

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 23 May 2014

**Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of Economic and
Social History held on 23 and 24 January 2014**

Ms Amber Higgins, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor Tom Guthrie	Professor of Private Law, Convener
Professor Graeme Morton	University of Dundee, External Subject Specialist
Ms Naomi Duffy-Welsh	Students' Representative Council
Mrs Margaret Milner	Adam Smith Business School, Cognate School
Professor Nick Jonsson	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Ming Cheng	Learning and Teaching Centre
Ms Amber Higgins	Senate Office, Clerk to the Review Panel
Ms Fiona Dick	Senate Office, Observer

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information

Economic and Social History (ESH) is one of five constituent subjects of the School of Social and Political Sciences (SPS), which is part of the College of Social Sciences. ESH is a distinct discipline combining social science and historical perspectives. There are three institutional centres based in ESH and give focus to three core areas of expertise: the Centre for Gender History; the Centre of the History of Medicine and the Centre for Business History in Scotland.

1.2 The Subject last underwent internal review in May 2008 as the Department of Economic and Social History when it was one of nine departments in the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences. The formal outcome of the review was that the Review Panel was very impressed by the performance of the Department across the range of its teaching provision, its imaginative and committed support for the quality and further enhancement of the student learning experience, and its support for, and clear articulation to students of, University policy on assessment. The Review had full confidence in the quality of the teaching and the academic standards of the Department.

1.3 The 2013-14 Self Evaluation Report was prepared by Dr Jim Phillips, ESH Head of Subject with assistance from Dr Duncan Ross and Mark Freeman. ESH held focus groups with students in October which contributed to a first draft, submitted to the Staff-Student Liaison Committee in November 2013. A full draft was circulated to all members of teaching staff in November and discussed at a Subject Meeting on 28 November 2013. The Review Panel found the finished version to be reflective and well written and provided a clear focus for the conduct of the review. The Review Panel would however have found it helpful to have had more explanation of the figures supplied in Tables 1.7 Total Staffing and 1.8 Student Numbers within the SER.

1.4 The Review Panel met with

- the Dean of Learning and Teaching, Dr Moira Fischbacher-Smith;
- the Head of School of Social and Political Sciences, Professor Christopher Carman;
- the Head of Subject, Dr Jim Phillips
- seven members of the Subject area teaching staff including, separately, the single probationary staff member
- three GTAs who had a range of experience
- three current PGT students and one who had completed an MSc in 2012-13
- seven undergraduate students representing Levels 1 and 2 and Honours classes.

Students	Headcount
Level 1	396
Level 2	160
Level 3	31
Honours	31
Undergraduate Total	618
Postgraduate Taught	13
Postgraduate Research*	19

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

The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by ESH.

- MA Social Sciences Single Honours in Economic and Social History
- MSc in Global Economy
- MSc in Social and Cultural History

ESH also contributes to the following *joint* degree programmes offered with other Schools or other institutions

- MA in Social Sciences
- MA Joint Honours in Economic and Social History and another subject
- MA in Social Sciences Joint Honours in Economic and Social History and another subject
- LLB in Law and Economic and Social History

ESH also contributes to the following degree programmes offered by other Schools or other institutions

- MSc in Chinese Studies
- MSc/MLitt in History
- MSc/MLitt in History of Medicine
- MSc in Management
- MSc in International Business and Entrepreneurship
- MSc in International Management and Leadership
- MSc in Global Health

2. Overall aims of the Subject's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan

The SER clearly detailed how the subject supported the University's strategic plan and the overall aims of the Economic and Social History provision were elaborated and resonated well with the University aim of teaching supported through research excellence.

Economic and Social History outline in the SER that they are looking to further enrich their international character of their student community. The Review Panel noted the small international student recruitment numbers and was concerned by this given that Economic and Social History was an international discipline.

