmes would not be possible without an increase in teaching staff resources.

The Research Masters degree, for which early planning had been indicated in the documents submitted by the School, was touched on only briefly in discussion.

C.5 *Student Recruitment, Support and Progression*

C.5.1 Student numbers and Internationalisation

The Faculty was warmly commended by the Review Panel for filling all the funded home student places available to it while maintaining the highest admissions standards and, at the same time, increasing overall numbers by means of vigorous overseas recruitment. The Faculty was congratulated also for achieving outstanding retention rates.

The Dean made the point that further expansion was impossible not just because of the limited capacity of the built accommodation and a limited supply of clinical cases for the support of teaching, but because of ratios set by the accreditation bodies. The Dean acknowledged that the University had indicated that it was looking for an expanded commitment to internationalisation across the board, and expressed the view, with which the Review Panel concurred, that to demand more of the Faculty in this respect would be unfair and unreasonable.

The implications - for infrastructure and other resources - of overseas recruitment taking student numbers to the limit are considered below (Section C.6.2).

C.5.2 Progress regulations

The SER had drawn the Review Panel's attention to a concern in the Faculty that regulations governing student progress through the BVMS programme should be

tightened. At the root of the problem was the excessively protracted discussion and review process, which was occasioned when a student's lack of progress had called into question the appropriateness of continued attendance on the programme. The Panel explored this matter with the Dean and Associate Dean and discovered that a Progress Committee had been established only in the previous session and that, subsequently, cases were being referred to and from that Committee, the Examination Board and the Dean, taking much longer to resolve. The Panel suggested that the process could be streamlined, and **recommended** that the Faculty seek advice from the Clerk to the Faculties of Science, and from colleagues in Undergraduate Medicine.

C.5.3 Student support

From their visit to the Faculty, the Review Panel formed a picture of a department in which the students felt comfortable and well supported. Staff were described as operating an 'open door' policy and being very approachable. This was particularly true of the administrators whose work in areas of personal and social support was described as outstanding. Excellent relations with staff and a "great atmosphere" were among the reasons why all of the students who spoke to the Panel were happy to confirm that they had made a good choice in coming to Glasgow.

Although there was evidence of good *esprit* and mutual help networks among the student community, the more formal regent system, which in its present form aligns a large group of students at different stages of their careers with one member of staff, meeting twice a year, appeared to most students who talked to the Panel to be irrelevant and serving no useful purpose. The Panel had noted staff concern also and that the Faculty minutes of August 2005 had referred to a "mismatch between the goals of the Scheme and the direction the meetings take." The scheme was discussed with the Dean and Associate Dean who acknowledged that some regents invested more effort than others, and reported that students were being consulted about ways in which the scheme might be improved or redesigned. As well as the vertical arrangement of regency groups, support is also provided horizontally by year advisers, and the Panel found it interesting that some students preferred to contact members of staff with whom they had established some rapport during self-directed learning in Year 1.

The Faculty was thought by students to be responsive and to listen well. Its Staff-Student Liaison Committee was described as effective – "everybody gets their say and the meetings are felt to be open". Being a student course representative was seen as a very positive experience.

Heavy recruitment from overseas had increased the pressure on student support activities, and staff referred to having to deal with a greater diversity of matters. UK students observed that their colleagues from North America were more demanding of staff attention.

Student finance is an issue in all teaching departments of the University but especially so in the Veterinary Faculty where fees are high, the degree programme runs for five years, and, as already noted, there is a requirement for students to participate in extra-mural studies. The Panel learned that a small minority took paid work during term and, for those students, keeping up with course demands tended to be a struggle.

Staff reported also a dramatic increase in the received number of declarations of disabilities, and that accommodating these had become more demanding. Staff used the services provided centrally by the University but the administrator primarily responsible for liaison indicated that getting student counseling could be difficult and that waiting times were long. Stress levels were reported to increase markedly in Years 4 and 5. The Review Panel was reminded that suicide rates among veterinary surgeons

were very high⁵ and, whether or not this had any common cause with the high student stress levels referred to, the Panel felt that this could not be ignored. In his comments on the suicide figures, Professor Richard Halliwell of the British Veterinary Association and a former president of the RCVS had said that training was demanding, and did not “really prepare people for the communication and helping skills that they need.” Professor Halliwell had also said that, to improve the situation, vet schools needed to teach more about work-life balance and coping skills from the beginning.⁶

The introduction to the curriculum of communications skills is clearly most apposite in this context but the Review Panel was minded to go further and **recommended** that the School consider seeking professional assistance, perhaps requesting that colleagues from the Department of Public Health might provide some teaching in this area.

