

**University of Glasgow**

**Academic Standards Committee – Tuesday 16 April 2013**

**Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of School of Modern Languages and Cultures**

**Mr Gavin Lee, Clerk to the Review Panel**

**Review Panel:**

Professor Frank Coton	Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching) (Convener)
Dr Alan Owen	Senate Assessor on Court
Professor Catherine Boyle	Kings College London, External Subject Specialist
Dr Ming Cheng	Learning and Teaching Centre
Dr Helen Stoddart	School of Critical Studies, Cognate member
Ms Hayley Macfarlane	Students' Representative Council
Mr Gavin Lee	Clerk to the Review Panel

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The School of Modern Languages and Cultures was formed in 2003, bringing together the former Departments of French, German, Hispanic Studies, Italian and Slavonic Studies. The former departments became 'Sections' of the School in 2003.
- 1.2 In 2009, all Sections of the School moved into a single, extended and refurbished Hetherington Building, thereby collocating all teaching and administrative staff. The Hetherington Building also houses the Language Centre which, from August 2012, was moved from University Services to become an integral element of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures.
- 1.3 The School of Modern Languages was retained in the University restructure in 2010, becoming one of four Schools within the College of Arts. From 2010, the 'Sections' within the School were removed to promote greater cross-School working. This also removed the requirement for Section Heads. From 2010, Programme Directors have been responsible for co-ordinating the running of the language-specific and comparative literature degrees and Course Conveners responsible for individual courses.
- 1.4 The School was last reviewed through the institution-led review process in 2006 (then Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment.) In addition, the School was reviewed through two Court-led review processes which reported in 2010 and 2011.
- 1.5 The School has demonstrated a willingness to respond to recommendations from each review. The School is to be commended for its positive response to meeting and, in many cases, surpassing the recommendations from the Departmental Programme of Teaching and Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) in 2006.
- 1.6 The panel met with Professor John Macklin, Head of School, Dr Barbara Burns, Deputy Head of School and School Learning and Teaching Convener, thirty two Undergraduate students, six Postgraduate Taught students, thirteen Key Staff, eight Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), two University Native Language Teachers

(UNLTs) and six probationer staff. A final meeting was held with the Head of School, Deputy Head of School and Dean of Learning and Teaching, Professor Alice Jenkins.

- 1.7 The Team commends the analytical and reflective Self Evaluation Report which demonstrated an inclusive and transparent approach to development and accurately portrayed an innovative School demonstrating self-awareness and an ability to reflect on, and enhance, practices and provision.
- 1.8 The Team commends the level of involvement of students in developing the SER and the contributions made by students who met the Team. The number of students who were willing to meet the Review Team and their positivity indicated a School which values and supports its students.

## 2. Background Information

### Students

- 2.1 Student numbers in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures for 2011-12 were as following:

Figure 2.1

<b>Students</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Level 1	1152	245.21
Level 2	785	243.97
Level 3	64	64.90
Level 4	2192	283.51
Undergraduate Total	4193	
Postgraduate Taught	55	19.04
Postgraduate Research*	29	

\*(for information only - research is not covered by the Review)

### Staffing

- 2.2 The staffing resource as at 1 January 2013 was as follows:

Figure 2.2

<b>Staff</b>	<b>Headcount</b>	<b>FTE</b>
Total staff	50	44.38
Academic staff	45	39.58

- 2.3 During the period between periodic reviews, the School experienced a lengthy period of staff attrition (including the loss of six professorial staff) before a substantial review of staffing in 2011-12. Since 2011-12, eleven new academic appointments have been made across the School (and across seniority levels). A further two posts will be advertised during 2013-14. Following the addition of the Language Centre in August 2012, a further 19.73 FTE staff are now employed within the School.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Language Centre staffing is not reflected in figure 2.2

- 2.4 Before the re-assessment of staffing requirements in 2011-12, the School reported that the staff:student ratio was unacceptably high. However, the School calculates that at the time of the review the staff:student ratio had reduced to a more acceptable 1:22.

### **Provision**

- 2.5 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the School:
- MA Single Honours degrees in French, German, Hispanic Studies (Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan), Italian and Spanish
  - Joint Honours degrees in Comparative Literature, Czech, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian and Slavonic Studies.<sup>2</sup>
  - MLitt in European Studies (introduced in 2010)
  - MSc in Translation Studies (introduced in 2012)
  - PG Diplomas in Russian, Czech and Polish Language (suspended in 2012-13 but to be offered again in 2013-14)
- 2.6 The School also contributes to the following degree programmes offered by other Schools or other institutions
- SMLC provides linguistic input to the degrees of Law with a Language (60 credits at Honours and relevant pre-Honours courses)
  - SMLC provides linguistic input to Social Sciences with Subsidiary Language (60 credits at Honours and relevant pre-Honours courses)
- 2.7 Since 2004, the School has provided all German teaching for students at the University of Strathclyde under the Synergy Agreement. The last intake under synergy was in 2008 with the final cohort of Honours students expected to graduate in 2014.

