

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee – Friday 13 February 2015****Periodic Subject Review: Responses to Recommendations arising from the Review of Politics held on 4 and 5 March 2013****Ms Fiona Dick, Clerk to the Review Panel****Conclusion**

The Panel was impressed by the positive feedback for teaching and administrative staff, from both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students about being taught at the University of Glasgow and their experience in Glasgow. However the Subject was subject to resource constraints which presented significant challenges in terms of a phase of reduced academic and administrative staff supporting significant and increasing numbers of pre-Honours students; and a sense of disenfranchisement following restructuring within the School and College. This had resulted in multiple negative impacts including: high SSR; accommodation issues; low staff morale; over-reliance on GTAs and sessional teachers, and over-burdened administrative staff, which potentially undermine the student learning experience. Panel members were very concerned that the current approach was unsustainable and required careful utilisation of resources and continued investment from the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences. The Panel *recommends* the Subject, School and College work closely and urgently to: address resourcing concerns; gain a better understanding of College and School strategies; and support the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the subject which draws on its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure.

Response from Head of Subject

The Periodic Subject Review of Politics in 2013 was conducted during a very challenging time for the Subject. We had lost a number of key staff members during the preceding years. At the same time our Honours programme expanded from 200 students in 2009 to over 400 in 2012, leaving us with an unsustainably high staff-student ratio. To add to these difficulties we were required to write the self evaluation report (SER) at a time when we did not have a Head of Subject. The past two years thus have been a re-building period for us and one in which we believe we have responded well to the constructive recommendations of the PSR report. The College/School have generously given additional resources to the Subject in the form of four additional staff members with 2.5 more to be hired in the coming academic session.

We have also worked hard to add to the teaching strengths of the Subject, while addressing some of the weaknesses identified by ourselves and the PSR report. At the end of the 2012-13 academic session we decided to carry out an internal teaching review of the Subject. This review was carried out by a committee of six staff members who met periodically throughout the past year to discuss and make recommendations for reforms to our curriculum, assessment procedures, quality assurance and teaching practices. It culminated with a teaching away day for the entire Subject after our exam boards in June during which we discussed and took decisions on the recommendations and proposals of the teaching review committee.

As we outline in this response, we have made a number of changes to our curriculum and teaching practices over the past year and hope to continue to improve on these positive developments in the coming years. Although there are still areas for improvement, including building up our administrative resources, we feel we are a much stronger teaching unit than

when the review was conducted as is reflected in the positive trajectory of our NSS scores over the past two years.

We have outlined our response to each of the 15 recommendations made by the committee in the pages that follow.

Response from Head of School

As the Politics subject group notes in its response to the Periodic Subject Review Report, the PSR was conducted during a particularly challenging time for the Subject. At the time of the actual review, the Subject had only recently established a new Head of Subject who joined Politics in January 2013 from outwith the University. Prior to that, the Subject had spent several months without a formal Head of Subject as the previous Head stepped down before the new Head assumed the post. Beyond the problems associated with a lack of clear leadership, the Subject had absorbed a significant number of students without a related increase in staff numbers, placing the Subject's staff-student ratio at the highest in the School.

With these challenges, the Politics subject group, and especially the Head of Subject, Dr. Kelly Kollman, is to be commended for the time, effort and thoughtful consideration invested in responding to and engaging with the PSR Report and recommendations. As is detailed in the subject's response, Politics has committed itself to engaging thoroughly with the recommendations.

Similarly, the School of Social and Political Sciences (SPS) has sought to support the subject as it is best able. It is, of course, the case that the School is not the budget holder and must look to make representations in order to secure the needed investment in the subject. This has proven successful and the College of Social Sciences has demonstrated support to reducing the SSRs in the School two largest subjects (Politics and Sociology) through investments in additional R&T staffing lines. Beyond that, SPS has leveraged what control is available in budgeting to direct resources to Politics (and all of the subjects in SPS) to assist the subjects in student engagement activities. These seem to have been successful and may have helped to contribute to the rise in NSS scores across the School, resulting in all of the School's subjects exceeding the University's NSS KPIs. Politics, particularly, increased positive NSS responses to Question 22, resulting in 94% positive on Q22. This achievement is largely the result of the diligence, time, effort and care invested by all members of the Subject group in engaging with students on both a collective and individual basis.

