

The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review 2019/20

Internal Periodic Review of Geography (Undergraduate provision)

6 & 7 February 2020

Final report

Section A- Introduction

1. Scope of the review

Range of provision considered by the review:

Current Programme
Geography (BSc Hons)
Geography (MA Hons)
Geography and Archaeology (MA Hons)
Geography and Economics (MA Hons)
Geography and Politics (MA Hons)
Geography and Social Anthropology (MA Hons)
Geography and Social Policy (MA Hons)
Geography and Sociology (MA Hons)

2. The Internal Periodic Review of Geography consisted of:

- The University's remit for internal review (listed in Appendix 1)
- The subject specific remit for the review (listed in Appendix 2), consisting of the following items:
Developing and resourcing well- balanced and sustainable programmes that improve student and staff experience with the sub themes
 - Recruitment and admissions
 - Joint Honours
- The Reflective Report and additional material provided in advance of the review (listed in Appendix 3)
- The visit by the review team including consideration of further material
- The final report produced by the review team
- Action by the Subject Area and others to whom recommendations were remitted following the review

3. Membership of review team:

Convener	Professor Stuart Anderson, School of Informatics
External Member	Professor Katie Willis, Royal Holloway, University of London
External Member	Professor Trevor Hoey, Brunel University London
Internal Member	Professor Elizabeth Bomberg, School of Social and Political Science
Student Member	Zohra O'Doherty, Centre for Open Learning
Review Team Administrator	Stephanie Kirkham, Academic Affairs, College of Science and Engineering

4. Situate Subject Area within its College

Geography is a subject area located in the School of Geosciences, which is one of seven Schools in the College of Science and Engineering.

5. Physical location and summary of facilities

The School of Geosciences is large and diverse and is located in 4 buildings in Central Campus and King's Buildings. Most staff contributing to the Geography programmes are located in the Institute of Geography in Drummond Street (Central Campus).

6. Date of previous review

The previous review took place on the 21 and 22 November 2013.

7. Reflective Report:

- Dr Dan Swanton, Geography Degree Programmes Convener
- Dr Rachel Hunt, Pre-Honours Coordinator
- Dr William Mackaness, Honours Coordinator
- Dr Anthony Newton, Senior Personal Tutor
- Katy McPhail, Student Support Coordinator
- Faten Adam Teaching Organisation Manager
- Susan Orr Head of Student Services

This document will be shared with academic staff and professional services involved in delivering the Geography programmes; School Learning and Teaching Committees; the Student Staff Liaison Committee, and all staff and students involved in meetings as part of the review.

Section B - main report

1 Strategic overview

- 1.1 The School of Geosciences is large and diverse, and the subject area of Geography is interdisciplinary. Consequently, the School has a complex organisational structure. There is no Head of Geography or dedicated subject area administration. Instead, key decisions are made through the School Planning and Resource Committee (SPARC), chaired by the Head of School. Resourcing of degree programmes is managed through the Learning and Teaching Committee. The School is organised into three research-based institutes (Earth and Planetary Science, Geography and the Lived Environment, and Global Change). Line management of academic staff is assigned to the relevant Heads of the Research Institutes. Staff teaching on Geography programmes are primarily managed by the Head of Geography and the Lived Environment and the Head of Global Change.
- 1.2 The review team understood from the reflective report and Head of School's comments that Geography is making significant contributions in teaching, research and student numbers. The review team felt from discussions throughout the review that the School needs to reflect on where Geography sits within the wider School strategic vision. The review team **recommends** that the School prioritises this exercise to enable the vision to inform further strategic thinking about teaching and other areas of development (e.g. admissions).
- 1.3 The review team valued the open and reflective nature of discussions during the review and were impressed by the dedication and commitment demonstrated by the staff they met. It is clear that the subject area has a core of staff who are clearly invested in enhancing learning and teaching on Geography Degree Programmes. Whilst progress has been made since the last review, the review team feel that examples of good practice related to teaching still arise more from dedicated individuals than from a systematic and strategic approach to teaching and learning. We encourage the School to continue to develop efforts to balance individual endeavour with systematic spread of good practice. The review team **commends** the culture of reflection and enhancement within the subject area and **recommends** that the School reflect on their structures to ensure that they best facilitate and encourage enhancements to learning and teaching provision and empower and support staff to make change.
- 1.4 The School uses a Workload Allocation Model (WAM) to manage staff contributions to teaching, research and other roles across the School. The tariffs used are agreed and approved by SPARC. The current expectation is that all staff spend 50% of their time on research and 50% on teaching and administration moving towards a 40:40:20 model of research, teaching and citizenship. Variation from this norm takes account of the circumstances of individuals who have particularly heavy commitments that necessitate some rebalancing. The review team appreciate the distance travelled in using the WAM to understand the distribution of workload across the staff and see this as a mechanism to introduce greater transparency and equitability of work allocation across the School. The review team **recommends** that the School further reflect on and revise the WAM appropriately to take account of large courses, equitable distribution of workload and facilitating teaching innovation through explicit resourcing of innovation.
- 1.5 Moreover, the review team were pleased to hear about the upcoming recruitment of four new Human Geography staff members which will help reduce reliance on fixed-term teaching staff. The review team **commends** the School-wide policy of using a teaching panel as part of the recruitment process.
- 1.6 Since the last review, steps have been taken to improve planning. The Heads of Research Institutes noted that teaching allocation meetings, carried out School wide,

have worked well when members of the meeting liaised with Degree Programme Convenors beforehand. The WAM has also been adapted to try to encourage innovation within existing courses and practice, however the subject area feel that this has not yet been engaged with effectively. The review team **commends** the adaption of the WAM to provide staff with space (50 hours incentive) to innovate practice and share across the subject area. This is a good example of the use of the WAM to encourage Innovation. The review team **suggests** that the subject area reflects on this use of the WAM and develops mechanisms that facilitate and encourage further engagement from staff with this issue.