## **3. Overall aims of the School's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan**

### **Breadth of provision**

- 3.1 The School identifies one of its key benefits as the breadth of its provision, making it almost unique in the UK sector. The Review Team discussed the range of provision with students who highlighted its breadth as one of the reasons they chose to study at Glasgow. The School intend to maintain a broad range of provision and the Team encourage them to do so. Staff identified the range of language and cultures include in the School as a tremendous benefit to the growing interdisciplinary practices of the School.
- 3.2 The School welcomed the transfer of the Language Centre (from August 2012) from University Services to the School of Modern Languages and Cultures. The School considered that the inclusion of the Language Centre will allow it to enhance the value of the Language Centre's current portfolio of language courses by developing credit bearing undergraduate, postgraduate taught and continuing professional development level courses. The Team recommends that the School moves forward with tighter integration of the Language Centre within the School on an academic and administrative basis to realise fully the potential benefits of the merger.
- 3.3 The School acknowledged that the current language spread represents a strongly European-focus. The School has been taking steps to develop this in recent years with, for example, a greater focus on Latin American culture through Hispanic studies. The Head of School indicated an intention to maintain the breadth of provision and to consider developing non-European languages such as Mandarin and Arabic to

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<sup>2</sup> The last intake to Joint Honours programmes in Czech, Polish and Slavonic Studies was in 2011 pending an SMLC review of Slavonic provision.

augment the European-focussed modern languages. The Head of School highlighted the central role the Language Centre could play in supporting this ambition.

- 3.4 The Team commended the School for intending to preserve the breadth of provision which benefitted the School greatly and encouraged the School to consider developing non-European language and culture provision.
- 3.5 The Team recommends that the School review the sustainability of provision and develop a strategic approach to development of new (or maintenance of existing) language provision to meet market demands and support the strategic development of the School.

### **Postgraduate Taught Provision**

- 3.6 As noted in Figure 2.1, the School has a fairly small Postgraduate Taught student cohort and has historically been somewhat limited in PGT provision. Three recommendations in the DPTLA 2006 Report were in relation to enhancing PGT provision. Partially in response to the DPTLA recommendations, the School introduced an MLitt in European Studies in 2010 and an MSc in Translation Studies in 2012. Despite initial success in recruitment to the MLitt in European Studies (nine students in 2010) the recruitment for 2012 was disappointing (two students). The School has committed to reviewing the programme, in partnership with students, to ensure the programme is targeted correctly and designed to meet market demand.
- 3.7 The School expects a greater shift in balance of provision towards postgraduate taught provision in the next five years to support the University's strategic aim to enhance its position as a leading postgraduate institution.

### **Harmonisation**

- 3.8 As noted in 1.4, the period since the DPTLA in 2006 has been one of transition for the School seeing multiple reviews, restructuring and relocation and significant changes in staffing.
- 3.9 The DPTLA in 2006 made five recommendations in relation to harmonisation or standardisation of practice which the School has successfully implemented or surpassed, including assessment policies (see 4.3), dissertations (see 4.3.6), Code of Assessment and course handbooks.
- 3.10 The School identified that initially the harmonisation of processes and practices, the restructuring of the School and the relocating to a single building had been seen as a potential challenge to academic autonomy, integrity of language and potential loss of identity. However, the Review Team considered that the inclusive process of review had allowed the process of harmonisation to be a positive, transformational development. Key staff reflected on the building sense of collegiality which had been afforded by co-location. The School ensured that students' views and concerns through restructuring were considered through extensive involvement of students in the review through SRC or Class Representatives or through regular communication to the wider student body.
- 3.11 The School considered that a significant benefit to co-location was the integration of administrative staff from across the School into an administrative 'hub' within the Hetherington Building. The co-location of administrative staff had allowed sharing of practice and knowledge and improved consistency of administrative support provided. Administrative support is further considered at 4.7.6-4.7.7. The School is encouraged to proceed with their plan to integrate the Language Centre administrative support in the School administration hub.
- 3.12 The School is commended for, independently and as part of the University-wide restructuring and reshaping exercises, developing a unitary School which staff and

students value and can see the benefits of in terms of support, interdisciplinarity, enhancement of quality and good practice and collegiality.

## **4. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience**

### *4.1 Aims*

- 4.1.1 The Team reviewed the Course and Programme Specifications and notes that they demonstrate a very close integration with the QAA Language Studies Benchmark Statement.
- 4.1.2 The Team commended the 'strongly affective dimension' of language teaching, especially in terms of increasing awareness and transforming attitudes towards culture, difference and diversity, which was highlighted in the SER and echoed by Key Staff.
- 4.1.3 The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirms that the programmes offered by the School remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application.

### *4.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)*

- 4.2.1 The Team were provided with course and programme-level intended learning outcomes for review. The Team considered that the ILOs were well-formed and extensive. The School is encouraged to consider whether the ILOs could, in some areas, be rationalised in order to allow more succinct and successful communication of ILOs to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.