C.6 *The Effectiveness of Provision*

C.6.1 Staff resources

The Review Panel had read in the SER that “recruitment of staff in the clinical and pathology areas is a major concern.” The external member reminded her colleagues that this is not a problem unique to Glasgow. Because of the salary differences between veterinary surgeons in practice and veterinary surgeons involved in teaching and research, it is difficult to get graduates to undertake PhDs and post-doctoral work; however there is an expectation that veterinary surgeons involved in teaching should have a research background. In his first meeting with the Panel the Associate Dean reported a problem finding enough staff to provide the required teaching of anatomy. By way of caveat he accepted that the subject was being over-taught, but added that health and safety considerations resulted in some classes being taught in two groups, this putting even greater demands on staff. For the most part, when asked, the students seemed unconcerned. They had noted the fall in numbers but were enthusiastic about the quality of teaching with which they were provided. Their reservation, however, was that demonstrators were in too short supply, and that Year 5 students were filling some gaps and not always effectively.

The SER had noted that “the Faculty had initiated an alternative clinical track in an effort to overcome this hurdle and that it remained to be seen if this will alter the situation.” Exploring this with the Dean, the Panel learned that the proposal had been approved in principle by Human Resources and, it was to be hoped, in terms of remuneration, would introduce a greater measure of fair play. The Dean added that the Faculty was trying to devise a progression path from junior to senior clinician. The Panel encouraged the Dean and his colleagues in this enterprise.

The documentation provided by the Faculty and examined by the Review Panel suggested strongly that the Teaching Unit had great difficulty meeting all the demands made of it. Discussions with staff on the day of the visit only reinforced the Panel’s initial concerns for an area that had been reduced in size as a consequence of the Early Retirement and Voluntary Severance Scheme. Referring to the internationalisation strategy, the Associate Dean indicated that countries other than the United States were now being targeted but that the Teaching Unit was not sufficiently well resourced to give all the support needed; the Faculty Management Group was, therefore, being asked to find three additional staff. The Panel was encouraged to learn that the Faculty recognised the need to reinforce this area, and that it was taking steps to do so.

⁵ In October 2005 the BBC reported rates four times higher than the UK average, and higher than for doctors and dentists.

⁶ Reported at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4310596.stm>

In the meeting that they had with two members of the Review Panel the probationary and other new staff reported that they did not feel overworked and were eased into their teaching duties. They did, however, reveal some issues which suggested a need for further enquiry. Although, for the most part, they appeared to have enjoyed the experience of the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme, they felt that, as far as their workload was concerned, no allowance was made for NLTP demands. New staff told members of the Panel that their line managers were not always aware of what other managers were asking of them. The Panel suggested that communications between managers might be improved, with more articulation between the different managers to whom new staff reported.

The new staff reported a tension between clinical and research activity. Among their number were staff who were working primarily as clinicians but who wanted to do research (not least for the implications for promotion prospects of not doing so) and were not sure how to go about it. Although new staff indicated clearly that informal support within the Faculty was very good, Panel members formed the impression that the onus was on them to find it as necessary. The Panel was disappointed that some new staff did not appear to have been assigned a mentor and it **recommended** that this anomaly be remedied.

The Faculty had drawn attention in its SER to the difficulties it had encountered attempting to develop a useful workload model. Addressing this topic in the first meeting of the day, the Associate Dean reported that the Faculty had had a model for two years but this had failed to reflect accurately the various burdens being carried by staff. The Review Panel recognised that the usual task of balancing teaching, research and administrative loads was complicated for the Faculty by the addition to this mix of clinical responsibilities.

The increase in student numbers, particularly, in some respects, the increase resulting from the internationalisation strategy, has resulted in increased loads on many clinical and administrative staff. The Review Panel recognised that it was very difficult to get research grant applications written during the teaching semesters. At the same time, it noted that there was variation – and a perception of variation – in staff workloads, and it encouraged the School in its resolve to continue to refine the model so that it worked effectively to assist the achievement of an equitable distribution of workload. It suggested also that, for probationary staff, NLTP work should be included in the model.

C.6.2 Structural resources

It was not only staffing resources that were under strain, however, and the Review Panel learned that accreditation by the American Veterinary Medical Association had been secured on condition that the creation of modern Farm Animal Teaching facilities was imminent. The theatre is uncomfortable and cold, and students described viewing problems as being “like getting a bad seat in an overcrowded cinema.” The Panel was further concerned that, although funding had been identified to meet the cost of repairs, no date had yet been fixed for their implementation. The Panel **recommended** that the University’s Estates and Buildings Department address this matter as soon as possible.

