

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 14 February 2014

Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of Open Studies
11 and 12 March, 2013

Geraldine Perriam, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor John Briggs	Clerk of Senate and Vice Principal, Convener
Professor Billy Martin	Senate Assessor on Court
Professor Anne Ryan	National University of Ireland, External Subject Specialist
Professor David Gaimster	Cognate member, Hunterian Museum
Dr Jane Mackenzie	Learning and Teaching Centre
Mr Donald Mackay	Student Representative Council
Dr Geraldine Perriam	Clerk to the Review Panel, Senate Office
Ms Fiona Dick	Observer, Senate Office

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Centre for Open Studies (referred to throughout this report as 'the Centre') provides a range of courses, both credit bearing and non-credit bearing, for adult learners from a wide range of backgrounds. In the latter years of the 20th century, the Centre was known as the Department of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE). The St Andrew's College of Education (after its merger with the University) and DACE formed the University's Faculty of Education in 1999. Additionally, DACE, now the Centre for Open Studies, moved from Oakfield Avenue, Gilmorehill, to the St Andrew's Building (SAB) in Eldon Street. The restructuring of the University in 2010, when faculties were merged into four colleges, meant that the former Faculty of Education became the School of Education.
- 1.2 The Centre shares SAB with the School of Education. The Information Office and the Guidance Adviser are accommodated at Ground Floor level next to Reception. This location is seen as being helpful to students due its proximity to the entrance to the building. A tutors' preparation room is located on the third floor of the North Wing of SAB and staff offices are located on the fourth and fifth floors of the same wing.

Some courses are also held outwith SAB, at Millport, Girvan and other locations. There is office space dedicated to staff at the Centre but teaching accommodation is shared. The Panel expressed concerns about the quality of teaching accommodation available to staff and students. The Panel **recommends** that accommodation of appropriate accessibility for disabled students be made available to staff and students at the Centre. (Recommendation 3)

- 1.3 The Centre offers a range of provision that differs from the usual provision to be found in schools of the University. Some of the courses on offer are non-credit bearing while other, credit bearing courses may count towards a CertHE or entrance to undergraduate study. Additionally, undergraduate students at levels 1 and 2 of the BEd programme enrol for

elective courses within the Centre. Students in other parts of the University also take some of the Cert HE and language classes on offer to gain extra credits. The main offerings are covered under:

- 1.3.1 **Access:** This is a 20 credit programme that provides an entry route for adult learners into undergraduate study.
 - 1.3.2 **CertHE:** This programme offers courses at 10, 20, 30 or 40 credits, mostly at Level 1. It also includes BEd elective courses.
 - 1.3.3 **ACE:** This programme offers over 300 courses, with a range of credit bearing (both University credits and non-University, Award in Continuing Education credits) and non-credit-bearing courses, some of which may be half-day events.
- 1.4 The Centre (as DACE) was reviewed under the DPTLA review process in 2000 and 2006. The Centre was also reviewed by Court in 2002 and again in 2011. Given the number of reviews in recent years, the Panel expressed concern that staff at the Centre had found this challenging and that it may have had an impact on staff morale.

The review of the Centre by Court in 2011 excluded the Access programme. The review resulted in the Centre being transferred to University Services in August, 2012.¹ The review of the Centre led to a list of 10 recommendations, 6 of which have been achieved to date. One of the recommendations was that the T grant support for ACE (languages and non-credit bearing courses) would be phased out over three years with courses being required to be self-funding. This is currently in progress, due to reach completion in 2016.

- 1.5 There has been a substantial reduction in staffing and a number of changes to staffing in recent years. Current numbers of staff can be found in Table 2.2. As well as key teaching and administrative staff, the Centre also employs a high number of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs – hourly-paid staff). Additionally, a number of guest lecturers are also employed on the programmes offered by the Centre.

In November, 2012, a Business Manager was appointed. The Business Manager has now left the University and another appointment is in progress. In December 2012, a new Director for the Centre was appointed. This latter appointment occurred a few months prior to the submission of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for the Review. The Academic Administrator left at the end of 2012 and, at the time of the review meeting, a replacement was being sought. The Panel expressed concern at the number of changes in leadership in recent years, particularly in light of the number of reviews undergone by the Centre in past decade.

The Panel also expressed concern about the lack of representation of the Centre's leadership on central University committees. The Centre has no representation on Senate or on the University Services Management Group (USMG). Nor is there any representation on the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). The Panel also considered the inclusion of representation from the centre on the School of Education's Learning and Teaching Committee. Additionally, the development of the Centre's own Learning and Teaching Committee, with the inclusion of student representatives, would also be of benefit. The Panel **recommends** that, as a matter of urgency, the Centre has

¹ Course Approval and other quality assurance issues are monitored via the School of Education and the College of Social Sciences.

representation on USMG as well as the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (Recommendation 1). The Panel also recommends that consideration be given to some input from the Centre's Director at Senate level.² The Panel further **recommends** that the Centre be represented on the School of Education's LTC and that the Centre constitutes its own LTC (Recommendation 2).