### *4.3 Assessment and Feedback*

#### **Harmonisation of Assessment**

- 4.3.1 The harmonisation of approaches to assessment and feedback has been a priority for the School since the last DPTLA. Due to the nature of the School's provision and the proclivity of students to undertake study across the School (e.g. Joint Honours), students could easily compare and contrast practices across the School and were often confused by the lack of parity in balance of assessments, length of assessments and type of assessments used.
- 4.3.2 A rolling programme of revision over the past three years has allowed implementation of a consistent approach to assessment. At levels 1 and 2, all language courses carry the same weighting for in-course summative assessment (30%) (assessment methods including short written exercises, technology-assisted assessment, and audio and video comprehension exercises) and final examination (70%) split 50% written assessment and 20% assessment of spoken language.
- 4.3.3 At Honours level, parity has been delivered in relation to credit-rating with one 40 credit Written Language course and one 20 credit Spoken Language course. The assessment split mirrors the 30% in-course assessment and 70% final assessment employed at Levels 1 and 2.
- 4.3.4 Culture courses mirror languages at levels 1 and 2 with the same split between summative in-course assessment (one essay worth 30%) and a final examination (final examination worth 70%)
- 4.3.5 Honours culture course assessment is split 50% final assessment and 50% in-course summative assessment utilising essay and, where appropriate, translation work.
- 4.3.6 The School has also harmonised practice in relation to the dissertation with all Honours students required to submit a dissertation of c. 6000 words at the end of Semester 1 of the students' Senior Honours year. From 2012, all students submitting a dissertation

are also required to submit a five-hundred word reflective appendix reflecting on their processes of learning and skills development. The reflective appendix is discussed further at 4.8.20.

4.3.7 At postgraduate level, a variety of assessment techniques are utilised to suit the programme including written assessment, advanced translation coursework, oral examination, presentation and dissertation. The students who met with the Team confirmed satisfaction with the processes of assessment.

#### **Feedback on Assessment**

4.3.8 Students' experience of feedback was variable – with evidence of good practice in delivering prompt, detailed, constructive feedback in some areas but less so in others. In many cases this seemed to reflect better practice in language areas with smaller student cohorts.

4.3.9 The School is aware and responsive to these levels of satisfaction and annual meetings are held with Head of School, Deputy Head of School and all staff in areas that have performed unsatisfactorily to consider strategies to improve. In an effort to respond to student concerns with provision of feedback (elicited through National Student Survey, Staff Student Liaison Committees and informally) the School introduced a standard feedback pro forma. The School consulted with students prior to implementation and post-implementation to seek suggestions for improvement. Students who met the Team considered the introduction of the feedback forms to have been a positive development however it was not clear that the forms were being deployed in all areas of the School. The School is encouraged to ensure the form is consistently implemented across the School.

4.3.10 Staff considered that the University guidelines on providing feedback on assessment within three weeks were broadly kept to. However, staff acknowledged that staff shortages had, in some areas, led to much longer turnaround times. Students, GTAs and UNLTs who met the Team were generally not aware of the three week suggested turnaround for feedback on assessment. Students reported varying timescales for return of pieces of assessed work ranging from two or three days for pieces of language work, to six to eight weeks for return of dissertations. The School is commended for the exemplary practice of returning assessed language work with written feedback within a week.

4.3.11 The Team recommends that the School should provide clarity and more information around feedback processes deployed in the School to ensure that students are aware:

- When feedback will be provided
- What constitutes feedback
- That the University guidelines permit a three week timeframe for feedback on assessed work
- If feedback cannot be given within the three week timeframe, why this is the case and when the students can expect the feedback
- That the return of work on a weekly or fortnightly basis is exemplary practice

4.3.12 At PGT level, students who met the panel felt well supported and valued the oral feedback provided but felt that their development could be aided by greater written rather than oral feedback to allow consideration and reflection on the feedback at a later date and personalised rather than general feedback. The nature of translation is 'personal interpretation' (and developing personal style) which is not well-supported by general feedback on translations. Students had raised this issue with the School and the School has taken steps to increase individual formative feedback on this course for next session.

4.3.13 The Team noted that GTAs and UNLTs had shown initiative, and had been encouraged by the School, to develop feedback mechanisms which suited their teaching style and their perception of their student's requirements. The Team noted the good practice in GTAs and UNLTs seeking to implement feedback mechanisms which required students to be self-evaluative in the feedback process rather than passive.

#### *4.4 Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

##### **Review of Undergraduate Curriculum**

4.4.1 Since 2009, the School has undertaken an ambitious review of the undergraduate curriculum. The School has taken a phased-approach to the redesign of the curriculum, focussing on revisions to one level each year (2010-11 Level 1, 2011-12 Level 2 etc).

4.4.2 The overarching principle in the curriculum review was to harmonise structures and utilise the unitary School structure to develop core courses across languages.

4.4.3 Through harmonisation, the School has introduced standard credit-values at each Year and standardised assessment practices across each Level (see 4.3). The standardisation of credit-rating for Honours courses and the introduction of several School-wide options has allowed students to take courses from across the School. Previously, credit-rating for Honours courses across the languages was independently determined and often inconsistent which limited students' abilities to take courses from outwith their target language and still meet Plan or Programme rules on number of credits and pre-requisites.

4.4.4 The School managed the process of harmonisation of the curriculum through a sub-committee of the School Learning and Teaching Committee with staff drawn from across the School. The approach to reviewing the curriculum is to be commended: the express desire to ensure fairness and transparency across the School without setting exact stipulations and restrictions on academics or students allowed the process to be smooth, valued and, most importantly, effective.

4.4.5 The Team commends the commitment to staff and student engagement in the curriculum review process which ensured a shared ownership and understanding of the approach to teaching in the School and which was reflected in meetings with staff and students.

