

ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: SESSION 2013-14

School of Philosophy, Religion and History and Science: Philosophy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY																		
Aspect	National Student Survey						Undergraduate Programme Experience Survey						Postgraduate Programme Experience Survey					
	2012-13		2011-12		2010-11		2012-13		2011-12		2010-11		2012-13		2011-12		2010-11	
	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni
Overall satisfaction	82	87	85	87	87	86	84	85	85	85	90	83	83	87	88	84	75	82
Teaching	89	89	90	90	89	88	90	85	87	84	90	83	89	87	100	85	100	84
Assessment & feedback	70	71	65	69	70	65	56	59	63	61	60	56	80	75	68	69	48	68
Academic support	71	81	75	80	68	77	64	72	64	72	63	68	78	85	96	80	70	79
Organisation & management	82	84	86	83	86	82	76	73	79	74	79	83	72	85	83	80	70	77
Learning resources	84	90	89	88	80	87	75	81	71	78	70	77	87	86	86	83	90	82
Personal development	68	81	72	81	69	78	62	69	53	68	64	65	75	77	70	71	58	70
Sector position		57/147		51/150		46/151												

Scores in each category are expressed as a percentage of the number of respondents who mostly or definitely agreed with a range of statements (score 4 or 5)

Impact of 2011-12 actions	<p>Last year's main actions were (a) a serious focus on Level 1 with permanent staff teaching some of the core tutorials across the main curriculum; (b) assessment and feedback, with close monitoring of feedback return; (c) a focus on JH students, and an attempt to forge better links with co-teaching schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far as Level 1 is concerned, the students who have benefited from the changes have yet to fill out even their first Programme Survey, so we must wait a little longer to judge whether there has been any impact yet – but early anecdotal signs are very good. The Level 1 SSF rep reports that attendance and preparation for those tutorials taught by permanent staff are far better than for other tutorials. • The relatively modest improvement of 5 points in the assessment and feedback figures masks much larger rises of +14 on 'feedback on my work has been prompt' and +11 on 'I have received detailed comments on my work' in the NSS. These are very pleasing improvements. Programme survey results, however, are much less impressive, with only the score for promptness showing a rise. The relative unresponsiveness of our scores here may be due to the heavy focus on assessment by examination at L2, which tends to result in less detailed feedback, and the continued employment of pg students last year to mark at Level 1. • The picture is mixed concerning JH students. This year, for the first time, it does not appear that students in the JH programmes are, in general, any less satisfied than those on the SH programme, but there is considerable variability across the different JH programmes for which data is supplied. The Politics and Philosophy programme looked this year to be the programme with which students were least content. Philosophy and TRS, on the other hand, shows a 100% overall satisfaction rate (response rate 68%).
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<p>Achievements in 2012-13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent staff are now teaching tutorials across the core curriculum at Level 1 and are also marking first year work. • Culture of meeting the 3 week feedback deadline now embedded in School and (outside of one or two particular emergencies) now always met. • Appointment of Deputy DoSE with special responsibility for employability and the student experience. • Student Development Workshops open to all School students at all levels running all year on Wednesday afternoons, covering a range of student experience, skills and employability issues. • Much progress made on the growing PPST programme, where there had been much dissatisfaction about inequitable treatment of these students (as compared with SH Psychology students). • New School-wide marking criteria have now been created and widely disseminated amongst staff and students. • Electronic-only submission now embedded in School and running smoothly, with consequent improvements in convenience to students and capacity to detect plagiarism. • Sample essays and dissertations now available on the VLE to help students interpret what the marking criteria might mean in practice. • School Student Education Support Office open 8.45am-4.45pm. • Information sheet prepared for personal tutors containing information on employability and careers resources to aid tutors in their role is now in use. • School-level alumni event on careers in education ran very successfully. • Industrial year is becoming increasingly popular and should lead in time to improving employability within the School. • Philosophy 'Students into Schools' module running for the first time. • PPE programme received in principle approval, to run from 2014-15. New bespoke means of providing some of the teaching on this programme will be utilised. • Philosophical glossary to help students studying only a relatively small amount of philosophy now completed to a very high standard.
<p>Main actions for 2013-14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This year we will begin a serious review of the curriculum in Philosophy. The first priority will be to configure our programmes so as to incorporate the Independent Research project at L3 – but we will also be considering modes of assessment, teaching formats, and the structure and content of the course. We aim in particular further to increase the quantity of time spent by students in tutorials and to explore an increase in the number of seminar-only modules at L3. • We are planning a focus on personal tutoring (in conjunction with the Faculty). We intend to attempt to link personal tutoring with first year tutorial groups, so that for at least the majority of students, their relationship with their personal tutor will be more meaningful. We will also institute a system of 'caretaker personal tutors' so as to minimise the disruption to students when their personal tutor goes on study leave and to avoid repeated changes of personal tutor. • We are scheduling a Learning and Teaching Away Day to discuss our strategy to improve the student experience and to increase staff engagement across the board in the enhancement of our provision. • We are planning a new approach to the new PPE cohort, who will be taught separately from other students, both in Economics and Philosophy. The aim is to attempt to develop a sense of community and cohesion amongst the programme group and to provide dedicated staff who are particularly focused on the complex needs of this particular group of students. If successful, we will attempt to find a way to extend this to some of our other our larger JH programmes. • Some negative perceptions seem only to have persisted because of the considerable difficulties involved in getting important information about beneficial changes, sources of support and help, etc. across to students. We plan a focus on improving our communications. We are investigating the cost of installing a plasma screen in the foyer on which important notices of events, deadlines, etc. might be displayed to attract attention; and are attempting to engage student reps more thoroughly in the process of conveying to other students important messages about

