

**Periodic Review Report Template**

**Department and Faculty**

**Geography and Environmental Sciences  
Engineering and Environment**

**Date of Review**

**1 and 2 February 2018**

**Review Panel**

(approved by Academic Registry)

Dr Scott Burgess, Academic Development Office, Academic Registry (Chair)  
Dr Jennifer Hill, Associate Professor, UWE (External Panel Member)  
James McConnel, Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences (Non-Faculty Internal Panel Member)  
Dr Noel Perera, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering and Environment (Faculty Internal Panel Member)  
Ryan Bush, Vice President Welfare, Students' Union (SU Sabbatical Panel Member)

*\* Initial panel chair identified unable to attend*

**Method of Review**

This review was conducted using the periodic review procedure defined in Northumbria's Review Framework available from <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/qualitysupport/reviewframework/>

**Notes:**

- Review reports are expected to be short and succinct, typically 3 to 4 sides of A4
- Sections highlighted in blue below, together with the header above, make up the published summary of this review. This will be published on the University's Teaching Quality Information web pages (<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/qualitysupport/PQI/>)

**Section 1**

**Department Context**

- Short summary of scope of review – programmes or programme areas included, total student and staff numbers
- Short statement of the main aims of the department
- Short statement of any necessary contextual information (e.g. physical and organisational location, any recent restructuring etc.)

The Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES), within the Faculty of Engineering and Environment, encompasses a range of interdisciplinary teaching and learning, research and enterprise activity, spanning the social, environmental and physical sciences. This subject group has been in existence since the late 1970s, recently known as the Department of Geography between 2013 and 2017, more recently renamed as the Department of GES in the summer of 2017 to better reflect the breadth of teaching and research across the Geographical and Environmental disciplines.

At undergraduate level, a foundation year as well as programmes in BA and BSc Geography are delivered, focusing on human and physical geography. In 2016, an integrated masters degree, MGeog, was established in both Human and Physical Geography, with the first cohort reaching MGeog Level 7 in the 2019-2020 academic year. At taught postgraduate level, the MSc in Disaster Management and Sustainable Development aligns closely with the departmentally based Disasters and Development Network and attracts high numbers of international applicants. Complementing this are the MSc in Environmental Health and the MSc in Safety, Health and Environmental Management (both established in 2016).

The department aims to deliver high quality programmes at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level, with a student-centred approach. Key foci are the increasing use of TEL, for example in electronic submission, marking and feedback, a growing emphasis on employability skills, research-rich learning and support tailored to individual student needs, supported by the personal tutor scheme and 'open-door' policy to students.

The Department of GES comprises 39 full time staff within Human Geography, Policy and Development (16) and Physical Geography and Environmental Science (23) subject areas. All staff (including those on fixed-term contracts) are engaged in a mixture of teaching, research/enterprise and administration, with a nominal distribution of 40:40:20 between these activities. Laboratory and field teaching is supported by 3 full time technicians, while professional administrative support for teaching is provided at Student Central for students and at Faculty level for staff. Postgraduate research students contribute to teaching through demonstrating in practical classes and field trips and leading small group tutorials at Level 4. Most option modules at Levels 5 and 6 include contributions from external staff, e.g. industry practitioners, normally amounting to 1-2 hours although this external input can be substantial on more vocational modules

In 2016, the Department relocated to a focus around the Ellison Building Hub: a large mixed-activity working area, which perfectly supports the Department's ethos as an integrated academic community of undergraduate students, postgraduates and staff. Adjacent to the Hub are staff offices and the Qualitative Research Suite, a new facility completed in 2016 for staff and students to undertake qualitative research including interviews, focus groups and small group workshops. GES also has laboratory space housing specialised analysis equipment on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors of Ellison Building, which may occasionally be used by dissertation students under supervision. Future developments include the refurbishment of the VRV Suite to house: i) a Geovisualisation Suite and ii) a microscope room for dissertation students and postgraduates. Further on-campus facilities include the central library, IT rooms and Student Central, adjacent to the main library, providing a full range of support services for students.

A collaborative venture partnership with the Hong Kong School for Higher and Professional Education (SHAPE). The Department of GES provides 7 final year modules which are delivered at SHAPE with oversight from Northumbria staff. GES currently does not have any distance learning programmes or part-time provision at UG level.

Section 2	Judgement Criteria	
Focus of judgements	Judgements	Outcome
The setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards	• meets UK and NU expectations,	✓
	• requires improvement to meet UK and NU expectations,	
	• does not meet UK and NU expectations.	
The quality of students' learning opportunities	• commended,	✓
	• meets UK and NU expectations,	
	• requires improvement to meet UK and NU expectations or,	
	• does not meet UK and NU expectations.	
Information about higher education provision	• commended,	
	• meets UK and NU expectations,	✓
	• requires improvement to meet UK and NU expectations or,	
	• does not meet UK and NU expectations.	
The enhancement of students' learning opportunities	• commended,	✓
	• meets UK and NU expectations,	
	• requires improvement to meet UK and NU expectations or,	
	• does not meet UK and NU expectations.	

<b>Section 3</b>	<b>The setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards</b>
------------------	--

**The Panel identified the following strengths:**

- Strong academic collegiality across the department;
- Consolidated programme portfolio to ensure continuing academic and professional relevance and routes into further study;
- Demonstrable commitment to employability and industry-focused academic programme development – evidenced by employers’ comments, accreditation reports and active and effective staff engagement with a range of key initiatives;
- Exemplary engagement with a range of initiatives to include NSS action planning, TEF submission and periodic review process. Evidence of holistic approach to academic quality – co-working across all of the above.

