

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 28 May 2010

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of
Department of English Language held on 20 February 2009**

Ms Fiona Dick, Senate Office

Conclusions

The Review Panel was very impressed by the commitment demonstrated by the Department to its taught programmes but even more to its students as individual learners. The amount of time that staff seemed to be prepared to give to students was very generous and, although this might accord with abstracts such as retention policy, the Panel did not hear that expression used. It was clear that systems had been developed to facilitate the identification of students in difficulties but these are dependent on teaching and administrative staff doing a great deal of work. The result is not, however, a Department characterised as bureaucratic and officious but, rather, as one that is efficient and above all welcoming and friendly.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the Department of English Language. It is important to note that some of these recommendations refer to tasks or issues identified by the Department for action either prior to the Review or in the SER. Some of these actions are already in hand.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are ranked in order of priority.

Recommendation 1:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department develops the strategies it was already considering to increase future recruitment to Level 1 which, it was anticipated, would result in greater numbers of students at Level 2 and in Honours. [*paragraph 5.5.4*]

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

We have appointed an Outreach Officer with a specific remit of increasing recruitment directly to Level 1. The June Open Day seems to have had some effect, in that our numbers at Level 1 have increased in session 2009. We have several plans for further driving recruitment, though the uncertainty about subject-profile brought about by the University's restructuring has been a serious distraction. The University has also reversed a commitment given to the Outreach Officer that a reduction in her contract (from 100-80%) would be compensated for by the appointment of a Research Fellow; the Department is contesting this decision but the appeal process has likewise been an unwelcome distraction from the business of recruiting.

Recommendation 2:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department keeps under review student take-up of opportunities for study abroad and that, if students prove unwilling or unable to subscribe to the proposed longer absence from Glasgow, the subject be raised for discussion in SESLL and at Faculty where other possible remedies might be sought. [paragraph 4.5]

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

Response:

We are continuing to review procedures, and have raised the issue with colleagues. A few students have taken up the opportunities on offer, although of course the possibilities at undergraduate level remain limited for our subject. We would be interested in hearing about “other possible remedies”, since very few practical suggestions have been made.

Recommendation 3:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department revisits the statements of its ILOs and that it revises these as appropriate in order to conform with the published guidance. [paragraph 5.2.1]

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

Response:

We have revised our ILOs in published material.

Recommendation 4:

With respect to the problem of technical support in the STELLA Laboratory, the Review Panel recommends that the solution proposed by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts that this might be provided by HATII should be explored and, if not viable, that an alternative be sought. [paragraph 5.9.2]

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

Response - Dean:

I understand that all campus-wide computers now have the appropriate fonts for phonetics and old English built in to the software.

Response – Department:

This issue has now been resolved to our satisfaction. However, the location of HATII in a distinct School under the restructuring, rather than as a cross-College facility, is a source of concern for us, since we are unclear about the arrangements for cross-School provision under the new dispensation.

Recommendation 5:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department proceeds with its undertaking to review, and amend as appropriate, its presentation to students of the assessment regulations. *[paragraph 5.3.7]*

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

Response:

We have reviewed and revised our presentation to students of the assessment regulations.

Recommendation 6:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department revises the Programme Specification for the MLitt in Medieval and Renaissance Studies so that the ILOs accurately reflect the criteria on which assessment will be made and that redundant criteria are removed. *[paragraph 5.3.8]*

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

Response:

We have drawn this recommendation to the attention of the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, and we are aware that the Programme Specifications have been revised, partly because GCMRS is also taking advantage of the opportunity to liaise with and share courses with counterparts at Strathclyde University. Please note, however, that the Head of Department of English Language has no direct control over the academic content of GCMRS courses.

Recommendation 7:

The Review Panel recommends that the Department considers the feasibility of providing feedback on Honours essays orally as a matter of course. *[paragraph 5.3.6]*

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

Response:

We have considered this suggestion, and current constraints on staff-time make one-to-one feedback not feasible. However, we have asked all colleagues to offer generic comments on essays for students, and we continue to make ourselves available for specific queries during our regular, published office hours. The Honours Convener has made himself available to give one-to-one feedback to concerned students on all Junior Honours examinations.

General:

The Department appreciates the time and effort put into the DPTLA process by the team of reviewers and we take seriously the constructive comments they made to improve what they happily recognise to be an exceptionally strong Departmental provision in teaching, learning and assessment. Given that the Department has a long history of providing a high quality of teaching and research, and that it enjoys a high level of administrative support by staff who are dedicated in every sense of the word, it is saddening that the restructuring process that

began after the completion of this review threatens to dismantle that support, and squander the gains made over several decades. From September 2010 the Department will have no status and its dedicated support staff will be largely dispersed. The message from the University centre is, I regret to say, that even high-performing subject disciplines are not valued, nor are the efforts made by academic and administrative staff to provide excellence in learning, teaching and assessment. This has been a damaging process.