	positive change in the School.
Summary of student involvement in the production of this Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All programme review meetings have included student feedback so that individual programme reviews have been able to take into consideration student concerns, queries and observations. • All NSS comments and suggested measures for improvements in response to particular comments on the NSS produced by Student-Staff forum. • Draft action plan reviewed by SSF.

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	School:	Faculty:	
Aspect	Progress with actions in response to 2011-12 feedback and indication of impact	Issues raised in 2012-13 feedback	Planned response in 2013-14
Overall satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JH Communications Up-to-date list of link tutors now available to assist personal tutors and programme leaders with liaison and communication with the other Schools involved in our many joint programmes. • PPST Many reforms to the PPST programme have been undertaken, in close consultation with Psychology, including provision of essay-writing advice and tutorials to PPST students. Programme review indicated students now far happier with provision. • Students taking limited Philosophy VLE-based glossary complete (though further amendments to organisational structure required). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to have been more involved with other students on the same course. • Workload too light. • Workload too heavy. • Attitude of other students too lackadaisical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New approach to the PPE cohort will serve as a pilot scheme for a means of teaching which will bring students on the same course together for cohort-specific teaching. • SSF agreed that it is difficult to know what to make of contradictory complaints of this sort – and felt that differences might be course-specific. In absence of clearer information about which students had made which complaints, SSF suggested no sensible action was possible, but that further investigation was called for. • This is a perennial complaint. We hope that the fact that permanent staff are now teaching the L1 core course will encourage students to develop good habits of attendance and preparation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicity for availability of help/advice Handbooks now rewritten to re-emphasise sources of advice and help within the School. • Lack of community Peer mentoring scheme ran – but appears simply not to be workable – students just do not seem to want this kind of support. SSF concurred with this assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be the opportunity to learn from older students. 	<p>early on, which will impact in time on the general student culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have attempted to increase these opportunities by means of a peer mentoring scheme, but there has been very little uptake by new students. SSF agreed that most students are unlikely to want this form of support.
<p style="text-align: center;">Teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module choice We have not yet made any major changes in the curriculum, having been prioritising consideration of the changes required by the CEP – but the forthcoming curriculum review will address this. • Contact hours Contact hours for students have not significantly increased this year, but a greater proportion of that contact is now with permanent staff (as opposed to PGR students). Curriculum review will address further the question of whether overall contact hours might be increased for students. It should be noted, though, that student opinion on the desirability of increased contact hours is divided, with some students asking how it would be possible to find the time properly to prepare for tutorials and lectures if more contact time was expected. A tension was also noted between the desire for increased quantity of contact hours, and a preference for contact in small groups. • Choice at L1 No changes as yet to the Level 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More contact hours. • Too few tutorials. • Not enough choice of HPS modules. • No bioethics or environmental ethics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These two complaints are amongst the most frequently made, and we will consider them together in the forthcoming curriculum review, since in some ways they pull in opposite directions. It would be easy to increase contact hours if we were to do our teaching in large-group formats; it is correspondingly more difficult to increase contact hours, the smaller the groups in which we provide our teaching. Students are divided on the issue of which is the more important consideration. • Some new HPS modules have been created this year; ('Nature, Knowledge and Power' and 'Science Communication: History and Theory' which should help with this. • New 'Ethics of Life and Death' module may respond, in part to this concern. Some parts of environmental ethics are covered by Philosophy of Food.