3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

3.1 Aims

The SER outlined that ESH approach to learning and teaching was to provide a challenging and coherent degree, which students could progress through in a structured and supported manner. ESH offers both a single honours degree and a number of combined and joint degrees widely within the University. The aims of the programmes are clearly supported by the active contribution of staff in research-led teaching. The aims of the programmes from a social-science perspective require students to develop a wide range of academic skills with students engaging with progressively more complex academic literature.

It was noted that ESH was an international discipline which aims to provide and encourage cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons. ESH aims to provide new perspectives on a global dimension of economic and social history. The External Subject Specialist noted that the subject coverage was very good and maintained a good balance between economic and social history with a good coverage of globalisation.

The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that the programmes offered by ESH remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application. The Review Panel found that the programme aims were robust.

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

It was clear from all the documentation provided to the Review Panel that all the programmes within ESH had clearly defined ILOs, which were clearly set out. The assertions made in the SER that the ILOs were clearly communicated with students were substantiated in discussions with staff and students. During the discussions with UG students it was clear that they had a good understanding of the ILOs and the relevance of these to their assessments. The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for the way that the ILOs are explained and disseminated to both UG and PGT students.

3.3 Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

The SER detailed how ESH had augmented the Code of Assessment verbal descriptors with the discipline specific descriptors, which had been published in all course documents. The Review Panel explored the links between the Subject's programmes and the ILO's, and found these to be appropriate and useful for assessing student attainment. It was also confirmed that the relationship between learning outcomes and assessments were discussed with students and were clearly understood by UG students.

The Review Panel noted with interest the development of a mechanism that will enable all Honours students to receive exam feedback. It was outlined that the internal markers would agree a common set of comments on each script which would be recorded electronically. Comments on each examination would then be compiled centrally so that each student had a profile of performance across all their examinations, with strengths and areas of improvement identified. This would be discussed with the student after the assessment period and it was hoped that this would lead to improved examination performance in the Senior Honours year. The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for the development and introduction of an examination feedback system for exam scripts for the Honours years.

3.3.1 Feedback on assessment

During discussions with students it was clear that feedback given on assessment was often very detailed and delivered in a timely manner which the students found to be beneficial to future submissions. The Review Panel discussed the quality and quantity of feedback on assessments with key staff during discussions. It was noted that although this placed increased demands on staff time, it was considered to be of vital importance to ensure that UG students remained satisfied and were able to improve their skill set. The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for its excellent provision of feedback on formative assessments to UG and PGT students.

3.3.2 Role of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in Assessments

The Review Panel explored with the GTAs the role they played in undergraduate assessments and if they understood the measures employed to ensure the consistency of the marks awarded. During discussions it became clear to the Review Panel that there was a lack of clarity in the amount of time that should be set aside to mark each assessment and the amount of feedback that should be provided. The GTAs were also unclear what measures were employed to ensure consistency in the grading of assessments across all the GTAs within ESH. The GTAs commented that the academic staff were approachable and helpful if they had specific queries or concerns.

The Review Panel raised the concerns about the lack of clarity with the Heads of Subject and School. The Head of Subject advised the Review Panel that all the assessments marked by GTAs were moderated to ensure that they were consistent with the university grading scheme and that there was parity across all markers. The Head of Subject was unaware that the GTAs felt they needed more guidance on the quality and quantity of the feedback required to be given on assessments and stated that the GTAs were expected to have attended the training provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre. The Head of Subject made this latter observation having read a document circulated on 12 December 2013 by College Undergraduate Administrative Officer, 'University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences, Internal Examiners 2012-13' (February 2013), which on pp. 19-20 (column 5) recorded that the GTA Training Status of all GTAs was 'completed'.

The Review Panel **recommends** Economic and Social History provides comprehensive support to GTAs to include specific guidance on feedback on assessments and the management of workloads to GTAs.

The Review Panel **recommends** Economic and Social History ensure that all GTAs have attended the GTA Statutory Training provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre before carrying out any assessment tasks.

