

Department of Geography

School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies

Annual Monitoring Report

Academic Year 2006-7

1. Remit of the Report

1.1. Coverage

This report follows the format of the generic Annual Monitoring Report format but contains additional sections that the Department feels are important to monitoring the quality of our courses and programmes. Specifically, greater emphasis is placed upon issues arising from SEQ data, NSS responses, and identified areas of good practice in teaching and curriculum management.

The report considers all programmes and courses offered by the Geography Department at Undergraduate level. The University requirement is that each course will be evaluated annually for the first three years of its delivery, but only every third year thereafter. The Department of Geography has elected not to sample survey individual courses in our programmes and instead to monitor all courses. We can better identify areas for improvement and evidence of good practice by making such an extensive survey. Spreadsheets containing analyses of the SEQ data are attached to this report.

1.2. Courses covered

The courses covered by the report are listed in the attached spreadsheets.

1.3. Programmes covered

Geography (BA) (L7005U)

Geography (BSc) (F8004U)

Geography and Anthropology (BA) (LL761U)

Geography and Archaeology (BA) (LV741U) *cancelled from 2009*

Geography and Contemporary European Studies (BA) (LR791U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography and Cultural Studies (BA) - *cancelled from 2006*

Geography and Development Studies (BA) (LL791U)

Geography and Environmental Science (BSc) (FF891U) *cancelled from 2009*

Geography and Gender Studies (BA) - *cancelled from 2006*

Geography and International Relations (BA) (LL721U) *cancelled from 2009*

Geography and Politics (BA) (LL722U) *cancelled from 2009*

Geography and Sociology (BA) (LL731U)

Geography with American Studies (BSc) (F8T71U) *cancelled from 2009*

Geography with Computer Science (BSc) - *cancelled from 2006*

Geography with Development Studies (BA) (L7LX1U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with Ecology (BSc) (F8C91U)

Geography with Education Studies (BA) - *cancelled from 2006*

Geography with French (BA) (L7R11U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with German (BA) (L7R21U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with Italian (BA) (L7R31U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with Spanish (BA) (L7R41U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography and Language(s) (LR7Y) *two languages programmes cancelled from 2009*

Geography with Management Studies (BA) (L7N21U) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with Management Studies (BSc) (L7N2) *cancelled from 2007*

Geography with the Global Economy (BA) (L7L11U) *cancelled from 2007*

2. Course & Programme Content

2.1. Significant issues raised by course/programme convenors

a. Our Level 1 courses rely upon a system of Academic Tutorials consisting of small groups of 5-8 meeting with an Academic Advisor around three times each term. Over the past two years this report has noted significant timetabling difficulties and the attempts made by the Department to address the problems. This year the tutorials have been connected to named courses so that they appear as credit-bearing and therefore eligible for timetabling. Despite this, the timetabler still objected to scheduling the tutorials stating that 'Tutorials' are not a priority mode of delivery for timetable purposes. Eventually the timetable did accommodate these tutorials – which have been identified as good practice by the University – but not without quite some effort on the part of myself, the Head of Department and the Coordinator. I hope that this will be the last Annual Monitoring Report that I will have to note the timetable issues with respect to Academic Tutorials.

b. Despite reducing significantly our programme offerings and cutting back on our elective choices at levels one and two we still suffer timetabling problems. During the Autumn Term faculty are teaching until 6pm, and during the Spring-Summer Terms faculty are being asked to teach until 8pm. This is not the fault of individual timetablers who have been as cooperative as possible, but of the timetable system. Beyond issues of teaching quality raised by this kind of scheduling – students appreciate it less than the faculty teaching them - there are also obvious issues of equal opportunity and health and safety. We would like to see a full audit of the timetabling process because it appears not to be fit for purpose.