- 1.6 The Centre's running cost is approximately £1.5m per annum. The income for the Centre is currently as follows:
 - 1.6.1 General University Funds. This includes the T-grant (the most substantial source of University funding) which is to be phased out over three years and a number of smaller funding sources, including the SFC Quality Research funding for REF-returned staff.
 - 1.6.2 Commercial Funding. This is derived from students who pay to study courses. The income from the enrolments is greater than the direct costs, including staffing, and contributes to the operating costs of the Centre.
 - 1.6.3 The School of Education pays the Centre for its offering of electives to BEd students in Levels 1 and 2.
- 1.7 The Panel met with the Director of the Centre, Mr Matthew Lee, and with Dr Robert Hamilton, ACE Programme Co-ordinator, 16 members of key staff, 10 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs, sometimes referred to at the Centre as tutors), 8 students on the ACE (sometimes referred to as the Open) Programme, 9 from the CertHE and 9 from the Access programme. The Panel was also shown a short film, giving examples of the learning and teaching and the good practice that is supported at the Centre. The film included interviews with staff and students. A final meeting was held between the Panel, the Director, Mr Matthew Lee and the Deputy Secretary of Court, Dr Dorothy Welch.
- 1.8 The Panel **commended** the Centre on the level of involvement of staff, GTAs and students in the development of the SER. The Panel recognised the amount of work involved and the challenge posed by the timing of the appointment of the Director just a few months prior to the submission of the SER.

The Panel found that the SER did not follow the usual template in terms of structure which posed difficulties for evaluating the document. The Panel recognised, however, that the provision at the Centre also posed difficulties in that the various pathways did not map easily onto the standard format. The section "Enhancing the Student Learning Experience" was found not to be fully detailed but the Panel agreed that the SER gave a positive picture of the learning experience for students at the Centre.

2. Background Information

2.1 Students³

The number of students enrolled at the Centre for academic year 2011-12 was as follows:

² At the time of the publication of this report, the University was undergoing a review of governance regarding Senate. The Panel recommends that the Centre have some link to Senate once the new structure is finalised.

³ Although the total headcount is 4,548, some students are enrolled on more than one programme.

Table 2.1

Students	Headcount
Access (Level 1)	229
CertHE (Levels 1 and 2)	588
BEd (Undergraduate Level 1 Electives)	320
Languages (Level 1)	1,179
ACE (Level 1)	2,509
Unaccredited (Level 1 equivalent)	2,148

2.2 Staffing

The staff numbers at January, 2013 were as follows. Further information on staffing appears in item 1.5

Table 2.2

Staffing in January 2013	Headcount
Academic staff	8 FTE
Total key staff	23
GTAs (hourly-paid)	237
Others (e.g. guest lecturers)	167

- 2.3 The Centre contributes to degree programmes offered by the School of Education. Staff from schools throughout the University contribute to the courses on offer at the Centre, as do other guest lecturers from outwith the University. As shown in Table 2.2, a large number of staff is hourly-paid. The Panel recognised that this required a good deal of organisation on the part of key staff, as well as the provision of training and support. It is important to observe here that GTAs were positive about the level of support and development given by key staff. Although the Panel **recommends** that further training and information be offered to GTAs (Recommendation 14), it recognises nonetheless that key staff currently play important support and advisory roles for GTAs.

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

3.1 Aims

The SER sets out the aims of the Centre, its overall aim being that it “offers a route, open to anyone, into the knowledge and learning of the University of Glasgow” (SER, Item 2.1, p.14). The Court review of 2011 endorsed the Centre's support for the University's 2020 Global Vision and Strategy. The Centre is seen as a key asset for increasing the impact of the University beyond the academic community. An example of this, as set out in the SER, is a member of staff involved in work on the Large Hadron Collider team, researching the Higgs Boson. The staff member in question lectures on elementary particles in the ACE course *The Fundamental Universe*. A number of similar collaborations across the University underpin the research-led teaching on a number of courses. Staff from the Centre also work collaboratively with colleagues in the University's schools and other services in the University, such as the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery. The Panel also discussed the importance of lifelong learning as a vision and as a strategy for the University. The Panel **commends** the Centre for its engagement with education beyond the academic community.

The broad aims for the three pathways offered by the Centre are as follows:

- 3.1.1 *Access*. The aim of the Access programme is to prepare adults for undergraduate study and to ensure that they are ready for that level of study. The programmes are designed for people who have not previously had an opportunity to study at a University.
- 3.1.2 *CertHE*. This programme offers a range of part-time, open entry courses. It offers students the opportunity to gain University credits towards a range of awards.
- 3.1.3 *ACE*. The courses offered in this programme include non-credit bearing courses. The courses offer open access to University level study and scholarship, regardless of previous learning or experience. This is a key programme for those who have not been well-served by formal education but who wish to pursue further learning in a particular subject.