2. Enhancing the student experience

2.1 Supporting students in their learning

- 2.1.1 Support is delivered to students in Geography through the Personal Tutor system and Student Support team. Staff acknowledged that they provide both academic and pastoral support for students but outlined that Personal Tutors mainly provide the academic support for students while the Student Support Coordinator largely supports pastoral care issues such as concessions and special circumstances. Tutees have two arranged meetings per semester with Personal Tutors (one individual and one group meeting), but some come more frequently if needed. The review team were impressed to hear that attendance at Personal Tutor meetings was high, staff estimated that 95% of meetings are attended.
- 2.1.2 The review team was impressed with the commitment and dedication shown by the Personal Tutors, the Senior Personal Tutor, Student Support team and Student Support Coordinator they met during the review. There was evidence of a supportive relationship between Personal Tutors, the Senior Personal Tutor and the Student Support Team. The review team also acknowledged the work that the Senior Personal Tutor undertakes to encourage consistency and monitor the Personal Tutor system. Personal Tutors are often the conduit for passing relevant matters onto the Student Support Coordinator. It is clear that the Personal Tutors and Student Support Team work well together, and the review team **commends** the School's efforts to provide robust student support.
- 2.1.3 On the whole students felt well supported by the School and valued the Personal Tutor system and Student Support Team. They also referenced handbooks and "Welcome/Year Meetings" at the start of each semester as highly beneficial ways of disseminating information and preparing students for the year ahead. The review team **commends** the subject area's commitment to supporting students in a consistent way each year and **recognise this as an example of good practice**.
- 2.1.4 Students value the consistency and visibility of the Student Support Team and the Student Support Coordinator and appreciate that not all schools benefit from a similar system. The review team were concerned however by the impact that increasing student numbers is having on the workload of the Student Support Team and the Student Support Coordinator in particular. It is clear that the quality and dependability of the Student Support Team rests on the capability and dedication of the team. However, to be sustainable, the resourcing of the team needs to be commensurate with student numbers. The team were pleased to hear the School recognises this. The Student Support Team and Student Support Coordinator are **commended** for their dedication and commitment to supporting students and the review team **recommends** that the School reflects on their capacity and subsequently sustainably resource the team.
- 2.1.5 Students positively referenced their Personal Tutor and, on the whole, felt supported, highlighting various ways that they have engaged with their Personal Tutor. However, they also identified that experiences with the Personal Tutor

system can be inconsistent depending on the allocated Personal Tutor. Negative experiences were attributed to lack of communication, frequency and timing of Personal Tutor meetings and personality clashes.

- 2.1.6 Students identified the Geographical Society (GeogSoc) and GeogPALs, the peer assisted learning support programme offered in Geography as useful tools for building community and shared experience. Pre-Honours students reported that they appreciated the less formal skills-based sessions for first year students but that they engaged far less with the scheme in their second year. Students demonstrated an appetite for additional networking and peer assisted skills reflection and the review team **recommends** that the School works with students to enhance peer assisted learning opportunities for Pre-Honours students (particularly second year students) to improve student engagement.

The University is due to undertake a review of the student support system (including Personal Tutors, Student Support Teams and Peer Support) and therefore, comments noted in section 2.1 will be reported to the working group for consideration.

2.2 Listening to and responding to the student voice

- 2.2.1 The subject area is clearly committed to, and invested in, hearing and engaging with the student voice. The Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) is the key forum for this communication. Recent developments include identifying and inviting Joint Honours student representatives to ensure all student experiences are represented. Moreover, efforts have been made to balance student and staff representation at SSLCs to ensure students feel empowered and able to offer feedback. In addition, students now chair the meetings to encourage student ownership of the meetings and issues raised. Students identified that this has empowered them and that subsequently students are more engaged. The review team **commends** the work done to develop the SSLCs and **identified student chairs as a key strength and as an example of good practice**.
- 2.2.2 Student representatives also identified where student voice has clearly effected positive change. For example, student feedback informed restructuring Year 3 of all pathways to address an imbalance in credit load between semesters 1 and 2. However, it was felt that the wider student body are largely unaware of how their feedback has influenced enhancements to the student experience. Whilst representatives on the SSLCs felt listened to and aware of changes made and they appreciated the use of screens in the building and the hosting of minutes in the Geosciences hub, they identified challenges in feeding this back to the wider student community. The review team **recommends** that the School works with students to identify better ways to close the feedback loop with the wider student body and **suggests** using action logs to demonstrate distance travelled and the narrative of change for future SSLC student representatives.
- 2.2.3 The Degree Programme Convenor's commitment to developing opportunities for hearing and using the student voice to build community and shape the development of the curriculum is admirable, and the review team **commends** his dedication to enhancing the student experience. His ambition to provide opportunities for co-creation should be supported and developed.
- 2.2.4 Students acknowledge that the School has made significant efforts to foster a sense of community and cohort identity and events such as the student and staff Scavenger Hunt were complimented. Students reported that there is a better sense of community in the BSc programme which was attributed to its greater cohort diversity and smaller class sizes. However, students reported that the MA Geography course in particular has 'cliques' of students who come from similar

'privileged' backgrounds and who only socialise together. The Geographical Society (GeogSoc) was seen to help students socialise across these barriers. Students expressed the view that a more diverse staff body and curriculum may further help to attract a more diverse student cohort (see 2.3.6).