Whilst there remains some work to do in Politics to meet fully all of the recommended objectives in the PSR Report, overall Politics as a subject has performed extremely well in responding to the PSR report.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the Subject. It is important to note that the majority of these recommendations refer to tasks or issues identified by the Subject for action either prior to the Review or in the SER. The Panel recognised that the full resolution of Recommendations 8, 9, 11 and 12 would be somewhat dependent on Recommendations 1 and 2, as these related to the resourcing and capacity. However, in the meantime, the Subject should seek to progress the enhancements to its provision referred to in these recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Panel **recommends** the Subject, School and College work closely and urgently to: address resourcing concerns; gain a better understanding of College and School strategies; and support the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the

subject which draws on its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure [paragraph Conclusion].

For the attention of: **Head of College/School/Subject**

Response: Head of College

The Vice Principal/Head of College, College Secretary and Head of School, are in discussion over the strategy and resourcing for the School of Social and Political Sciences. The appointment in August 2013 of the former Head of Subject (Politics) as Head of School in SPS, has provided an early opportunity to review a range of considerations within the School that relate to changes in the provision of UG and PG teaching, the impact of internationalisation, and the longer term direction and commitments of the School and, in particular, Politics. This work will be ongoing in an effort to ensure that the strengths of, and opportunities presented to, Politics are fully realised.

Response: School

Whilst it there should always be an on-going process of close working between the Head of Subject and the Head of School to ensure that the Subject is properly resourced and that resources are directed toward fulfilling the University, College and School strategic objectives and, especially, teaching mission, following the PSR Report the Head of Subject and Head of School worked collaboratively to identify ways that the School could, within the context of its limited control of resources, support the Subject in recognising and exploiting the opportunities afforded under the 'new' organisational structure. The School strongly supported the Subject's initiative in examining and restructuring its undergraduate curriculum, looking to identify ways to improve efficiencies whilst improving teaching provision. In particular the School provided (modest) resources for an 'awayday' within the Subject designed to specifically address teaching and curriculum matters. The School, as noted in the introduction to this response, has provided each Subject within the School financial resources, to be directed by the Subjects, themselves, toward improving the interaction and engagement between the Subjects and students. Subjects have used these funds for a variety of activities – both academic and 'social' - that have helped to develop better relations between staff and students, fostering a positive environment. As noted above, the Politics NSS scores on Q22 now exceed the University's KPI.

In addition, the School has examined the administrative efficiencies to be gained through rationalising the manner in which the School's subjects administer teaching related activities. The School has moved to adopt a common extensions policy, for instance, that improves the administrative efficiencies and helps to alleviate (as much as possible) pressures on academic staff. More generally, since becoming Head of School in August 2013, I have sought to identify ways to improve administrative functions within the School to try to free up more academic time for research and student engagement. This, of course, is not an easy task in a School that is – depending on how you measure it – the largest or second largest in the University. The School went for a significant period of time without a Head of Administration during 2014 which served to limit our ability to pursue our aims. With the new Head of Administration having taken up post on 20 October we are looking forward to conducting a full administrative review of the School with the specific and clear mandate of determining how we can improve efficiency, address targeted, strategic aims and support academic and administrative staff across the School.

