University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 29 May 2009

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Responses to the Recommendations Arising form the Review of Classics held on 25 February 2008

Mrs Lesley Fielding, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The Review Panel commends the Department on its awareness of its strengths and weaknesses as evidenced in its Self Evaluation Report. Although there are a number of recommendations, the Panel has no concerns regarding the quality of the Department and was most impressed with the level of commitment displayed by staff.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. It is important to note that many of these recommendations refer to issues identified by the Department for action, either in the Self Evaluation Report or through discussion at the Review.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs to which they refer in the text of the report. They are grouped by the areas for improvement/enhancement and are ranked in order of priority.

Learning and Teaching Resources

Recommendation 1:

The Review Panel acknowledges the seriousness of Department's issues with its existing accommodation and **recommends** that priority be given to the relocation of the Student Counselling Service on completion of the Hub building to make the basement at 65 Oakfield Avenue available to the Department of Classics for its sole use as soon as possible. The Department should provide a clear plan of how they would use this additional space.*[paragraph 4.8.1 – 4.8.4]*

For the attention of: **The Director of Estates and Buildings**
The Head of Department

Response – Director of Estates and Buildings

Assistant Director of Estates (Project Services) happy to receive the Department proposal for future discussion with the Dean.

Response: Head of Department

It appears that the space issue will be shortly resolved: the Dean of the Faculty has announced that the upper floor of the adjacent building will be made available.

Recommendation 2:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty consider providing additional funding to the Department's GTA budget to enable some additional development of GTAs teaching skills through stronger engagement with the peer observation of teaching initiative and by offering them the opportunity to provide lectures. *[paragraph 4.8.13].*

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

Response:

The Panel will be aware that the issue of GTA pay, and therefore their contribution to undergraduate teaching provision, is a matter of ongoing discussion centrally via HR and other agencies. We recognise that the contribution of GTAs to student retention and confidence is vital, and are attempting to budget for a feasible level of employment for them. Faculty and the Department will undertake an appropriate level of training, as before. The provision of opportunities for GTAs to gain lecturing experience is, within the constraints of agreed remuneration and budget levels, for the Head of Department to support.

Recommendation 3:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty supports the Department by ensuring the prompt replacement of retiring staff by appointees who would be research active. [paragraph 4.8.7]

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

Response:

The replacement post currently in hand has been advertised to recruit a research-active candidate, in line with Faculty policy; we shall be interviewing for that post shortly.

Recommendation 4:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Clerk of Senate review the provision of additional invigilators for students requiring special examination arrangements with a view to removing this responsibility from Departments. *[paragraph 4.8.6]*

For the attention of: **The Clerk of Senate**

Response - Professor Andrew Nash, former Clerk of Senate:

During my time as Clerk of Senate I was aware of the requirement for increased numbers of invigilators due to the growing number of students permitted to sit examinations away from the main examination room, and the pressure that this placed, especially on smaller departments, to meet the demand. I discussed with various parties the need for an overall change in the provision of invigilators and in May 2008 with the Deans, it was agreed that for ease of administration, and probably cost, the preferred route for change would be to train and recruit Graduate Teaching Assistants to act as invigilators. They could operate at departmental, faculty or institutional level although the ideal would be to work towards centralising and managing the operation through Registry.

Later in the spring of 2008, the Vice Principal for Learning & Teaching and Internationalisation undertook to investigate the possibilities for change and I understand that the Acting Director of Registry has recently written a report for discussion by the Education Policy & Strategy Committee. I trust that this will provide the basis for change and that it will embrace the requirement for invigilation of students in separate rooms as well as that in the main examination rooms.

During the summer and autumn of 2008 I met with the Senior Disability Adviser and a Specialist from the IT Service to review the existing provision of a dedicated examination computer cluster in the University Library. Departments can choose to direct students permitted to use computers in examinations, but not needing a separate room, to this facility, or may prefer to continue to make their own in-house arrangements. With regard to the cluster, while, for the time being, a member of the department concerned should supervise their student(s) at the beginning and end of the examination, it is likely that those present will be able to agree amongst themselves about sharing the responsibility for invigilation, as only one invigilator is required for the number of students involved. Use of the Library facility will go some way to relieve the problems for departments in providing adequate numbers of invigilators.

Recommendation 5:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department arrange for the appropriate staff member(s) to receive training to enable them to digitise those items from the Departmental slide collection that are essential for future teaching. *[paragraph 4.8.7]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

The issue of slide digitization continues to be discussed. There are some difficult questions about the copyright of some slides. There are also serious issues about staff workload and the lack of space in current arrangements for extra staff time to be devoted to what is actually a very marginal part of most teaching. However, the digitization of slides is ongoing. There are no current plans for further staff training, but we are sure that teaching has not been adversely affected as a result.

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department implement, at the earliest opportunity the Faculty of Arts guidelines on workload models prior to the next point of allocation of duties. [paragraph 4.8.8]

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

A faculty workload spreadsheet has now been developed, and will be used to audit the current sessions teaching. Teaching for next session (2009-10) is being planned using the spreadsheet.