2.3 Learning and Teaching

- 2.3.1 The review team heard that the subject area has invested time in curriculum development with an aim to provide clear and distinct Geography pathways and improve and enhance the student experience through increased fieldwork opportunities.
- 2.3.2 Staff and students identify flexibility as a key feature of Geography programmes. Students, particularly on MA programmes, spoke positively about the opportunity to learn both human and physical Geography and further shape their learning experience through optional course selections. **This is recognised as a distinctive aspect and key strength, particularly for the Edinburgh Geography MA experience and is highlighted as an example of good practice.** However, students who are following the new degree programme, particularly for the BSc course, pointed out that their current programme is not aligned with their expectations upon application. The review team **recommends** that the subject area consider effective communication on curricular reform. In particular:
- how best to communicate changes to staff and students (matriculated and prospective)
 - how to engage the community of students in curriculum reform
 - how to work effectively with the School and College curriculum approval processes to ensure a robust consideration is given to such matters for future changes.
- 2.3.3 Students and staff were enthusiastic about the field courses included in their degree programmes. The proposed programme restructuring that embeds field courses into each year of study for BSc programmes is a significant effort. The expected rewards of improved recruitment should bear fruit shortly. The reported benefits of experiential learning and opportunities to socialise and build "Geography community" were realised by both staff and students. The review team **commends** the subject area for its field course provision for MA and BSc students and its commitment to fully fund compulsory field courses to enhance the student experience.
- 2.3.4 Honours students in particular praised the introduction of the Year 1 Loch Insh field course and felt this would help build peer relationships. However, Pre-Honours students identified that the field course can be intimidating due to its timing, size and novelty. Pre-Honours students considered the Year 2 field courses had more tangible outcomes because of their duration and requirement for close working with their peers. This allowed them to develop stronger relationships. The review team **suggests** that the subject area reconsiders the timings and content of the first year field course in consultation with students who have direct experience of field courses throughout their degree programmes.
- 2.3.5 Students, whilst enthusiastic about the diversity of field courses also raised concerns about their carbon footprint. The review team **suggests** that the subject area works with students to continue to work towards the co-production of sustainable practices. These may involve, for instance, selecting closer locations of field sites to cut down on carbon impact of travel, or the possibility of using more public transport to reach destinations.

2.3.6 Staff and students recognise that diverse perspectives on the subject area are essential to modern Geography curricula, learning and teaching and the lack of diversity in the staff and student bodies restrict this at present. Challenges related to diversity and the subject-specific remit item of diversifying admissions were discussed in depth (see 2.5.2 and 2.5.3). The review team **suggests** the subject area establish a group that includes a diverse range of students and staff (both internal and external to the subject area and university) to consider the best routes to break down stereotypes and build diversity in the academic community and in the curriculum.

2.3.7 With regard to the subject-specific remit item of enhancing the experience for Joint Honours Degree students, the panel received extensive student feedback about field course opportunities affecting students' sense of belonging. At the time of the review, Joint Honours Degree students are unable to access field courses. Students who moved from a Joint Honours Degree to a Single Honours Degree attributed this move largely to the field course opportunity. The subject area's ambition is to extend Year 3 field course opportunities to Joint Honours students to increase opportunities for experiential learning and socialising with their peers.

Joint Honours students also reported a lack of identity and feeling that they did not belong in either of their subject areas. Whilst Joint Honours students felt satisfied with their Personal Tutors, they felt they did not have anyone to ask about issues specific to their learning experience (or partner subjects), or issues beyond the Personal Tutor remit. The Senior Personal Tutor was highlighted as a useful contact point for some particular Joint Honours student issues.

The review also discussed opportunities for Joint Honours students to share their expertise and skills with Single Honours students through, for example, group projects to provide Joint Honours students with increased opportunities to share expertise and build community.

The review team recognised that the subject area has taken clear steps to attempt to enhance the experience for Joint Honours students through inviting students to Year-based meetings and including Joint Honours reps on the SSLCs (see 2.2.1), although at times this can make students feel out of place where information is not relevant for them. The subject area have also recently established the Honours and Pre-Honours Coordinators who are responsible for the operational and strategic oversight for the student experience on MA, BSc and Joint Honours Degree programmes and a Joint Honours Degree working group is ongoing. The review team **commends** the commitment and strategic approach to enhance the student experience this way.

The review team **recommends** that the review team for Joint Honours provision fully engage with Joint Honours students to identify the key issues of provision for Joint Honours students and work to better integrate them into the academic life of the subject area and **suggests** that a Joint Honours student (external to the subject area) or alumni representative is invited to the working group to offer their insight and shape the direction of travel.