Response: Subject

Since the year that the SER was written and the review conducted, Politics has gained five permanent members of staff and had the contract of one university teacher extended by three years. Although one of these hires replaced a member of staff who left, the addition of four posts has greatly improved our staff-student ratio. In September 2012 our SSR was an unacceptably high 29.2; by September 2013 it was 24. The latter number is still the highest in the School and well above the School average of 18. To further improve our SSR and inject necessary resources into the Subject, we submitted a proposal for three additional positions in October, which the College/School have generously agreed to fund. We will be hiring 2.5 lecturers in the coming academic session (one position is to be shared jointly with CEES).

We have worked closely with the School to shape these jobs and think they both build on our traditional teaching strengths by adding to the breadth of our curriculum and fit well with overarching School/College/University goals. In particular our recent hires will make contributions to the new Graduate School at Nankai University, continue to build expertise in the area of global security and add to the College's growing strength in quantitative social science. We have also gained additional administrative support during the course of the year. However further support is still required to run the Subject Area effectively and efficiently. The College/School have indicated that they will give us additional administrative resources to help run our growing undergraduate exchange programme, which we very much hope will be in place for the coming academic session. We plan to request additional administrative support for our Honours programme, which because of its size is too large for a single administrator to handle (our current Honours Administrator, Margaret Murray, does a fantastic job under what are often difficult circumstances). This additional support could help with such tasks as room bookings, entering/collating marks, organising materials to be sent to external examiners, moodle support and chasing up late/non-submitted student course work. At present many of these tasks fall to academic staff, which not only takes time away from research, but also our ability to think creatively about our teaching programme and practices.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences urgently takes appropriate steps to reduce the staff student ratio, liberating staff to be more creative and to spend more effort in the provision and enhancement of the student learning [paragraph 3.8.6].

For the attention of: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of Subject/School**

Response Head of College:

There have been a number of staffing changes over recent months but each academic post that has been vacated, has either been or will be, filled. The SSR data is currently being reviewed as there seem to be some discrepancies in the numbers reported. However, as noted in response to recommendation 1, this issue will be the subject of discussion and strategic review by the Vice Principal/Head of College and Head of School on an ongoing basis. Additional academic staff have already been recruited and more recruitments are planned. SSRs have reduced considerably over the last 3 years and will reduce further following these investments. There is some indication that workload pressures reported by academic staff may be due in part to administrative support for the subject. This has been reviewed already by the Head of Subject and (as noted below re recommendation 10) a number of measures have been taken already to reduce the administrative burden on administrative and academic staff. Additional administrative resource has been approved, and the Dean of Learning and Teaching is exploring the possibility of yet further administrative

support in particular for the growing area of student mobility; an activity in which Politics has borne greater pressure than elsewhere in the School.

Response: Head of School

It is, as the recommendation indicates, outside of the School's ability to create staffing lines to improve subject SSRs. That said, the School has attempted to address the problem of high SSRs in Politics and Sociology in several ways. First, the School has strongly lobbied for the creation of staff lines specifically targeted to addressing the high SSRs in subjects within the School. This has largely been successful and College has agreed to invest in the School, targeting SSRs. Second, the School has sought, where possible and reasonable, to reallocate resources within the School to deal with high SSRs. Third, the School has strongly encouraged the Subjects to work together in a collaborative and positive way to 'cross-list' and adopt Honours modules as appropriate offered by other subjects. This has been largely successful with the number of 'cross-listed' modules increasing dramatically. (This serves to spread the Honours student 'load' across the School in a way that helps to (1) reduce the SSRs in Politics and Sociology whilst (2) improving the SSRs in the other three subjects within the School.). Fourth, a similar exercise is on-going with PGT teaching, looking to identify ways to more efficiently deliver PGT modules that leverage modules offered across the School. Whilst there is still work to do to ensure that the SSRs are manageable and sustainable across the School, distinct and demonstrable improvements have been made.

Response: Head of Subject

As above, the College has invested significant new staffing resources in the Subject with new hires, which has reduced our SSR from the unsustainable level that existed at the time of the PSR in 2012-13.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences and the University address serious accommodation issues by offering alternative or additional teaching space that meets the needs of the Subject [paragraph 3.8.17].

