

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 23 May 2014

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to Recommendations Arising from the Periodic Subject Review of Celtic and Gaelic held on 15 February 2013

Mrs Lesley Fielding, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions and Recommendations*Conclusions*

The Review Panel highly commends the Subject Area for the overall quality of its provision and the dedication of the staff team in providing a rewarding and supportive student environment. The research work of the Subject Area is also to be commended which provides a wide and varied range of courses for the students; however, the Panel had concerns regarding the high workload of some staff team members as a result of strategic research leave and the work-intensive assessment methods.

Recommendations:

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

Recommendation 1:

Whilst the Panel appreciates the value of the current research leave strategy, the Panel considered that, in its current form, it placed considerable pressure on the Head of Subject and the Teaching staff. Therefore the Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reflect on the current research leave strategy in order to identify potentially difficult periods and to ensure that a relatively even balance between teaching commitments and research level is maintained for staff. [paragraph 3.8.1]

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

As a Subject Area we fully take on board the Panel's recommendation and will seek in the future to find improved ways of balancing teaching and research across the subject. There is nonetheless a tension which is particularly acute in a relatively small subject area such as Celtic and Gaelic between this and the University's guidelines on research leave which indicate that R&T staff may reasonably expect one semester of research leave in every four years, while there remains the need to accommodate the research leave which staff may have built into, and support through, externally funded projects. The issue of research leave cannot be taken in isolation from the issue of maternity and long-term sick leave with limited resources available to support this and thus can present particular difficulties in smaller subject areas where there are fewer staff to share the additional burden. The current academic session has been a particularly challenging one with two colleagues unavoidably both on research leave in Semester 2 and a further on sick leave followed by maternity leave. It is however anticipated that a more-balanced year lies ahead in 2014-15.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area review their forms of assessment for Levels 1 and 2 to extend the range of assessments at Levels 1 and 2. [paragraph 3.3.2]

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

Response:

Since the Periodic Subject Review, this issue has been discussed at some length by staff involved in delivering Celtic Civilisation Levels 1 and 2, courses in which two essays and an examination are the means of assessment in each course (Gaelic courses already involve essays, language exercises, oral presentations, oral examinations and written examinations).

The Panel Report refers to the “show and tell” exercises used in Celtic Civilisation level 1 and suggests considering using this for formal assessment. Staff wish to emphasise that the work undertaken by students as part of this “show and tell” exercise is in fact already assessed within the end of course examination. Part of the rationale for the Panel’s recommendation, and fully appreciated by staff, was that this change might relieve staff workload. However, staff are of the opinion that making “show and tell” a summative assessment would provide little relief and indeed would be more labour intensive. The majority of tutorials are taught by GTAs rather than staff and all assessment of, and feedback on, presentations would still need to be moderated by core staff members requiring the recording of all presentations. Staff are also of the opinion that making this exercise a summative assessment risks impairing its pedagogic impact. Student feedback year-on-year demonstrates that students find this an enjoyable and ‘fun’ exercise and their enjoyment is likely to be diminished if it were summative. Also, the collaborative nature of the exercise is an important attribute designed to promote ‘bonding’ and a sense of belonging early in 1st year, especially for International students (a strategy commended as good practice by the First Year Coordinators Network). The need to allocate individual grades to work done as a group would alter the nature of the group interaction and potentially impair the exercise’s important wider function.

While staff acknowledge the importance of good presentational skills, they consider that the great majority of students arrive with very good skills in this area. Written skills, however, tend to be very significantly weaker – a point brought up by a succession of external examiners. Staff therefore consider the greatest priority to be working with students to improve their academic writing skills in advance of, and to prepare them for, Honours subjects. Each essay within each of the courses is designed to develop and assess different skills, for instance, in the level 2 essays, there is a strong contrast between the first essay, which is broad and comparative (and historically driven), and the second essay which is focused on the explication of a particular text of the student’s choosing. Both distinct essay-writing approaches are demanded at Honours level across a range of courses.

Staff successfully bid for an Learning and Teaching Development Fund grant in 2012-13 to assist in the development of skills in handling primary sources in translation and over the last two years have been developing new written assessments to test these. Staff continue to monitor and review the impact of all these assessments at Level 1 and 2, both pedagogy and in terms of staff work-load.

It has, however, been agreed that the issue of assessment at Levels 1 and 2 will be discussed further during 2014-15 when a close to full complement of Celtic Civilisation staff will be involved in teaching.