4.4.6 The flexibility of courses and curriculum selection is to be applauded. At Honours-level, a number of courses are delivered in the target language, which can also assist with linguistic development and increase opportunities to speak the target language. Other courses are delivered in English with texts studied in the foreign language, and some with texts available in English translation, to allow students from other languages (who would not have the linguistic ability to take the course if delivered in another target-language) to study. This allows interdisciplinarity of learning and a greater sharing of experience for students across the School.

##### **Graduate Teaching Assistant and University Native Language Teacher engagement in curriculum development**

4.4.7 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) and University Native Language Teachers (UNLT) who met the Team were empowered by the degree of freedom that they have been provided to develop materials and teaching styles and welcomed the open-door policy and support provided by senior colleagues. GTAs and UNLTs would welcome a greater role in supporting the development of generic skills, such as essay writing, as they felt that they would benefit from providing their students with advice on what they would be looking for when marking and that their students would benefit from 'tips and tricks' rather than the more formal Learning and Teaching Centre-led training. It was also noted that, as GTAs and UNLTs were not present at the LTC-led essay writing lectures, they were not always aware of what guidance students were being given.

## **Language Year Abroad**

4.4.8 The Language Year Abroad (LYA) was identified by staff and students as the most successful part of the curricula for developing target language skills. The Language Year Abroad was valued as a tremendous opportunity for a student to become immersed in a different language and culture. A number of Joint Honours students who met the Team reflected on the different experiences and opportunities to develop in their second language (a much shorter placement of around eight weeks) as compared to their first language which they were immersed in for a year. While it was acknowledged that there were practical, time-related issues that prevented equally long visits to both, students who had taken an eight week visit to their second language country felt at a disadvantage in their cultural knowledge and linguistic skill in comparison to peers. It was also noted that students who had undertaken their Language Year Abroad through the British Council Assistant programme had fewer opportunities to practice their target language as they were expected to speak English in their role as English Language Assistants. The School are encouraged to ensure that students have fully considered the options and implications when selecting their Language Year Abroad.

## **4.5 Student Recruitment**

### **Undergraduate student recruitment**

4.5.1 The School has taken a mature and proactive approach to ensure consistent (and high) levels of recruitment against a broader trend across the UK of decreasing recruitment into language degrees. Students are admitted to the College of Arts, rather than a specific programme, through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The School works closely with the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) to develop promotional materials. The SER reports that the School takes an active role in Open Days and Applicants' Visit Days emphasising the importance of personal contact with applicants to convert them to students. The School have also nominated students to be Student Ambassadors and include student representatives in their open day presentations.

4.5.2 Equally, the School has taken cognisance of the developments and provisions, or lack thereof, of foreign language teaching in secondary education and has moulded their curriculum to allow students without a linguistic background to enter into language programmes.

4.5.3 In view of the above, the School also supports students taking a modern language as a 'third subject' which can also allow that student to take languages as a joint honours or to move into single honours languages. This pathway was evident from meetings with students.

### **Postgraduate taught student recruitment**

4.5.4 As noted in 3.6, during the period since DPTLA 2006, PGT provision has been a developing area for the School. Two new programmes were introduced: a MLitt in European Studies and an MSc in Translation Studies and both recruited well in their inaugural years (2010-11 and 2012-13, respectively) although recruitment to the MLitt dropped in 2012-13. The School intends to review the MLitt in 2012-13 and refocus the provision to better align to market demand.

## **Internationalisation**

4.5.5 The School acknowledges the challenge in recruiting international (non-EU) students to study a foreign language in the UK (when prospective students are more likely to choose to study in the country of their target language). However, the School is increasingly international and healthy recruitment of EU students and ERASMUS exchange students helps deliver an internationalised student body.

## 4.6 *Student Progression and Retention*

### **Progression**

- 4.6.1 The School informally monitors progression at language-area level through annual monitoring and discussion at the School Learning and Teaching Committee. The School promotes progression from Level 1 Beginners courses to Level 2 by offering additional language support to students during the summer to ensure students are academically and pastorally equipped to achieve at Level 2.
- 4.6.2 To encourage student to progress from undergraduate study to postgraduate study at the University, the School holds information evenings.

### **Retention**

- 4.6.3 The School considers that small-group teaching and regular interaction with staff (and fellow students) is key to retention and highlights its concerns (and those of students) that the delivery of spoken-language classes fortnightly rather than weekly in Level 1 and Level 2 has had a negative impact on academic development, engagement and retention. While many steps have been taken to mitigate the academic impact of reduced classes (such as innovative use of Moodle, amendment of teaching style in other courses) the impact is still a matter of concern. For further discussion of limited delivery of oral classes see 4.8.1-4.8.4.