For the attention of: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of Subject/School**

Response – Head of College:

There has been considerable liaison with Estates and Buildings in recent months, particularly in relation to provision for large class teaching. Much of the pressure experienced by Politics has been outwith the direct control of the College but both the Vice Principal/Head of College and the Dean of Learning and Teaching have become directly involved in discussions across the University about room allocations in preparation for future academic sessions and provision for Politics (especially level 1) in particular. The restrictions across the institution do place constraints on our ability to secure the teaching space that we would wish for teaching across the College but all efforts that could be made in this regard are being made.

Response – Head of School

If the School has little ability to address Recommendation 2, there is even less that the School can do to address accommodation needs within the School. Within the administrative team, we are constantly looking to identify ways that we can better make use of the insufficient space that we have. The space issues have, as many are aware, caused major problems in accommodation PGR students and providing adequate space for the Subjects to expand. The

School will quickly be at somewhat of a crisis point if additional space is not identified and allocated to the School.

Response: Head of Subject

Teaching space issues remain a significant problem for the Subject. We have tried to feed into campus-wide discussions about future accommodation plans where appropriate. Georgios Karyotis serves as a Politics representative on the College teaching space committee chaired by Moira Fishbacher-Smith, the College Teaching and Learning Dean. Unfortunately these problems cannot easily be solved in the short term and our space issues remain and if anything have become more problematic.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject liaises with RIO to engage constructively with appropriate colleagues in the College and School in the consideration of the viability of current and new PGT programmes, which respond to student needs and build on the strengths of the subject [paragraph 3.5.5].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject and Director of RIO**

For information: **Head of College**

Response: Head of Subject

Politics has a healthy suite of PGT programmes that draw on our teaching and research strengths. These programmes have increased steadily—about 30% over the past two year—and now are some of the largest in the School. It is of course always helpful to review these courses internally and by working closely with RIO and colleagues in the School. Indeed before receiving the PSR recommendations and in consultation with the Head of School, we took the decision in early 2013 to cancel our programme in European Politics and Law, which had never recruited well and for which we really did not have sufficient staff or resources. Over the past year, we also had in-depth conversations with the Head of School and the School PGT Director about the broader MSc in European Politics programme and its future viability. Although it remains the smallest of our PGT programmes, at the urging of the School we decided to keep this course in place and to see if we could increase recruitment onto this programme in the coming years.

As we have in the past, over the course of the last year, colleagues in Politics have continued to work with RIO to both develop and rebrand our PGT provision. Recent examples of this include rebranding our programme in International Politics to International Relations in 2011. In 2013-14, the subject played a key role in developing an international programme with Nankai University, building on our existing strengths in IR and research methods. Further, we continue to liaise closely with RIO in developing recruitment strategies for our existing programmes. Staff attend regular open days, contribute to newsletters, web chats etc. In 2013-14, we worked directly with the COSS recruitment team to develop an event to showcase our PGT courses for existing UoG undergraduate students. We look forward in the future to continuing our constructive relationship with RIO and building on the past successes of our PGT programme by putting on courses that respond to student needs and draw on the strengths of the Politics staff.

Response: Director of Recruitment and International Office

The Strategic Marketing team within the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) completed a market assessment for the School on the 4 Feb 2014 to determine the competitive position of the School's global suite of programmes – Global Health, Global Economy and Global

Security . This Assessment is attached for reference. Further discussion has taken place with the Head of Strategic Marketing and Nick Bailey, Christopher Carman and Laura Macfadyen on 27 March 2014 to discuss recruitment to date and potential rebranding opportunities.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel **recommends** that that the Subject engages directly with staff from Learning and Teaching Centre and through online support available (see Guidance Notes: www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_106193_en.pdf) to ensure a consistent approach in the communication of assessable Intended Learning Outcomes to students [paragraph 3.2.1].

