

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 28 May 2010

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Response to the Recommendations arising from the Review of
English Literature held on 16 and 17 March 2009

Mrs Jackie McCluskey, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions

The Review Panel was impressed with the leadership of English Literature by the Head of Department, the collegiality of the Department's staff, the quality of support to GTAs and above all, to the Students. The Students who met with the Panel were enthusiastic about their learning and spoke highly of the Department. The GTAs echoed this and displayed a great passion for their subject and the Department. There was strong evidence of energy and enthusiasm at all levels.

The Department demonstrated that it had made significant progress since the previous departmental Review in March 2003, with an impressive array of strengths and self-awareness of areas in which it wished to improve. The most substantive of these are reflected in the recommendations that follow.

Response from Department

On behalf of the Department I would like to thank the panel for their most constructive and encouraging report. Reviews of this sort are inevitably greeted at first with some degree of trepidation, and I am pleased to note that staff and students alike were pleasantly surprised at how much they appreciated and even enjoyed the review process, and how it enabled us to dwell on our strengths and think about how to build on them, as well as providing a morale boost for all.

I would also like to thank Senate Office staff, in particular Jackie McCluskey and Janet Fleming, for their efficiency and helpfulness throughout the process.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. It is important to note that the majority 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 in the paragraphs of the report to which they refer and are not ranked in any particular order.

Recommendation 1:

The Panel **recommends** that the preparatory guidance provided to Heads of Department should emphasise the need for reflection on the outcome and recommendations from the previous review in order to demonstrate the level of enhancement achieved. [*Paragraph 1.1.4*] **For the attention of: Senate Office**

Response:

The Senate Office recognises that the DPTLA process and in particular the Self Evaluation Report provided for the Review Panel, should fully reflect on the outcome and recommendations from the previous review, as part of the departmental self-critical evaluation of programme provision. The need for a reflective approach is included in the Senate Office's Guidance Notes for Departments and now emphasised during the meeting with Senate Office staff and Heads of Department and other relevant departmental staff, that are provided in advance of the submission of documentation and the review visit.

Recommendation 2:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews its policy on the provision of feedback to students to ensure that a clear and consistent process exists across all programmes. The process should address, amongst other things, a strengthening of feedback for postgraduate students after week 3 of the first semester. The Department should ensure that the agreed policy is communicated to all relevant parties and its effectiveness monitored at all levels. [*Paragraph 3.3.5*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

This has been implemented. In particular the postgraduate feedback system has been improved with explicit reference made to course aims and objectives. We have created mid-term assignments, weighted considerably lower than final essays, that allow students to be assessed and receive feedback early in the term. We also now require that all students submit a complete draft of their dissertations to their supervisors in mid-summer so as to receive a detailed written response on the entire draft before they begin their final revisions. In all cases, assessed work is returned no later than three weeks after submission (and in many cases, considerably sooner); tutors also make themselves available for regular informal meetings with students as required. As such, our MLitt students are now receiving more, and earlier, feedback on their work than they ever have before. These initiatives have been lauded by students. Last year's cohort used their course evaluation forms to praise the benefits of staggered assessment, noting its crucial role in improving their skills and giving them a detailed and realistic understanding of the standards required for postgraduate work. Mid-term exercises and dissertation draft submission will remain a staple part of our programme.

Recommendation 3:

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department reports departmental experiences of the new academic year structure to the Convener of the Academic Structures Implementation Group and liaises with the International and Postgraduate Service about the late arrival of Erasmus students to minimise any potential for their being disadvantaged. [*Paragraph 3.3.9*]

**For the attention of: Head of Department,
Director of IPS**

Response – Head of Department:

The departmental overseas students convener held discussions on the situation with Linda Buchan (the administrator with responsibility for ERASMUS students in RIO) and has monitored the situation at the beginning of Semesters 1 and 2. At this stage, late arrival does not seem to be a problem: The convener met with all ERASMUS students taking our level 1 and 2 courses by the end of the first week of teaching in Semester 1

and had met with most of them by the end of the orientation week which precedes teaching in the Autumn.