3.2 *Range of Provision*

- 3.2.1 The range of provision at the Centre is substantial, offering over 300 courses to a diverse community of students, as evidenced by the different programmes on offer. The Centre has a local and national reputation for the quality and breadth of its courses, as well as the expertise and dedication of staff. These qualities were endorsed by students who met with the Panel. Their regard for the staff and the quality of teaching was matched by the satisfaction of students with the range of courses available. Students frequently used the term “life-changing” with some students agreeing that their studies at the Centre had made them “completely new people”. The Panel **commends** the Centre for the breadth and flexibility of its provision.
- 3.2.2 In 2013, the Centre will be offering a summer school, with students coming from abroad as well as locally. There are also plans to increase the range of courses offered by engaging in online learning and distance learning, as well as by developing “virtual communities of learners” (SER, 0.2.5, p.7). The Panel endorses these ambitious plans while recognising that adequate resourcing would be key to its success. There are further plans to offer a range of learning opportunities in collaboration with the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery. Staff at the Centre are discussing these new developments with staff from the Hunterian.

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

4.1 *Aims*

- 4.1.1 The Panel discussed benchmarking and other external reference points for the Centre, particularly because there could be no direct comparison between most courses offered by the Centre and those offered on other programmes in the University. It was acknowledged that differing approaches were needed for the different programmes. There were also indications that individual courses were meeting benchmarks and external criteria, as evidenced by External Examiners’ Reports. There were also those courses, such as the COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skills, which had been fully accredited in 2011. Members of the Panel commented that perhaps some overall benchmarking in relation to the sector might be of use to the Centre. The External Subject Specialist assured Panel members that programmes were current and valid, but also noted that the Centre might benefit from a more overt pedagogical positioning that would ensure that its work

was critiqued within the social, cultural and other contexts in which learning takes place, rather than solely in terms of specific subjects or in monetary terms.

- 4.1.2 The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirms that the programmes offered by the Centre remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application. The Centre's work in continuing the long tradition of reaching out to those in the city of Glasgow who have been poorly served by formal education was strongly endorsed by the Panel. The Panel noted the benefits of the Access programme in widening opportunities for students. 47% of students on the Access Programme have come from areas of deprivation in the West of Scotland. The Panel **commends** the Centre for its work in widening participation in Higher Education.

4.2 *Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)*

It is a Learning and Teaching requirement that ILOs are succinctly outlined and well-communicated to students. The Panel found that some of the ILOs for courses were more clearly articulated than others. There was also concern expressed by the Panel about how aware students were of the ILOs for their courses. Discussions with students indicated that this was variable. The Panel **recommends** that students be made fully aware of ILOs for all provision offered at the Centre prior to enrolment (Recommendation 11).

4.3 *Assessment, Feedback and Achievement*

Assessment

- 4.3.1 The programmes on offer at the Centre are unique in that, there is an option of not taking assessments for the courses in which they are enrolled, particularly where the courses are not credit bearing. For Access students, assessments must be taken in order to achieve the credits required for University entrance. CertHE courses also have assessments but, as both staff and students explained to the Panel, students sometimes opt out of assessments. This is due to them preferring to audit⁴ the course as it may provide a higher level of input and knowledge acquisition than a course on the ACE Programme. For some students, it is the learning experience gained from the classes themselves that is of value and importance rather than the assessment. Some students who had chosen not to undertake assessments felt that they were less enthusiastic about classes on essay writing but recognised that these were important for those students undertaking assessments.

- 4.3.2 The assessments for the Access programme are both formative and summative, providing assessments that are aligned with the University's Code of Assessment and that follow University assessment practices. As pointed out in the SER, students returning to education on the Access programme can be reluctant to submit work for assessment, particularly where they have had negative experiences with earlier, formal education. The first assessment exercise is formative and aims to ease students into the assessment process. The Panel was satisfied that the first assessment for students was a supportive re-introduction to the submission of written work for assessment. Access students who met with the Panel expressed gratitude for the support and development that they received when tackling assessments. One student expressed some dissatisfaction with a lack of choice in essay topics for a Law essay but on the whole, students indicated

⁴ When students audit a course, they attend classes but opt not to submit any assessment.

that they had a good range of topics from which to choose. The Panel was satisfied with the range of assessment types available to students.

- 4.3.3 Students on the CertHE programme were also satisfied with the support given by staff regarding assessment. Some students indicated that they liked the challenge of assessment, while others were more interested in attending classes and the interaction with staff and students. The support of staff was welcomed by the students, particularly in encouraging them to take on the challenge of assessment exercises while recognising that for other students, assessment was not their main reason for attending the course.
- 4.3.4 ACE courses⁵ of 15 hours or longer carry 8 ACE credits for those students who submit assessments and whose work satisfies the assessment criteria. The credits can be accumulated for an Award in Continuing Education, which requires 40 ACE credits. This is a non-University Award. Students are assessed, like the majority of students at the Centre, at Level 1 (SCQF Level 7). Assessments are scrutinised by an External Examiner and grades are confirmed at an ACE Exam Board meeting held each summer. Some ACE courses are unaccredited and are often short, sometimes lasting only a day or a half-day. Students meeting with the Panel expressed satisfaction with the support they received from staff with their work on assessments.