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

For information: **ADU, Learning and Teaching Centre**

Response:

The Head of Subject met with a member of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Dr Ming Cheng, in early November to go over the centre's guidelines for writing effective intended learning outcomes (ILOs) in our course materials and communicating these clearly to our students. These guidelines were distributed to all staff in Politics at this time and we took care to highlight these guidelines to staff who were putting in PIPs proposals for new courses. In addition we put ILOs on the agenda of an internal teaching review that we conducted during the 2013-14 academic session (see introduction above), which ended with a teaching away day for the entire Subject in June. We invited Dr Jane MacKenzie from the TLC to lead a discussion on ILOs at this away day. Dr MacKenzie went through the TLC guidelines with members of the Subject and we had a robust discussion about what makes an effective ILO. Although the Subject now has a much better sense of how to highlight and communicate the purpose of ILOs to our students, there is still some disagreement about the use (and prohibition of the use) of certain verbs such as 'understand' in ILOs. Despite this controversy, Politics staff are much more aware of the importance of ILOs and that we need to take more care in communicating the content of these ILOs to students in our courses. We have now asked each member of staff to review the ILOs in their course materials in accordance with the Guidelines from the TLC and submit any necessary revisions to these ILOs for PIPs approval during the coming academic session.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages with students, through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, in a review of course descriptors that accurately reflect course content [paragraph 3.2.1].

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

Response:

We asked our student representatives across all levels to examine and get feedback from their peers on our course descriptors. They then reported their findings and suggestions to the Staff-Student liaison committee. In general the feedback from the student representatives at SSM in November was very positive. In addition we have asked all staff to update the course summaries that we post to our Moodle page on an annual basis.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject make transferable skills more explicit to students, via Programme Aims/Intended Learning Outcomes through links with initiatives and good

practice available in the School of Social and Political Sciences, College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre [paragraph 3.4.7].

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

Response:

As above, the Head of Subject met with a member of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Dr Ming Cheng, in early November to go over the centre's guidelines for writing effective intended learning outcomes in our course materials and communicating these clearly to our students. These Guidelines include recommendations for embedding and highlighting transferrable skills within course ILOs. In addition the Honours coordinator, Ana Langer, met several times with the College Employability Officer, Dr Dickon Copsey, to discuss graduate attributes and how we can better highlight transferable skills in our course materials. Dr Copsey gave us Guidelines for embedding graduate attributes into our curriculum as well as examples of how this had been done in other Subjects in the College, which we have distributed to all Politics staff. To reinforce the message contained in these written Guidelines, we invited Dr Copsey as well as Dr Jane MacKenzie of the TLC to attend our teaching away day in June to give a short session on how to write effective ILOs and how to embed transferrable skills more clearly within them. Finally, as above, we have asked each member of staff to review their course materials and ILOs in light of these guidelines before January and to make any necessary revisions to their ILOs for the 2015-16 academic session. We have also encouraged staff to better highlight graduate attributes and transferrable skills in their non-ILO course materials and discussions with immediate effect.

Recommendation 8¹

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject introduces pre-Honours induction for junior honours students, timed appropriately, to guide and support undergraduate students in the transition to Honours [paragraph 3.6.4].

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

Response:

We have developed and delivered a number of new induction sessions for our undergraduate students over the past two years. We now hold two induction sessions in March/April, the first for level 2 students seeking entry to our Honours programme and one for Junior Honours students before they progress to Senior Honours. We also have an induction session in September for all of our Honours students, which is followed by a social reception attended by students and staff to kick off the new year. These sessions are led by our two Honours coordinators, Ana Langer and Myrto Tsakatika, but we also invite student societies, the College Employability Officer as well as other members of staff such as the Dissertations Officer to help introduce students to key staff and College/University services. We believe the introduction of these meetings has greatly improved student induction into the Honours programme and helped to build a sense of community for our Honours students from the beginning to the end of their two years with us.

¹ The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recommendations 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 8, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see paragraph 6.3.2].