It might be that this audit reveals that departments are at fault, specifically departments that have employed a practice of over-booking teaching space so that they have a choice of slots. Should this be found to be the case, some disincentive should be developed which could include 'fines' for unused slots or extending the space-charge system to General Teaching Space - both of these are common solutions in other Universities who have suffered the same problems of room blocking.

c. Cross-listing of IDPE courses: The Department has received permission to cross-list IDPE courses taught by Geographers into all Geography programmes. This concerns five courses as follows:

R9003 *Europe and International Migration* (CES, Aut Level 2)

V3026 *Culture, Race and Ethnicity* (CS, Spr/Su Level 2)

L2103 *Environnemental Perspectives on Development* (DS, Spr/Su Level 2)

L2123 *Environment Ecology and Development* (DS, Spr/Su Level 3)*

L2126 *Population and Development* (DS, Spr/Su Level 3)*

* 36-credit courses. Geography students will only take one of these options in their final year.

These will appear as options on all programmes run from the Department (i.e. not as 'electives' but as 'options'). The timing, assessment methods, credit weighting and methods of evaluation remain as they are currently.

In addition, V3001 *Culture Across Space and Time*, will be introduced as a Autumn Term Level One elective.

The reasons for these changes are twofold: First, student feedback suggested that there was a need to increase the number of options at level two and three. Due to low faculty

numbers and our commitments to IDP teaching this has proved difficult to address through the introduction of new courses. Second, with the reduction in our programme offerings, it has become clear that we have reduced the interdisciplinary focus of Geography degrees. Listing interdisciplinary courses as options will help re-emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of Geography.

d. Over the past year the following programmes have been cancelled due to low recruitment: Geography with the Global Economy (L7L11U); Geography with a Language (Spanish, French, Italian, German) programmes (Geography's language programmes are now all joint (and) programmes. A decision has just been taken to allow only one language to be taken); Geography and International Relations (LL721U); Geography and Politics (LL722U); Geography and Archaeology (BA) (LV741U); Geography with Management Studies (BA) (L7N21U); Geography and Environmental Science (BSc) (FF891U); Geography with American Studies (BSc) (F8T71U).

The following programmes are under review and will be considered for deletion next year: Geography and Sociology (BA) (LL731U); Geography with Ecology (BSc) (F8C91U)

2.2. Issues raised by external examiners

a. Both Geography External Examiners made the following recommendations which the Department are unable to act upon without changes in School/University policy:

i. A stricter regime for using the full range of the First and Fail classifications. It was suggested that in the First Class range, we do not grade below 75%, awarding 75% for a first, 80%+ for a good first and 90%+ for an excellent first. Conversely, failures would be recorded as 35%-, 25%-, 15%- and zero. Such a change might require revised assessment criteria but would reduce the number of borderline candidates at exam board.

ii. A request to increase the assessment load norms. This was the case for courses that actually assessed over the original norms but assess in line with the new norms (e.g. Cultural Geographies) and especially directed towards the length of UEX. Both examiners felt that the system required more leeway so that there was not so much of a trade-off between CWK and UEX.

Both of these requests have been taken to the SocCul Teaching and Learning Committee.

b. As a further response to External Examiners reports with respect to research skills training (noted in last years report) we have redesigned *Research Skills in Physical Geography* (RSPG) and cancelled *Scientific Techniques in Geography*. From this year we have a 'fat' 24-credit RSPG course that incorporates a substantial amount of laboratory work supervised by the Departmental Research Officer.

2.3. Balance of assessment modes

Geography programmes tend not to have standardised assessment modes. For example, unlike some departments in SocCul, we do not have the same mode of assessment for, say, all Level 1 Spring Term courses. Our assessment modes are designed to address and test course-specific and programme-specific learning outcomes and are not driven by administrative convenience.

External Examiners have once again praised the variety of our assessment modes and the ways in which they address course-specific and generic programme learning outcomes.

Apart from the standard essays, dissertations and unseen examinations, our courses also use learning diaries, assessed group presentations, field notebooks, lab reports, short-answer tests, and so on.

Despite this variety, no student can progress through their programme without a secure mode of assessment (in most cases at least one unseen exam at the end of the second year). If one considers assessment modes other than unseen examinations as 'secure', such as Learning Diaries, Field Diaries, Laboratory Reports and Presentations, most students have several 'secure' assessments throughout their three years.

2.4. Availability and appropriateness of assessment criteria

Students are made aware of assessment criteria through programme and course handbooks and their Sussex Direct pages. Examiners (internal and external) are also issued with the same course and programme handbooks. All course handbooks contain generic and assessment mode specific assessment criteria. Some assessments, such as Learning Diaries, Field Diaries, Group Presentations and Individual Reviews, have mode-specific criteria listed in relevant documentation along specially designed feedback forms.

