1. Method(s) of Assessment

A uniform, School-wide questionnaire was employed that was designed with student input in 2015-6.

2. Outcomes of the Process

Overall, the scores indicate, again, a high level of student satisfaction with UG modules in Art History, ISC, and Philosophy. The School’s average was a 4.3 average for the global average and the overall excellence of the modules – comparable to previous years. It is pleasing to see above-4 scores in all questions at the aggregate level for the School.

There were several very highly rated modules in all three sub-units – Art History, ISC, and Philosophy: AR113 taught by Caspar Pearson (4.7 for the global index and 4.8 for teaching); AR115 taught by Diana Presciutti (4.7 for the global index and 4.9 for teaching); AR120 taught by Matt Lodder (4.8 for teaching); AR219 taught by Jo Harwood (4.8 for teaching and overall excellence of the module); AR216 taught by Ana Bilbao (4.8 for overall excellence of the module); AR223 taught by Diana Presciutti (4.8 for teaching); AR312 taught by Ana Bilbao (a perfect 5 for teaching and 4.8 for overall excellence of the module); AR342 taught by Caspar Pearson (with perfect 5s for the global index and overall excellence of the module); AR343 taught by Michael Tymkiw (with perfect 5s for the global index and overall excellence of the module); AR344 taught by Diana Presciutti (with a perfect 5 for the overall excellence of the module and 4.8 for the global index); AR345 taught by Caspar Pearson (a perfect 5 for overall excellence of the module); AR346 (perfect 5s for teaching and overall excellence of the module, and a 4.9 for the global index); CS220 taught by Matt Burch (4.8 for teaching); CS301 taught by Cathy Duxbury (perfect 5s for teaching and overall excellence of the module); CS831 taught by Jane Hindley (4.8 for the global index and teaching); PY114 taught by Lorna Finlayson (4.7 for overall excellence of the module as well as 4.8 on assessment), PY428 taught buy Jörg Schaub (4.7 for the global index); PY432 taught by Steve Gormley (4.7 for teaching); and PY450 taught by Fabian Freyenhagen (4.7 for teaching).

GTAs teaching on modules often secured very high scores – for example, Darshan Cowles for PY407 (4.9), Lauren Windsor for AR113 (4.9); Ishpur Bhandal for CS220 (4.9); Min Kim for Py429 (5).

The six new summer term modules in Philosophy were altogether well-received (with above School-average scores for many of them), albeit three were negatively affected by teething problems (see below). Generally, several Philosophy second- and final-year modules were negatively affected by teething problems related to the new methods of teaching (additional contact time) and assessment (greater variety, with no formal sit-down exams). Addressing these teething problems happened either already in-year or will be in place for 2017-8.

A number of modules scored below the threshold of 4 that triggers particular scrutiny in our School:

a) AR118 with 3.9 for the overall excellence of the module (but 4 or above scores for all the other questions). This is the second year in a row that this module received a sub-4 score, albeit there is an improvement from 3.2 and employability modules tend to do less well with students. It will not run in 2017-8, and should it be offered again, will be rethought further.

b) AR217 with a 3.3 on the global index and sub-4 scores on all questions. This module was taught by a part-time teacher not familiar with our students and their expectations, who decided to reverse engineer the module as taught successfully by a permanent member of staff in the previous year. This was unsuccessful, and the contracted teacher should have instead adopted teaching material and a teaching approach more in line with this teacher’s expertise and style. The module will be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8.

c) AR220 with 3.8 on the global average and sub-4 scores on several questions. This module was affected by a late change in teaching staff. Partly as a result, the teacher drafted in on short notice had less time to prepare it and, having taught only on text-based modules before, focused too heavily on
direct teaching of texts and too little on related artworks (as raised in the free text comments). This module will be revised accordingly and taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8.

d) CS102 with 3.5 on the global average and sub-4 scores on almost all questions. This module is one of the jointly taught modules which are rich in contents but facing the difficulty of maintaining overall coherence. This year it was held together by a new overall teacher, less experienced than the ones in the past. Also, large number of members of staff who usually contribute to the module were on leave or could not spare the time to lecture. This meant that the lecture programme had to be moved around and was ultimately less coherent than in the previous year. The programme will be reworked again to secure more coherence.