Recommendation 9²

The Panel **recommends** the Subject undertakes a review of tutorials to both reduce tutorial class sizes for honours students and ensure that provision is meeting the needs of international undergraduate students [paragraph 3.7.1]

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

Response:

I am a bit puzzled by this recommendation. In the report the panel states, “the undergraduate group preferred the smaller class sizes they experienced in Honours, as they were more interactive and provided the opportunity to develop relationships with teaching staff.” The rest of the paragraph also seems to imply that the problem with tutorial size is with our pre-Honours courses. The recommendation here, however, is for Honours modules, which seems contradictory. In practice, we cap pre-Honours tutorials at 16 and Honours tutorials/seminars at 20 and very occasionally 25. For Honours courses, tutors can decide if they wish to teach two, two-hour seminars or a one-hour lecture with two, one-hour tutorials capped at 20.

Given the vast disparities that exist across the School in terms of student numbers and how much larger the Politics programme is at every level than other Subjects in the School (with the exception of Level 1 Sociology), it is not helpful to compare the average size of our tutorials with the School or other Subject averages. The size of our courses will be larger in almost every instance. We did increase the cap of our Honours modules for three years (2009-2012) from 40 overall to 50 overall and single-hour tutorials from 20 to 25 due to the very unfavourable staff-student ratios highlighted in the report. Once our SSR came down to the still very high 24 in the 2012-13 session, we reduced the cap on Honours courses to 40 overall and 20 for single-hour tutorials. We go to great lengths to keep class size manageable within the Subject. For example, the Politics Subject does more double teaching (either by teaching a second, two-hour seminar or teaching two, single hour tutorials) than any other Subject in the School in an effort to keep student numbers as low as possible. This commitment to keeping our seminars and tutorials at a 20-25 student maximum comes at no small cost to the Subject as most tutors double teach their Honours modules. It also necessitates that we put on over 30 Honours modules per year, a number that is considerably higher than any other Subject in the School and creates a not insignificant burden for our administrative staff and Honours coordinators. We will continue to review the situation as we welcome new staff members and our SSR continues to improve. However lowering the cap of seminars and tutorials below the current 20 student limit would run the risk of reducing student course choice as some students would likely be blocked from taking our most popular courses. As we believe course choice to be one of the core strengths of our Honours programme, we would be reluctant to block off popular courses to our students by adopting caps that are too low.

The Politics Subject has always welcomed a significant number of international students into our Honours programme via exchanges and as full-time GU students. As above, we believe the breadth and variety of our curriculum makes Politics particularly attractive to international students. Like many Subjects in the University, however, the number of students entering the Subject with less developed English-language skills has increased over the past five years. We have tried to address this issue in different ways and have begun a discussion of how to mark work that demonstrates a clear engagement with course readings and concepts but is marred by unclear English. We have also encouraged staff to give more detailed feedback on coursework that focuses on grammar and writing style. Again however, given our student numbers and the need to return work to students in a timely fashion, there is only so much of

² The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recommendations 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendation 9, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see paragraph 6.3.2].

this we can do with our current resources. In addition we have sought to disseminate information to our students about the resources and help available to them from the Writing Centre and other University services. We are still in the process of developing these marking norms and working out a strategy, in conjunction with the School, College and University, for addressing the needs of students with poor English and/or writing skills. For example, one member of staff, Tom Lundberg, is a member of the Writing Centre Steering Group and feeds the recommendations of this committee back into the Subject.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject extends plans in relation to online essay submission and with a view to reducing the administrative burden, to include all written work through Turnitin, Moodle or similar, in consultation with the College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre. The Subject should also consider the scheduling of submission deadlines to manage the load on IT systems and minimise the risk of system breakdown [paragraph 3.3.7].