Recommendation 7:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department encourage students to submit requests to the Library in order that usage figures accurately reflect difficulties in obtaining particular books and explore with the Library the possibility of purchasing further copies of recommended texts to alleviate the situation*. [paragraph 4.8.5]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

Students were encouraged at initial meeting (for Honours students), and via their student representatives, to submit such requests. This message will be repeated in future sessions.

Recommendation 8:

Given the urgent need to release more time for study leave and the small size of the academic staff, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Department review teaching profiles to allow larger group teaching and reduce the amount of time spent on small group teaching. *[paragraph 4.8.10]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

We have now moved to a situation where there is an expectation that one member of staff will be on leave per semester. This will allow for much more frequent study leave than has been possible in the past. The rationalization of teaching loads remains a high priority: the faculty workload spreadsheet will provide a firm basis. The obvious target for the reduction of small group teaching is in small language classes. Students were extremely resistant in discussions that suggested even a reduction at level 2 from 4 to 3 hours per week. The necessary revolution required in the curriculum overall to ensure smaller teaching loads while fostering greater student engagement cannot be a swift one. Faculty expectations, as well as entrenched pedagogical habits, play a role here, over and above the design of a curriculum in one single department. Replacing small group with large group teaching is not viable in language classes (which only have small numbers after level 1). Honours Classics classes are already large, and few economies are possible there without detriment to the student experience. The introduction of an Honours core will be one way of rationalizing the curriculum and saving some load. Some small economies in pre-honours lecturing have been made. In order to sustain sufficient student contact with staff while simultaneously reducing teaching load will require a significant revision of the curriculum. Discussions are ongoing, but changes in staffing also need to be considered. We are currently in the middle of an appointment process. Once the staffing situation for next session is clear, the department will be taking a serious look at its coverage of the core parts of the discipline, and looking to modify the curriculum to ensure a more streamlined provision.

Recommendation 9:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure adequate information is provided to junior staff regarding promotions. *[paragraph 4.8.15]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**
The Director of Human Resources

Response: Head of Department

The regularization of P & DR, and its monitoring by faculty, as well as mailings from HR, will ensure that promotion is more visible.

Response: Director of Human Resources

Awaited

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Learning and Teaching Centre should consider providing follow-up sessions for tutors in tutorial practice once they have gained adequate experience. *[paragraph 4.8.12]*

For the attention of: **The Head of the Learning and Teaching Centre**

Response: Head of Learning and Teaching Centre

The Learning and Teaching Centre has considered this recommendation and reached the following conclusions:

- The Learning and Teaching Centre is aware that the GTA Statutory Training Course provides initial training for tutors and demonstrators, often before they have undertaken any teaching tasks. It further recognises the concerns of GTAs who would appreciate additional support for their teaching role, once they have undertaken some teaching.

The Learning and Teaching Centre has determined the following strategies for dealing with this recommendation:

- The GTA Development Forum

  (http://services.moodle.gla.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=184) is a Moodle site which has been developed to provide resources for GTAs in their teaching role. This site is introduced to GTAs in the Statutory Training session and the web address provided in supporting documentation. Information about and a link to the site is provided on the LTC website at: http://www.gla.ac.uk/learn/taughtcourses/graduateteachingassistantstutorsanddemonstratorsstatutorytraining/

- The Learning and Teaching Centre's website provides a range of useful reference material which could be helpful to GTAs. The Learning and Teaching Centre would encourage the Department to promote these resources to its GTAs. Full details of the resources available are provided at http://www.gla.ac.uk/learn/goodpracticeresources/

- The Learning and Teaching Centre would value the opportunity to liaise with the department, to provide a follow-up session for tutors in tutorial practice, and the department is recommended to contact Dr Mary McCulloch (m.mcculloch@admin.gla.ac.uk) about this in the first instance. The Learning and Teaching Centre feels that it would be of more benefit to provide targeted additional training support in collaboration with the department, rather than offer more generalised support, as this might not address the issues about which the GTAs feel most concerned.

- The Learning and Teaching Centre is developing a Moodle resource to support Reflection on Teaching, which it is expected will provide a means by which higher education teachers can reflect upon the learning and teaching aspects of their academic practice. The resource will also provide directions for those who wish to seek accreditation of their teaching through the Higher Education Academy. This resource is currently in development and will be piloted with a small number of groups over summer 2009, for implementation in the academic year 2009-2010.

Honours Core Module

Recommendation 11:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department review their decision not to offer a core course and continue to explore the introduction of the travel course as a future Honours core course with a view to providing opportunities for the Honours cohort to meet as a single class as well as maximising potential benefits of reducing staff workloads. *[paragraph 4.4.2]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

Discussions with students over the core have taken place. A pilot Honours course on Classical Travel was offered this year, from which a more extensive core course, including the existing travel requirement (currently not assessed), could be developed. There is a certain lack of enthusiasm from some staff, and some students, esp. Joint Honours students, who fear that any core will detract from the choice they might have within their curriculum. Again, the wider issue of curriculum design is important here. However, as the curriculum is considered (again in the light of staffing changes), the possibility of the core will continue to be discussed. As the panel members will be aware, it is a personal enthusiasm of mine. But it will require significant changes to the shape of the curriculum before it can be introduced.