## 4.7 *Student Support*

- 4.7.1 The Team considers that the nature of the School's small group, frequent contact teaching significantly benefits the level of support provided to students. The SER notes that student feedback has consistently been positive in relation to student support.
- 4.7.2 Students who met the Team praised the open-door policy employed by staff in relation to student support. Students particularly praised the support provided by Programme Directors at postgraduate taught level.
- 4.7.3 It was noted, however, that students felt that the level of support provided was dependent upon the individual member of staff with some members of staff willing to go above and beyond and others offering a more cursory level of support. Students who met the Team would have particularly welcomed greater clarity on choice of Honours options as there seemed to be confusion amongst students about who they should approach for advice on option choice and at what stage in the year they would be required to select their curriculum for the following session.
- 4.7.4 Students praised the support provided while planning, undertaking and upon return from their Language Year Abroad. The Team noted that specific support and guidance had been provided to students with additional requirements to enable them to successfully undertake the Language Year Abroad. Students reported individual examples of support provided to ensure a smooth transition from/into the year abroad which appeared indicative of the supportive atmosphere developed across the School.

## **Organisation and Management**

- 4.7.5 The Team explored organisation and management with students. It was clear from students, and reflected in National Student Survey results, that organisation and management (particularly in relation to Statement 15: The course is well-organised and is running smoothly) is variable across the School and, in many areas, satisfaction is below College and University averages. It was noted that there were areas of higher satisfaction, particularly in languages with smaller cohorts, where good practice could be identified and emulated across the School.
- 4.7.6 Students who met the Team confirmed that they were comfortable approaching members of academic staff for support but highlighted lack of clarity over what issues

should be raised to administrative staff. This was compounded by a lack of awareness of who within the administration team was responsible for any particular issue.

- 4.7.7 The Team recommends that the School reviews the information provided to students detailing the key administrative contacts, their respective responsibilities and the appropriate methods to enquire (e.g. in person, telephone and email contact details).

#### *4.8 Approaches to Learning and Teaching*

##### **Provision of oral classes**

- 4.8.1 The SER noted that the delivery of oral classes had been reduced from weekly to fortnightly, with the exception of Slavonic Studies, at Levels 1 and 2. It was reported that, following the loss of native language teachers, the School was unable to provide the necessary staffing resources.
- 4.8.2 Students and staff highlighted their disappointment with the decision to reduce the provision of oral classes. Students who met the Team highlighted the importance of spoken language learning in building confidence and accuracy before undertaking the Language Year Abroad. It was noted that, while voluntary or extracurricular opportunities were available and utilised they were suitable for developing conversational language but not necessarily academic or technically accurate linguistic skills.
- 4.8.3 The Head of School confirmed that the rationale for reducing the provision of oral language classes to fortnightly at Levels 1 and 2 was an issue of limited resources. The School has amended approaches to support students' oral language skills through increased use of Moodle (see 4.8.14-4.8.16), support for informal language opportunities (e.g. tandem language learning, film screenings, social events, Goethe Institute/Alliance française) but as many of these opportunities rely upon volunteers it is not possible to formalise (or guarantee) these opportunities. Across all meetings, it was evident that there is a desire and an appetite to deliver a greater number of oral classes to allow students to develop their oral language skills. However, it was noted that even with increased resources and increased number of oral classes students would still need to utilise voluntary or extracurricular opportunities to develop and practice their spoken language skills.
- 4.8.4 The Team recommended that the School work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes.

##### **Graduate Teaching Assistants and University Native Language Teachers**

- 4.8.5 GTAs and UNLTs who met the Team all expressed satisfaction with the support provided by senior staff highlighting open-door policies, support to develop individual styles and support for managing assessment as particularly welcome. It is testament to the successful and meaningful engagement between the School and the GTAs and UNLTs that they felt their role was unfairly described as an 'Assistant' and reflected that their role might be more accurately represented as 'Graduate Teachers' given the degree of autonomy and responsibility that they were entrusted with.
- 4.8.6 GTAs and UNLTs reported that they had attended GTA Training provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre but had not found the generalist approach to be particularly helpful. While the School had not provided any formal training the regular interactions between GTAs, UNLTs and permanent staff allowed a sharing of practice and ideas and the open door policy ensured that all felt well supported in their role.

- 4.8.7 The meeting with GTAs and UNLTs highlighted that while they greatly enjoyed and valued their role (in teaching and supporting their students and for the experience it provided to aid their future careers) the range of responsibilities and the time commitment that was required of them was not reflected in the recompense that was provided. In addition to formal teaching hours they were paid for thirty minutes of preparation time. Additionally, office hours or other time dedicated to providing support to students above and beyond formal teaching hours, e.g. responding to student email queries, were unpaid. The Team considered that the value the School receives from GTAs and UNLTs should be reflected in the level of recompense they receive.
- 4.8.8 The Team recommends that GTA and UNLT pay and recognition is reviewed by the School and College to ensure the processes operated by the School are in line with University policy such that GTA and UNLT staff receive fair recompense for the quantity, and quality, of work they deliver.

### **Probationers**

- 4.8.9 All probationers who met the Team welcomed the formal and informal support provided by the School including the mentoring and the unofficial open-door policy which operates. The formal induction of probationer staff is augmented by informal ongoing oversight usually provided by Programme Directors (and specific support given by Course Conveners for courses they teach on).
- 4.8.10 The probationers felt that their workload was managed appropriately and while high (largely due to student numbers) suitable cognisance was given to their relative experience and specific days were allocated to research to ensure time was protected.
- 4.8.11 The School is commended for the exemplary support provided to probationer staff through official mentoring processes and through regular informal support such as discussion of pedagogical, assessment or student support issues.
- 4.8.12 The probationers who met the panel had had a range of engagements with the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) provided through the Learning and Teaching Centre. Due to the different appointment times, two had started the PGCAP, two had been exempt from undertaking PGCAP due to previous experience, one had completed it in a previous institution and one was scheduled to start in September 2013.