Feedback

- 4.3.5 Discussion between the Panel and students indicated that feedback on assessment was variable, that for some assessments it was detailed and for others, it was a “bare minimum”. Students were very satisfied with the feedback for examinations in Biology, where students received individual feedback on their work. Turnaround on assessments was found to be variable with Law assessments being returned very quickly and Psychology assessments sometimes taking 12 weeks between submission and return. Students on the Access programme indicated that they were generally informed when they would be receiving feedback on their assessed pieces of work. Students also expressed a desire for more assistance with referencing.
- 4.3.6 Students on the Access Mathematics course explained that they were “deeply impressed” with feedback on this course, deeming it to be “exceptional”. Overall, the students felt that feedback was “better than a regular University course”.
- 4.3.7 External Examiners for the CertHE programme praised the level and quality of feedback given to students on the programme, finding it to be constructive (SER, Appendix G).
- 4.3.8 The Panel recognised the good practice that was evident in the return and feedback on assessments but expressed concern over long turnaround times on some pieces of assessment. The Panel **recommends** that turnaround on assessments be brought into line with University guidelines, in accordance with the Code of Assessment (Recommendation 12).
- 4.3.9 The Panel expressed some concern about the additional load on staff through full double marking of all assessments on some courses. Normal practice is for a

⁵ The development of all ACE courses is subject to the University’s course approval process and occurs via the School of Education and the College of Social Sciences.

sample of assessments to be double marked. The Panel **recommends** that double marking for all assessments be confined to a sample from each course.

4.4 *Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

- 4.4.1 The range and level of provision at the Centre is dependent on attention to curriculum design and development, with evaluation of the viability of delivery and currency of content. Curriculum design and delivery is research-led, involving academic staff at the centre and colleagues across the four Colleges of the University. The development of courses to adequate standard requires a good deal of time from staff, particularly since the range of courses on offer is eclectic and designed to appeal to as broad a range of learners as possible. Curriculum design and development also takes into account the views of students via course evaluation and feedback forms and those conveyed by course student representatives.
- 4.4.2 GTAs are involved in curriculum design and development at subject level. Some of the GTAs are doctoral research students at the University and their knowledge of subjects is current and informed by their research work.

4.5 *Student Recruitment*

- 4.5.1 The range of students enrolling at the Centre reflects the diversity and flexibility of provision. Recruitment to the Access programme is limited to 250 students in total, due to staffing and accommodation restrictions. 47% of students come from areas of the West of Scotland that are considered to be deprived.⁶ The fee for the programme can be mitigated by bursaries from local authorities, a fee waiver from the Scottish Government or an Individual Learning Account (ILA). Concern has been expressed by the Centre's Director about the continuation of the ILA, given the Government's current cost-cutting measures for other benefits. Students drawn from all over the world enrol in the programme, including members of EU states and others who have been granted refugee or settled status in the UK. Each student is interviewed prior to acceptance on the programme.
- 4.5.2 Numbers enrolling for the CertHE courses stabilised in 2012-13. There had been some decline in numbers due to fewer students registered on the BEd but this is likely to rise in 2013-14 due to the expansion in enrolments on the BEd. The age range of students enrolling in CertHE is largely between 20 and 60.
- 4.5.3 The ACE programme, on the other hand, has two thirds of its students at retirement age. The languages on offer recruit students of an age range between 20 and 80 years. The high level of satisfaction with ACE courses means that many students return each year to enrol on other courses as well as taking some courses again. Students meeting the Panel commented that they had enjoyed coming to courses so much they had re-enrolled the following year. The Centre also links with various community groups outwith the University, such as the Glasgow Women's Library, Whiteinch Community Centre, as well providing Gaelic Language courses for CalMac ferry staff. Courses are also offered in the Greater Glasgow area, in East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, North and South Ayrshire and Helensburgh and District. The Language courses face competition from other Language providers including the University's Language Centre and the Confucius Institute.

⁶ i.e. Living in postcodes in the bottom two quintiles of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

- 4.5.4 Students who met with the Panel expressed disappointment that there were no courses offered at Levels 3 and 4 although they understood that for courses to run, student numbers had to be viable. Others expressed a desire for courses that developed the knowledge and skills gained in previous courses but saw that the already extensive provision and commitment of staff meant that resources were stretched.
- 4.5.5 The plans for the Centre to expand its provision to online and other forms of delivery will have an impact on recruitment and resources. Additional resource will be needed to accommodate these new pathways.
- 4.5.6 *Internationalisation.* The expansion of provision to include courses offered during the summer will enhance international recruitment as the currently offered summer school has already recruited a number of international as well as home students for its 2013 offering. The Centre also hopes that the aforementioned expansion to online and distance provision will increase international recruitment.
- 4.5.7 *MyCampus.* The Centre began enrolling students via MyCampus in August 2012, one year later than the rest of the University. For key staff at the Centre and students, the experience led to high levels of stress and such an increase in the volume of work that four temporary members of staff had to be employed. Staff informed the Panel that MyCampus staff had been helpful but that the different nature of the programmes offered by the Centre meant that there were significant problems with registration as MyCampus was designed for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The following issues arose:
- A significant number of students had been unnecessarily distressed by demands for unpaid fees.
 - Students interviewed by the Panel had been unhappy about the confusion and stress of the enrolment process but had praise for the high level of support and responsiveness of staff at the Centre.
 - Staff confirmed that they were “dreading” the enrolment process when it returned in 2013.
 - Unfortunately, the ‘Lessons Learned’ consultation process had taken place prior to the Centre using MyCampus for enrolment for the first time.