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 12:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department should ensure that unseen examinations should be an essential element of assessment. *[paragraph 4.3.1.]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

This is already standard practice within the department. There are very few courses that do not include this element, and for any individual student, it will always be an important part of their experience of the assessment process.

Recommendation 13:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department review the Departmental handbooks to ensure inclusion of the aims and ILOs of courses and highlighting transferrable skills. The Department should consider using the essay writing guidance in the Student Handbook as a template for this exercise. *[paragraph 4.3.5]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

ILOs are included in the Honours Handbook.

Recommendation 14:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department undertake to clarify the aims and objectives of the on-line Moodle assessment and ensures that they are communicated effectively to students. *[paragraph 4.3.3]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

In light of the DPTLA comments, care was taken this year to augment the information on aims and outcomes for the course which involves online assessment which is running this year. The introductory handout was revised and care taken in the opening face-to-face seminar to address the online component. Similar steps will be taken with the other course which involves online assessment when it next runs.

We are pleased to say that student engagement online is markedly improved this year in comparison to previous years and much more consistent over the course of the the term.

Indeed the students are even using the online community for this course in order to conduct peer-support for other (offline) courses run by the department.

Absence Monitoring Process

Recommendation 15a:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department consider introducing tutorials in either Week 2 or Week 3 of Year 1, such that any students not appearing can immediately be contacted to ensure that there are no problems and the student intends to continue. *[paragraph 4.6.3]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

With the change in the shape of the academic year, tutorials do now begin in week 3 at level 1.

Recommendation 15b:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department closely observe student performance during Year 1 examinations and offer suitable support to maximise student success in re-sits and increased retention from Year 1 to Year 2. *[paragraph 4.6.3]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

There are some signs in the statistics that this policy is already bearing fruit. The failure rates at level 1 seem to be falling. In the current assessment round, we will be monitoring this again. The Faculty's Annual Monitoring Reports ensure that this data is examined each session.

Postgraduate Students

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department review the usefulness of examinations for postgraduate students and explore the viability of replacing this with continuous assessment. *[paragraph 4.3.2]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

We have not taken any action on this front as yet. However, once the urgent issues in the undergraduate curriculum have been addressed, the Postgraduate curriculum will be examined. It should be remembered that we have very small PGT numbers. The issue of assessment patterns will be considered alongside curriculum design, with the overall aim of improving recruitment.

Recommendation 17:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department publicise the new postgraduate study space in the Gilbert Scott Building when it becomes fully available to ensure that its postgraduate students are aware of the facility and their entitlement to use it. *[paragraph 4.6.4]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

This recommendation has been followed: students are made aware of the facility at introductory meetings, and reference is made to the space on the relevant website.

Staff-Student Liaison Committees

Recommendation 18:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department introduce separate mechanisms to seek feedback from the postgraduate research and postgraduate taught students, through or independent of the undergraduate Staff-Student Liaison Committee, such that any concerns can be identified and dealt with an early stage. *[paragraph 6.1]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Response:

The M.Litt students are required to send a representative to the SSLC (as laid out in the M.Litt handbook). In practice, it has been difficult to recruit such a representative (given the small numbers of students, and their often complex work patterns; many are self-funding and/or part time). However, the invitation to be represented will continue to be stressed. Given the small numbers of students involved, and their close and regular contact with staff, the department, and the students themselves, evidently do not feel that formal representation is crucial to ensure that views are heard. Nevertheless, we will continue to encourage post-graduates to participate in the formal process.

Recommendation 19:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Student Representative Council ensure that student representatives be given brief instructions on writing minutes, particularly with regard to ensuring a record is kept of actions being completed. [paragraph 6.1.1]

For the attention of: **The Vice-President (Learning and Development) of the SRC**

Response:

While the joint University of Glasgow / SRC Code of Practice on Student Representation does encourage departments to give student representatives the option of chairing the committee, it does not suggest that students should take on an administrative role: the rationale behind this omission is that minute taking is (as the department correctly identify) a highly specialised skill which cannot adequately be covered in training, and that holding responsibility for taking minutes is likely to inhibit the students' ability to carry out their representative role effectively and engage in the wider discussion.

The SRC commends the department for their student-centric approach to Staff-Student Liaison Committees and their desire to see students take ownership of the process; however, we would recommend that the practice of inviting students to take minutes is discontinued in future.

Programme Specifications

Recommendation 20:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Senate Office review the location of the Programme specifications on the University website with a view to making them more visible to students and staff. *[paragraph 4.1.3]*

For the attention of: **The Director of Senate Office**

Response:

Senate Office has held several discussions with Corporate Communications to ensure that Programme Specifications are prominently displayed, consistent with other priorities. It is also intended that links will be established from Specifications to the online Prospectus. The matter remains under review.

Clerk's Note:

The Senate Office Programme Specification Guidelines state at 2.5 that Departments should include links to the Senate Office webpage at www.senate.gla.ac.uk/progspecs/staff/psguide.pdf