

DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW - HEBREW & JEWISH STUDIES DEPT

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 The Executive Committee of the Academic Council of the University of London asked the College to address certain matters concerning the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. These were:
- (a) To undertake a review of the procedures in the Department for registering students and monitoring their progress and
 - (b) To report back (to the Executive Committee) on the measures that will be implemented to ensure a satisfactory standard of administration in future.
- 1.2 In accordance with the request of the Executive Committee the Provost set up a review panel under the Chairmanship of Professor D. R. Harris, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Arts. Other members of the panel were Professor W. Davies (Dean, Faculty of Arts), Mr R. Allan (Deputy Tutor, Faculty of Arts) and Miss P. J. Ensor (Registrar's Division).

2. METHOD OF WORKING

- 2.1 The panel held its first formal meeting on Tuesday 26 May during which it interviewed individually three undergraduate students and four members of the academic staff of the Department viz:

Students

First year	Ms Liv FENNER
Second year	Mr Emmanouil PAPOUTSAKIS
Fourth & Final year*	Ms Rosemary BENNETT

Academic Staff

Head of Department	Professor M. Geller
Postgraduate and Non-Degree Tutor:	Dr J. Klier
Departmental Tutor:	Dr A. Rapoport-Albert
Examination Liaison Officer and Chairman of Sub-Board of Examiners:	Dr M. Weitzman

*Students studying for undergraduate degrees in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies spend their third year abroad at the University of Jerusalem.

3. THE SHAPE OF THE REVIEW

3.1 The Review was conducted under four broad headings:

- (a) Course design, structure, and content
- (b) Monitoring students' progress
- (c) Visiting Teachers
- (d) Examination procedures and Visiting Examiners.

3.2 Course design, structure, and content

The course-unit degrees offered in the Department are:-

- Hebrew (Classical, Medieval and Modern, with Aramaic)
- Jewish History (with Hebrew)
- Ancient Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew

3.3 In the first year of each degree students are required to take six courses totalling 4 units. In each of the second and third years they must take a language course but they are free to choose their other courses from a wide range of whole and half units. This reflects the academic philosophy of the staff of the Department who believe it is advantageous to permit students to have a considerable amount of choice.

3.4 In practice the staff of the Department have, in the past, structured degree programmes, and with a small intake they have been able to monitor closely the course choices made by individual students; a recent large increase in student numbers means that this is no longer possible.

3.5 All new students receive copies of a departmental course booklet which is updated every year; it indicates the mandatory courses that students take in their first year and lists all other courses, of which only 30-40% are taught annually. In 1992 there are 86 approved course units in the Department of which 31 are being examined.

3.6 Second and final year students do not know, in advance of the year, which courses will be available to them because the published list of courses in any year is not finalised until the beginning of each session.

3.7 Monitoring students' progress

General student progress is the responsibility of the Departmental Tutor but no central records (i.e. reports and coursework marks) are kept of individual student's progress. There are attendance sheets to inform staff of poor attendance; discussions about problems faced by students are informal. Consequently there is no regular feedback to students on their overall progress.

3.8 Students do not have personal tutors but they all have recourse to the Departmental Tutor. There are no fixed tutorials and the only opportunity for group discussion is at open lectures where students are encouraged to participate. Private discussion often takes place when staff return marked essays to students.

3.9 The return of essays varies from a few days to several weeks. There is no agreement that essays should be returned to students within a certain time, and students have complained about the lateness of the return of essays.

3.10 Although most staff are available for most of term time there are no set 'office hours' indicating when staff will definitely be available to students.

3.11 Course evaluation questionnaires are distributed to students with course lists rather than in class and many are not returned.

3.12 A Staff/Student Committee (SSC) meets at irregular intervals (the Panel received only one set of minutes, for 13/11/91) and some of the staff and students feel that it is an ineffective vehicle for student opinion.

3.13 There is no procedure in the Department for regular staff meetings and most discussions take place informally. It is the view of the Head of Department that formal staff meetings should be kept to a minimum (the Review Panel received five sets of staff-meeting minutes for the period January 1990-March 1992).

3.14 Visiting Teachers

Each year up to two Visiting Teachers come from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to teach at UCL for either one or two terms. Some are world specialists in their field and make a distinguished contribution to the work of the Department. Some visitors are invited to teach in areas that the core staff cannot cover.

3.15 The unusual practice of inviting Visiting Teachers to submit proposals for course(s) which they are to teach often results in course unit proposals not being submitted in time for approval in accordance with University Regulations; nor can Visiting Teachers participate in College examining procedures and Departmental Meetings.