	<p>curriculum – once again, these will be considered in the round along with other proposed changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay writing help Student development workshops have included more help with essay writing; we have also considerably developed resources to help with this on the VLE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition of material between modules. • Too much focus in tutorials on basic content at expense of more difficult material.. • Not enough module choice at L1. • Not enough module choice at L3. • Alleged that in certain areas (e.g. moral and political philosophy) curriculum advances from A level only very slowly, whereas metaphysics and epistemology courses expose students to advanced material from early on. • Lectures on a Wednesday, clashing with sport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be investigated within the process of curriculum review, which should offer opportunities for rationalisation. • This is a difficult issue because students have different needs, depending on their level of ability. We have made a big effort to advertise office hours and make it clear that students with advanced queries should use office hours as a means of supplementing tutorial provision. • We will give further consideration to whether it is possible to introduce more choice at L1 and L3 during the curriculum review process. It is likely, however, that there will be little scope to increase module choice at L3 because of the need to make provision for the independent research project. • Will be considered in the Value stream meeting in December. • Students seem unaware that we have already forsworn (in philosophy) the timetabling of formal teaching on Wednesday afternoons. This indicates the problem noted above of getting information about positive change across to the student body.
<p>Assessment and feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promptness of feedback We publicised and monitored closely adherence to a 3 week deadline for feedback return. It was evident from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments said to be unimaginative. • Too much assessment by examination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will be addressed in the context of the forthcoming audit of assessment.

	<p>scores that we have been rather successful in addressing concerns about promptness – but must remain focused.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion about submission Students no longer seem confused about electronic submission, now that the system has bedded in, and everything seems to be running smoothly. • Request for example essays Sample essays have been provided on the VLE. • Marking criteria Marking criteria have been refreshed and we have increased awareness of them amongst students. Staff have been encouraged to reference the criteria in giving feedback. • Level 1 marking All marking at L1 across the core curriculum now undertaken by permanent staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One lecturer slow in returning marks. • Very little focus on marking and feedback of work in first year. • Unclear marking criteria. • Essay feedback “not really good enough”. • Perceived differences in what is required in assessments by different disciplines. • Not enough group work and presentations. • Not enough advice on essay-writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite isolated incidents, students were aware of big improvements on this front and recognised that the School had made great strides with swift return of marks and feedback. • We expect that this will be addressed by the greater involvement of permanent staff in marking at L1. • New School-wide marking criteria have been produced and extensively advertised to students. • We will continue to exhort staff to ensure that feedback is of high quality, as well as promptly returned. • Since there are of course such differences, what seems important is that students are made very aware of what the requirements are for the different disciplines in which they might receive teaching. So far as Philosophy and TRS are concerned, we are undertaking a project to help students see that the interdisciplinary differences are not so great as they might think – and to help them understand such differences as there are. • Discussion at SSF revealed that opinion is in fact very divided here. Some students perceive group assessments to be very unfair. We will consider this issue in the context of the upcoming assessment audit. • Student Development Workshops addressed to these skills have been
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Academic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dyslexia and Dyspraxia The Equality and Diversity Committee is liaising with Equality Services to attempt to improve sharing of information about the needs of our dyslexic and dyspraxic students. Elective advice We have improved out advice concerning electives – and expect that the introduction of the Discovery Themes should help students considerably to find out about what electives are available to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little opportunity to get to know staff. Office hours too few and far between. Sometimes teachers and lecturers “seem more wrapped up in their own research projects than teaching”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The increased presence of permanent staff in L1 teaching should help with this. We have also (once again) been encouraging students to attend office hours in order to take advantage of individual help on offer. We will also have a focus this year on personal tutoring. The experience of staff is that overwhelmingly, office hours are under-used – which means they are reluctant to increase them. We have encouraged staff to put on extra office hours in what are likely to be important weeks (e.g. the weeks leading up to essay deadlines) and this is now very common practice. We stress in all our literature that it is always possible for students who cannot attend a given office hour to email staff for an appointment at another time. We will discuss at the Away Day why some students have come away with this perception, and consider appropriate measures.
Organisation and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion about rules for classification, credits, etc. No evidence this year of confusion about credits, the system for degree classification, etc. – we hope that improvements to the Handbook have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closure of JH centres led to “numerous administrative problems”. JH students get less support than SH students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Faculty-wide review of Joint Honours should help with some of these issues. Where we have been aware that this is the case (e.g. PPST) we have acted.