e) CS261 with 3.9 for the global average and sub-4 scores on several questions. This module is also one of the jointly taught modules which are rich in contents but facing the difficulty of maintaining overall coherence. A number of changes will be made for 2017-8 which should help in giving students a clearer sense of the overarching themes and how the different lectures fit together. Notably, there will be new introductory lectures in the first weeks of both Autumn and Spring Terms. Also, the module supervisor will work more closely with the GTAs on the module to secure cohesion and consistency. Even more so than with other modules, attendance at the seminars is crucial as they provide the glue that binds the module together.

f) PY408 with 3.6 for the overall excellence of the module (but 4 or above scores for most of the other questions). Here the contents of the module will be rethought. Currently, there is not enough of a narrative arc to hold together the set of metaethical topics discussed in it. More precise guidance on student presentations and a reduction of expected readings might also be advisable. The module will be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8.

g) PY429 with 3.8 for the overall excellence of the module (but 4 or above scores for most of the other questions). Here expectations about when PowerPoint slides will be posted on Moodle seems to have had a negative effect on the score – what students can expect will be set out more clearly next year and the turnaround time reduced. Some philosophy students found the economic content demanding, but it is integral to the topic at hand. This will be addressed by introducing more topical examples next year.

h) PY430 with 3.4 for the overall excellence of the module (but 4 or above scores for other questions). Here too teething problems with the new assessment seems to have negatively affected scores. Assessment will be reduced in 2017-8, and the module will be taught by a different member of staff.

i) PY431 with 3.8 for the global average and sub-4 scores on several questions. The module was probably pitched too high for second-year students, expecting more independent learning than may be appropriate for this stage. More guidance on the new assessment forms would have been helpful at an earlier stage. We also lacked this year a specialist in Ancient Philosophy, and someone with a heavy overall teaching load had to cover this module. It will be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8, with a specialist being recruited over the summer.

j) PY434 with 3.7 for the global average and sub-4 scores on several questions. This was one of the new summer term modules, and the lower score seems to be mainly related to teething problems and a late change in teaching staff due to an unexpected illness. Students found the 3h slots difficult to cope with, despite conspicuous breaks and long discussion periods within them. They also were getting used to the marking criteria on presentations and reading summaries, and more guidance on these assignments will be advisable. It will be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8.

k) PY436 with 3.7 for overall excellence of the module (but 4 or above scores for most of the other questions). This is a second summer term module with teething problems. The issue here seems to have been particularly the compressed nature of the assessment. The number of assessment will be reduced in 2017-8. It will also be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8.

l) PY437 with 3.8 for the global average and sub-4 scores on several questions. As this module scored highly in previous years and there were no significant changes to the highly rated contents and teacher, the drop in score seems to have been related to the additional teaching hour added to it (and the other second- and final-year UG modules). This hour was in this module used for group presentations, but due to the high overall enrolment on it, these were more rushed and the groups rather bigger than on other modules where such presentations worked successfully (like PY428). This module will be taught by a different member of staff in 2017-8, and s/he will reconsider whether to use group presentation, given the high enrolment numbers, or to put the third contact hour to a different use.

m) PY951 with 3.9 for the global average and sub-4 scores on four specific questions. Less than half returned the forms, so there is a danger here of an unrepresentative sample. Still, requests for more structure and contemporary applications will be acted upon in 2017-8. The module will be taught by a different member of staff.
The action noted in the previous year was, for the most part, successfully implemented. All but one module that in 2015-6 scored below the threshold of 4 that triggers particular scrutiny in our School have improved to a level of 4 or above – in some cases, significantly (for example, AR113 jumped from 3.5 to 4.7). The one module which did not improve above 4 (AR118) will not run in 2017-8.

3. Action

Action 1: to review of modules noted above as having a sub-4 scores for the global average (or overall excellence, if global averages were unavailable) and to implement revisions for 2017-8.

4. General Comments

N/A.

Head of School’s Signature: (Prof Fabian Freyenhagen)
Date: 03/07/2017