2.4 Assessment and Feedback

2.4.1 Since the last review, assessment methods and patterns have been reviewed through a LEAF mapping exercise and subsequently a Taught Assessment Working Group developed new Principles for Taught Assessment which were approved in 2019. The subject area has taken the opportunity to increase efficiency by reducing, where appropriate, the number of assessments. A notched marking scale has also been introduced to increase consistency and clarity of marking across Geography programmes and to encourage staff to use

the full range of marks including awarding high Firsts (as recommended by external examiners). The review team **commends** the positive changes made to enhance the student experience through these improvements to assessment within the subject area.

- 2.4.2 Students talked enthusiastically about courses that used diverse assessment methods including zines, story maps and critical analysis of mixed media. The review team **commends** the subject areas adoption of innovative assessment methods and the WAM reward for staff developing them (see 1.8) and **suggests** the development of templates to reduce staff time required to expand good practice.
- 2.4.3 Students were able to identify the skills developed through assessments and particularly enjoyed opportunities to communicate academic knowledge in accessible ways. Following feedback from students, the review team **suggests** that the subject area investigates ways for students to apply learning and practical skills developed from these assessments into the wider local community through, for example, projects or volunteering opportunities. Students also highlighted “fear of the unknown” which can lead to anxiety when completing a different style of assessment for the first time and the review team **suggests** that the subject area works with students to create “assessment guides” that describe what students will encounter in terms of assessment, and when.
- 2.4.4 Students did not raise issues relating to feedback and positively referenced ongoing student voice work, highlighting where their feedback has resulted in positive change (see 2.2.2). The review team were satisfied with the subject area’s approach to feedback and **commends** the ‘Talking about teaching’ reading group which has resulted in proposals to revise feedback practices and the review team welcomed the proposed improvements.

2.5 Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation

- 2.5.1 The subject area has a Widening Participation (WP) working group who devised a WP strategy which has subsequently led to a successful bid for a Principal’s Teaching Award Scheme (PTAS) grant. The work is getting underway and will focus on two of the University’s Widening Participation Strategy “support to succeed” and “support to progress”. A Widening Participation Coordinator is in place (0.2 FTE) and the review team **commends** the School for commitment to this cause and dedicating staff time to it.
- 2.5.2 Diversity and inclusivity within the Geography programmes has been identified as a challenge and part of the subject specific remit is to focus on diversifying admissions to rebalance the MA and BSc as well as promoting greater diversity in the student community. The review covered this matter in depth and discussed high RUK admissions, particularly to the MA programme, and acknowledge the part that capped student places and the institutional image and reputation may play. The review also recognised the effect that the large RUK student population in Geography programmes has on the social composition of the student cohort and implications for student’s sense of belonging. Students reinforced this message (see 2.2.4). The review team **recommends** that the School works with students to better understand the challenges students face due to the social composition of the cohort and how to combat this.
- 2.5.3 Upon reviewing application data, it appeared that both the MA and BSc programmes receive strong application numbers with significantly more offers made to MA than BSc students to date. The College Admissions Officer explained that College Admissions targets are yet to be set following the UCAS deadline and so current offers are only early offers and explained the principle of early offers and the flagging system to award these. The review team

recommends that the Subject Area investigates how to work more closely with College Admissions to ensure transparency and exchange of information to facilitate understanding recruitment patterns and how to achieve goals of greater diversity and rebalancing recruitment across the School. Moreover, the team **suggests** more transparent discussion within the School to determine the most appropriate intra-school allocation of SEU places.

- 2.5.4 The review team also recognise the efforts being made to address recruitment challenges and diversity of the student body through incorporating an exciting portfolio of field-based learning experiences for the BSc (see 2.3.4) and introducing Admissions Advisors for both the MA and BSc programmes. In particular, the review team **commends** the subject area for working closely with the Marketing Manager to diversify marketing materials, use social media and incorporate student testimonials from BSc students.

2.6 Learning environment (physical and virtual)

- 2.6.1 The subject area, while primarily based in Drummond Street, is split across three buildings on two campuses and many courses have outgrown the teaching spaces available at Drummond Street meaning students are required to travel between buildings and campuses for their teaching with some students struggling to get between lectures on time. In addition, unpredictable growth in course sizes has resulted in late room changes which students have highlighted as negatively impacting on their experience.

- 2.6.2 It was identified that the estates constraints can also negatively impact students' sense of belonging but the School have worked to optimise space available, particularly in Drummond Street, to create new social and study space. Students felt that the building in Drummond Street is an important space for creating a sense of belonging and community. The review team recognises the challenges faced and **commends** the School's allocation of the coffee common room as both a staff and student space as well as making the Old Library available as a student study space during the mornings following its return to School control. The review team **suggests** that in lieu of new space opportunities at Drummond Street, the Old Library space and equipment is reviewed and refreshed as necessary.

2.7 Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes

- 2.7.1 Since the last review, a more strategic approach has been taken to embedding employability. The subject area recognises that the degree programmes allow students to develop a vast range of skills suitable for a number of different career paths and that more needs to be done to clearly communicate the skills, knowledge and attributes which students will develop and the transferability of their skills. The review team **suggests** carrying out a mapping activity to identify the skills, knowledge and attributes students will develop on their degree programme and communicate this with the student body. Employers should be consulted during the process and the mapping should be used when communicating with employers and prospective students. Moreover, it **suggests** the subject area consider engaging with alumni who are a valuable source of employment knowledge and networks for current students. The review also discussed teaching on sustainability themes and **suggests** that the subject area further incorporates this into the curriculum as a key feature of employability. The subject area identified that there are many examples of this emphasis in postgraduate taught programmes but that more could be done to bring topics to an undergraduate level. The review team feels this would also be a positive promotional tool for the subject area.