Students reported other facilities as being under more pressure than they seemed to be designed to support. The library was described as too busy and noisy, and it was suggested that more study space was required. The computer centre was very busy at all times. The Review Panel was advised that, throughout the School, there were insufficient female toilets – a very credible assertion given the increase in student numbers and the fact that the great majority of students were now women. The Panel was very pleased to learn from the Dean that student study space would shortly be increased and that a second cluster of 20 additional computers is to be established. It

recommended that the Faculty discuss the perceived inadequacy of female toilets with the Department of Estates and Buildings.

D. Maintenance and enhancement of the standard of awards

Except in respect of candidates who have shown special merit throughout the programme and are awarded the degree with Honours or Commendation, the BVMS is unclassified. The maintenance and enhancement of standards remains important, however, and is assured by visitations from the RCVS and AVMA, the participation in the programme of numerous external clinicians, and the critical support of a large number of External Examiners.

The Review Panel discussed with staff how the reports of External Examiners were processed within the Faculty and were satisfied that they were dealt with rigorously and scrupulously with criticisms and suggestions addressed at appropriate levels, be that by an individual teacher, a course co-ordinator, a course team or the Faculty's Board of Studies.

E. Maintenance and assurance of quality

Board of Studies minutes provided to the Review Panel for scrutiny in advance of the visit to the School made it very apparent that the Annual Course Monitoring Reports were taken very seriously and given careful attention.

Student feedback on course provision is an important element in quality assurance and the Review Panel was disappointed to learn that, with *Moodle* (the University's preferred virtual learning environment) being used as the medium for delivering feedback best response rates had fallen from 90% to 50% and worst rates from 18% to 8.7%. Questionnaires had traditionally been collected by lecturers and passed to course co-ordinators but, with reorganization, the process had been centralized and feedback collated by the Teaching Unit. Switching to *Moodle* provided some relief for this hard pressed area but, in discussion with the Review Panel, QA staff agreed that response rates were poor and said that they would "persevere for a bit longer but go back to paper if necessary."

The Staff-Student Liaison Committee appeared from its minutes to be generally well attended. Student comments to members of the Review Panel were very positive as to the value and effectiveness of this Committee. The interest taken by the Faculty in student opinion was demonstrated by its reaction to the joint report from the Association of Veterinary Students and the British Veterinary Association which seemed relatively unfavourable in respect of Glasgow. It was the students themselves, however, in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, who had pointed out how few students had taken part in the AVS/BVA survey and that the margin between highest and lowest rankings was narrow⁷.

The confidence of the Review Panel in student attitudes to the programme as a whole was reinforced by the results of a survey of recent graduates and employers which returned high satisfaction scores⁸.

Variations in EMS placements have already been discussed (Section C.4.2). It was noted that feedback is collected both from students and those providing supervised work experience.

⁷ Minutes of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, March 2006

⁸ On a range of 1 to 5, a mean score of 3.77 was returned by students for overall satisfaction. Employers averaged 3.75 in their scores of recent Glasgow graduates' veterinary knowledge and skills and 3.85 for their dealings with clients.

F. Enhancing the Student Learning Experience

F.1 Moodle

The introduction of *Moodle* has considerable potential for enhancement of students' learning experience. Despite the not unrelated controversy surrounding the printing of lecture notes which is discussed below (Section F.2), open-ended access to an electronic version of lecture notes and other 'handouts' had significant advantages for students. They may be quickly searched for a forgotten reference, and they can be copied and edited with new annotations and links to other relevant material discovered by the student. *Moodle's* potential as a learning resource extends far beyond that of being a storage context for course notes. Some of this potential is being realised with students reporting to the Panel their appreciation of 'quizzes' which helped them determine what they had learned and what they needed to revise. The students thought some staff could make more use of it than they did, and the probationary staff suggested that they, as teachers, could get more out of it though they felt they needed further training to do so.

F.2 Lecture notes

It was apparent to the Review Panel from preliminary reading that the provision – or discontinued provision – of lecture notes had become something of a *cause célèbre*, and was without question the favourite topic in the student meetings with members of the Panel. The issue is not quite straightforward but in the background is the perception of a golden age when lecturers distributed copious handouts whose contents summarised, reproduced or elaborated on the contents of the lecture. With the introduction of *Moodle*, which provided for an electronic distribution of notes as well as a repository and archive, the Faculty had decided that distributing paper should stop.

