

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE TO THE 2008 PPR IN CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

The department thanks the panel for their comments and a positive report following the recent PPR visit. With regard to the 'Conclusions and recommendations' section of the report, the items below are considered to require a response:

Panel recommendation: Continue to improve the quality, quantity and timeliness of feedback to students on their assessed work and progress;

Department response: Department policy has been amended so that generic feedback will be provided on each examination taken by UG and PGT students. It is intended to provide this feedback in a timely fashion (i.e. soon after the publication of results) via the Learn Server. Regarding coursework, staff have agreed to utilise a pro-forma in conjunction with free-form comments within the assignment itself to provide feedback. Departmental policy has been revised so that in most cases (at least) one piece of written feedback is provided for coursework per module.

Panel recommendation: Modify ILOs and Section 7 of its programme specifications ('What makes the programme distinctive?') to distinguish programmes from each other more effectively.

Department response: The 'ILOs' and 'Section 7' of all Programme Specifications have been modified in order to more clearly identify distinguishing features between BEng and MEng programme variants, as well as between differently themed BEng and MEng programmes. It is noted that the Subject Benchmark Statement for Engineering (2006) acknowledges that many learning outcomes for BEng and MEng programmes will be similar. Thus, most of the significant changes made in the Programme Specifications have focussed on improvements to 'Section 7'.

Panel recommendation: The Panel's perception that the Department's mechanisms for 'closing the loop' on student feedback on modules were currently unsatisfactory was confirmed by the students it met. The University's Code of Practice on student feedback questionnaires required that "Heads of department will report to the appropriate Staff-Student Committee on the quantitative outcome of student feedback questionnaires".

Department response: A written summary document regarding the outcome of student feedback questionnaires will be tabled each year at a SSC meeting. It is noted that the Head of Department and Director of Studies are both members of the SSC and will thus be able to answer any questions raised by the student representatives.

Panel Recommendation: The Panel was concerned that the current Staff-Student Committee was not effective. Student attendance was often poor, students seemed unaware of who their representatives were, how they were selected, and where to take issues, and felt the system was not working. The Panel believed the Department should be more proactive to ensure that the SSC, the Department Committee (instituted by the Students' Union to run in parallel to the SSC), and the well-established Departmental Chemical Engineering Society worked together to benefit both staff and students.

Department Response: Attempts have been made by the Chair of the SSC in Chemical Engineering to arrange meetings with the Chairs of other Engineering Faculty Departments, but as yet it has not been possible to meet. The aim is to identify best practice. Further attempts will be made in due course. The overall objective will be to make SSC meetings more positive in identifying improvements to (i) the course content and delivery and (ii) the student experience in chemical engineering. It is envisaged that (at least) the Chair of the Chemical Engineering Society will be invited to attend future SSC meetings and contact will also be made with the Students' Union regarding their committee. Arrangements here will be made when students return for the start of the 2008/09 academic year.

Panel Recommendation: The Panel strongly recommended that the University identify a contractual means to encourage engagement of very experienced, senior engineers in specific areas of the curriculum such as Design project.

Department Response: Discussions between the Department/University and a senior engineer from AstraZeneca are currently at an advanced stage. It is hoped that a positive outcome will ensue and assistance with the Part B design project can commence from Semester 2 of the 2008/09 academic year. If negotiations are successful then the Department is likely to proactively seek similar assistance with final year design projects in future years.

Date of response: September 2008