The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to the enrolment process for the Centre’s students to ensure it is more fitted to the nature of the courses offered and the needs of the students/learners, and that staff at the Centre receive adequate support and training in the use and development of MyCampus to accommodate the needs of the Centre (Recommendation 6).

4.6 *Student Progression, Retention and Support*

Progression

- 4.6.1 The Centre offers students flexible learning opportunities which allow for part-time learning and evening classes. The flexibility of the programmes enables a range of choices for students, which is a strength of the Centre’s organisation. The Panel recognises this strength. It **recommends**, however, that clearly articulated information on pathways be made available to students to guide them through flexible learning and that these are disseminated to students and staff, allowing for greater clarity about the range of learning opportunities (Recommendation 9).

4.6.2 It was emphasised in discussions with staff at the Centre and with the External Subject Specialist that students who enrol at the Centre do so for a number of reasons. That some students choose not to continue with study can be regarded as a positive choice (while recognising that, in some cases, the choice may be due to more negative reasons). Students on the Access programme, for example, may decide, after undertaking the programme, that they do not wish to progress to undergraduate study. Having gained a great deal from their experience of the Access programme, some students decide that the learning experience is sufficient and that they no longer wish to pursue further study. Approximately 60% of students complete the Access programme and 50% continue to full-time undergraduate study. The SER indicated that for some students who complete the programme, their choice is to continue their study at another type of institution, such as an FE college. The enthusiasm of the students on the Access programme and their written comments on their experiences indicate that, although not all students go on to undergraduate study, the learning experience is a positive one.

Similarly, students taking courses in the CertHE programme may decide not to take the assessments for the course, preferring to focus on the learning experience in the classroom rather than in undertaking formal assessment. The varied and flexible nature of the programmes at the Centre is a strength of the learning experience for students. The Panel recognises the value of such an approach but also the difficulties in supporting students through the range of choices open to them, balancing encouragement with reflexive course development and student support.

Support

4.6.3 Student satisfaction overall remains high, reaching 98% in some cases. High levels of satisfaction were evident in discussions with students. Students who met with the Review Panel felt supported in their learning and some of them told the Panel that they had also been supported pastorally in times of bereavement and crisis. Students found staff approachable and helpful. The Panel **commends** staff at the Centre for the level of support provided to students.

4.6.4 Students have the support of a Guidance Advisor and a Disability Co-ordinator. Support for students in each of the programmes is considerable, from key staff as well as hourly-paid staff. The Panel recognises and **commends** the efforts of staff to provide support for students. It further **commends** the Centre's recognition of students' circumstances and how staff take these into account, recognising the challenge this presents for staff. Given the diverse nature of the programmes and needs of students, the Centre's commitment to supporting and encouraging students is commendable. Further support would be useful regarding the dissemination of information for students for individual courses, as it is a requirement that students be given adequate information on courses provided. The Panel suggests that this include an explanation for students of the course approval process.

4.6.5 *Equality and Disability.* The Centre provides a strong level of support for students with disabilities and is committed to the provision of equal opportunity. Some students told the Panel that they had been well-supported by the Centre but others had felt less supported by Student Services, commenting that their needs had not been supported effectively.

Students with physical disabilities, particularly limited mobility, are not well-served by the current provision of teaching space in SAB and the seemingly random allocation of inappropriate rooms by the central room booking service. The Art Room is inaccessible to those with limited mobility and/or in wheelchairs. The Panel heard that, for one course, students in wheelchairs had to wait at reception each week while a suitable room (one that was accessible for those in wheelchairs and was not currently being used) was found as the rooms allocated were inappropriate for wheelchair users. The Panel **recommends** that the Director consult with appropriate staff in Estates and Buildings to discuss the provision of suitable accommodation that is appropriate and accessible to those of limited mobility. This would apply to *all* courses for the Centre (Recommendations 3 & 4).

4.7 *The Quality of Learning Opportunities*

- 4.7.1 The Review Panel found the quality of learning opportunities to be high. The high levels of student satisfaction reflected the level of commitment by staff to provide high quality learning experiences. Research-led teaching informed curriculum development and the employment of GTAs who were currently undertaking doctoral research augmented the work of key staff and guest lecturers in providing up-to-date knowledge of the subjects for the courses.
- 4.7.2 Student feedback is provided informally and also through formal written student evaluation, as well as via the Student Representative elected for each course. Experiences of students for the latter mechanism were variable, with some students feeling that the process worked well while others found that, if a Student representative left during the course, another might not be elected or that the tutor would appoint the replacement without election. The Panel commented that harmonising and disseminating this procedure would improve the quality of feedback mechanisms available to students.⁷ It was suggested that staff consult the Code of Practice for obtaining feedback from students.
- 4.7.3 The harmonisation of the value of the Centre's provision to encompass a range of subjects, student needs and backgrounds was clear in the SER and in discussions with staff and students. It was clear that the Centre embedded University strategy into its provision, particularly regarding its impact beyond the academic community. The Panel **recommends** that the Centre formulates and disseminates a clear vision of the values that guide its work and its impact beyond the academic community (Recommendation 5).