Recommendation 3:

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area review the submission dates for course work at Levels 1, 2 and Honours with a view to staggering these dates to alleviate the pressure on staff in providing feedback on such a large quantity of work. [paragraph 3.3.4]

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

Response:

Language exercises at all levels are already spread evenly across both semesters, however the Subject Area has reviewed its essay submission dates and has endeavoured, where possible, to adjust these as a means of avoiding bottlenecks in marking. There is however, limited scope for staggering essay deadlines as, for pedagogical reasons, students cannot reasonably be expected to submit essays before reading week, leaving Weeks 7-11 of each semester for the submission of these assignments. In addition to reviewing deadlines we are ensuring that students are kept updated where delays with marking work occurs.

Recommendation 4:

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area explore options to promote the beginner's Gaelic class specifically to SMLC students. [paragraph 3.5.4]

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

Head of School of Humanities

Head of School of Modern Languages and Cultures

Joint Response:

The Head of Subject, Dr Sheila Kidd, has discussed this with Professor Kathryn Crameri, Head of SMLC and with Dr Eanna O' Ceallachain, Learning and Teaching Convenor in SMLC. Gaelic is already included in the Modern Languages brochure for Open Days. However, SMLC have also offered to make Celtic and Gaelic's subject leaflets available on their stands at Open Days and Applicants' Visit Days. SMLC has also decided to adopt a bilingual English / Gaelic name for the School, which will appear on SMLC signage this year and which should help to raise awareness of Gaelic within SMLC. The Head of School of Humanities has provided a suitable Gaelic translation for this purpose.

Recommendation 5:

The Panel **recommends** that, if there was no marked improvement in recruitment to the MLitt Celtic Studies for entry in 2013/14, the Subject Area should review the programme. [paragraph 3.5.5]

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

Response:

In May 2013 the Subject Area took the decision to suspend the MLitt programme until 2014-15, allowing us to focus on reshaping the programme independently of the MLitt in Scottish and Celtic Studies which is no longer offered, and on recruiting for 2014-15 without the problems in publicity at College level which have been acknowledged and, to some extent, addressed. Lack of financial support for PGT students remains a problem beyond our control, but applications for next session are higher than at the same time last year with five applications and four offers made, and a number of other enquiries with possible applications pending.

It is impossible to consider PGT provision in isolation from its impact on PGR recruitment. To date the majority of our PGR students have come from our own PGT programmes, thus the Subject Area remains committed to this crucial recruiting ground and will continue to seek new ways of publicising it, including through the Subject Area's relatively new Facebook page and in the context of the University's hosting of next year's International Congress of Celtic Studies.

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **recommends** that the School reflects on how to ensure that the Gaelic-speaking environment developed and nurtured by the Subject Area continues to be adequately supported particularly in view of the relocation of the office of the Gaelic-speaking administrator staff member. [paragraph 3.8.7]

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

Response:

The Gaelic-speaking environment has been, and will continue to be, maintained by the presence in the building of the University's Gaelic Language Officer / Oifigear na Gàidhlig (GLO), Fiona Dunn. It is hoped that planning for the new Estate will bear the strong Gaelic environment in mind as it is a unique selling point for Glasgow. The GLO organises many events in the building which also helps in this regard, including a regular Cothrom Còmhraidh / Conversation Opportunity, which is open to all University staff and students. Celtic & Gaelic continues to implement and support its Gaelic Language Policy within the building. The Native Language Assistant, Gilbert MacMillan, has moved his office to the first floor (the administrator's old office), which is next to teaching rooms; this also ensures an added Gaelic presence for students. Although the presence of the Gaelic-speaking administrator, Carol Smith, is missed in the building, one positive spin off is that students converse with her in Gaelic in the main School Office, which has the advantage of normalising the language in other settings and environments. The School and Subject Area will ensure that inductions for new UG and PG students, as well as course handbooks, inform students that the Celtic & Gaelic administrator speaks Gaelic and welcomes its use in the School Office.

Recommendation 7:

The Panel **recommends** that the subject area should review its handbooks for all courses to make them more consistent in terms of presentation of general student information. [paragraph 3.2]

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

Response:

A new generic Level 1 and 2 handbook was produced in the course of the summer 2013 and was made available to all non-Honours students in the Subject Area during 2013-14. The Subject Area continues to produce a separate handbook for Honours students since the nature of our Level 3 and 4 courses, and also some of the regulations, are different from those at Levels 1 and 2.