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

For information: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of ADU, Learning and Teaching Centre**

Response: Head of College

A good deal of consideration has been given to this recommendation by the Head of Subject, Head of School Administration and Dean of Learning and Teaching both in relation to online submission and other administrative functions. Support and training from the College Learning Innovation Officer has been directed towards Politics to ensure that during 2013-14, online submission (through Turnitin) and other administrative tasks can be done in a more efficient manner. Unfortunately, a technical feature of Turnitin/Moodle interface meant that there was not the desired smooth transition to online submission and online marking, but this is being resolved by the LTU as a matter of priority.

Response: Head of Subject

In an effort to be more vigilant about guarding against academic fraud, we introduced the use of Turnitin (TII) in all of our courses during the 2013-14 session. This new policy gave us the possibility of changing to an online essay submission system. Because of continuing problems with the reliability of both TII and moodle, however, we decided to keep the requirement for a paper submission in place for this first year that we were using the system. We did reduce the requirement from two paper copies down to one, thus saving on paper and some administrative time. We worked closely with the College Learning Innovation Officer, John Kerr, to implement the new system and to draft guidelines for students and staff to facilitate the use of the new technology. Despite his help and hard work, our experience with the online submission of essays and TII has been mixed. Although there were no outright catastrophes and many staff and students did welcome the use of TII originality reports and having access to online essay submissions, the system broke down several times during the year, and we had to move the submission dates back on more than one occasion. In our Levels 1 and 2 courses we had to discontinue the use of TII and online essay submission altogether in certain instances. We are currently facing a similar situation with our MSc dissertations that are due on 1 September as a new plug-in that was installed into the moodle pages has disabled the entire system for an undetermined length of time. At this time the technology does not seem sufficiently reliable to move to an online-only system.

We are also concerned about some of the recommendations we have been given for using this new technology, which include moving to 3 AM online submission time to prevent the

system from becoming overloaded. It isn't clear to us that the benefits of using this new technology outweigh the costs when we have to implement policies that are likely to make little sense to the students and are out of keeping with normal practice. We think that a broader discussion needs to be had across the College and School about when the early adoption of unreliable technology is beneficial and when it creates more problems than it solves. Despite these misgivings we are open to using online marking, submission and plagiarism detection programmes. Once we are confident that the technology works properly, we plan to move to full online submission of course work and to consider online marking, which we piloted this year, again with mixed results. Based on our experiences this past year, however, we are not confident the technology is up to the task of replacing paper submissions.

Recommendation 11³

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject should take steps to reconcile student needs for improved feedback on assessment with the variable practise across the subject area, drawing on appropriate examples of good practice from within the Subject [*paragraph 3.3.5*].

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

Response:

Over the past year, we have worked hard to improve the quality and reliability of our marking procedures and standards, including the quality of the feedback that we give students. Once again we feel that marking was negatively impacted by the deterioration of the SSR in the Subject as well as by the high levels of staff turnover that we have experienced since 2009. We took several steps last year to address this problem. First, we shored up second marking procedures in the Subject by having the second marker pick the sample of course work to be reviewed, making clear they should review a larger sample if the marking looks unreliable, and introducing a new mark distribution sheet that the second marker must review and comment on. We have also encouraged second markers to comment not just on grade distributions but also on the nature of the feedback the first marker gives students in an effort to better disseminate best practice across the Subject. We also took the decision to return to full, blind second-marking of Honours and MSc dissertations, which again should add depth and breadth to the feedback students receive on this extended piece of work.

We have sought to further encourage the dissemination of best marking practice in other ways. The Head of Subject held a marking workshop for the six new members of staff in which we discussed common expectations for feedback on student course work. We have disseminated examples of feedback from tutors whose practices have been praised by our External Examiners and the PSR panel. The teaching review committee also examined assessment practices as part of their year-long internal review. At our teaching away day we decided to create a voluntary peer-review system of individual teaching. Marking and improving feedback on course work will be part of this peer mentoring system. We also took the decision to create a common feedback template for oral participation marks in the Subject to improve the consistency of feedback across our courses that use oral participation. Finally, the Head of Subject and Assessment Officer plan to compile an Assessment Handbook before the end of the 2014-15 session that will be disseminated to all staff and include marking policies, feedback templates, information on grade distributions in the Subject as well as examples of best marking practice. Taken together we believe these changes have and will continue in the future to help us improve the quality of the feedback we give students as is reflected in our improving assessment scores in the NSS.