3. Programme Analysis

3.1. Student Recruitment

Geography Recruitment 2006 (as of October 2006)		
Programme	App No.	Intake
Geography (BA)	239	32
Geography (BSc)	173	19
Geog & Anth	13	1
Geog & Arch	9	0
Geog & CES	1	0
Geog & Dev St	40	6
Geog & Env Sci (BSc)	25	1
Geog & IR	12	3
Geog & Pol	7	1
Geog & Soc	21	2
Geog w AS (BSc)	9	2
Geog w Comp Sci (BSc)	3	0
Geog w Dev St	13	3
Geog w Ecol (BSc)	5	0
Geog w Ed St	9	0
Geog w Lang	27	4
Geog w Man St	27	4
Geog w Man St (BSc)	7	1
Geog w G Econ	25	3
Total	665	82

Low recruiting programmes are monitored closely and cancelled where necessary (see 2.1.d above)

Geography at Sussex continues to increase numbers of applications despite a general downturn in the number of applicants nationally and a recent rise in entry requirements.

Whilst this increase in marginal (0.8%) in the year under review here, the single honours programmes in particular are emerging as both the strongest recruiters and are consistently increasing application rates (+16% BA; +7.5% BSc). This further justifies the continuing reduction of joint programmes.

In the current academic year (2007-8) entry requirements will be raised again.

The Department continues to act on improving conversion rates and particularly increasing CF rates and lowering CI rates. It is hoped that raising the entry requirement will decrease insurance acceptances and increase firm acceptances as applicants perceive a higher quality of Department. We have improved the quality and quantity of the Geography element of Open Days and Admissions Days and enhanced communication with applicants through a system of electronic correspondence.

The Geography Admissions Officer is looking at innovative ways of engaging with applicants who chose not to attend Open Days, using a TLDU grant to equip a geography student video diary project that will be distributed to all applicants.

3.2. Student retention rates

All Geography BA Programmes Permanent Withdrawal Rates				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
2002/3	9%	0%	0%	0%
2003/4	7%	0%	0%	0%
2004/5	11%	14%	0%	25%
2005/6	12%	2%	0%	0%
Est.05/06 figures*	15%	1%	0%	0%
2006/7	6%	3%	0%	0%

All Geography BSc Programmes Permanent Withdrawal Rates				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
2002/3	6%	6%	0%	0%
2003/4	10%	4%	0%	0%
2004/5	4%	3%	0%	0%
2005/6*	0%	0%	0%	0%
2006/7	4%	0%	0%	0%

* As reported in last year's Annual Monitoring report, there were significant problems with the 2006 data. These data have not been corrected.

There are no figures for average PWD levels across the University with which to compare the performance of Geography programmes. We have to assume therefore that, given that the levels of PWD seem to have dropped we have improved our retention of students. Whilst it would be preferable to have some comparative figures, it is possible to say that most PWD occur in the first year and that this figure has dropped for our BA and BSc programmes. The Department have been aware of this pattern of PWD and have focused our best teachers in the first year, especially in the first term.

There were only three temporary withdrawals last year.

3.3 Transfers

For the first time we now have comprehensive and detailed figures for transfers. The PWD figures reported in 3.2 above incorporate transfers in and out of our programmes and so do not necessarily give an accurate picture of the total percentage of students lost in any one year. The transfer data analysed below comes from SocCul. For some reason, the progression summaries from the Academic Office have not recorded transfers for the year under review.

Transfers in and out of Geography 2006-7				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
IN	3	1	0	4
OUT	4	2	1	7
Balance	-1	-1	-1	-3

Some of the transfers out of Geography programmes in Years 2 and 3 were into the new Development Studies major. Interviews with individual students choosing to make this transfer suggested that the overriding reason was that they would not have to conduct a research project in the final year.

Most of the transfer movement of Geography students was between Geography programmes as detailed in the table below:

Transfers <u>within</u> Geography 2006-7			
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
From Joint (& 'with') to Single Major	7	2	0
From Joint (& 'with') to Joint (& 'with')	2	0	0
From Single to Single	2	0	0
From Single to Joint (& 'with')	0	1	0

It is quite clear that our single honours programmes are the main destination for intra-departmental programme transfers (11 out of the 14 transfers recorded). They are also the main destination for students transferring into the Department. This adds further justification for trimming down our joint offerings and focusing upon our single honours programmes and only strongly recruiting joints.