- 2.7.2 Honours students valued a session which introduced them to opportunities available including internships. The subject area's reflective report also

highlighted a range of employability events developed through working closely with the Careers Service, however students appeared to have limited awareness of these and reported that they would welcome earlier networking and employability opportunities, particularly highlighting a lack of employer engagements and support for pathways into academia.

The [Edinburgh Award](#) was reported by students as a beneficial opportunity to reflect on skills but that it is not directly advertised through the School. The Edinburgh Award also has specific eligibility criteria, for example serving as a Student Ambassador or LEAPS volunteer, which can make it less accessible. The review team **suggests** that the University considers broadening criteria to ensure the award is accessible for all students.

The review team **recommends** that the subject area better communicates employability and personal development opportunities to students and incorporate more external employer engagements as well as greater support for those interested in careers in academia earlier in the student lifecycle.

2.8 Supporting and developing staff

2.8.1 The subject area has made consistent efforts to enhance the teaching provision within its programmes and encourages staff to take advantage of the Edinburgh Teaching Award, delivered through the Institute of Academic Development. The Edinburgh Teaching Award is a route to HEA accreditation. Staff are awarded 50 hours on the WAM after the successful completion of the Edinburgh Teaching Awards and the review team **commends** the subject area's approach to continuing professional development for its staff and **suggests** some WAM allowance is allocated to support completion of the Edinburgh Teaching Award (rather than *post-hoc*).

2.8.2 The subject area also encourages sharing of good practice and engaged discussion on teaching through a monthly reading group "Talking about teaching" and the inclusion of "sharing practice" as a standing item at the Geography Degree Programme meetings. However the subject area has struggled to engage staff with a voluntary peer observation scheme to encourage reflection and further sharing of practice. The review team **commends** the commitment to sharing of best practice to enhance teaching excellence within the subject area and **recommends** that the School considers how to incorporate an element of Teaching Professional Development into the Annual Review Process.

2.8.3 Whilst senior administrative staff were not available during the review, the review team was impressed by the dedication and commitment shown by the professional services staff seen during the review. The review team **commends** the excellent support provided to students and staff by the professional services staff. The staff met felt supported in their roles and highlighted that they felt valued and treated as equals by the staff they work with in the subject area.

2.8.4 Tutors and Demonstrators are supported by an Academic Rep who provides mandatory induction training for new Tutors and Demonstrators each semester. The Academic Rep has also introduced feedback meetings to share good practice or problems as well as providing an opportunity to socialise. However, engagement with these is poor which may be due to the fact that it was not advertised that Tutors and Demonstrators are paid for their time if they attend these meetings. Clearer messaging will be included in promotion of feedback meetings moving forward.

The review team were impressed by the dedication demonstrated by the Tutors and Demonstrators towards their roles and recognises their valuable contributions as members of the academic staff.

Tutors and Demonstrators the Review Team met during the review reported inconsistencies in their experience and felt that there is no clear structure in place for concerns of issues to be escalated. Concerns around inconsistent and late pay, varied expectations in terms workload and highly variable engagement and support from Course Organisers were raised. Tutors and Demonstrators reported that the subject area lacks systematic criteria for Course Organisers requesting Tutor and Demonstrator support or approval for roles. However, the School are attempting to improve and streamline processes and Tutors and Demonstrators reported that the updated recruitment system was an improvement. The Head of Student Services has been asked by SPARC to review the Tutor and Demonstrator system, what they are asked to do, how many hours they are working etc.

Peer support was reported as crucial for Tutors and Demonstrators and the office structure in the Drummond Street building was identified as crucial to facilitate this. Support from Course Organisers was reported to be variable. Tutors and Demonstrators welcome feedback on pedagogic practice when it has been made available however very few Tutors and Demonstrators met during the review had received feedback. Constructive and relevant feedback is important to tutors' and demonstrators' experience and development. Tutors and Demonstrators also reported varying engagement with CPD opportunities and the Edinburgh Teaching Award and would welcome greater support to engage with this.

Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the subject area's review of Tutor and Demonstrator provision remit is directed to ensure that Tutors and Demonstrators have good support in their work, are well trained, and have transparent processes for appointment and allocation of work in their roles in line with the [Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators](#).

To this end the review team **recommends** that the review considers the following:

- clarifying appointment processes
- ensuring job descriptions are accurate and informative
- monitoring Tutor and Demonstrator experience on courses
- providing a structured approach to CPD
- providing clear redress procedures in the case of Tutors and Demonstrators having issues with their Course Organisers

3 Assurance and Enhancement of provision

3.1 Setting and maintaining academic standards

3.1.1 The School operates within the University Quality Framework and the review team is confident that academic standards are high. Courses and programmes map onto the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level descriptors and to the relevant Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement.

