

INSTITUTION-LED SUBJECT REVIEW: SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL STUDIES

19-21 November 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Institution-Led Subject Review (ILSR) is the University's process to formally review and plan future enhancement of its taught provision leading to academic awards. The School of Applied Social Studies, one of eleven cognate Schools within the University, delivers the following subject areas, which were the focus of the ILSR:-

- Psychology
- Social Work
- Sociology

An ILSR event was organised by the University including an invited Panel comprising: external academic experts and practitioners, representatives from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), a Student School Officer from another School, an employer, a service user and carer and senior members of staff from other Schools. The Panel met with a range of stakeholders including: the School's senior team, academic staff; support staff; students (including online learning students); alumni; employers; Practice Teachers and service users and carers. In addition, a meeting was included in the programme on a School staff led session on strategic subject approaches to learning and teaching, including snapshots/case studies of good practice.

At the conclusion of the event, the Panel **confirmed** that it was satisfied that the School had provided an effective, comprehensive and reflective account of its current situation. Furthermore, the Panel **confirmed** that the School had effective quality assurance arrangements in place. The Panel also identified a number of **recommendations** and **commendations** based on issues raised in the *Reflective Analysis* and discussions at the event as follows:-

Commendations

- (i) Clear passion, drive and professional excellence within the staff body and as reflected in the subject portfolio.
- (ii) Open and honest way in which all parties, i.e. alumni, employers, practice teachers, service users and carers, staff and students, engaged with the Panel.
- (iii) Value placed on the service users and carers as fundamental to the Social Work selection, recruitment and curricula.
- (iv) Continued steady growth of the School during the period since the last ILSR which included significant changes within both the University and the School.
- (v) Positive learning experiences the Erasmus placement afforded students.
- (vi) Clear evidence from discussions with students that feedback provided by students was acted on and changes implemented as a result.

Recommendations

- (i) The Panel **recommended** that a single vision and strapline be developed which encapsulated all of the School's subject areas and the overall ethos of the School. This would not only assist the School in going forward but would be of benefit to the School in

the external environment as it would provide a clear message around the School's specific strengths and what it was known for.

Furthermore, to assist the School in going forward the Panel **recommended** that the School identify the order of priority for the actions within the Implementation Plan (RA, Section 4). (Ambitions and Priorities)

- (ii) The Panel **recommended** that the School give serious consideration to adopting a placement within the BA (Hons) Applied Social Sciences degree with a view to enhancing students' graduate employability skills but also with a view to providing students with increased awareness of graduate employment pathways. In making this recommendation, the Panel voiced support for the activities the School was already undertaking/planning to undertake to engage students, including:-
- early liaison with school Guidance Teachers;
 - addition of an entrepreneurship module within the curricula;
 - undertaking volunteering opportunities;
 - engaging with Employability Hub initiatives;
 - undertaking community based projects/dissertations. (Professional Employability)
- (iii) The Panel **recommended** that the School explore the potential of developing the BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies degree to incorporate a named Psychology route and a Sociology route, with associated exit awards, thereby providing students with clear pathways through the course and improved graduate identity thereby enhancing professional level graduate employment. (Curriculum Developments)
- (iv) The School's management structure coupled with discussions at the event highlighted the strong leadership and drive from the Head of School and the Associate Head of School with responsibilities for the subject areas shared between them. Whilst this appeared to work well, there were concerns amongst the Panel that the School's reliance on the Head of School and Associate Head of School could leave the School vulnerable and the Panel **recommended** that the School consider growing the senior level team to provide increased robustness to the School's structures.

A post for a Professor of Social Work was currently being advertised with a view to generating and promoting research within the School. The Panel was supportive of this appointment but surprised that the role was subject specific rather than being a cross-School appointment. The Panel believed that there could be merit in further developing the role to generate research across the School. The Panel, therefore, **recommended** that the new professorial appointment be developed to spread research methodologies and culture across the School with a view to promoting and growing research beyond the specific Social Work subject area. (Staff Development and Succession Planning)

- (v) It was evident from discussions that service users and carers had a strong voice within the School's Social Work provision and that their input was valued by both staff and students. It was less clear, though, how the service user and carer voice was heard in the wider University context. It was, therefore, **recommended** that consideration be given to how service users and carers were represented on University committees. (Service User and Carer Voice)

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