We and RIO are agreed that there is no ongoing problem with this. Obviously, should this change in future years, we will have to respond accordingly.

Response – Director of Recruitment and International Office (formally IPS)

The Recruitment & International Office has not been contacted by the Head of Department and we are not aware of any problems relating to the late arrival of Erasmus students.

Recommendation 4:

The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty's examination board procedures be reviewed to ensure consistent practice across all departments. [*Paragraph 3.3.10*]

For the attention of: Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching; Head of Department

Response – Head of Department:

Our observation arose from the experience of joint boards where representatives of other departments did not seem fully aware of recommended Faculty procedures. The Associate Dean was alerted to this accordingly and a reminder sent out to all departments.

Response – Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching

The Faculty fully recognises the crucial importance of consistency across exam boards, and is confident that our practice is in accordance with the Code of Assessment. In response to a question from the Head of Department in English Literature, exam board practice was discussed at the Faculty's Undergraduate Studies Committee on Wednesday 11 February 2009, and will be discussed again at the Undergraduate Studies Committee on 5 May 2010, following which a reminder of good practice guidelines will be forwarded once again to all Heads of Department for dissemination at Department level.

This summer's examination diet is, of course, the last at which Department-run exam boards will take place. From winter 2010 on, such boards will be run by the four Schools within the College of Arts. School Heads of Learning and Teaching will be tasked with reporting on meetings of their School's exam board for at least the first two sessions post-restructuring, in order to promote very best practice and to ensure consistency.

Recommendation 5:

The Panel **recommends** that, as part of its review of the honours provision, the Department considers the introduction of literary theory based lectures in Level 1 and the inclusion of the study of an anthology of individual poets. [*Paragraph 3.4.1*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

This is in course of implementation. Some theory-based lectures were introduced in session 2009-10, with more planned for 2010-11. Poetry provision continues to be improved, with specialist recruitment in this area and the introduction of podcasts. We are looking to change anthology provision in 2010-11.

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensures that all students are fully informed about requirements for dissertations, particularly the relevant timescales and arrangements for support, and that students are kept informed should these be subject to delay. [*Paragraph 3.4.5*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Implemented. Teething problems with dissertations have been overcome and procedures tightened in accordance with our successful programme of honours reform. Students are kept fully informed through briefing lectures, handouts and FAQ pages, in hard copy and on Moodle. Both generic and dissertation-specific advice and help are offered by supervisors according to a set diet of group and individual sessions. The dissertation has also been re-timetabled so that all work takes place at level 4. This makes for a clearer sense of timescales and better focus on the tasks of preparing and writing the dissertation.

Recommendation 7:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews arrangements for PG seminars to ensure that part-time students are not excluded, even if this requires repeating the seminars.. [*Paragraph 3.4.7*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

From the main report it is clear that this refers to research training seminars. Most Masters seminars are scheduled in the evening in order to provide for the needs of part-time students. We propose introducing a number of evening training workshops in session 2010-11.

Recommendation 8:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department provides reading lists and timetables to PGT students in advance of the start of their programme. [*Paragraph 3.6.3*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Implemented. Creative Writing staff have been reminded to provide material and timetables in advance according to good practice set by our other PGT courses.

Recommendation 9:

The Panel **recommends** that the University reviews its position on the provision of janitorial staff to ensure that desirable out of hours teaching opportunities are not jeopardised. [*Paragraph 3.8.2*]

For the attention of: Secretary of Court, Director of HR

Clerk's note: Following discussion with the Secretary of Court and Director of HR, this recommendation was forwarded to the Director of Campus Services.

Response – Director of Campus Services:

Sometime ago there was detailed consultations with Mr Laurence Edgar, Head of Central Services, myself and the Head of English Literature to discuss the opening of and control of buildings of academic use out with normal hours. Both Mr Edgar and myself consider that a workable solution was put in place and that to date there have been no representations to Mr Edgar from English Literature to suggest there has been any problems.

