

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 7 October 2011

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment
(now known as Periodic Subject Review): Update on
Recommendations arising from the Review of Accounting and
Finance held on 24 and 25 February 2010**

Mrs Catherine Omand, Senate Office

This report contains further responses to recommendations arising from the Review of the Department of Accounting and Finance held on 24 and 25 February 2010. The recommendations where further responses were requested and the initial responses provided to ASC on 27 May 2011 are set out below for information and are followed by the further responses received.

Recommendation 3:

The Review Panel **recommends** that, as part of its planned review of undergraduate provision, the Department, through its Undergraduate Studies Committee, considers the level of group work as part of a broader review of learning objectives across the curriculum to ensure a more even coverage of attributes is being developed. In addition the Panel **recommends** that the Department explores best practice regarding group work across the University. [Paragraph 4.3.2]

For the attention of: **Head of Business School***Response:*

Accounting and Finance is currently undertaking a full review of the BAcc degree. This includes a review of all assessment methods, their use across the degree and within levels, their weightings as part of final course marks, their relation to learning outcomes and teaching methods, and their relation to employability skills development, and taking into account student views and professional accreditation requirements. The role and extent of the use of group work will be reviewed as part of the overall review of assessment methods.

Feedback to Original Subject Group Response:

There was no mention in the Subject Group response of any exploration of best practice regarding group work across the University.

Revised Response:

Accounting and Finance is currently undertaking a full review of the BAcc degree. This includes a review of all assessment methods, their use across the degree and within levels, their weightings as part of final course marks, their relation to learning outcomes and teaching methods, and their relation to employability skills development. We will also take into account student views and professional accreditation requirements. The role and extent of the use of group work is being reviewed as part of the overall review of

assessment methods.

The Subject Group includes group working throughout the degree programme, as working as part of a team is an important skill and graduate attribute to be developed. There are individual exams or tasks involved in all courses, and no course is assessed purely through group work.

In order to ensure that the Subject Group is conducting group work in line with recognised best practice, resources on collaborative learning on the Learning and Teaching Centre's website were consulted. The Subject Group considered these resources fully and would like to note the following points to help illustrate that they do operate group working tasks in line with recommended best practice.

The use of group work is considered over the whole degree programme, with a development of the complexity of the tasks the groups are performing. Across the different courses, group sizes vary, dependent on size/length and complexity of the task.

Some of the ways that groups are organised/facilitated are as follows:

- In first year it is recognised that group working may be a new way of working for students, and may be particularly difficult in semester 1 when students are making the transition to University and are less familiar with the institution and their peers. In order to facilitate integration between the students (to help to prepare them for working together), there is a group working lecture early in semester 1.

The students are split into groups and given a series of tasks to complete around campus. They then need to report back and are 'debriefed' on the exercise and there is a discussion on working together and how to consider structuring a group to best achieve the objectives of a given task.

- In addition to the group working lecture, first year students are also given detailed guidance (both written and verbal) on group working and how to structure/organise this process. Help is also available from staff for groups who are having difficulties working together.

Students are also provided with information on the task itself and provided with guidance on the objectives and assessment criteria to be used.

- The range of tasks students need to complete in a group situation and the amount of guidance they are given gradually changes over the period of their degree programme as they start to develop and improve their group work skills. Some of the tasks they are involved in include:
 - Analysing data using specialist computer software
 - Managing a portfolio of shares
 - Preparing a business report
 - Critically evaluating a research article and discuss what are the practical implications, and
 - Researching a particular issue and presenting findings to the class (in lectures or tutorials)

Therefore, although a range of group working tasks are undertaken, the differing nature of tasks allows a range of other attributes to be developed, such as presentation skills.

A range of methods are used to assess the group working process. This varies from

asking students to complete personal reflective statements to asking students to peer review other team members' contribution (and also their own input).

In general, team working is viewed by the subject group as a way to improve academic knowledge whilst also helping students to develop social skills and build their graduate attributes/employability skills. As with any other teaching method there are different approaches (each with their own pros and cons) and no one "best" method. Using a variety of techniques gives a rich and varied environment to our students.