4.8 *Resources for Learning and Teaching*

- 4.8.1 One of the biggest challenges for the Centre is supporting and developing a range of provision by a *range of staff*. Students' endorsement of the level of support provided by staff indicated a significant commitment by staff to students as well as to the learning experience. The high levels of staffing required for such diverse provision means that many staff are hourly-paid (237 GTAs and 167 others, including guest lecturers). Supporting high numbers of hourly-paid staff provides a challenge although GTAs who met with the Panel endorsed the level of support they received from key staff. Nonetheless, the provision of adequate facilities and training for such a large number requires considerable organisation and resource.

⁷ The University's guidance on assessment and feedback can be found at: www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/goodpracticeresources/assessmentandfeedback/

The Panel **commends** staff at the Centre for the levels of support provided to GTAs and notes the high level of expertise available among staff at the Centre and the opportunity this presents for staff development. The Panel **recommends** that all GTAs receive clear information regarding quality assurance of the learning experience, including the course approval process (Recommendation 13). The Panel further **recommends** that a systematic policy be developed for GTAs, including a bespoke training programme for new GTAs that complements the nature of the programmes offered (Recommendation 14).

- 4.8.2 The *physical accommodation* was found not to meet the needs of the Centre. Although key staff were adequately accommodated, GTAs were accommodated in a room that had a maximum capacity and IT provision for 10 staff. Given that 237 GTAs are employed, along with 167 other visiting staff, this accommodation is inadequate. The Panel **recommends** that additional office provision for GTAs be allocated for session 2013-14 (Recommendation 15). Further, the Art Room was unable to accommodate students with limited mobility, as well as being cramped and unable to accommodate many students at any one time. Room bookings were found to be inadequate for disabled students and quite often inaccessible for those in wheelchairs. In general, the availability of classrooms was limited due to block booking by staff outwith the Centre. A lack of continuity of teaching accommodation was noted. The Panel **recommends** that the Centre pursue, with the Director of Estates and Buildings and staff responsible for room bookings, adequate learning and teaching accommodation for all students and that the accommodation is accessible to students who are wheelchair users and/or those with limited mobility (Recommendation 3 & 4).
- 4.8.3 The Panel also noted that it would be more appropriate for the Centre to be more centrally located within the University estate at some point in the future. A central location would allow for more visibility of the Centre within the local area and the University. Proximity to the centre of the University would allow students, particularly those students on the Access programme (approximately 250), to experience the daily life of the University as a whole, as well as being closer to various University services. The Panel **recommends** that consideration be given by the University Court, to relocating the Centre closer to the main campus of the University as part of the campus re-development plans associated with the acquisition of the Western Infirmary site (Recommendation 17).
- 4.8.4 The Panel noted with disappointment that all students who attended evening classes at the Centre had no access at all to catering facilities apart from vending machines. The Panel agreed that the lack of catering also posed problems for hourly-paid staff who came to teach evening classes. It was further noted that the issue had been raised at the DPTLA review in 2006 and that the unprofitability of opening for the Centre's students had been raised. The Panel expressed dissatisfaction with the current situation, with no provision for out-of-hours catering for staff and students. The Panel **strongly recommends** that out-of-hours catering for students and staff at the Centre be made available and that profitability should not be a primary consideration. Discussion about opening the STAC café out-of-hours should take place between the Centre and Hospitality services upon publication of the report (Recommendation 16).
- 4.8.5 The use of *Moodle* by students was inconsistent, with approximately 50% of language classes using Moodle. The Panel noted that there was an uneven use of Moodle across courses.

4.8.6 The commitment of all staff was evident. The Panel **commends** the commitment and dedication of staff and their concern and support for students. The Panel noted that such commitment and the breadth of provision entailed high workloads for all concerned. It was noted that GTAs, in responding to student queries and posting information on Moodle, were working beyond the hours for which they were paid (including preparation time). While the Panel agreed that such enthusiasm was commendable, it also expressed concern about staff being “stretched” to provide such a high level of support.

5. Maintaining the Standards of Awards

5.1 The formal pathway for course approval was unclear in the SER and further discussion is needed to clarify how courses are approved. The pathway appears to be via the School of Education and the College of Social Sciences. The Panel noted this and **recommends** that the approval process be made clear to both staff and students (Recommendation 10).

5.2 External Examiners overseeing the programmes at the Centre rate the standard of teaching, assessment and feedback highly. The level of written feedback is commonly praised by External Examiners. Where issues such as consistency of marking or unclear instruction have been raised with staff, they have responded to these comments by addressing the issue. One issue noted by the Panel was the late notification of Exam Boards. Another area of concern to the Panel was the number of courses covered by so few External Examiners. For the 80 CertHE and BEd courses, there are just 16 External Examiners. The Panel noted that there are plans for the Centre to consider appropriate enhancement measures.

5.3 The Panel noted that student grades were, overall, very good, with 74% of Access students achieving a minimum of A or B and around 70% of graded students for the CertHE achieving A or B and 76% of BEd students achieving A or B grades for their work.

