

## **The Peer Review System in Mathematical Sciences** **(March 2014 Version)**

The Department of Mathematical Sciences maintains a panel of Peer Reviewers, appointed by the Head of Department. New panel members are invited to review a standard lecture jointly, and to discuss the outcomes, with an established member of the review panel. All members are given a copy of this description of the Peer Review System, and copies of the standard Peer Review Form.

At the beginning of each year, the Peer Review Coordinator (a member of *SEC*, the Student Experience Committee) draws up a list of modules to be Peer Reviewed, and assigns them to members of the Peer Review panel. The list is compiled in such a way as to satisfy the following requirements:

- all modules being taught for the first time by a particular lecturer are reviewed;
- all modules being taught by lecturers who are on probation are reviewed;
- all modules for which problems were identified the previous year are reviewed;
- every member of staff has at least one module reviewed every four years; and
- no lecturer should normally be reviewed by the same reviewer more than once in any three year period.

Modules which are laboratory based (such as computer based modules) are reviewed in the same way as lectured modules. In addition, small group tutorials may be peer reviewed at the discretion of *SEC*.

Reviewers contact the lecturers of the modules they have been assigned to review, and inform them that they will be reviewing a lecture during a given period, usually of 7-10 days duration. They do not normally let the lecturer know which particular lecture they will be attending. They also

- request confirmation of the module timetable;
- ask for information about any lecture periods which will not be in the normal format (e.g. tutorials or class tests); and
- ask to be provided with any handouts which the lecturer intends to circulate during the review period.

The reviewer attends a class during the review period, arriving a few minutes before the start and independently of the lecturer. If the class is a standard lecture, the reviewer normally sits towards the back of the room. The reviewer pays careful attention to the session, noting also the reaction of students, but does not intervene or make any comments during the class. He or she makes whatever notes are necessary to fill in the Peer Review Form, including an approximate count of the students present. (For a computer class, it may also be appropriate for the reviewer to walk around the room and ask students how they are getting on, whether they have enough help, etc.)

After the class, if practical, the reviewer spends a few minutes in private with the lecturer, outlining the main points which are likely to be made on the Peer Review Form, commenting on aspects of the class which were particularly successful, and making suggestions about things which could easily be improved. The reviewer may also comment on the class reaction and on discipline. It is common to start such a conversation with a question such as "Was that a normal lecture?", to give the lecturer the chance to point out any unusual features (including the possibility that the reviewer's presence made the lecturer nervous). The main purposes of this meeting are: to help reassure the lecturer; to discuss details while they are still fresh; and to provide additional input where appropriate for the meeting of the panel of reviewers.

The reviewer then completes the Peer Review Form, adding such comments as are appropriate. The form is not returned to the lecturer until after the meeting of the panel of reviewers.

As soon as possible after all the reviews have taken place, the panel of reviewers meets to discuss the outcome of the review. Modules are taken one by one, and reviewers leave the room when a module that they themselves teach is being discussed. The objects of the group discussion are to:

- ensure a uniformity of approach;
- pick up generic problems with classes or lecturers;
- enable the exchange of good practice observed during the reviews; and
- help in the training of new reviewers.

Following this discussion, final versions of the Peer Review Forms are created for return to the lecturers reviewed. It is normal for the reviewer to give the form to the lecturer in person, allowing a few minutes' additional discussion if necessary. The lecturer will normally already know the essence of the report, since it will have been discussed immediately after the class which was reviewed.

Any particular problems with individual modules are normally followed up with a second review, or by discussion with the Head of Department or with SEC. The Peer Review Forms are included in Module Reports, which are scrutinised as a matter of course by SEC after the end of the semester. The Staff-Student Committee sees a subset of the module reports, but does not see the Peer Review Forms.