3.4 Curriculum Design, Development and Content

The Review Panel noted from the SER the processes for reviewing the curriculum and welcomed the involvement of students in this process. Professor Morton, External

Subject Specialist on the Review Panel commented that the coverage of the subject was good and focused mainly on modern history. It was clear that the research quality of Economic and Social History staff was strong and that this research informed curriculum design and content throughout the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The 'globalization' theme for the overall curriculum was seen as a particular strength, that conforms to wider disciplinary developments.

Discussions with staff also highlighted the need to balance the economic and social strands to ensure a balance within ESH. During the discussions with the students they highlighted the choice of courses as a particular strength and that once they understood the subject they found it to be rewarding and interesting to study but that there was a lack of understanding of ESH from students outside the subject area.

The Review Panel noted from the SER that students could elect to take RESH-2, which is an extensive historiographical study and meets the requirement to complete an extended piece of independent work, instead of a dissertation. This was seen as a particular strength for the programme particularly for students who did not want to progress to a PGT programme. This was raised during the discussions with undergraduate students who found this to be a positive way forward for students.

3.5 *Student Recruitment*

3.5.1 *Undergraduate recruitment*

The SER highlighted a number of challenges faced by ESH in the recruitment of undergraduate students. It was clear that ESH is dependent on the enrolment of MA (SocSci) or MA students on Level 1 courses. This had proved to be a particular challenge following the introduction of MyCampus which enabled students to self manage their studies and curricula. ESH had worked hard to engage with university wide recruitment events such as Open Days, Applicant Visit Days and Freshers' Week 'supermarket' but nevertheless this remained a major challenge for ESH.

Discussions with the UG students also highlighted a lack of understanding and awareness of the subject in the wider student population. The students stated that once students engaged with ESH they found the support provided to be outstanding which often encouraged them to study the subject as their main degree programme. It was suggested by the Undergraduate students that it would be beneficial to provide information to prospective students or to send out a guide on the subject area prior to the start of the enrolment on courses to enable students to gain a greater understanding of the subject area.

3.5.2 *Postgraduate Taught recruitment*

The Review Panel noted a number of changes that ESH had undertaken in the provision of postgraduate programmes since the last review in 2007-08. It was noted that the ESH had engaged more widely with the Adam Smith Business School to deliver on the MSc Management programmes. ESH had also discontinued two programmes, in 2010 MSc in Contemporary Economic History and in 2012 MSc in Social and Cultural History. A new programme in MSc Global Economy had now been developed following extensive dialogue with the School of Social and Political Sciences and RIO, and although a large number of applications had been received, the conversion rate to students on the PGT programme had been lower than expected.

During discussions with PGT and UG students it was highlighted that staff were particularly supportive and proactive in encouraging student to apply for PGT programmes. It was noted that ESH were also very good at encouraging the students to apply for PGT programme funding and that this remained the biggest

barrier to students taking up places. The lack of awareness of PGT Programmes particularly the MSc Global Economy by international students was highlighted as a concern by one PGT student.

The Review Panel **recommends** that Economic and Social History investigates opportunities to work closely with RIO, the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences to increase the recruitment of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Home and International students and to increase awareness of the subject.

3.6 *Student Progression, Retention and Support*

The Review Panel noted with interest from the SER that not all the Honours students would have progressed through all the Level 1 and Level 2 courses. This flexibility was as a response to the unfamiliarity of ESH to University-entry students, however the number of students following this system were small.

Professor Morton reported that from the evidence viewed it was clear that ESH works impressively in the area of student support. This statement was supported by the discussions with undergraduate students that said once they start to take courses from ESH they feel supported and that feedback given by staff was excellent.

The Review Panel had been impressed by what it had read in the SER about the flexibility of staff responses towards student needs, and their commitment to student support. During the discussions with key staff it was evident that staff saw student support as a vital part of their role in the retention of students. It was clear from the discussions with PGT students that ESH was very good at encouraging students to progress from Undergraduate to Postgraduate taught and on to Postgraduate research programmes, which the students highlighted as a particular strength.