### **Teaching in target language**

- 4.8.13 As acknowledged above in 4.4.6, the School has developed a greater number of courses which are taught in the target language, partly to support spoken language learning following the reduction of oral classes to fortnightly (at Levels 1 and 2). The greater teaching in the target language supports language learning and allows students to engage with the target language more regularly and academically. However, the steps the School has taken towards greater unity have, in part, been to encourage students within the School to take courses from other languages (hence the standardisation of credit-rating to allow this). However, if a course is taught in the target language then a student not from that language track would not possess sufficient linguistic ability to take the course. Students who met the panel expressed desire for greater teaching in target language but also welcomed the ability to 'dip in' to other language or culture courses.

### **Technology-enhanced learning and teaching**

- 4.8.14 The School has increased the use of Moodle across its provision to supplement oral and language teaching (in the context of reduced number of oral language classes). The School boasts many examples of good or innovative use of Moodle, with Moodle assessments used very effectively, for example in delivery of highly-tuned French grammar assessment.

4.8.15 Students who met the Team confirmed that the use of Moodle in some areas was exemplary and greatly valued. Students reported varied uses of Moodle ranging from being a simple repository of standard course information to innovative online assessment and a resource developed to support additional independent study. The School is encouraged to utilise resources, such as the Learning and Teaching Development Fund, to enhance the use of software in language learning.

4.8.16 The Team recommends that the School continues to develop and improve the consistency of use of Moodle across the School, utilising the skills and expertise of internal good practice (e.g. French) to support and enhance Moodle provision. The use of a sub-committee of School Learning and Teaching Committee, with representatives from across the School and students was an effective mechanism for implementing curriculum developments, and may also be suitable for delivering enhanced Moodle provision.

#### **Breadth of ability in classes**

4.8.17 Staff (and students) reflected that in some classes the mix of students with varying ability or experience in the target language could negatively impact on the experience of students, particularly very capable ones who were not being linguistically challenged. Meetings with GTAs and UNLTs highlighted the pressure on staff to manage the mixture of personalities within a small group to ensure contributions from all i.e. to prevent domination by a more confident or extroverted student. It was suggested that the success in managing these groups to ensure that the less confident students contributed equally was variable.

4.8.18 It was further noted that the introduction of self-enrolment in tutorials had led to unequal enrolment (e.g. popular time slot classes filled, less popular time slots with much smaller groups.) While the School and tutors had encouraged students to swap to alternative classes they were often unwilling to do so. The School is encouraged to explore enrolment controls within MyCampus that would ensure a more even spread of enrolments.

#### **Development of Graduate Attributes**

4.8.19 The SER reports that the School's programmes are designed to facilitate the development of subject-specific academic and intellectual skills and that the curriculum facilitates the development of generic and transferable skills. The School highlights the areas of communication, oral and written presentation of ideas, critical thinking, use of IT and independent and team-working skills. It has also been promoting the University Graduate Attributes to students through a poster campaign and accompanying handout. The School confirms that they conform to the skills-development requirements set in the QAA Language Studies Benchmark statement.

4.8.20 The School requires students to conduct structured reflection on their learning and their practices. In 2011, the School piloted an approach where students were required to provide a reflective appendix with their dissertation to enhance their awareness of the acquisition of transferable skills and graduate attributes and the resulting employability benefits. Following the successful pilot, this was rolled out in 2012.

4.8.21 Additionally, students on work placements abroad are required to compile a report in which they reflect on their development and learning during their time working abroad.

#### **Equality and Diversity**

4.8.22 The SER reports that issues of equality and diversity are integral elements of the curricula and learning programmes across the School. The programmes, by their nature, promote and require an understanding of and engagement with diverse cultural perspectives. Particularly through Comparative Literature, students are required to

consider cultural information and analyse and evaluate the literature through intercultural frameworks (e.g. western perspectives, post-colonial).

## **5. Maintaining the Standards of Awards**

- 5.1 The School ensures maintenance of the standards of awards through a number of means detailed below.

### **External Examiners**

- 5.2 The School operates a standard process of external examination. External Examiners provide an annual written report confirming maintenance of the standard of award delivered at Glasgow, including comparability to the awards across the UK (and internationally), attends and provides a verbal report at the School-wide Exam Board and highlights any areas of concern or for development.
- 5.3 Since the last DPTLA, the School has amended the External Examiner process (following a recommendation in the DPTLA report) to ensure that all External Examiner Reports are considered, in the first instance, by the Head of School before being passed to Language Areas and the School Learning and Teaching Committee for consideration and action, where required.

### **Exam Board**

- 5.4 The School recently (2010-11) moved to a single Exam Board covering all Honours programmes within the School. The Exam Board is convened by the School Exam Convener, attended by all External Examiners, and academic and administrative staff from the School. The School believes that the revised Exam Board structure has helped ensure consistency of policy and practice and therefore assured quality throughout the School. Feedback from External Examiners confirms that the new process reflects enhancement to the management of standards and is working effectively.