Recommendation 8:

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area clarify its policy in relation to the electronic submission of work and convey this clearly to the students. [paragraph 3.3.3]

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

Response:

At the point of our Periodic Subject Review we were trialling the use of electronic submission in our largest course and inevitably encountered some teething problems, at both Subject and University level, particularly in relation to work submitted late. Improved technical solutions and greater understanding of the limitations of the system based on these initial experiences mean we have established improved working practices surrounding electronic submission and improved the information given to students both in handbooks and on individual course Moodles. All our non-language courses now require students to submit their essays electronically in line with the new School of Humanities policy on the submission of work.

Recommendation 9:

The Panel **recommends** that the Library should, in conjunction with the Subject Area, identify a more effective method for the classification of books in order that no books utilised by the Subject Area should be removed without their approval. [paragraph 3.8.6]

For the attention of: **Subject Area Librarian**

Response:

The procedures for the weeding of the Library Short Loan Collection to which this recommendation pertains are well established. The annual review of Short Loan stock is driven by severe constraints of shelving space, and the need to keep the collections up-to-date and focused to immediate student need. Accordingly Lending Services produce a Short Loan listing every summer for each discipline, including Celtic and Gaelic, detailing all stock in each subject range which has not been borrowed in the last three academic years, so that these books can be considered for discard. This list is then carefully reviewed by the Celtic Subject Librarian, and the academic member of staff serving as the Celtic Library Representative. Any books identified as relating to suspended courses, or considered essential core teaching material, are marked up for retention, before Lending staff take the discard process forward. No unique copy is ever discarded. Any single copies appearing on the list are returned to the main research stock. In Celtic and Gaelic, as in other disciplines, much relevant teaching stock will necessarily be shelved within other discipline sequences just as in any university Library and indeed may be intensively used by students studying courses not connected with the Celtic and Gaelic Subject Unit. The Celtic and Gaelic Library classification itself is, of course, primarily a language-based sequence. Other books commonly used for Celtic and Gaelic coursework on historical and cultural modules will frequently be shelved in sequences as diverse as Archaeology, English Language, History, History of Art, Law, and Theology. However, it is important to stress that, contrary to the implication in the report, all the arts subject librarians do everything possible to consider the full range of potential discipline use of each book in every sequence when making a final decision on discard. Given that many 'Celtic' books will be intensively used by students from each of the disciplines detailed above, creation of a dedicated 'Celtic and Gaelic' sequence for the exclusive use of students from that one subject unit, would be only be possible, if we duplicated all 'shared' holdings, which would be a very wasteful use of the available course materials funds.

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** the School of Humanities and RIO support the publication of a Gaelic-only leaflet outlining the programmes available in order to maximise the potential audience reached by the University. [paragraph 3.5.1]

For the attention of: **Head of School
Director of RIO**

Response: Head of School

The Head of Subject (Dr Sheila Kidd) and the Gaelic Language Officer (Fiona Dunn) met with the Recruitment and Conversion Marketing Officer for the College of Arts (Carin Fyfe) and the Deputy Director of Recruitment Marketing (RIO) to discuss this matter. Dr Kidd will prepare the content for the leaflet by 16 June 2014 with input from the GLO. The leaflet will be available at the September Open Day and will also be sent out in the annual mailing to all Schools in Scotland where Gaelic is taught.

Response: Director of RIO

Unfortunately the taking forward of a specific brochure for Celtic and Gaelic has been delayed owing to the departure of the College of Arts RCMO at the end of last year. However, a meeting has now been established with Dr. Sheila Kidd, Senior Lecturer in Celtic and Gaelic, and Fiona Dunn, the University's Gaelic Language Officer, to progress the production of this marketing collateral. The meeting is due to take place on the 24 April owing to prior diary conflicts.

Recommendation 11:

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of School Administration discuss the use of room 202 with Estates and Buildings to identify how improvement in access could be made. [paragraph 3.8.9]

For the attention of: **Head of School Administration**
Director, Estates and Buildings

Joint Response:

For this year 2014/15, the CTT team have prepared a schedule of rooms which will be manually allocate in advance of Central Allocation - Room 202 is one of the rooms identified. This means Celtic and Gaelic will have priority use of Room 202 subject to the College providing CTT with the data needed prior to Central Allocation first week of May

Recommendation 12:

Panel **recommends** that a taught postgraduate student representative should be appointed to the SSLC to ensure that there is parity in the representation of all students. [paragraph 5.5]

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

Response:

When the MLitt in Celtic Studies runs again in 2014-15 a representative from this course will be appointed to the Subject Area's SSLC. Since the PSR, PGT representation has been established on the School PG Committee rotating among Subject Areas (including the MLitt in Celtic Studies).