**The Panel made the following recommendations and timescales for further development:**

- To monitor more effectively the assessment planning process through the drafting of a departmental plan for the scheduling of assessment submission dates across programmes, building on earlier work in this area - either through the planned online portal or other mechanisms - to minimise the need for in-semester changes to hand-in dates – in time for Semester One 2018 entry.

**The Panel made the following observations:**

The panel commends Geography’s pro-active approach, characterised by a range of innovative and impressive interventions (e.g. TQEF-funded enhancement presentation, followed by national conference attendance and presentation as well as publication outputs).

Clear alignment of programme specifications (learning outcomes, curriculum content and assessment diversity) to QAA FHEQ levels and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PFNA. This is also confirmed by external examiners’ comments, professional standards are met as shown by PSRB accreditation documentation.

<b>Section 4</b>	<b>The quality of students' learning opportunities</b>
------------------	--

**The Panel identified the following strengths:**

- Commitment to supporting students as evidenced by student feedback, exceptional metrics for progression/retention and NSS scores on teaching and confirmed by the Student Written Submission and loyalty and commitment of the Alumni to engage with the Department;
- Support and nurturing of an authentic community across all programme levels and through an open door policy, fieldtrips and co-creative research, supported by a communal and carefully constructed learning estate with associated facilities (laboratories and a Geography-specific student Hub area);
- Healthy student representative system and excellent practice in engaging the wider student body with the work of the Student Staff Programme Committees (e.g. departmental student newsletter);
- Exceptional uptake of Study Abroad and year-long placements;
- Strong accreditation across the programmes, especially for Environmental Science with its multiple accreditation pathways (IEMA, CIEEM or both) (clear alignment with professional standards);
- Strong links to external practitioners and employers across programmes via guest lectures, work-based learning, live projects and assessments;
- Clear examples of research-informed enhancements to support the student journey, e.g. “Up and Running Week” and ongoing research into student motivation and attendance (TQEF applications, HEA fellowships).

**The Panel made the following recommendations and timescales for further development:**

- No recommendations applicable.

**The Panel made the following observations:**

In order to recognise the excellence of the department, we encourage colleagues to engage further with broader recognition schemes, such as the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and Senior and Principal fellowship of the HEA.

To encourage the department to reflect on potential strategies to strengthen cohesion amongst the student body when high student numbers are going out and coming back from year-long placements. The department is encouraged to continue to reflect on provision of opportunities to support the employability of students who do not participate in year-long placements in the context of GEESE Futures.

The encouragement given to all students to engage in volunteer and other related activities is to be applauded and we would encourage the department to consider ways in which these extra- and co-curricular achievements can be recognised in the HEAR.

**Section 5**

**Information about higher education provision**

**The Panel identified the following strengths:**

- Foundation Year redesign, responding pro-actively to student feedback to offer a tailored programme;
- Ongoing consideration of currency and development of programme portfolio as part of a wider evidence-based approach in line with University strategies;
- Positive retention and progression with a sustained effort to support student attendance;
- Engagement with the Athena Swan agenda, taking pro-active steps to driving cultural changes.

**The Panel made the following recommendations and timescales for further development:**

- No recommendations applicable

**The Panel made the following observations:**

The panel would like to applaud the department's engagement in this area with a number of planned major national initiatives, e.g. Athena Swan. Plans outlined to the panel were detailed, realistic and achievable and should bring positive significant changes to the provision.

**Section 6**

**The enhancement of students' learning opportunities**

**The Panel identified the following strengths:**

- Staff are mindful and embracing of institutional strategies and policies, implementing bottom-up enhancement initiatives embedded in the scholarship of teaching and learning and situated in the discipline;
- Enhancements are intentionally delivered across the entire student journey;
- Evidence-based and scaled responses informing innovative employability approaches, embedded within the curriculum (from accreditations of programmes to the inclusion of guest speakers and live assessments);
- Collegiate, cohesive departmental culture and community of learning;
- Excellent laboratory facilities, supported by the partnership between professional support and technical and academic staff, both within the department and more broadly within the faculty as a whole, in enhancing student learning.

**The Panel made the following recommendations and timescales for further development:**

- No recommendations applicable.

**The Panel made the following observations:**

We invite the department to consider ways in which to formalise contributions from industry, such as visiting fellows.

<b>Section 7</b>	<b>Further Quality Assurance Monitoring</b>	
	<i>This section is copied from the self-evaluation document to acknowledge actions which the Department/Faculty has already identified and is already actioning.</i>	
Affirmations <sup>1</sup>	Please list any affirmations identified and accompanying actions ( <i>add extra rows as needed</i> )	
	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action</b>
	Employability	Action Plan; Employers' forum; GEESE Futures
	Recruitment: Environmental Geography and international students	Consolidation around Environmental Science BSc Promote Environmental Science in potential markets in the far east.
	Assessment Feedback – timing and quality	Marking grids example; feedback focus group
	University central systems e.g. module review, portals, timetabling	Feedback to FAPVC L&T and Registrar via informal meetings, Faculty Education Committee, Monthly DIR L&Ts meetings.
Audit Trails	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student attendance: constraints, myths and motivations (internal quality enhancement initiative, resulting from concerns around attendance and engagement).</li> <li>2. Up and running week (internal quality enhancement initiative, resulting from concerns around student transition to university and basic skills development).</li> </ol>	
Compliance Checks	Faculty Compliance Checks Report submitted	

<sup>1</sup> examples of developments, planned or in train which seek to address issues previously identified

Section 8	Department Response to Report
<p><b>Short summary response by Department on follow up action for inclusion in published report:</b></p> <p><i>No details added.</i></p>	