It is rather to be regretted that the data provided to us from the 2011/12 NSS and SSS surveys treats the School of Philosophy and Art History as a single cohort. The School runs an array of quite diverse courses historically associated with discrete units of the University: Philosophy, Art History and CIISH. The different courses present quite different issues in terms of Student Satisfaction, and in future it would certainly be preferable to have disaggregated data.

With that proviso, however, the following observations are in order.

NSS

The degree schemes administered by SPAH continue to turn in an impressive performance on the NSS, with the “bottom line” question regarding “Overall Satisfaction” coming in at 91% for the School. This is slightly lower than the historical highs associated with the discrete reporting units of Philosophy and Art History respectively, which both regularly turned in 100% student satisfaction ratings on this question. The fall off is very likely to be attributed to the fact that this was the first year of operation for the new merged School, with some teething problems, some faculty resignations, and a significant degree of change to the operation. However we must also acknowledge that students are now embedded in a significantly larger unit than under the pre-merger arrangement. There may be important lessons to be learned here about the risks associated with the merging of small academic units. While there are undeniably gains in efficiency, these may come at a risk to student satisfaction. But for now it is too soon to tell. We should plot these results over a three-to-five year period, and certainly should aim to reproduce the historic highs associated with the pre-Merger units.

Among the high points in the NSS data, we take particular note of the exceptionally strong performance on some of the core academic questions. 96% of respondents reported that they found the course(s) intellectually stimulating; 96% praised the staff as enthusiastic about the material they are teaching; 95% reported that they received detailed feedback on their work. These are among the very highest scores on these questions of any unit in the University, and in the case of the “detailed feedback” question, SPAH has the highest rating among all Essex units, and stand 24 percentage points above the University mean. This reflects an enormous amount of hard work by staff in providing feedback; it is crucial that we note that this hard work is recognised and appreciated by our students.

Our review of the NSS data suggests the following areas as points where further work needs to be undertaken:

“Feedback from Students”: While we are good at providing feedback to students, we need to look for better ways to ensure that we have good avenues whereby students can give feedback to us on our performance. We scored on 44% on Question B6 3. We are introducing a new annual open meeting to try to help with this. These will be meetings in which the HoD and DA, together with selected members of staff, are available to meet with students
(we propose to meet with the different cohorts separately) in order to solicit their input. In advance of the 2012-13 NSS survey, we distributed an email in which we also reported on the changes that had been made in response to student input over the most recent academic year.

“Access to Specialised Equipment”. We scored poorly on this question, with only 72% responding affirmatively. It is possible that in the case of Philosophy students, negative responses to this question reflects a perceived lack of need for specialised equipment. The NSS does not really provide a way to distinguish different kinds of response on this query. Nonetheless, we propose that the planned move of SPAH into the vacated Registry Space should incorporate some planning around specialist equipment, with student input.

“Careers”: Our scores around the employability and career-preparation questions leave room for improvement, with an aggregate score of only 66% on Question B1. We have already submitted a detailed report regarding our Employability plans, and have designated our “Careers & Employability Officer” as a major departmental post from 2013 forward. We have already begun to implement a number of the action points in this plan, for instance in connection with the new Employability Module, and with a series of events in which alumni and other “veterans” of philosophy and art history give informal talks about their career paths. We believe that one strategy here must be to generate student involvement in these programmes without overusing the rhetoric of “employability.”

**SSS**

Overall, SPAH students continue to report on a high level of satisfaction. The data shows a 92% affirmative response to question 30: “Overall I am satisfied with the quality of my degree.” 93% report that they find the course intellectually stimulating; 90% found the course to be well-organised. This is very much in keeping with the results from the NSS survey, which suggests strong performance on core academic matters. Some of the lower scores are perhaps to be expected: Only 61% reported that they had been given good advice about opportunities for further study and 56% reported they had good advice for making career choices; this is no doubt to be explained by the fact that we tend to focus such advice in mentoring our third year students, whereas it is primarily first and second year students who respond to the SSS. Rather more alarming is the fact that only 58% of student reported that the marking criteria used are clear. We are responding to this by expanding our experiment in using a comments proforma that includes a tick-box grid and the marking criteria is now printed on the essay cover sheets, as well as in the student handbook. Reponses to the “Careers” question continues to show room for improvement; see my comments above. We note, however, that 80% of students in the SSS report that their career prospects are being improved by their course. This suggests that our recent intensive efforts in this area are beginning to pay off. Only 37% of student thought that it was clear that feedback in these surveys was effective in changing practice. See my comments above on our strategy with this issue.

Prof. Wayne Martin  
Head of School  
Philosophy and Art History  
10.5.2013
### Appendix D Action plan template

**SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND ART HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSS section</th>
<th>Issue to address</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>By who</th>
<th>By when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Improve 61% rating on &quot;Feedback from Students&quot; (Including 44% on Q B6.3)</td>
<td>Introduce annual &quot;Open Meeting&quot; for UG's</td>
<td>HoS</td>
<td>Initial meetings to be held Spring, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consider revision to terms of reference for Student Staff Liaison Committee</td>
<td>SPAH Teaching and Learning Committee, School Staff Meeting</td>
<td>SPAH TLC to consider in Spring Term, 2013; SPAH Staff Meeting agenda item Summer 2013.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distribute a &quot;You asked ... We said&quot; email message, recappling actions taken in past year</td>
<td>HoS, with support from Deputy School Administrator</td>
<td>In time for 2013 student survey season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Access to specialised equipment. Aim is to increase the current response of 72% on Q 1B.</td>
<td>Incorporate review of learning resources into planning for SPAH occupation of 6th floor</td>
<td>SPAH Senior Management Team</td>
<td>Timing will depend on timing of the planned move into the current Registry Space. Preliminary Plan in Space Planning Team in 2013-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| B1 | Careers | Incorporate Employability Module as an Option in all SPAH courses | HoS and School Administrator, subject to approval by SPAH Teaching and Learning Committee | As soon as the Employability Module comes on line. Action for Faculty Board in Autumn 2013? |
| B1 | Careers | Greater Exposure to Employed Alumni | SPAH Employability Officer | Ongoing events |

Prepared by: Wayne Martin  
8 Jan., 2013