

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 27 May 2011

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Responses to the Recommendations Arising from the Review of
Urban Studies held on 15 and 16 March 2010**

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions

The Review Panel commends the Department on its constructive engagement with the DPTLA process, its open and reflective approach to the SER and the positive attitudes displayed by staff and students in discussions with the Panel during the review visit. A number of recommendations have been made in the body of the report, many of which concern areas that the Department itself highlighted for further development prior to the review or in the SER.

Recommendations

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.

In light of the restructuring of the University, recommendations have been redirected to the appropriate designates. Please note that the text of the recommendations has not been updated.

Context

Following the restructure of the University in August 2010, the Department of Urban Studies was merged with 4 other departments and a stand-alone research centre into the new School of Social and Political Sciences (SPS). While our programmes retain their Urban Studies branding, longer term strategies are now being developed at the School level, especially for UG programmes, so that Urban Studies programmes will become less distinct than previously. The formation of SPS has also meant that considerable energies by Urban Studies staff and others have been put into developing School-wide working across all our activities. MPA support for teaching programmes has also been centralised at School level, and in the last 12 months there has been a reduction in staff FTEs devoted to Urban Studies teaching programmes. Urban Studies has also prioritised responding to university-wide imperatives to expand PG numbers, which has resulted in the consideration of several new opportunities and initiatives. At the same time, we have lost two of our core funded staff complement due to resignation and retirement. These changes all mean that we have had somewhat less opportunity than expected to focus on developing and maintaining our existing programmes.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department develop an explicit Learning and Teaching Strategy. This should include the articulation of a subject-specific philosophy for

education in Urban Studies and provide a framework and timetable for the on-going development of the Department's work.

The Strategy should, among other things:

- Inform the review of Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes of programmes and courses
- Formalise departmental QA procedures, with an emphasis on feedback to students, external examiners and validating bodies, and on effective communication between all departmental staff on QA issues
- Set out a systematic approach to the development and dissemination of good practice in Learning and Teaching

[paragraphs 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 5.10]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

We have made some progress in this area but do not yet have a full strategy in place for Urban Studies programmes. The comments above about the integration of Urban Studies within SPS are germane here.

For UG programmes, the SPS Learning and Teaching Committee is leading the development of developing a long-term strategy for the provision of the MA (SocSci). A working paper has been produced by the Committee and we are expecting a new model for the MA Soc Sci to be put forward for approval during 2011-12. Some of this thinking has shaped our strategy for the UG Public Policy programme (see recommendation 4 below).

At PG level, we have been running a review group which has now met three times focussing initially on Real Estate Planning and Regeneration, our biggest programme. The group is working through the academic rationale for the programme and how it interfaces with other parts of our provision. We expect that this review will lead to some major revisions to REPR. As part of this process we will be going on to look at QA against the background of College Learning and Teaching Plans and School QA procedures.

Recommendation 2

The Panel **recommends** that the Department investigate, through dialogue with students, the NSS indicator on the lack of promptness of assessment feedback, and consider assessment scheduling, manage student expectations appropriately or take whatever other action is indicated by the results of that investigation.

[paragraph 3.3.10]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

Our investigations suggest that the late return of marked work identified by DPTLA was the result of staff absence due to recurrent illness leading to some very long delays in getting work marked rather than an endemic problem of underperformance. Feedback from students has

been gathered through Staff Student Liaison Committees and has been positive for 2010-11. Our target is to return marked assignments to students within four working weeks. All staff are aware of this and when work is issued for marking the target return date is clearly communicated. Students are also advised of return dates alongside submission dates. Occasionally and unavoidably this time scale is not met for reasons such as staff illness or unavoidable absence.

Recommendation 3

The Panel **recommends** that the Department review its marking practices and consider the replacement of double marking with a robust moderation process which gives particular attention to borderlines at Levels 1 and 2, and the use of double rather than blind double marking of honours in-course assignments.

[paragraph 3.3.14]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

At Pre Honours we have always used a robust moderation process which carefully considers borderline marks and the recommendation is redundant.

