**Periodic Programme Review Report Response**

**Loughborough University School of Art and Design**

**08 October 2010**

The School of Art and Design underwent its Periodic Programme review in May 2010; this document is the Department’s formal response to the report that was issued following that review.

The Panel commended the School for a number of new developments that had taken place during the period under review, including: our structural alignment with centre in all areas of the L&T process; the outstanding job done by our L&T Coordinator and Committee in being proactive in relation to quality assurance and enhancement across the breadth of our taught programmes; the production of exemplary Programme Handbooks; the implementation of assessment and feedback forms with integral ILOs; the inclusion of enterprise education and opportunities for international exchange within both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

In our internal review of the PPR report, colleagues agreed that these were key features of the past five years’ work and were pleased to see them acknowledged. There were, as one might expect in an ‘external’ review, areas where colleagues felt that the practices or processes within the Department had been misunderstood or misrepresented. In one particular instance, a point was made that did not lead to a ‘recommendation for action’, but colleagues’ response to it was of sufficient strength to warrant a comment in this response. In short, we would note that fees for materials and/or access to specialist technical facilities are already explained to all students and appear delineated in writing in course material; the request of the Panel that we explain materials costs to students is already being honoured.

In response to the Panel’s specific Recommendations for Action:

A number of points were either relatively insubstantial or have diminished in scale with subsequent probing and thus we speak only briefly to them here. Where substantive points have been raised, we respond at greater length.

*Points (viii), (vii), (x):*

In detailed exchanges with the Faculty’s outgoing and incoming AD(T)s and the University’s Teaching Quality Enhancement Officer concerning the ‘visual maps’ recommended in *point viii*, it was agreed that the School’s exemplary Programme Handbooks already contained this material and that the recommendation required no further address. The recommendation to promote international student exchange opportunities more fully within the School has led to the instatement of both regular e-mail communication and scheduled ‘open’ meetings, advertised to all students, from 2010-11. Finally, the Administrative team for the School have been asked to clarify their preferred mechanisms for student contact and the maintenance of accurate contact lists and those will now be centralised, so that academic colleagues are not devising their ‘own’ lists (*point x*).

*Points (i), (ii), (iii), (ix):*

The recommendations within these four points concerned curriculum structure in both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and the development of the PGT infrastructure (international student support, recruitment, assessment) needed to support the increasing number of M-level programmes and students in the School.

In relation to undergraduate programme developments, we were pleased that the Panel confirmed that the streamlining of our programmes through single, more broadly-based pathways and integrated theory/practice elements was supported and we can only say that we are mindful of those implications as we see our new single Textiles: ID programme in this year (2010-11) and begin the process of developing a single Visual Communications programme. However, we would note that we would not wish to sacrifice subject specialism within these new programmes to the extent that we could simply use ‘Fine Art’ as a global model for every single route pathway.

We also concur with the Panel that PGT infrastructural development is critical over the next few years and we are mindful of the recommendations concerning International students. We are seeking to work more closely with the Graduate School on many of these issues, as we feel that they are not peculiar to this School, but University-wide recruitment, language skills and integration issues. We are reviewing recruitment processes as we write, with the assistance of the Department’s PGT Coordinator; this will include looking again at marketing as well as bursaries, studentships and stipends. In addition, we are working, through the role of the central Coordinator, to bring our final project modules more closely into alignment across all MA programmes, as part of the process of responding to the recommendations of the PPR Panel regarding MA assessment.

*Points (v), (vi):*

There are three main responses to the recommendations concerning the routes by which students communicate with the School. The first is that we would not like to sacrifice the informal communication routes that were noted as being extensive by the Panel. In our subject, we would expect students to know a small number of tutors very well and would anticipate that they would feel inclined, when in need, to go to those familiar faces. However, we are addressing, within the School, the issue of *staff* training and development to ensure that students who approach individuals get the same advice and are sent through the same formal channels on every occasion.

In regard to these formal channels, we have been aware for some time that the University and Students’ Union changes to student representation of 2008-9 adversely affected our School. We have begun the process of clarifying these structures with LSU and reconfiguring our Committee appropriately. Not mentioned in the PPR report, but relevant to the issue of Personal Tutoring is attendance monitoring. In light of changes to the requirements of attendance monitoring, the School began in summer 2010, an audit of both our academic and personal tutoring systems, including the use of our own academic tutorial forms and Co-tutor’s facilities and we anticipate the first stage of this audit (including recommendations) to be completed during 2010-11. This will impact significantly upon, and address, the recommendations of the PPR Panel.

*Point (xi):*

In regard to the NSS participation rates, we would note the low returns across the whole sector in art and design and locate our returns within that context as being quite high; hence, we are dealing with a local notion of low returns. However, we are aware of the seriousness of the NSS to the University and have a standing item on our SSC, have brought the University’s QE managers and NSS coordinators into our dilemma each year, have followed their advice and still seem to have a dwindling return.

Hence, our response to this item is to acknowledge that we do not seem to be able simply to manage this as an isolated issue within the School and to ask that centre acknowledge our requests to become proactive in assisting the Department to encourage students to engage with the Survey. In addition, we have volunteered the School to be one of the pilot Departments for the CLEAR audit. We feel that the NSS issue would best be understood as a wider question of student engagement and hope that what we learn through CLEAR can be applied usefully toward NSS.

*Points (iii), (iv):*

Of some concern to colleagues within the School of the Arts, were the recommendations made under *(iii)* and *(iv)*, derived from item 7.9 of the report, that began: ‘*Though not evidenced by students’ comments*, the Panel was aware of the danger that the location of the School… could result in students feeling detached from the University.’ The Panel went on to advise the School to ‘encourage its students to make greater use of those University central services that did not *appear* to be widely used by the students, such as the Library and IT services…’. These issues were raised briefly during the review, but clearly, the School’s colleagues did not address it with sufficient clarity for the Panel’s concerns to be allayed, and so we find ourselves responding to recommendations *(iii)* and *(iv)* here.

First, we would suggest that the fact that the current President of the LSU (Lucy Hopkins) and Rag Chair (Madeleine Buckley) are LUSAD graduates, and that our students have regularly received University and Faculty prizes for their academic excellence and service work over the past five years, would suggest that their full integration into the student community is not in question.

In terms of the use of central services, we host members of DANS within our Department because our students are the single largest users of the support offered for dyslexia and dyspraxia and the experience of dealing with art and design students has changed central support practices within DANS. As for IT services, the Panel failed to recognise the fact that there have, until this present year (2010-11), been no centrally-supported Mac labs on the campus (critical to our students’ use of IT) and that, far from not availing ourselves of central services, we have been obliged to support our students in house at cost.

Finally, we wish to right the erroneous impression that our students are not introduced to, or somehow fail to use, the Library. Every student undertaking a Foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme in the School has a formal induction to the Library and our subject specialist Librarian, Barbara Whetnall, has specifically devised sessions in research skills and using search tools for art and design students. What our students do not tend to do, is remain within the Library to work together (though this is part of an assigned task in Part A modules to develop an awareness of working in that way), *because* they have dedicated studio space within our Department. They undertake most of their reading, textual preparation for seminars and group project/presentation work, within the Department, because they can, not because they are not accessing the Library appropriately (indeed, developing remote access has been a key part of Library strategy for some time and our students take full advantage of it). Moreover, the Department has, for over a decade, taken an active role in the acquisition of visual sources, exhibition catalogues and books within our subject area and the Library’s holdings have been transformed by this. We would argue that our programmes and our students have contributed in a substantive way to the changing intellectual and cultural landscape of the University in the 21st Century and are not ‘distanced’ from it.