3.1.2 The review team noted that two external examiners raised concerns in 2017/18 about elements of the examination procedure, and that these concerns are being dealt with in accordance with University procedures. External Examiners otherwise expressed their satisfaction with academic procedures, assessment and the classification of degrees.

3.1.3 Programme and course approval is undertaken at School-level by the Board of Studies which operates as an extension of the School Learning and Teaching

Committee. The School Board of Studies meets once each semester and is the mechanism by which the school makes additions or changes to the curriculum. All academic staff are members.

- 3.1.4 The subject area has a robust mechanism for special circumstances which works through their Student Support Coordinator, Senior Personal Tutor and Student Support Team, the review team were impressed with the subject area's approach to student support (see 2.1.2)

3.2 Key themes and actions taken

- 3.2.1 External Examiner reports raised inconsistencies in marking practices. A working group was subsequently set up which introduced a notched marking scheme (for year 2019-20) to increase consistency and clarity of marking across Geography programmes and to encourage staff to use the full range of marks including awarding high Firsts (see 2.4.1).
- 3.2.2 The School's Annual Quality Report for 2019 statistics suggest that Scottish students are underperforming across all programmes and all years of undergraduate study when compared to all fee-based groupings. This trend is more marked in other parts of the School than Geography and the School has identified this as an action item in their report.

Section C – Review conclusions

Confidence statement

The review team found that subject area, Geography, has effective management of the quality of the student learning experience, academic standards, and enhancement and good practice

Key Strengths and Areas of Positive Practice for sharing more widely across the institution

No	Commendation	Section in report
1	The review team commends the culture of reflection and enhancement within the subject area.	1.3
2	The review team commends the School-wide policy of using a teaching panel as part of the recruitment process for four new Human Geography staff members.	1.5
3	The review team commends the adaption of the WAM to provide staff with space (50 hours incentive) to innovate practice and share across the subject area. This is a good example of the use of the WAM to encourage Innovation.	1.6
4	It is clear that the Personal Tutors and Student Support Team work well together, and the review team commends the School's efforts to provide robust student support.	2.1.2
5	The review team commends the subject areas commitment to supporting students in a consistent way each year through "Welcome/Year meetings" each semester and recognise this as an example of good practice.	2.1.3
6	The Student Support Office and Student Support Coordinator are commended for their dedication and commitment to supporting students.	2.1.4
7	The review team commends the work done to develop the Student Staff Liaison Committees and identified student chairs as a key strength and as an example of good practice.	2.2.1
8	The review team commends the Degree Programme Convenor's dedication to enhancing the student experience and commitment to developing opportunities for hearing and using the student voice to build community and shape the development of the curriculum.	2.2.3
9	The review team commends the subject area for its field course provision for MA and BSc students and its commitment to fully fund compulsory field courses to enhance the student experience.	2.3.3
10	The review team commends the commitment and strategic approach to enhance the Joint Honours student experience through the Joint Honours working group.	2.3.7
11	The review team commends the positive changes made to enhance the student experience through improvements to assessment within the subject area.	2.4.1
12	The review team commends the subject areas adoption of innovative assessment methods and the WAM reward for staff developing them.	2.4.2
13	The review team were satisfied with the subject area's approach to feedback and commends the 'Talking about teaching' reading group which has resulted in proposals to revise feedback practices and the review team welcomed the proposed improvements.	2.4.4
14	A Widening Participation Coordinator is in place (0.2 FTE) and the review team commends the Schools for commitment to this cause and dedicating staff time to it.	2.5.1

15	The review team commends the subject area for working closely with the Marketing Manager to diversify marketing materials, use social media and incorporate student testimonials from BSc students.	2.5.4
16	The review team commends the School's allocation of the coffee common room as both a staff and student space as well as making the Old Library available as a student study space during the mornings following its return to School control.	2.6.2
17	Staff are awarded 50 hours on the WAM after the successful completion of the Edinburgh Teaching Awards and the review team commends the subject area's approach to continuing professional development for its staff.	2.8.1
18	The review team commends the commitment to sharing of best practice to enhance teaching excellence within the subject area.	2.8.2
19	The review team commends the excellent support provided to students and staff by the professional services staff.	2.8.3

Recommendations for enhancement/Areas for further development

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility of
1	The review team felt from discussions throughout the review that the School needs to reflect on where Geography sits within the wider School strategic vision and recommends that the School prioritises this exercise to enable the vision to inform further strategic thinking about teaching and other areas of development (e.g. admissions)	1.2	Head of School
2	It is recommended that the School reflect on their structures to ensure that they best facilitate and encourage enhancements to learning and teaching provision and empower and support staff to make change.	1.3	Head of School
3	It is recommended that the School reflects on the capacity of the Student Support Coordinator and Student Support Office and subsequently sustainably resource the team.	2.1.4	Head of School
4	The review team recommends that the School reflect on and revise the WAM appropriately to take account of large courses, equitable distribution of workload and facilitating teaching innovation through explicit resourcing of innovation.	1.4	Head of School
5	The review team recommends that the subject area consider effective communication on curricular reform. In particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how best to communicate changes to staff and students (matriculated and prospective) • how to engage the community of students in curriculum reform • how to work effectively with the School and College curriculum approval processes to ensure a robust 	2.3.2	Head of School, Director of Undergraduate Teaching, Degree Programme Convenor