Despite the advantages of *Moodle*, turning off the paper supply was, from the point of view of the students, not good news. The Panel heard some suggestion that the timing of the announcement was unfortunate because it coincided with the distraction of exam preparation, but the main problems, as perceived, were that printing costs were transferred from the Faculty to the students, and that there was insufficient printing capacity on the local network to cope with student demand.

Some students were, themselves, ready to admit that cost was not a compelling issue – they were permitted each an allocation of print credits to their network accounts which some said were sufficient for their needs. But these credits may be redeemed against any network printing and not all students were so sanguine about the monetary impact of the change. Some, especially some from North America who were already paying heavily for their tuition, resented the imposition of an additional burden even if it was comparatively small.

Network capacity was, however, a matter about which the evidence presented to the Review Panel remained entirely consistent. Because, as has already been noted (Section C.6.2), the computer cluster is always busy, and because the associated printers are heavily used, the transfer of this responsibility to students has been viewed as being at least a considerable nuisance. What has made it something worse than that, however, has been, so the students reported, the tendency for some lecturers to post their material on *Moodle* very close to the time of the class meeting at which it would be required. The students complained that the ensuing rush to print created surges of demand with which the network was simply unable to cope. The result has been that students have wasted time in queues and the Panel heard from one student who went outside the University to have notes printed at commercial rates.

The Panel was told that, in response to criticism, some new rules had been introduced. Reasonable deadlines had been set for staff uploading notes to *Moodle*, and handouts

were again to be permitted if limited to three pages. This might have gone a long way to resolving the difficulty had it not been for the facts that, firstly, in subjects where textbooks are considered poor, such as animal husbandry, the longer notes still have to be printed, and, secondly, some staff still fail to get their material up on *Moodle* early enough. In its meeting with teaching staff the Panel learned that this was not always accidental but the result of a principled stand against supplying students with notes which diverted their attention from what was being demonstrated.

The Review Panel was pleased to learn before the end of its visit that the Faculty intended to review the provision of printing capacity on the local network. Had it not expressed this intention, the Panel would have felt compelled to recommend such a course of action. While it respected the right of staff to exercise their own judgement in the classroom, the Panel **recommended** that rules which are published to the students should be applied consistently by all staff. In the event that adoption of this recommendation should require some further review of these rules – perhaps explicitly allowing justified exceptions – the Panel further **recommended** that the Faculty take into account that multiple jobs on a standard network printer is in all respects a poor efficiency alternative to high speed reproduction on a large photocopier. As one student said to the Panel, it was disingenuous to argue that wasteful over-provision could only be countered by substituting distributed for central printing.

F.3 Computer assisted learning

The Review Panel noted that the staff publication list contained a large number of papers on the application of computer assisted learning to veterinary education. Members noted also in the feedback reports that, although some CAL courses had, at least initially, been unpopular with students, others had been very well received. The Panel commended the School for its innovative approach to the use of learning technology and saw in this further opportunities for enhancing the learning experience.

F.4 Small Animal Hospital

Attendance at the Small Animal Hospital is an integral part of Year 5 clinical training but some students lamented the lack of accommodation and the amount of time that was spent in inactivity. They suggested that radio pagers might be provided to call them to the hospital when there was something for them to see or do. The point was put by the Review Panel to support staff who responded that something similar had been attempted using mobile phones but had not been successful. It was the Panel's view, however, that this matter might be revisited, and that solutions be sought to the problems which had caused previous attempts to fail.

F.5 Communications skills

Although reference has already been made in the section on curriculum development (C.4.1) to the inclusion of communications skills training in the programme, the Panel highlighted it as a significant enhancement of the learning experience. The Associate Dean had informed the Review Panel that up to 20% of practising veterinary surgeons had been in the past the subject of complaints in their first two years following graduation, and that most of these complaints could be ascribed to poor communications between vet and client. Meeting a member of the Panel, two recent graduates contrasted their own initial anxieties with the relative confidence expressed by two Year 4 students who had experienced the new course.

G. Summary of Key strengths and Areas to be improved or enhanced in relation to learning and teaching and Conclusions and recommendations

G.1 Key strengths

Among the key strengths listed by the Faculty in its SER appeared the following which the Review Panel firmly endorsed:

- Highly qualified and very motivated, enthusiastic students.
- Student *esprit de corps*.
- Highly qualified and motivated staff.
- Regular cycle of external accreditation.
- Wholesale curricular transfer to *Moodle*.

The members of the Panel were most impressed by the dedication of the staff whom it met and the students' reports of their teachers, and would, themselves, not have introduced a distinction between the motivation of either group. To the above list the Panel would add the following:

- Imaginative and forward looking approach to curriculum development.
- Commitment to maximising student numbers and income by an energetic pursuit of the University's internationalisation policy.
- Innovative approach to the application of computer assisted learning.