The PGT students that met with the Review Panel and highlighted the large readings lists that they received at the start of the session said that it would have been beneficial to have received this prior to the start of the programme along with guidance on the most important texts to read.

3.7 *The Quality of Learning Opportunities*

The Review Panel was satisfied that the range of learning and teaching methods used by ESH was appropriate to the aims and learning objectives. The primary mode of teaching was by formal lecture but the process of engagement was deepened through tutorials and seminars which aligned closely to the University strategic emphasis on enquiry-led teaching.

It was clear to the Review Panel that ESH actively sought to consult students on all new course proposals. The UG students discussed the Economic and Social History Society which was currently led by students. It was noted that the staff attended as many events as possible but the Review Panel questioned how well the Society was advertised around the School and College and suggested that more could be done to improve the profile of the Society within the School and College.

The SER highlighted the use of Moodle within ESH not only for making course brochures and lecture notes available, but for providing additional links to external websites and other forms of support material. The Review Panel noted from the SER the positive National Student Survey (NSS) results that ESH had achieved. In 2013 the Subject area recorded levels of satisfaction in all five areas of assessment and feedback that were significantly above the University and College of Social Sciences averages.

3.8 *Resources for Learning and Teaching*

3.8.1 *Staffing*

The Review Panel would have welcomed more information on the distribution of work and the range of expertise of staff but it was noted from the SER that a number of new senior appointments had recently been made within ESH. Concerns were raised during the discussions with key staff about the current top heavy breakdown of staff and the issue of succession planning was raised. The Head of Subject reported that there was a current freeze on any new appointments but that the School and College were aware of the need for confirmation of staff posts. During discussions with the probationary staff member it was clear that a larger induction programme would have been beneficial however staff had been very supportive particularly the administrative staff within ESH.

3.8.2 *Workload Model*

The SER detailed little information on the current workloads for staff members and it was noted during the discussions with key staff that some staff were unclear as to how the workload model was being implemented and suggested that there was a lack of transparency on the methodology being used. The Head of School reported that the workload model was being reviewed but that it had been available on the School website for some time along with the calculations used.

The Review Panel noted from the SER that ESH would be sending a staff member to Nankai University to teach for the second semester. It was unclear from the SER as to what plans had been put into place to support the staff member or the workload that this would entail. During discussions with key staff it was clear that the staff within ESH were supportive of this proposal and would support the member of staff involved but it was unclear as to what long term plan had been put in place to ensure staff were not overloaded by this new arrangement.

3.8.3 *Administrative Support*

It was clear from the discussions with both UG and PGT students and key staff that the administrative support provided was outstanding. During the discussions with both the UG and PGT students, it was highlighted on a number of occasions how approachable and helpful the administrative support provided was. This was also highlighted during the discussion with probationary staff who stated that the administrative staff were extremely approachable and helpful. The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History administrative support staff for the way in which they deal with staff and students.

3.8.4 *Teaching and study facilities*

The Review Panel welcomed the tour of Lilybank house provided by ESH and noted the learning and social space provided. The UG students highlighted the specialist research libraries housed in Lilybank house as a particular strength. During discussions with key staff it was highlighted that as a consequence of restructuring, access to space used for technology in history, specifically the DISH Labs in University Gardens, was closed to ESH students due to budgetary constraints which was disappointing.

When UG and PGT students were asked about the facilities they reported that they were happy with the space available. The UG students however reported that at the start of the academic year the library had been particularly busy but that this had now evened out.

4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards

It was stated in the SER that ESH was informed by the History QAA benchmarking statements. Professor Morton, External Specialist confirmed that ESH conformed closely to QAA Benchmarking in terms of student employability and critical thinking which was achieved through an emphasis on internationalisation and social science interdisciplinary teaching. More detail on the communication and IT skills would have been beneficial to the Review Panel as it was unclear as to how this aspect met QAA Benchmarking.