At Honours, as recommended, we have changed our marking practice for 2010-11 to double marking rather than blind double marking. We have developed a protocol which has been communicated to all staff marking assignments to ensure a standardised approach. In summary all scripts are marked and commented on by the first marker, and then all are considered by the second marker, with subsequent adjustment to marks and comments made through discussion.

At PG level, we continue with our existing approach of double marking.

Recommendation 4

The Panel **recommends** that the Department pursue its review of undergraduate provision, initially at Level 2, focussing on curriculum content, progression from Level 1, and tutorial provision.

[paragraph 3.4.6]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

We are anticipating major changes soon in the MA SocSci as SPS seeks to better integrate its provision across subjects with the aim of creating efficiencies and quality enhancement. In the meantime we have 'modularised' the MA Public Policy by breaking down year-long courses into new half-size units which allows more flexible curricula for students and is consistent with the aim of greater integration. The changes were carried through after wide consultation with students, teaching staff, and the external examiner, with the final elements of the changes achieving approval in 2010-11. Modularisation of the Honours programme was already underway at the time of the DPTLA review and now pre-Honours has also been modularised

with the new course starting in September 2011. The number of lectures and tutorials in pre-honours has been revised.

Modularisation has allowed us to develop the educational philosophy that underpins the programme and the sense of intellectual progression that it embodies. Topics introduced in year one, for example, are developed further and in more complex ways in year two. Students may then choose these topics to study at a higher level in their Honours years. Furthermore, the topics in the programme overall are interrelated and organised thematically; they connect vertically from Level 1 to Honours and horizontally across the programme.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department continue its development of a marketing and recruitment strategy. The SER noted that programme teams were working on strategies and action plans, and the Panel encourages a departmental overview of this, seeking to draw on the full range of assistance and opportunities available at University level and in the new School and College.

[paragraph 3.5.8]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

This is an area of our work that we continue to develop. Our strategy has three components. First, we attempt to maintain or heighten the profile of Urban Studies as a whole among our key stakeholders (who include research contacts as well as teaching stakeholders); we do this through our web presence and also by email and mail bulletins. We are also currently developing a new set of PG and UG brochures and also renewing our banners for use at public events, student fairs etc. In 2010-11 we have distributed Urban Studies Review, a round up of our recent research to around 1000 individuals and agencies. Second, we have become much more aware of the benefits of working with marketing specialist within the University. We have developed a new approach to PGT admissions and conversion by sharing responsibility for the first time for all our PGT programmes with RIO. We are monitoring the success of this at present. We have also used RIO to market test ideas for new programmes, or new variants of existing programmes. Third, because much of our PGT offer relates to professional occupational groups, programme directors are in the best position to assess and implement additional activities, such as targeted advertising and employers' conferences, and they are charged with the delivery of these.

However, there is still room to pull this activity together in a more complete plan, identifying more clearly responsibilities and annual actions.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department continue extending the range of non-traditional methods of assessment within the context of developing an assessment strategy that is consistent with the revisions made to ILOs.

[paragraph 3.3.4]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***

Joint Response:

We are continuing to develop the range of non-traditional methods of assessment in the UG programme, including critical appraisals, practical interviewing techniques, statistical analysis exercises, policy reviews, reflective journals, and critically reflective written exercises. At PG level we also have assessed group work and group presentations. A particularly innovative assessment method is a self-assessed oral presentation newly-introduced in one Honours course. Students are required to: reflect on the development of their employability skills through the course and placement, self assess their own presentations, and negotiate and agree a mark with the course convenor that contributes to their overall grade and ultimately the degree classification. Further developments in assessment methods involving the use of Mahara are also being considered for courses at Honours level. Such developments are being informed by current research within the CSS. We anticipate that the ongoing thinking about the delivery of the MA SocSci across SPS will result in further innovation in assessment methods.

Recommendation 7

The Panel **recommends** that the Department develop a rationale for dealing with plagiarism which encompasses its approach to using Turnitin.