	consideration is given to such matters for future changes.		
6	<p>The review team recommends that the subject area's review of Tutor and Demonstrator provision remit is directed to ensure that Tutors and Demonstrators have good support in their work, are well trained, and have transparent processes for appointment and allocation of work in their roles in line with the Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators.</p> <p>To this end the review team recommends that the review considers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarifying appointment processes • ensuring job descriptions are accurate and informative • monitoring Tutor and Demonstrator experience on courses • providing a structured approach to CPD • providing clear redress procedures in the case of Tutors and Demonstrators having issues with their management 	2.8.4	Head of Student Services
7	The review team recommends that the Subject Area investigates how to work more closely with College Admissions to ensure transparency and exchange of information to facilitate understanding recruitment patterns and how to achieve goals of greater diversity and rebalancing recruitment across the School.	2.5.3	Head of School
8	The review team recommends that the School works with students to better understand the challenges students face due to the social composition of the cohort and how to combat this.	2.5.2	Degree Programme Convenor
9	The review team recommends that the review team for Joint Honours provision fully engage with Joint Honours students to identify the key issues of provision for Joint Honours students and work to better integrate them into the academic life of the subject area.	2.3.7	Head of School, Director of Undergraduate Teaching, Honours Coordinator, Degree Programme Convenor
10	The review team recommends that the School considers how to incorporate an element of Teaching Professional Development into the Annual Review Process.	2.8.2	Head of School
11	The review team recommends that the subject area better communicates employability and personal development opportunities to students and incorporate more external employer engagements as well as greater support for those interested in careers in academia earlier in the student lifecycle.	2.7.2	Head of School

12	The review team recommends that the School works with students to identify better ways to close the feedback loop with the wider student body.	2.2.2	Degree Programme Convenor
13	The review team recommends that the School works with students to enhance peer assisted learning opportunities for Pre-Honours students (particularly second year students) to improve student engagement.	2.1.6	Head of School

Suggestions for noting

If an issue is minor but the review team nevertheless wants to flag it as a potentially useful action, it will be couched as a suggestion rather than a formal recommendation. Suggestions are not tracked in onward reporting.

No	Suggestion	Section in report
1	The review team suggests that the subject area reflects on this use of the WAM (to innovate practice and share) and develops mechanisms that facilitate and encourage further engagement from staff with this issue.	1.6
2	The review team suggests using action logs to demonstrate distance travelled and the narrative of change for future SSLC student representatives and to better close the feedback loop with the wider student body.	2.2.2
3	The review team suggests that the subject area reconsiders the timings and content of the first year field course in consultation with students who have direct experience of field courses throughout their degree programmes.	2.3.4
4	The review team suggests that the subject area works with students to continue to work towards the co-production of sustainable practices. These may involve, for instance, selecting closer locations of field sites to cut down on carbon impact of travel, or the possibility of using more public transport to reach destinations.	2.3.5
5	The review team suggests the subject area establish a group that includes a diverse range of students and staff (both internal and external to the subject area and university) to consider the best routes to break down stereotypes and build diversity in the academic community and in the curriculum.	2.3.6
6	The review team suggests that a Joint Honours student (external to the subject area) or alumni representative is invited to the Joint Honours working group to offer their insight and shape the direction of travel.	2.3.7
7	The review team suggests the development of templates to reduce staff time required to expand good practice in assessment.	2.4.2
8	Following feedback from students, the review team suggests that the subject area investigates ways for students to apply learning and practical skills developed from these assessments into the wider local community through, for example, projects or volunteering opportunities.	2.4.3
9	To support students to engage with the diversity of assessment methods, the review team suggests that the subject area works with students to create "assessment guides" that describe what students will encounter in terms of assessment, and when.	2.4.3

10	The review team suggests more transparent discussion within the School to determine the most appropriate intra-school allocation of SEU places.	2.5.3
11	The review team suggests that in lieu of new space opportunities at Drummond Street, the Old Library space and equipment is reviewed and refreshed as necessary.	2.6.2
12	The review team suggests carrying out a mapping activity to identify the skills, knowledge and attributes students will develop on their degree programme and communicate this with the student body. Employers should be consulted during the process and the mapping should be used when communicating with employers and prospective students. Moreover, it suggests the subject area consider engaging with alumni who are a valuable source of employment knowledge and networks for current students.	2.7.1
13	The review also discussed teaching on sustainability themes and suggests that the subject area further incorporates this into the curriculum as a key feature of employability.	2.7.1
14	The review team suggests that the University considers broadening criteria to ensure the Edinburgh Award is accessible for all students.	2.7.2
15	The review team suggests some WAM allowance is allocated to support completion of the Edinburgh Teaching Award (rather than <i>post-hoc</i>).	2.8.1

Appendices

Appendix 1 – University remit

The University remit provides consistent coverage of key elements across all of the University's internal reviews (undergraduate and postgraduate).

It covers all credit bearing provision within the scope of the review, including:

- Provision delivered in collaboration with others
- Transnational education
- Work-based provision and placements
- Online and distance learning
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD)
- Provision which provides only small volumes of credit
- Joint/Dual Degrees
- Massive Open Online Courses MOOCs (even if non-credit bearing)

1. Strategic overview

The strategic approach to:

- The management and resourcing of learning and teaching experience,
- The forward direction and the structures in place to support this.
- Developing business cases for new programmes and courses,
- Managing and reviewing its portfolio,
- Closing courses and programmes.