It is also clear that there is quite some movement. Taking Year 1 alone, 14 out of the original 82 students chose to transfer programmes (the figure appears to be 15, but one student transferred twice and has been double-counted in the tables above). 17% of students would seem quite high and suggests not only that our joint programmes are perhaps attracting students who are a little indecisive about their direction, but also that it might be a little too easy to transfer. Judging by the names published on the transfer data spreadsheets, students involved in transfer applications tend to be the same students who eventually either transfer again or withdraw (temporarily or permanently).

3.4. Student performance (based on degree outcome)

All Geography Programmes															
	1st		2(i)		2(ii)		3rd		Unclass		Pass		Fail		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Total
2004	5	6.1	55	67.1	21	25.6	1	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	82
2005	6	6.2	55	56.7	33	34.0	2	2.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	97
2006	5	5.9	62	72.9	18	21.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	85
2007	4	6.5	46	74.2	10	16.1	1	1.6	1	1.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	62

As noted in previous reports the general trend of increasing proportions of 1st/2(i) classifications continues. It should also be noted however that entry grades have been raised during this period.

4. Examinations

4.1. Errors/problems discovered during examinations

No errors/problems were discovered during examinations

4.2. Action taken over aberrant marks

No action was required to be taken over aberrant marks

5. Student Evaluations

All courses were evaluated by students using a scale of 1 to 5. '5' reflects an excellent level of satisfaction, '3' reflects an average level of satisfaction, and '1' reflects a poor level of satisfaction with the course in question. In previous years '3' has been taken as the threshold value with values above '3' reflecting good, very good and excellent levels of student satisfaction. Significant improvements in evaluation scores over the past few years have dictated an amendment to this practice. This year '3.5' will be used as a level below which courses will be subject to closer scrutiny.

This report contains information on students' levels of satisfaction with both the course overall, and with the teaching that they have received. Where appropriate, Audit forms completed by faculty have also been utilised.

5.1. Average Ratings by Year

Using the criteria outlined above, most Geography courses score well above the satisfactory threshold and most record very good to excellent ratings of 4 and above. No courses scored below the old threshold value of 3. The table below details the global figures by level and includes data on previous years for comparison along with response rates.

	Overall assessment, year average			Average response rates (%)		
	Year 1	Year 2	Final	Year 1	Year 2	Final
2002-03	3.8	4.0	4.4	57.0	55.6	75.2
2003-04	3.8	4.1	4.3	72.1	66.5	76.0
2004-05	3.5	3.6	4.1	46.3	43.1	69.9
2005-06	3.7	3.8	4.3	63.1	73.4	77.9
2006-07	3.6	4.0	4.2	79.4	71.1	88.5

On average, it appears that Geography undergraduate core courses and special options have received scores ranging from good to excellent. The normal pattern of increasing satisfaction levels as students progress through the programme is repeated this year. Smaller option courses and especially field classes were much appreciated. The slight drop in first and final year average scores is explored in detail in section 5.3 below.

Response rates have improved markedly in Year 1 and the Final Year and remain good for Year 2. Some courses do record low rates. As has been noted in previous years, there is a correlation between high response rates and high average levels of satisfaction.

5.2. The National Student Survey

After two years during which Geography programmes were equal best in the University (with Mathematics), the NSS scores dropped in line with the University average. The low NSS scores are not mirrored in the SEQ data attached to this report.

There are a number of possible explanations for this drop in NSS performance, not the least of which is the fact that only 23 students completed the survey. This report however will not dwell on these explanations which have already been detailed in the Operational Services Review. Instead, detailed below are the actions being taken by the Department to address the issue.

In line with School responses, we are monitoring Academic Advisors' twice yearly meetings with second and third year students by requiring all Advisors to send their appointments timetable to the Geography Coordinator. Student –staff consultation meetings will immediately precede our Teaching Committee meetings and will be minuted as part of those meetings. Geography already has a formalised system of academic advice for first years which has been seen as a model for other departments. A handbook for these sessions is distributed to staff and students, and activities for each session, tied to current lecture courses, are suggested. Faculty are timetabled for these sessions as part of their core teaching duties.