	<p>helped with this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of JH courses We have made some changes which should help staff communicate with link tutors in other Schools, but essentially, the difficulties surrounding JH students are not fully resolvable by any single School. We welcome the renewed Faculty focus on the JH programmes and hope that it will lead to considerable improvements in student support for these students. • Complaints about essay hand-in New opening hours for the School office together with electronic submission has resolved a range of issues concerning the hand-in of essays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing courses difficult. • When administrative issues arise it is very difficult to get anyone to take responsibility for resolving them. • Timetable said to be “unnecessarily inconvenient”. • Interaction between two sides of JH course “somewhat lacking”. • Office staff have “no appreciation of students with special circumstances”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not intentionally make this process difficult for our students – but inevitably, the practicalities are sometimes very tricky. Individual students are encouraged to seek help with the process from the appropriate Director of Undergraduate Studies. • Changes to the allocation of students to personal tutors ought to help with this; as should the readier availability of information about link tutors. Staff to be encouraged to be pro-active on behalf of their JH students (e.g. calling up link tutors to ask questions on their behalf). • Students on SSF understand the enormous complexity of the timetabling process and understand that no consideration can be given to the convenience of individual students (or staff!). • This is indeed the case. We have made some minor improvements to the personal tutor system and the provision of link tutor information – but the overriding difficulty relates to the very large number of JH programmes. Consideration to be given to the question whether decreasing the number of JH programmes might help. • Provision of greater staff training for Student Support staff has already been implemented.
<p>Learning resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library opening hours The Edward Boyle library is now open for 24 hours at peak times. • Library fines New system in operation for library fines – 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT facilities should be open for longer. • Smaller rooms (not lecture theatres) for small modules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students on SSF thought the problem here was student awareness of the extent of provision. This will be fed back to ISS. • We recognise the desirability of appropriate space – but as with the

	<p>early indications are that students perceive this to be fairer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unevenness of VLE provision The staff member who was due to undertake the audit of VLE provision left – so this has not yet been done. We will readdress the question in the context of consideration of our blended learning strategy. • IT Provision IT provision appears to remain an issue this year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More digitisation of resources needed. • Books sometimes difficult to get hold of. 	<p>timetabling issue, complexity is such that it is not always possible to find an appropriate room.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We continue to encourage staff to make use of the digitalisation service. • Though this complaint still occurred this year, it appears to be less frequently made as the years go by and SSF thought in general that the problem was not large in philosophy, where journal articles tend to figure large on reading lists. We continue to urge staff to observe library deadlines.
Personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice from personal tutors Personal tutor information sheet distributed again and improvements made, so that staff are better equipped to direct students to appropriate resources. • Changes of personal tutor We have not yet managed to institute effective arrangements to ensure that changes of personal tutor are minimised, because of the complexity of the task. This will be a focus for this year. • Outside sources of inspiration We organised an alumni event on careers in education which was well attended and successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal tutor system “does not work”. • Interaction with personal tutor ‘sporadic’ and personal tutor ‘changed without notification’. • Did not teach proper time management. • Students not always aware of all possibilities – extra curricular academic opportunities and pg career/study options available to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several known problems with the personal tutoring system at the moment. This is one of our main focuses for the current year – we will institute new procedures to notify students of changes to their personal tutor and to minimise such changes. We also hope to link the allocation of tutees to personal tutors with the Level 1 core curriculum tutorials. The Faculty is also looking at this issue. • Student Development Workshops will address this issue. • We are acutely aware of this issue. Though students are circulated with this information regularly, they confess to not always reading it properly. Opinion is divided about whether greater use of social media would help’ We are currently investigating the cost of installing a screen on which to display important notices in the School foyer.