2. Enhancing the Student Experience

The approach to and effectiveness of:

- Supporting students in their learning
- Listening to and responding to the Student Voice
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment and Feedback
- Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation
- Learning environment (physical and virtual)
- Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes
- Supporting and developing staff

3. Assurance and Enhancement of provision

The approach to and effectiveness of maintaining and enhancing academic standards and quality of provision in alignment with the University Quality Framework:

- Admissions and Recruitment
- Assessment, Progression and Achievement
- Programme and Course approval
- Annual Monitoring, Review and Reporting
- Operation of Boards of Studies, Exam Boards, Special Circumstances
- External Examining, themes and actions taken
- Alignment with SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level, relevant benchmark statements, UK Quality Code
- Accreditation and Collaborative activity and relationship with Professional/Accrediting bodies (if applicable)

Appendix 2 Subject specific remit items

Developing and resourcing well- balanced and sustainable programmes that improve student and staff experience.

Under this remit item we want to develop a coherent approach to the strategic planning for the Geography Degree programmes that will enhance the education and experience on all of our programmes, improve staff to student ratios on all programmes, and relieve pressures on staff. Within this broader remit item, we have identified 2 key areas:

i) Recruitment and admissions: We are seeking to diversifying our admissions. Geography faces two specific challenges relating to recruitment that have a direct impact on the student and staff experience. First, there is a long-term imbalance between the MA and BSc programmes (current student cohort MA 57%; MA Joint Honours 21%; BSc 22%). This has an impact on students because of high staff to student ratios on MA programmes, and teaching methods that need to prioritise efficient teaching over more appropriate pedagogical practice. Second, we are keen to promote greater diversity in our student community. Geography recruits heavily from RUK students. This has specific implications for the class profile of the programme. The programme draws a very small number of students from widening participation backgrounds and has relatively few students from BAME backgrounds.

ii) Joint Honours: We are interested in improving the communication, support and coherence across our programmes. There are 8 Joint Honours Geography programmes (7 owned by Geography). Geography also contributes heavily to the teaching of students on Geology and Physical Geography (School of GeoSciences) and Sustainable Development Programme with Geography Pathway (School of Social and Political Sciences). In particular we are keen to improve the sense of belonging for Joint Honours Students, and enhancing cohort identity and community. One key challenge is that Joint Honours students are not able to participate in field trips that are compulsory for single honours students. This affects their sense of belonging and means they miss out on important opportunities for experiential learning. Funding and staff resource are not currently available to increase the number of students on field trips, but we would like to extend this field trip opportunities to all Geography students.

Appendix 3 Additional information considered by review team

Reflective Report & Appendices: Status of recommendations from previous review Glossary of terms Principles for the Geography degree programmes School of Geosciences taught assessment principles Story maps assessment on research skills in Physical Geography (Year 2 BSc field trip)
Accreditation MA Geography form BSc Geography form RGS Accreditation email
School Quality Assurance Reports (2016/17-2018/19)
External Examiners Summary reports: 2018-2019 2017-2018 not available due to Data Protection Letter to external examiners 2016-2017
School Organisation Chart
Current Subject Area staff information
Programme Handbooks (or equivalent) Geography Handbook 19-20
Programme specification information Geography and Archaeology (MA Hons) Geography and Economics (MA Hons) Geography and Politics (MA Hons) Geography and Social Anthropology (MA Hons) Geography and Social Policy (MA Hons) Geography and Sociology (MA Hons) Geography (BSc Hons) Geography (MA Hons) Geography and Economic and Social History (MA Hons) Geography with Environmental Studies (MA Hons)
Statistical information: Applications by Year of Entry Offers by Year of Entry Ratio of Offers to Applications by Year of Entry Acceptances by Year of Entry Percentage High Classification Awards Entrants report Progression Report Completion rate of entrants Course Results Widening Participation entrants Students Studying Abroad Equality and Diversity Student Report

School Background Data for First Destination Statistics (DHLE Survey) Undergraduate Intake GeoSciences Last 5 Years
National Student Survey (NSS) results 2018-2019
Student Staff Liaison Committee meeting minutes 2018/19 14 March 2019 7 February 2019 8 November 2018 10 October 2018
Comments from School of Social & Political Sciences - Sociology
University of Edinburgh Standard Remit 2019/20
Subject Specific Remit
Edinburgh University Students' Association School Report
Introductory Information Geography Joint Honours Joint Degrees Geography

Appendix 4 Number of students

Undergraduate Student Numbers 2019/20						
Programme Code	Programme Title	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
UTGGPHY	Geography BSc	22	27	39	16	104
UTGGPHYMAH	Geography MA	87	59	69	53	268
UTGGPAR	Geography and Archaeology	0	0	0	0	0
UTGGPES	Geography and Economic and Social History	0	0	2	4	6
UTGGPEC	Geography and Economics	7	11	6	3	27
UTGGPPO	Geography and Politics	14	7	5	3	29
UTGGPSA	Geography and Social Anthropology	1	4	3	3	11
UTGGPSP	Geography and Social Policy	1	0	3	3	7
UTGGPSO	Geography and Sociology	2	2	2	2	8
UTGGPEV	Geography with Environmental Studies	2	2	5	1	10
Total by Year		136	112	134	88	470