Aside from these initiatives, new departmental initiatives and already in place:

a. Focus Groups: The Head of Department has convened focus group discussions with representatives of each year group, with a free lunch provided for participants. These were intended to identify any grievances currently being nurtured immediately so that they can be addressed as soon as possible.

A number of suggestions have already arisen from these groups and will be considered at the next Departmental Teaching Committee.

b. Internal Programme Review: for some time we have been planning to conduct our own programme review in the Spring term, with all students in the final year invited to an informal meeting with the HoD and other faculty. Drinks and nibbles will be provided and a brief questionnaire circulated as the basis for discussion. This review will be timed so as to immediately precede the period in which the NSS itself is conducted.

c. Coffee Meetings: We have introduced structured coffee times in the Geography Resource Centre, to which both staff and students are invited. This is intended to facilitate students' sense of belonging to the department and allow greater

familiarity between students and their lecturers. It will give opportunities for more informal feedback and discussion of the issues preoccupying students.

d. Geography Resource Centre Manager's Office Hours: Recognising that many students give the most immediate feedback of their experiences to the Geography Resource Centre Manager, she now has advertised office hours.

e. Advertise the NSS: The focus groups made it clear that multi-recipient emails tend to be deleted by Geography students at Sussex, especially emails from outside agencies. To improve the response rate of the Survey we have produced posters to advertise its existence and purpose. These posters will be displayed around the Department and a smaller version reprinted on the first page of all Final Year course handbooks. The posters not only advertise the NSS but also make clear that it is an external Survey the results of which will affect the external perception of their degree and their institution by future employers and postgraduate admissions tutors.

A number of other initiatives are under consideration by the Department, including improving quantity of feedback by requesting a change of policy with respect of non-coursework assessment; the introduction of year tutors; expanding the first year field weekend; making changes to thesis supervision arrangements; and revising the structure of the final year.

5.3. Year-by-Year Analysis

This year all courses were surveyed but course specific qualitative comments will be limited to a smaller number of courses that have been chosen to highlight areas of good practice and possible areas for improvement.

Year One

The pattern of teaching in Year 1 consists of lecture-based teaching supported by regular Academic Advisor meetings. These meetings have been identified by the University as good practice. The pattern of these personal tutor meetings is roughly three per term plus one Week 0 meeting. Whilst these sessions have proven successful, students have had varied experiences. We are therefore looking into ways to make these tutorials more standard, which includes the possibility of introducing a set of non-assessed formative exercises taken by all students and based upon key skills. This will be done by identifying areas of good practice already in place in a number of these academic advisor sessions.

Last year, for the first time, the Department also introduced course-specific seminars in the First Year for the compulsory course, *Environmental Management and Sustainable Development (EMSD)*. Last year's Annual Monitoring Report noted that this change will be monitored over the next couple of years with SEQ scores for this course scrutinised to ensure an improvement and thereby measure the efficacy of seminars.

EMSD did not improve its SEQ scores this year: compare 05-06 scores of 4.1 for teaching quality and 4.0 for overall evaluation with 06-07 scores of 3.6 and 3.8. Whilst the seminars were welcomed by students many felt they were too large for debate and discussion. Perhaps the most consistent criticism however concerned the assessment. The course was assessed last year by one essay at the end of term. The Department has now reacted to these criticisms and made changes to the assessment pattern so that the seminar presentations now count 10% and the essay 90%. It is hoped that this change will also give the seminars greater purpose.

Human Geography was again the worst performing first year course in relative terms (teaching 3.1, overall 3.0). Last year's report promised to monitor this course closely. As a result of this process the staffing of the course has been changed for the current academic year. Following the successful model of most of our Autumn Term level 1 and 2 courses, one member of faculty will now on teach all of the course (as has been noted many times, courses taught by one member of faculty are better received by students).

Geographies of Development and Inequality also recorded scores below 3.5 (3.3 and 3.2). This Spring-Summer course will from the current academic year be taught by one member of faculty.