3.16 There are problems in dealing with these academic visitors at long range and it can take up to 3 years in some cases to finalise their teaching arrangements. In addition they do not have any responsibilities until the start of term, which is often when they arrive at College.

3.17 Examination Procedures and Visiting Examiners

No member of staff interviewed, including the Chairman of the Sub-Board, had seen copies of the Visiting Examiners' Reports and all were unaware that these reports are sent from the University to the College for onward transmission to the Sub-Board of Examiners for comment. (It should be noted that no Visiting Examiners' Report for 1991 has been received from the University.)

3.18 The Department does not act in accordance with the Instructions to Examiners for the Conduct of Examinations in that essays submitted as assessed coursework by first year students, for 2 courses without written papers, are marked by postgraduate students.

4.0 SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department is historically a language department but in 1967 it was extended to include a much wider range of courses with an emphasis on Jewish History. The Department has not yet adjusted fully to this additional responsibility.

4.1 The Department has gone through a period of expansion, from a small number of students in the early sixties to an expected undergraduate total of over 120 in 1994. It is therefore no longer possible to use informal methods when dealing with problems.

4.2 The Department is a busy one, involved not only in teaching and research but also organising conferences, exhibitions and fund-raising. It is important that administrative procedures are established if it is to run efficiently in the future.

4.3 There is no evidence that the students were discontented with the organization of the Department, and all commented positively on the teaching.

4.4 However there is very little provision for the regular monitoring of students' progress.

4.5 The difficulties experienced in the use of Visiting Teachers must be resolved if the Department is to *continue to offer* the wide range of choice in the courses available.

4.6 The Head of Department is personally resistant to anything that he sees as bureaucratic time-wasting. He admits that he is not good at delegating and that there is a level of inefficiency in the Department. In terms of departmental efficiency and procedures, he requests advice from the Review Panel.

5.0 MATTERS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION BY THE DEPARTMENT

The Department should:-

- 5.1 Provide for the monitoring of students' progress; a departmental record (i.e. reports and coursework marks) should be regularly maintained for each student.
- 5.2 Ensure that the role of the Visiting Teachers is clearly stated and that, if they are examiners, they participate in all aspects of the examining procedures. They must be appointed to the Sub-Board of Examiners.
- 5.3 Hold Staff/Student Committee Meetings at least twice a year and keep formal minutes of them (in accordance with the UCL Academic Manual).
- 5.4 Hold Departmental Staff Meetings at least twice a year and keep minutes of them systematically (in accordance with the UCL Academic Manual).
- 5.5 Give students course lists, indicating the course units available in any one session, no later than the middle of the third term in the session preceding the session when the course units will be taught.
- 5.6 Ensure that (a) all examined work, whether written paper, report, or essay is marked by at least two examiners; (b) if postgraduate students participate as one of the examiners they should be formally nominated as Assistant Examiners and the other examiner(s) must be appointed member(s) of the Sub-Board.
- 5.7 Revise annually the Departmental Booklet so that students are fully aware of the structures of the degrees offered by the Department.

6.0 MATTERS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION BY THE COLLEGE

The Faculty Officers should require the Department to:-

- 6.1 Send a copy of the departmental course list to the Dean by the middle of the third term of the session preceding that in which the courses are to be taught.
- 6.2 Inform the Chair of the Faculty Teaching Committee, at the beginning of each session, of the dates of each Staff/Student Committee Meeting and Departmental Meeting to be held during that session.
- 6.3 Send a summary of the course-evaluation questionnaires to the Faculty Teaching Committee in the third term.

6.4 Invite the Faculty Tutor and/or a member of the Registrar's Division to attend all Sub-Board Examiners' Meetings, which should be minuted.

7.0 MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE DEPARTMENT

The Department is strongly advised to consider:

7.1 Providing a greater degree of structure to its undergraduate programmes. The establishment of blocks of courses, from which students could select their courses, would still maintain flexibility in the Department.

7.2 Organising regular tutorials in all years (except the year abroad) in which students could meet to discuss their work with members of staff, individually or in small groups.

7.3 Establishing a system of staff office hours for informal student consultation.

7.4 Handing out, and collecting in course evaluation questionnaires at the penultimate meeting of a course.

7.5 Appointing a full-time secretary to deal with the necessary student administration.

7.6 Appointing a Departmental Administrator to assist with conferences, exhibitions and fund-raising if the increase in student numbers is maintained and the Department is still heavily involved in aspects other than teaching and research.

7.7 Proposing 'shell' course units with general titles covering various combinations of course-unit values and methods of course assessment, into which courses offered by Visiting Teachers can be fitted.

16 June 1992

Prof D. R. Harris
Vice-Dean and Chairman of the Review Panel