

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 28 May 2010

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Update on Recommendations arising from the Review of Classics
held on 25 February 2008**

Ms Fiona Dick, Senate Office

This report contains further responses to recommendations 8, 13, 16 and 19 arising from the Review of the Department of Classics held on 25 February 2008. The recommendations where further responses were requested and the initial responses provided to ASC on 29 May 2009 are set out below for information and are followed by the further responses received.

The Department has requested to give an update to Recommendation 1 which was not originally identified as requiring further clarification, however the department has indicated that the statement that exists in the report cannot now be regarded as accurate.

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.

Updated Response – May 2010

The issue of space has not been resolved in the manner envisaged in the initial report. Contrary to earlier indications that the whole top floor of the adjacent building would become available, Classics has been allocated only a single office for an additional staff member. Initial discussions had led us to expect a number of rooms, which would have enabled us to move staff and create teaching and study space more fit for purpose. However, priority has been given to a spacious office and large kitchen for the incoming staff in 63 Oakfield Avenue.

In plans to increase postgraduate recruitment, and accommodate increasing numbers of undergraduate students, the lack of flexibility in current accommodation is a greater obstacle than ever. Unfortunately, the Department cannot be as optimistic of an effective resolution as it was at the time of the initial response, and would therefore urge the committee to reopen this issue with Estates and Buildings/University Services.

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.

Updated response – May 2010:

There have been developments since my initial response. When announcing their courses for the following year's menu of Honours options staff now specify a teaching format: lecture, a mixture or lecture/seminar, or purely seminar. The seminar has a target maximum of c.16 students, and where the lecture/seminar format is used, we have been recruiting students in multiples (usually 2 groups) of 16. We do not restrict recruitment for the larger lecture-based courses. The allocation of staff time to Honours courses now reflects exactly the delivery method of the course (in contrast to earlier practice).

With regard to language courses we have adopted a number of measures. We are increasing the accessibility to Honours courses that require linguistic competence, as well as post-beginners' language courses. Our aim is to ensure both increased numbers in what have traditionally been small classes, and that more students benefit from staff investment in advanced language work. When students enter Honours, we encourage all those who have fulfilled the language requirements to consider the possibility of a Latin/Greek course, even if they are taking Honours in another subject (or in Classical Civilization). We also encourage Honours students without language to take them up, and many do so. We are also focussing on the transition between level 1 and level 2 language, since this is the point where most students who take up a language abandon it. We have redesigned the delivery and assessment of level 2 languages to bring these courses into line with the University's guidelines on assessment, to facilitate re-assessment, and to ensure that they fit more closely with students' actual capacities. We are confident that this will encourage more students to continue to level 2, and thus

increase class sizes there. There are signs that this change of approach is already working: we had over 20 students beginning level 2 Latin this year, compared to 9 last year.

Our plans for an Honours core course [see also recommendation 11], to act as a compulsory element, have been the subject of ongoing discussion. After receiving approval in principle from student representatives and the Learning and Teaching Committee (which now includes a student rep.), the course specification now exists in draft form. It has been approved by an external examiner, and is being refined for submission to Board of Studies next semester, to run for the first time in 2011-12. The course will be built around the Honours travel requirement, and will focus upon high-level disciplinary and transferrable skills. There will be an optional Senior Honours course following on from it, involving an extended project based on research undertaken during while abroad. Both these courses will be credit bearing, and will thus ensure that students are clustered in large groups. However, these courses will move beyond the traditional lecture/seminar format, involving autonomous learning groups, and group project activities.

I am confident that these measures together will ensure both that students experience a good range of learning experiences, and that staff time will be well spent with students in groups of a size appropriate to the delivery of the ILOs.

The initial thrust of this recommendation was to ensure that regular study-leave did not impose an impossible burden upon a small department. The measures outlined above have resulted in a significant reduction in the overall teaching load of the Department, such that study leave no longer causes any significant problems.

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.

Updated response – May 2010:

It was agreed to request a fuller response to this recommendation to include reference to transferrable skills.

In the transfer of all courses from the CCIMS database to the new PIP system, all ILOs have been revised, and they now refer much more consistently to transferrable skills. In addition, the new core courses will place a direct emphasis upon these skills.

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.

Updated response – May 2010:

The assessment of all PG courses has been revised, and brought into line with the University's guidelines on assessment. Postgraduate assessment is now much more mixed. Most translation-based courses are assessed by essay only, but some include an examination. An examination element remains only the norm on courses which include texts in the original language. In all cases, careful attention has been paid to the University's guidelines on assessment, to ensure a proper balance between different components. In most courses, this has involved reducing the amount of assessment from earlier iterations.

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.

Updated response – May 2010

The Department remains convinced that minute-taking is a useful skill for the student who takes on the responsibility of chairing the staff student committee. The views of the current and previous chair of the committee confirm that they view minute-taking as a valuable part of this position. This is the only context in which student representatives are required to take minutes. In the absence of formal training from SRC, the Department ensures that the incoming chair is shown past minutes, and the H.o.D. discusses the draft minutes with the chair before they are circulated. The current and previous chair have both confirmed that this arrangement is satisfactory.