### **Second marking arrangements**

- 5.5 The School employs second marking throughout its assessment to ensure consistency of marking and maintenance of standards.
- 5.6 At Honours level written and oral assessments are marked by two internal reviewers and oral assessments are digitally recorded for moderation by the Course Convener and the External Examiner to ensure consistency and fairness. At pre-Honours level, a sample of assessments is second marked. The School views this as a key role for the Course Conveners in ensuring the consistency and fairness in marking, particularly across large classes where scripts have been marked by a large group of staff.
- 5.7 GTAs and UNLTs who met the Team praised the support for marking, and guidance on the consistent implementation of the Code of Assessment, from senior staff.

## **6. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience**

- 6.1 The School utilises a wide range of processes to ensure the delivery of a high quality student learning experience.

### **Annual monitoring**

- 6.2 In 2011-12, the University revised the timetable for Annual Monitoring; the School considers the revised timetable for annual monitoring (requiring completion of annual monitoring at the end of the teaching period) to have enhanced the effectiveness of annual monitoring allowing swifter reporting of issues to School, College and University- level than previously. The School meets University guidelines on annual monitoring with the Annual Monitoring Reports and School Annual Monitoring

Summary (written by the School Quality Officer) being submitted to School Learning and Teaching Committee for consideration. The School Learning and Teaching Committee, including SRC representation, considers the report and proposes amendments before submitting the School Annual Monitoring Summary to the College Quality Officer.

### **Student feedback**

- 6.3 The School employs a number of survey mechanisms for eliciting feedback from students.
- 6.4 The School has a well-established process for requesting end-of-course feedback through hard copy questionnaires. In line with the School's desire to utilise technology to enhance learning and teaching, the School trialled delivery of end-of-course surveys through Moodle. Unfortunately, the very low response rate when delivered through Moodle meant the results were unreliable and subject to being swayed by a small number of students. From 2012-13, the School has taken part in the University pilot of the online survey system EvaSys, which facilitates electronic analysis and evaluation of hardcopy feedback responses. The School is encouraged to continue trialling innovative or new practices in relation to eliciting feedback from students.
- 6.5 The School also participates in University-wide surveys such as the First Year Student Learning Experience Survey, the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the Student Barometer.
- 6.6 The School has consistently received high satisfaction ratings for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey. All areas within the School met or exceeded the University benchmark of 90% in 2012 with the exception of Hispanic Studies. The School acknowledged in the SER that improvements could be made in relation to Hispanic Studies, which reflected increasing student numbers at the same time as staffing difficulties.
- 6.7 The School has a well-established process for analysing and responding to NSS results. NSS results are discussed at language area and at the School Learning and Teaching Committee. Where areas of satisfaction are low or where satisfaction has dropped e.g. Assessment and Feedback, Hispanic Studies, the Head of School and School Learning and Teaching Convener meet with staff in the relevant area to develop strategies to improve.

### **Student membership of committees**

- 6.8 The School provides formal opportunities for students to engage in the day-to-day and strategic management of the School through membership of Committees.
- 6.9 The SRC School of Modern Languages and Cultures Representative is a valued member of the School Learning and Teaching Committee and is therefore included in discussions of annual monitoring, assessment practices, curriculum development and other key learning and teaching issues.
- 6.10 More broadly, students' views are sought through Class Representatives. Class Reps attend regular School-wide Staff Student Liaison Committees. The Team reviewed Staff Student Liaison Committee minutes and found evidence of a student-centric approach with evidence of discussion and remedy of issues.
- 6.11 The School is encouraged to ensure that the minutes of Learning and Teaching Committee and Staff Student Liaison Committees clearly and accurately reflect the many actions and outcomes from the discussions, particularly year-on-year to ensure students are aware of the resolution of issues.

### **Informal feedback**

- 6.12 The nature of the SMLC programmes and the close and regular contact between staff and students (and the willingness of staff to engage) has developed an easy rapport which allows regular feedback to be provided by students. GTAs and UNLTs in particular felt that their interactions with students elicited useful feedback which in turn informed the development of the course. GTAs and UNLTs were very positive about the receptiveness of senior staff to take their ideas and viewpoints on board.

## **7. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching**

### **Key Strengths**

- 7.1 The Review Team identified the following areas of good practice:
- Engagement with, and support for, students
  - Support and autonomy given to Graduate Teaching Assistants and University Native Language Teachers
  - Successful transition into unitary School structure
  - Consistent and appropriate strategies for assessment
  - Engagement with QAA Benchmark and identification of the 'affective' dimension of teaching languages
  - The breadth of language provision and scope for development following inclusion of Language Centre

### **Areas for improvement**

- 7.2 The Review Team highlighted the following areas as opportunities for improvement:
- Clarity of feedback processes
  - Strategic approach to management of breadth of provision
  - Under-provision of oral or spoken language learning

### **Conclusions**

- 7.3 The Review Team observed a dynamic and forward thinking School which has grasped opportunities and sought to reflect on its practices in order to ensure continual enhancement. The School has successfully developed a unitary structure, with the removal of Sections, which has contributed to the growing sense of collegiality identified during the Review. The inclusive approach to harmonisation and co-location has contributed to this and has facilitated synergies and sharing of best practice across the School. The Team were impressed by the commitment from the student body to the School and to the Review process. The engagements with students confirmed the mutual respect between the students and staff and highlighted the meaningful and regular engagement with students in learning and teaching, student support and quality processes. The previous six years has seen a great deal of change and transition for the School, which has greatly enhanced its provision and effectiveness, and the Review Team commends the School for its excellent practices and encourages it to continue providing an excellent student learning experience.