5.4 The Panel noted that Annual Monitoring processes followed University guidance.

6. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students’ Learning Experience

6.1 Students’ engagement with the feedback process operates at a number of levels. There are formal questionnaires, Staff Student Liaison Committees, and informal feedback. GTAs are also given a form to complete and are encouraged to review students’ formal, written feedback. The Panel noted that further detail could be provided to students on actions taken as a result of feedback received.

6.2 The Panel noted that the section of the SER detailing Quality Enhancement and Assurance (QE&A) procedures was limited. The External Subject Specialist noted, however, that the overall picture was one of a very positive learning experience for students.

6.3 The Panel agreed that enhancement would be aided by stability of resourcing and future planning, and further agreed that the development of an overall strategy and development plan would be an important factor in future plans for quality enhancement and assurance.

6.4 The Panel advised that the establishment of a Strategy Advisory Group for the Centre would be of benefit in future planning for QEA. Such a group would advise on QEA in light of strategic planning as well as the learning experience. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the Centre establish a Strategy Advisory Group upon publication of this report (Recommendation 7).

- 6.5 The Panel agreed that the identification of a Quality Officer would be of assistance to the Centre. The Panel **recommends** that a Quality Officer be identified (Recommendation 8).

7 **Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching (good practice and recommendations)**

Conclusions

The Review Panel was in agreement that both the breadth and flexibility of provision were to be commended. The enthusiasm of staff and students was evident both in discussion and in the written statements provided in the SER. The commitment to the provision of education beyond the academic community and the passion with which staff carried out their work highlighted the dedication of staff to the aims of the Centre.

The Panel recognises the challenges to staff at the Centre after four reviews over the last 13 years. The Panel nonetheless agreed that the articulation of a clear vision and the development of a strategy for the future would enhance the work of the Centre and could contribute to avoiding any shortfall in funds that may occur with the phasing out of the T grant. The development of a summer school was recognised as an important aspect of future planning and development.

The Panel agreed that representation of the Centre on key University management bodies would enhance visibility, support and connection to the wider University.

One of the most pressing matters is the provision of accessible accommodation for all students. Those students who are wheelchair users, and those with limited mobility, have not been well-served by some of the current room allocations. The Panel agreed that this needed to be dealt with as a matter of some urgency.

7.1 *Key Strengths*

- Breadth of provision; **[commended]**
- Flexibility of provision; **[commended]**
- The high regard in which the Centre is held in Scotland and in Glasgow;
- Staff/student involvement in the development of the SER; **[commended]**
- Commitment of staff to research-led teaching;
- The Centre's support for students; **[commended]**
- Enthusiasm of students and their support of the Centre; **[commended]**
- Students' engagement with learning;
- The role of the Centre in widening participation; **[commended]**
- The Centre's support for Equality and Diversity as evidenced in its commitment to providing support for students from deprived areas of the city; **[commended]**
- Support of key staff for GTAs; **[commended]**
- Satisfaction of GTAs;
- Support of administrative staff for students and other staff at the Centre;
- Recognition of students' differing learning needs; **[commended]**
- The passion of staff for their subjects;
- The engagement of the Centre beyond the academic community. **[commended]**.

7.2 *Areas for improvement*

- Strategy and future planning;
- Lack of representation of the Centre within the wider University;
- Learning and also staff accommodation;
- Provision of accessible learning space for students with limited mobility;
- Location of the Centre;
- Provision of catering facilities for students beyond 5 pm;
- Training and information for GTAs;
- Information for students on course approval and Intended Learning Outcomes;
- The development of a Strategy Advisory Group for the Centre.
- Development of strategy and planning process for quality enhancement and assurance, including the identification of a Quality assurance Officer;
- Reconsideration of the enrolment process in MyCampus for the Centre to ensure a better fit with the nature of provision at the Centre and with its students' specific needs;
- Feedback, turnaround and assessment processes;
- Clear pathways for students regarding provision.

7.3 **Commendations**

7.3.1 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for the breadth and flexibility of its provision. [Paragraph 3.2.1]

7.3.2 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for the high regard in which is held locally, nationally and internationally. [Paragraph 3.2.1]

7.3.3 The Review Panel **commends** staff and students at the Centre for their involvement in the development of the Self-Evaluation Report. [Paragraph 1.8]

7.3.4 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for the high level of support provided for students. [Paragraphs 4.6.3; 4.8.4]

7.3.5 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for its dedicated contribution to the University's commitment to widening participation in Higher Education. [Paragraph 4.1.2]

7.3.6 The Review Panel **commends** staff at the Centre for their recognition of the contribution of GTAs and the support provided to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. [Paragraph 4.8.1]

7.3.7 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for its commitment to, and support of, Equality and Diversity. The Panel further **commends** the Centre for its recognition of the diverse needs of its student population. [Paragraph 4.6.4]

7.3.8 The Review Panel **commends** the Centre for its engagement with teaching and learning beyond the academic community. [Paragraph 3.1]

7.4 **Recommendations**

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the corresponding sections of the report and are ranked in order of priority.