The model of best practice in terms of delivering a first year course is, once again *Dynamic Earth*. This course recorded the highest ever scores for a first year course (4.8 and 4.4). Again, rather than calling for seminars, students were requesting more lectures.

Finally, it should also be noted that the compulsory (and bench-marked) statistics course, *Introduction to Geographical Methods and Statistics* recorded good scores, especially for teaching quality (3.7).

Year Two

The pattern of teaching in Year 2 is similar to that of the first year except course groups are often smaller, students receive more course specific workshop and seminar teaching, and attend a field class. At the moment we do not continue the formal Academic Advisor sessions beyond the first year but meet individually with advisees twice during the year to feedback on progress and performance.

Only one Year 2 course scored below 3.5 for teaching quality and overall evaluation. This is an excellent performance and much improved over the past few years. *Social Geography* was taught by different faculty and suffered none of the problems that it has in the past with respect to the assessment arrangements. *Cultural Geographies*, *Historical Geographies*, and *Environmental and Climatic Change* scored particularly well. And field trips were once again very well received.

Research Skills in Human Geography is the only course that scores (marginally) below the 3.5 threshold. As a skills course *RSHG* has always had its problems with students often unwilling partners in the learning experience. Over the next two years we plan to redesign *RSHG*. *Research Skills in Physical Geography* performed well but is becoming a 24-credit course from this academic year (see 2.2.b above). It might be that identified areas of success of this redesigned course could be fed into the future plans for its human geography counterpart.

Final Year

This was the second year that the new credit system was used in the final year. All final year units are 30-credits, including the *Geography Undergraduate Thesis* (GUT). Students can take two courses in either the Autumn or the Spring Term. During the term in which they take a single course they focus upon their research projects. In practice most students took two courses in the Autumn Term and one in the Spring. There remains some concern that students disengage from the Department and the University too early in the final year with this pattern of delivery. Under its NSS action plan the Department is considering ways to address this problem. This may involve a radical restructuring of the Final Year into 15-credit options at one extreme, and at the other, a more formalised pattern of GUT supervision. Above all, the Department want to retain the pattern of

delivery because it enables students to focus on their research projects more intensively, whilst allowing us to facilitate faculty research leaves with a minimum impact on the final year curriculum.

All final year courses were once again, very well received by students. There are no data for *Tropical Rainforests Biogeography and Conservation* although this was the last year that the course was convened due to faculty retirement. It is worth noting that this course has a long history of exceptionally high SEQ scores.

Only one course, *Coastal Processes and Coastal Management (CPCM)* scored less than 4 (3.3 for teaching quality and 3.5 for overall evaluation). This is the second year in which *CPCM* has recorded a low score (by final year standards). In the Operational Services Review, the Department was asked to record what action it will take with respect to the lowest performing course in each year. In any other year, and probably in most other Departments these would not be considered poor SEQ scores, nevertheless, a series of measures will be used to identify ways to improve the student perception of *CPCM*.

Problems with Environmental Science students taking Geography final year options noted in last year's report have not recurred.

Problems identified last year with the role and purpose of student presentations are now addressed through statements in all relevant course handbooks.

6. Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT)

6.1. PoT model used

The Department of Geography use a flexible model of PoT that allows coverage of all of our modes of delivery which, in addition to standard lectures, seminars and tutorials, includes fieldwork, lab practicals and workshops. A two-side report form is completed by the observer, discussed with the observed faculty member, and their comments incorporated.

6.2. Staff and activities observed

This year five faculty members took part in PoT. Observers and observed were in cognate fields which this year were in Human Geography: *Cultural Geographies* (seminar), *Historical Geographies* (lecture and seminar) and in Physical Geography: *ECC* lectures and practicals, Seychelles fieldwork and *Coastal Processes and Management* seminars.

6.3. Issues arising from PoT

No significant issues arose that need addressing formally through staff development or departmental learning and teaching strategy.

6.4. Examples of good practice

The evidence of good practice identified by PoT have been compiled into section 7 below.

7. Good Practice

7.1 Ongoing actions undertaken by the Geography Department to ensure that good teaching practice is maintained

- The Geography Department has a Teaching Committee that meets before termly Department meetings to discuss matters that relate specifically to teaching and learning quality and provision. The Teaching Committee makes recommendations for

discussion and decision at Department meetings. The Teaching Committee will from January 2008 be immediately preceded by the Departmental staff-student forum. Issues from that forum will be taken forward into the Teaching Committee portion of the meeting.