Recommendation 16:

The Review Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department, in liaison with the Dean, urgently develops and implements a clear 3-5 year strategy outlining the mix and strengths of the staffing required. [Paragraph 4.8.5]

For the attention of: **Head of Business School
and Head of College of Social Sciences**

Response:

Since the DPTLA review the Subject Group has recruited one Professor and three Lecturers but has also lost one Professor and one University Teacher. We have recently appointed another two Lecturers and one Senior Lecturer, and further posts are to be advertised shortly. Our subject area suffers from high staff turnover and a highly competitive labour market, making recruitment difficult. Staff planning is also complicated by the increasing but uncertain number of PGT students.

Feedback to Original Subject Group Response:

It was acknowledged that consideration had been given to the issue of staffing. However, there was no reference to the development of a 3-5 year strategy.

Revised Response

The staffing strategy for the Accounting & Finance subject area aims to maintain teaching and research excellence, while reducing the unacceptably high SSR.

Over the next 3-5 years, we envisage our undergraduate student numbers will remain stable (a target intake of 110 to the BAAcc + students on joint programmes and exchange students, bringing 1st year cohort to approximately 135), that our PGT student numbers will remain at approximately 350 per year, and that our PGR student numbers will grow from approximately 12 to 25+. There are currently just under 800 Accounting & Finance students.

In the last year, we have recruited 8 new members of staff, but we have also lost 1.5 fte through resignations. With the new appointments, we will have 24.85 fte academic members of staff. This will still leave us with an unacceptably high SSR, in excess of 31. We are shortly to advertise for 3 new posts, which, if we are successful in filling, will bring our SSR down to about 28. Further investment has been agreed with the College and our aim over the next couple of years is to bring the SSR ratio down towards 24.

However, while we have been successful in recruiting 8 new members of staff over the last year (through a lot of effort in eliciting applications and three rounds of adverts and

interviews), the job market in Accounting & Finance is very competitive. Indeed, while we in the last round advertised 4 posts, we were only able to make 1 appointment. Furthermore, not only is recruiting very difficult, but retention is also a major concern, particularly in the lead up to the REF. Two members of staff are also in their mid 60s and *may* choose to retire soon. If they do elect to retire we will seek to make replacement professorial appointment to maintain and develop research leadership within the subject.

Our staffing strategy is to appoint staff who can make a real contribution to both teaching and research.

We aim to bring down our SSR while also adding to our research base and strengthening our REF submission. However, recruiting and retaining staff to achieve our aim of reducing the SSR towards 24 will be a real challenge.

In light of these circumstances, it is hoped that our recruitment and retention will be supported by the use of market supplements to staff salaries. These are deployed by a number of competitor institutions and recent experience appears to indicate that higher salaries will be required to attract the best qualified field

Recommendation 18:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department closely monitors the support provided to probationary staff to ensure that the impact of any future staff shortages is minimised. *[Paragraph 4.8.9]*

For the attention of: **Head of Business School**

Response:

The Subject Group operates close monitoring and mentoring of probationary staff and protects their work load during their probation period. Despite the staff shortages we have been able to protect probationary staff work loads.

Feedback to Original Subject Group Response:

The Subject Group response indicated that probationary staff workloads were protected during staff shortages. However, there was no explanation of how this was achieved.

Revised Response:

The Subject Group operates close monitoring and mentoring of probationary staff and protects their work load during their probation period.

Probationary members of staff are each allocated an academic mentor, who is a senior member of staff in the Subject Group. The mentor and the probationer meet regularly to discuss progress and for the mentor to offer advice and support.

Probationary objectives are set indicating that the teaching load is expected to be below 50% of normal load in the 1st year and below 75% in the 2nd year, and we strive to also give reduced teaching loads in the 3rd year of probation.

The Accounting & Finance Department / Subject Group has for several years operated a workload model, which makes explicit allowances for probationary members of staff. In the old Department of Accounting & Finance work load model, probationary members of

staff were given twice the normal allowance for each lecture and tutorial delivered, to reflect that new members of staff will need time to develop new teaching.

In the new Business School work load model being developed, the allowance for probationary staff is amended to focus on protected time for research rather than giving higher weighting to their teaching. However, the net result is similar as both models aim to ensure probationary staff are given sufficient time to develop their teaching and to make progress with their research. In the draft Business School work load model, new academics will, for the first five years post PhD, be given a research allowance of at least 500 hours.

Despite staff shortages and high student numbers, we have been able to protect probationary staff work loads, partly at the expense of high workloads for the non-probationary members of staff, but also with the help of specialist bought in teaching.