Recommendation 1

With a view to ensuring adequate representation of the Centre on key management bodies of the University, the Review Panel **recommends** that the following bodies consider including representation of the Centre for Open Studies as part of their annual review of membership at their meetings during session 2013-14: University Services Management Group; the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Panel further recommends that, once revisions to the governance of Senate are complete, that there be a link between Senate and the Centre. [Paragraph 1.5]

[Action: Clerk of Senate, Chairs of USMG & LTC]

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Director of the Centre for Open Studies raise the matter of representation on the School of Education's Learning and Teaching Committee with the Head of School and Head of College during session 2013-14. In conjunction with this, the Centre should constitute its own Learning and Teaching Committee, including student representation, as soon as possible. [Paragraph 1.5]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

For information: Head of School of Education, Head of College of Social Sciences]

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel endorses the Centre's commitment to, and support, Equality and Diversity. To that end, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Director of the Centre for Open Studies pursue, with the Director of Estates and Buildings and staff responsible for room bookings, adequate learning and teaching accommodation for all Open Studies students, that is accessible to students who are wheelchair users and/or those with limited mobility. In the meantime, the Centre should identify specific needs and negotiate with Central Room Bookings and request that these specific needs be given priority in the booking process. [Paragraph 4.6.5, 4.8.1 and 1.2]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

For information: Director of Estates and Buildings, Central Room Bookings]

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel considers the currently allocated Art Room to be unfit for purpose due to its size and its lack of accessibility for students with limited mobility. The Panel **recommends** that accommodation of suitable size and accessibility be identified and refitted in consultation with the Centre within the next six months. [Paragraph 4.6.5 and 4.8.1]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

**For information: Head of College of Social Sciences,
Director of Estates and Buildings]**

Recommendation 5

While recognising the challenges of frequent changes in staffing at senior levels at the Centre, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Centre develop a business plan and development strategy incorporating a clearly articulated vision for the future of the Centre. A draft plan should be circulated to staff for consultation and a final version be sent to the Secretary to Court, within six months of the publication of this report. [Paragraph 4.7.3]

**[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies, Secretary to Court
For information: Deputy Secretary to Court]**

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that consideration be given to the enrolment process in My Campus for the Centre's students to ensure it is more fitted to the nature of the courses offered and the needs of the students/learners, and that staff at the Centre receive adequate support and training in the use and development of MyCampus to accommodate the needs of the Centre as soon as possible after the publication of this report. [Paragraph 4.5.7]

[Action: MyCampus Team and key staff at the Centre]

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** the constitution of a Strategy Advisory Group at the Centre, upon publication of this report, in order to assist with development strategy and future planning as well as advising on quality enhancement and assurance. [Paragraph 6.4]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 8

The Panel **recommends** that a Quality Officer for the Centre be identified during session 2013-14. [Paragraph 6.5]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 9

The Panel **recommends** that clearly articulated information on pathways be made available to students to guide them through flexible learning, and that these be disseminated to students and staff to allow for greater clarity about the range of learning available. [Paragraph 4.6.1]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that information for staff and students be made clearly available regarding the integrity and robustness of courses and the process of development and approval for courses at the Centre. [Paragraph 5.1]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel **recommends** that students be made fully aware of the Intended Learning Outcomes for all courses offered at the Centre *prior* to registration. [Paragraph 4.2]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel **recommends** that further development of feedback, turnaround and assessment processes take place, ensuring that feedback and turnaround of assessments are completed in a timely manner, in accordance with the University's

Code of Assessment and Assessment Policy and that only sample double-marking on assessments take place to ease the burden on staff. [Paragraph 4.3.8]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel recognises the support provided by the Centre for hourly-paid GTAs. The Panel **recommends** that further information for GTAs be provided regarding quality assurance of the learning experience. [Paragraph 4.8.1]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel **recommends** that GTAs be provided with bespoke training by the Centre that complements the nature of the programmes offered. [Paragraph 4.8.1]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel **recommends** that additional accommodation for GTAs be sought in order to accommodate the high number of staff employed in this capacity. The provision of additional accommodation should not reduce existing accommodation for key staff at the Centre. [Paragraph 4.8.2]

[Action: Director, Centre for Open Studies]

For information: Head of School of Education, Head of College of Social Sciences]

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel was disappointed by the lack of provision of out-of-hours catering for students and staff at the Centre, noting that such provision had been a recommendation at the DPTLA Review of 2006. The Panel **recommends** that out-of-hours catering facilities be made available to students and staff at the Centre and that profitability should not be the primary consideration. Discussion about opening the STAC café out of hours should take place between the Centre and Hospitality Services upon publication of this report. [Paragraph 4.8.4]

[Action: Clerk of Senate; Director, Centre for Open Studies]

For information: Director of Hospitality Services]

Recommendation 17

The Review Panel **recommends** that consideration be given by the University Court, to re-locating the Centre for Open Studies on the main campus of the University as part of the campus re-development plans associated with the acquisition of the Western Infirmary site. Such a re-location would place the Centre more centrally, allowing it to be a more visible sign of the University's engagement with the wider community. [Paragraph 4.8.3]

[Action: Secretary to Court]