- We continue to monitor the progress of teaching innovations and to develop strategies to ensure that these innovations are rolled out where appropriate to other courses. This has included the increased use of student-led learning and the exploitation of Study Direct.
- In applying the APT system the Department incorporates information derived from the annual audit of courses. Specifically we are moving towards a more rational and efficient distribution of teaching in which individual faculty are involved on fewer courses, and in which the individual courses themselves are taught by fewer faculty. Evidence from the SEQs presented in this report suggests that this move will have a positive effect on teaching quality.
- The Department convened an 'away'-day in June 2007. The purpose of the day was to develop and agree long-term research and teaching strategies. From this day a Global Transformations theme was developed and is currently under review for strategic investment. One of the outcomes related specifically to the curriculum was agreement over a series of management principles and the development of even closer synergies between research and teaching. For example, new courses currently under discussion all address the broad theme of Global Transformations from natural and social science perspectives.

7.2 Evidence of good practice (incorporating PoT, SEQ and focus group evidence)

- Courses taught entirely by one member of faculty perform better than team-taught courses.
- Posting of lecture notes on the Geography website and now increasingly Study Direct sites before lectures.
- Field class teaching that grounds complex theoretical and empirical issues both on the Level 2 field classes and as part of other courses such as *Historical Geographies*, *GIS*, *Coastal Processes and Management* etc.
- The delivery of core skills in regular academic advisee meetings during Year 1.
- The use of assessed group presentations based upon guided reading in place of unseen examinations to ensure coverage of the full breadth of a course.
- Use of student-centred learning via reading and research tasks on final year options
- Three members of the Department were identified by the PVC Education as being in the top 5% of teachers in the University last year.

8. Summary

8.1 Actions to be taken over the following year

- In the management and design of the curriculum take steps to enhance synergies between research and teaching
- Encourage the development of new courses based upon the broad Departmental theme of Global Transformations
- Continue to review the utility and success of seminar teaching for *EMSD*
- Re-design *RSHG*
- Identify areas of good practice in level one academic tutorials and devise a set of non-assessed formative exercises based upon key skills and taken by all students.
- Take action to improve NSS scores
- Consider the shape of Final Year provision
- Incorporate and act upon recommendations from the Departmental Periodic Review (held November 23rd 2007)
- Continue to monitor recruitment and retention and to cancel low recruiting programmes
- Take action to improve conversion rates
- Try to resolve ongoing timetable problems (see section 2.1.a and 2.1.b)

8.2. Action plan from last year

Plan	Action taken
To move to a 75% first year for BA and BSc single honours Geography programmes	This has now been implemented.
Continue to monitor recruitment and retention and to cancel low recruiting programmes	See section 2.1.d.
To take action to improve conversion rates	This is ongoing. See section 3.1.
To consider introducing a pre-NSS programme review survey during the Autumn Term of the final year	See section 5.2.
To review the utility and success of seminar teaching for EMSD	Ongoing. See section 5.3.
To keep a close eye on student evaluations of <i>Human Geography</i> , leaving open the possibility of changes to this course next year	See section 5.3. Course redesigned and change of staffing
For <i>Historical Geographies</i> , to make more explicit in the handbook the connection between student-led seminars, group presentations and the unseen examination	From this academic year the group presentations are now incorporated into the assessment for the course
Consider whether to set prerequisites for final year options taken by ES and MSc Biodiversity Survey students, or to offer some form of pre-course foundational reading to bring these students up to speed	No action taken. The problems noted have not recurred.
To make more clear in our final year course handbooks the kinds of skills and knowledge that student presentations are intended to address	Relevant course handbooks have been reviewed to ensure that they address this issue
To consider ways to maintain the flexible pattern of 30-credit final year courses whilst ensuring that students do not disengage from the Department	Ongoing. See section 5.3.

8.3. Other Comments

It remains quite laborious to abstract and reformat the PWD, transfer and progression data required for this report. There is no reason why this data cannot come ready-formatted.

Simon Rycroft
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