G.2 Areas to be improved or enhanced

The SER included a long list of points for improvement, several of which referred to different aspects of curriculum development discussed in this report; the Panel has amalgamated these in the first point below. The second and third points were also considered important:

- Progress changes in the structure and content of the curriculum to reflect changing professional requirements and current thinking about veterinary education generally.
- Exploit potential of *Moodle*.
- Increase study space.

The second of these points should be understood to include resolution of students' concerns about the timeliness of the provision of learning support material on *Moodle*.

In discussion with the Panel, the Dean identified the buildings as being his greatest concern, and it is perhaps in recognition that enhancement here was largely beyond his control that this did not figure on the action list in the SER. The Panel shared the Dean's concern, however, and this is reflected in the recommendation below addressed to the Director of Estates and Buildings.

To the list begun by the authors of the SER the Panel added the following:

- Review issues related to student printing with a view to overcoming the difficulties which appear to characterise present arrangements.
- Continue efforts to devise an appropriate remuneration and career progression for clinicians.
- Increase staffing in the Teaching Unit.
- Improve communications between managers to whom new staff report.

- Continue to develop and refine a useful workload model.
- Consider how the time of students 'on call' at the Small Animal Hospital might be employed more efficiently.

G.3 Conclusions and recommendations

Despite most unfavourable weather, members of the Panel enjoyed their visit to the Faculty where arrangements made for their comfort and the conduct of meetings was exemplary. The documentation prepared for them was helpful, particularly the Self Evaluation Report which followed Senate Office guidance and contained evidence of critical evaluation of the Faculty's undergraduate provision. The attitude of the staff whom the Panel met was positive, constructive and helpful. The students were well prepared for their meetings with Panel members, and were thoughtful and lively.

The Review Panel was impressed by the way the Faculty had responded to various challenges and, particularly in the face of resource constraints, had maximised student recruitment and undergraduate fees income. The Panel was impressed also by the fact that a very high proportion of recruits was retained through a long and demanding programme to graduation.

The Review Panel commended the Faculty for innovations already introduced to the curriculum, and for the direction in which it was proposed future developments should take. It recognised that not all staff were convinced of the merit of some of the proposals but was itself satisfied that the principles (a) that a secure foundation in the traditional disciplines was a prerequisite for clinical practice and (b) that learning throughout the programme should become more self-directed and practical, were capable of being reconciled.

The recommendations interspersed throughout this report and summarised below are made in the spirit of support and encouragement to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. They are ranked below in order of priority and include references back to the sections from which they are derived.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommended that the Curriculum Working Group should, as a matter of urgency, seek to translate the principles driving reform into sound and workable proposals while, as far as possible, addressing the concerns of colleagues who did not share their enthusiasm for change. [Section C.4.1]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommended that the University's Estates and Buildings Department address as a matter of high priority the problems at the Farm Animal Teaching facilities, including the Ilay Lecture Theatre for which a budget has been secured but no date determined when the work may be carried out.

For the attention of the **Director of Estates and Buildings**

Recommendation 3

In view of reported stress levels among students in Years 4 and 5 and comments from the BVA on the high suicide rate among veterinary surgeons and the responsibilities of vet schools, the Panel recommended that the Faculty consider seeking professional assistance, perhaps requesting that colleagues from the Department of Public Health

might provide some teaching in 'coping skills' and achieving a healthy 'work-life balance'. [Section C.5.2]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommended that all new staff should formally be assigned a mentor. [Section C.6.1]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Recommendation 5

In the context of provision of lecture notes by staff to students, the Panel recommended that rules which are published to the students should be applied consistently by all staff, and that, should these rules be reconsidered, the Panel recommended that the Faculty take into account the cost inefficiency of standard network printers relative to that of high volume photocopiers. [Section F.2]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommended that statements of Intended Learning Outcomes occurring in course documents should be revisited and revised in accordance with the advice provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre and the Senate Office. [Section C.2]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommended that the Faculty discuss the perceived inadequacy of female toilets with the Department of Estates and Buildings. [Section C.6.2]

For the attention of the **Dean of the Faculty** and **Director of Estates and Buildings**

Recommendation 8

The Panel recommended that, in the matter of determining an appropriate procedure for considering student progress cases, the Faculty seek advice from the Clerk to the Faculties of Science, and from colleagues in Undergraduate Medicine. [Section C.5.2]

For the attention of the **Associate Dean**

Prepared by: Janet Fleming, Senate Office

Last modified on: Monday 21 May 2007