Response – Head of Department:

We have indeed reached a workable compromise, which involves staff taking responsibility for security between 5 and 8 p.m. This at least enables us to conduct our Masters classes in appropriate rooms.

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department takes steps to standardise the provision of AV equipment in its seminar rooms, for example, by making a strategic application to the Faculty Technical Committee. [*Paragraph 3.8.3*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Portable AV equipment is now available for the one public seminar room not thus provided. Further improvement is pending reallocation of estate resources following restructuring.

Recommendation 11

The Panel **recommends** that the Department discusses with the University Library the adequacy of provision of secondary texts and that the Department considers placing extracts of relevant texts on MOODLE as well as providing on-line access to those DVDs currently available for hire. [*Paragraph 3.8.4*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

The department is committed to finding online solutions to the problems raised here and provision is constantly being improved with the collaboration of course conveners, individual tutors and library staff.

Secondary materials were supplied through:

- * selected (3 or 4) recommended books on the reading list supplied in the bookshop
- * multiple back-up copies of these and a number of other books placed in short loan in GUL
- * a list of key book chapters and articles were digitised by the library to be made available through the library web site and on the 1A Moodle site
- * students were referred to LION, JSTOR and other electronic resources purchased by the library for both additional primary materials (mainly poetry) and critical essays and reviews (links made available on Moodle)
- * additional pdf copies of recommended reading were added to Moodle throughout the semester by staff and GTAs on an ad hoc basis.

In addition, as of next session, we will be piloting at Level 1 a customised anthology containing both primary and secondary material, published in the form of a standard Longman text book.

Recommendation 12:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department make specific reference to the role of the Departmental Disability Coordinator in the workload model. [*Paragraph 3.8.6*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Implemented.

Recommendation 13:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department introduces formal feedback from UG students on the performance of the GTAs. [*Paragraph 3.8.10*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

This has been implemented with the help of Level 1 and 2 conveners.

Recommendation 14:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department clearly formalises the mentoring arrangements already in place and takes steps to ensure that all parties are aware of their relevant roles and responsibilities. [*Paragraph 3.8.13*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Implemented. Meetings were arranged between staff, mentors and the Head of Department. As part of this the relation between mentoring, probation and PDR were explained. Notes for this were drawn up for use with any new staff.

Recommendation 15:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department continues the revision of all documentation intended for students and ensures adequate reference to ILOs and compatibility of the style and content with the target readership. The Department should also consult the students as an integral part of the revision process. [Paragraph 3.8.17]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Response:

Implemented. As part of Honours reform all Honours documentation was redrafted, and we took the opportunity to redraft Level 1 and 2 documentation, to ensure consistency of practice across the board. Reference to ILOs has been revisited and revised where necessary and are being built in to feedback questionnaires. Student consultation on this was achieved through the SSLC as well as through student representation on the Conveners' Committee.

Recommendation 16:

The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department ensures full compliance with Annual Course Monitoring requirements for all courses. [Paragraph 4.1.1]

**For the attention of: Head of Department,
Departmental and Faculty Quality
Assurance and Enhancement Officer**

Response: Head of Department:

Lapses here arose some years back due to rapid staff turnover. Procedures have been reviewed and tightened up at both Departmental and Faculty level.

Response: Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officer:

I have been in regular correspondence with the HoD in relation to AMRs for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. For the 2008-09 session, all AMRs have been completed. We continue to be in dialogue about means of maximising the value of the AMRs for colleagues and ensuring that examples of best practice within the subject area are flagged for the benefit of colleagues across the Faculty.

The report notes that previous non-submission of AMRs may have been due to high staff turnover. Recent changes to the annual monitoring process (for undergraduate programmes) to ensure that AMRs are completed within the academic year to which they refer should mean that high staff turnover and leave arrangements have less of an impact in future. English Literature has been very supportive of these proposed changes.