The standards of the awards were assessed by the external examiners whose confidence in ESH's procedures and practices had been noted from the external examiners reports that had been made available to the Review Panel. It was clear to the Review Panel that ESH had robust and clear procedures for maintaining the standards of the awards which were consistent with University policy and procedures.

5. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

Since 2010, quality assurance and enhancement had been co-ordinated at the level of School, the procedures in place within the School ensure that University policies on assessment, learning and teaching, and quality were applied consistently within ESH.

The Review Panel noted from the SER that the student learning experience had been enhanced through structured feedback, annual monitoring and student involvement in the design of new undergraduate courses. The Review Panel noted the low uptake of Erasmus programmes within ESH and **encouraged** ESH to promote this more widely to UG students where possible.

5.1.1 Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)

During the review of the documentation provided to the Review Panel it was noted from the SSLC minutes provided that it was not clear who was responsible for the actions nor who was responsible for reporting back on the actions that were identified at the meetings. The UG students mentioned that a student was the Chair for the meeting and was responsible for the agenda and minutes but that staff support was provided and it was seen as a good skill to develop.

Although the Review Panel welcomed the use of a student Chair due to the skill enhancement opportunity, it was clear from the minutes that further guidance was needed on minute taking and reporting structure, and the need for actions taken to be reported back to the committee.

The Review Panel **recommends** that Economic and Social History ensures that the SSLC meetings are clearly documented with, actions directed to individuals responsible and progress or conclusions noted at the next meeting.

6. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching

Key Strengths

- Commitment of staff to the student experience in providing fast and analytical feedback to students on written work.
- Enthusiasm of staff for providing students with a friendly and approachable environment.
- Administrative support provided to staff and students within Economic and Social History.

- Feedback on examination scripts for Honours students.
- Wide range of topics available for study at Honours.

Areas to be improved or enhanced

- Support and training to be provided to GTAs.
- Recruitment of undergraduate and PGT students
- International community of UG and PGT students and study aboard opportunities.

Conclusions

The Review Panel highly commends Economic and Social History for the overall quality of its provision and the dedication of the staff team in providing a rewarding and supportive student environment. The Review Panel was impressed by the range of its teaching provision, its committed support for, and clear articulation to students of University policy on assessment. There is an effective committee structure which has sought to include students at all levels of discussion of teaching and learning provision.

Commendations

Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for the way that the ILOs are explained and disseminated to both UG and PGT students. *[paragraph 3.2]*

Commendation 2:

The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for the development and introduction of an examination feedback system for exam scripts for the Honours years. *[paragraph 3.3]*

Commendation 3:

The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History for its excellent provision of feedback on formative assessments to UG and PGT students. *[paragraph 3.3.1]*

Commendation 4:

The Review Panel **commends** Economic and Social History administrative support staff for the way in which they deal with staff and students. *[paragraph 3.8.3]*

The areas that require attention are listed in the Recommendations below. These have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are ranked in the order of priority.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that Economic and Social History investigates opportunities to work closely with RIO, the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences to increase the recruitment of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Home and International students and to increase awareness of the subject. *[paragraph 3.5.2]*

For information: Head of College
For information: Head of School
For the attention of: Head of Subject

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** Economic and Social History provides comprehensive support to GTAs to include specific guidance on feedback on assessments and the management of workloads to GTAs. *[paragraph 3.3.2.]*

For the attention of: Head of Subject

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** Economic and Social History ensure that all GTAs have attended the GTA Statutory Training provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre before carrying out any assessment tasks. *[paragraph 3.3.2.]*

For the attention of: Head of Subject

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that Economic and Social History ensures that the SSLC meetings are clearly documented with, actions directed to individuals responsible and progress or conclusions noted at the next meeting. *[paragraph 5.1.1]*

For the attention of: Head of Subject