[paragraph 3.3.15]

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences**

Joint Response:

Generally our approach to plagiarism is to manage the risk by encouraging good practice in writing. Also, non-traditional assessment moves students away from having to write essays on standard topics which are more readily plagiarised. We have the 'Guide to Essay Writing and Plagiarism' available to all our UG students on Moodle, and we continue to offer essay writing skills tutorials and workshops at pre-honours. Given more staff time, we would also endeavour to provide an advanced writing skills workshop at Honours level. We continue to encourage our Level 1 students to use *Turnitin* to assess their work before submission.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department invite student membership of Department Teaching Committees.

[paragraph 5.8]

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Response:

Formal committees have now moved up to College and School level where students are formally represented. In Urban Studies, students are represented at the UG and programme-specific PG Staff Student Liaison Committees. Subject staff meetings about teaching, where they happen physically, are now informal and used more for operational matters. Students have not been invited to attend these because of issues of confidentiality as individual cases may be discussed.

Recommendation 9

The Panel **recommends** that the Department investigate all possibilities for overseas study by its students, including pre-Honours and for periods of less than a year.

[paragraph 3.5.7]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

This is something we have looked at. At UG level there is very limited demand: opportunities for study abroad for most of our students must be in English and affordable. Where opportunities are advised by the university, we ensure these are well communicated to students.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department take steps to ensure that induction and probation procedures are strictly adhered to for all staff.

[paragraph 3.8.5]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences***

Joint Response:

We acknowledge the issue raised by the review and will work with others to ensure more rigour in future. However, no new staff have been appointed in the last 12 months.

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department take an overview of its use of and requirements for accommodation, addressing issues that are under its own control (e.g. establishing privacy of office space for Graduate Teaching Assistants) and presenting to Faculty those issues of work- and social-space that are outwith its control. The Panel further **recommends** that the Faculty prioritise the enhancement of disabled access, and consider other accommodation issues presented by the Department in the context of the imminent restructuring.

[paragraph 3.8.18]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
and **Head of School of Social & Political Sciences**
and **Head of College of Social Sciences***

Joint Response: Head of Subject and Head of School

Of the two main points raised by the review panel, privacy for meetings between students and GTAs can be dealt with readily by reserving one of the three meeting rooms we have within the Urban Studies accommodation (outwith central room bookings), and we see no need to escalate this beyond Urban Studies. All GTAs have been made aware of this.

Regarding the other point about building access, we have never had disabled access to the building in which Urban Studies staff offices are located and where some teaching takes place. This is well known to the School Disability Coordinator who is located in Urban Studies and to the Disability Service. When classes are scheduled that include students who are prevented from accessing the building by its design, we schedule them elsewhere; ditto for staff meetings with students such as dissertation supervision or advising.

Ensuring all buildings are accessible and comply with the DDA is a clear university policy and the responsibility of the Director of Estates and Buildings. We see no need to communicate this further to him. Over the years there has been plenty opportunity to survey the building and make suitable modifications. We understand, but have had no confirmation, that the long term plan for this building is disposal.

Response: Head of College

Awaited

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department consider greater engagement with the Careers Service at undergraduate level, and extends to other programmes the good practice in PDP being developed on the Masters in Public Policy and Management.

[paragraph 3.6.14]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***

Response:

With a view to organising a seminar on careers for our Honours students, we contacted the Careers Service this session to request they give a presentation, but did not meet with a positive response.

We are however, keenly aware of the desirability of enhancing students' employability. We highlight the use of PDPs and Mahara in one of our Honours courses. In another, students do voluntary work on placement as part of their coursework. Employability skills and graduate attributes are discussed in this class and students follow recommended reading on employability. Students are also required to reflect on the development of their employability skills in an oral presentation that is summatively assessed. The placement raises awareness of future employment and may influence career choice. A number of students have pursued careers in social work and teaching as a result of this course or are studying for PhDs in areas directly related to their placement.