## **Commendations**

7.4 The Review Team commends the School on the following (which are presented in the order they appear in the report)

### **Commendation 1**

The School has demonstrated a willingness to respond to recommendations from each review. The School is to be **commended** for its positive response to meeting and, in many cases, surpassing the recommendations from the Departmental Programme of Teaching and Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) in 2006. [Paragraph 1.5]

### **Commendation 2**

The Team **commends** the analytical and reflective Self Evaluation Report which demonstrated an inclusive and transparent approach to development and accurately portrayed an innovative School demonstrating self-awareness and an ability to reflect on, and enhance, practices and provision. [Paragraph 1.7]

### **Commendation 3**

The Team **commend** the level of involvement of students in developing the SER and the contributions made by students who met the Team. The number of students who were willing to meet the Review Team and their positivity indicated a School which values and supports its students. [Paragraph 1.8]

### **Commendation 4**

The Team **commended** the School for intending to preserve the breadth of provision which benefitted the School greatly and encouraged the School to consider developing non-European language and culture provision. [Paragraph 3.4]

### **Commendation 5**

The School is **commended** for, independently and as part of the University-wide restructuring and reshaping exercises, developing a unitary School which staff and students value and can see the benefits of in terms of support, interdisciplinarity, enhancement of quality and good practice and collegiality. [Paragraph 3.12]

### **Commendation 6**

The Team **commended** the 'strongly affective dimension' of language teaching, especially in terms of increasing awareness and transforming attitudes towards culture, difference and diversity, which was highlighted in the SER and echoed by Key Staff. [Paragraph 4.1.2]

### **Commendation 7**

The School is **commended** for the exemplary practice of returning assessed language work with written feedback within a week. [Paragraph 4.3.10]

### **Commendation 8**

The School managed the process of harmonisation of the curriculum through a sub-committee of the School Learning and Teaching Committee with staff drawn from across the School. The approach to reviewing the curriculum is to be **commended**: the express desire to ensure fairness and transparency across the School without setting exact stipulations and restrictions on academics or students allowed the process to be smooth, valued and most importantly effective. [Paragraph 4.4.4]

### **Commendation 9**

The Team **commends** the commitment to staff and student engagement in the curriculum review process which ensured a shared ownership and understanding of the

approach to teaching in the School and which was reflected in meetings with staff and students. [Paragraph 4.4.5]

### **Commendation 10**

The School is **commended** for the exemplary support provided to probationer staff through official mentoring processes and through regular informal support such as discussion of pedagogical, assessment or student support issues. [Paragraph 4.8.11]

### **Recommendations**

7.5 The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. They have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are ranked in order of priority.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Team **recommends** that the School review the sustainability of provision and develop a strategic approach to development of new (or maintenance of existing) language provision to meet market demands and support the strategic development of the School. [Paragraph 3.5]

**For Action: Head of School**

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Team **recommends** that the School moves forward with tighter integration of the Language Centre within the School on an academic and administrative basis to realise fully the potential benefits of the merger. [Paragraph 3.2]

**For Action: Head of School**

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Team recommended that the School work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes. [Paragraph 4.8.4]

**For Action: Head of School**

**For information: Dean (Learning and Teaching)**

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Team **recommends** that GTA and UNLT pay and recognition is reviewed by the School and College to ensure the processes operated by the School are in line with University policy such that GTA and UNLT staff receive fair recompense for the quantity, and quality, of work they deliver. [Paragraph 4.8.8]

**For Action: Head of School**

**For Information: Dean (Learning and Teaching)**

#### **Recommendation 5**

The Team **recommends** that the School should provide clarity and more information around feedback processes deployed in the School to ensure that students are aware:

- When feedback will be provided
- What constitutes feedback
- That the University guidelines permit a three week timeframe for feedback on assessed work
- If feedback cannot be given within the three week timeframe, why this is the case and when the students can expect the feedback

- That the return of work on a weekly or fortnightly basis is exemplary practice [Paragraph 4.3.11]

**For Action: School Learning and Teaching Convener**

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Team **recommends** that the School reviews the information provided to students detailing the key administrative contacts, their respective responsibilities and the appropriate methods to enquire (e.g. in person, telephone and email contact details). [Paragraph 4.7.7]

**For Action: Head of School**

**For information: Head of School Administration**

#### **Recommendation 7**

The Team **recommends** that the School continues to develop and improve the consistency of use of Moodle across the School, utilising the skills and expertise of internal good practice (e.g. French) to support and enhance Moodle provision. The use of a sub-committee of School Learning and Teaching Committee, with representatives from across the School and students was an effective mechanism for implementing curriculum developments, and may also be suitable for delivering enhanced Moodle provision. [Paragraph 4.8.16]

**For Action: School Learning and Teaching Convener**