The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recs 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 11, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see *paragraph 6.3.2*].

Recommendation 12⁴

The Review panel **recommends** the subject to engage with internal and external stakeholders to develop a strategy and plan for embedding applied learning (employability) and reflection (PDP) within the Graduate Attribute framework. Where appropriate the approach adopted should involve the Careers Service, Club 21, the Politics Society, potential employers and alumni, together with good practice initiatives in the College of Social [paragraph 3.4.14].

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

For information: **Director, Careers Service**

Response:

The Subject has made a concerted effort this year to better highlight employability and the skills embedded in the Graduate Attributes agenda to our students. As above (see response to recommendation 7), the Honours coordinators, Ana Langer and Myrto Tsakatika, have worked with the College Employability Officer to review our course materials so that we can develop a strategy for better embedding transferrable skills into our curriculum in a more visible and systematic way based on the resources we have available to us. We invited Dr Copsey to our teaching away day to reinforce this message and to disseminate best practice in this area to all staff in the Subject.

In addition to reviewing our course materials to better highlight applied learning and transferable skills to our students, we have also invited Dr Copsey and a representative from the Careers Centre to speak to our students at our Honours induction. Additionally, Dr Copsey does a session on employability for our Level 1 and dissertations students. Next year he will also speak to our Level 2 students.

Perhaps most importantly, we appointed Philip Habel as the Subject Careers Officer, a position that had gone unfilled for the past three years due to lack of staff. Dr Habel used the year to liaise with the College Employability Officer, the Careers Service and Politics students / societies to gain a better understanding of what the students' needs are and what resources are available on campus to meet these needs. He worked closely with a student intern in the Employability Office to carry out these tasks, which included running a focus group with our students about employability issues. He and the student intern used this and other feedback to update and overhaul our careers webpage. For the first time there is significant content aimed at assisting our post-graduate students in addition to what exists on the site for our undergraduates. Dr Habel plans to extend these efforts further next year by working closely with the Careers Service to organize employability events throughout the year, e.g. an alumnae panel or CV writing workshop, and to better disseminate information to our students about job and internship opportunities held by the Careers Service.

Longer term we will look into a broader consultation with external stakeholders that would include alumnae and potential employers. As was noted by the panel, this is a very resource intense and time consuming endeavour that we cannot ask a single member of staff such as our Honours coordinator or Careers Officer to undertake alone. As more resources are invested in the Subject, however, we will expand our efforts in this area. But we believe we have made good, common sense changes to enhance the employability and transferable skills of our students over the past year.

⁴ The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recs 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 12, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see paragraph 6.3.2]

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject to liaise with course lecturers to ensure the inclusion of sufficient subject-specific examples, particularly for the mandatory Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Social Sciences courses, to meet the needs of Politics students in cross-discipline teaching provision [*paragraph 3.4.3*].

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

Response: Head of Subject

Several members of Politics have worked with the course coordinators of the two School methods courses to ensure that there is sufficient Politics content in these modules. As Head of Subject, Chris Carman reviewed the course materials of quantitative methods course and made several suggestions for readings and databases with Politics content that could be added to these materials. Kelly Kollman also made some suggestions for additions to the qualitative course guide and delivered a lecture on case study methodologies for the undergraduate course. We believe these efforts have gone some way towards addressing our students' concerns about these courses. Politics colleagues have also played an active role in helping to develop the new Q-step programme currently being set up to embed quantitative literacy into the School's undergraduate curriculum by participating in the advisory committee and attending and commenting on the job presentations for new Q-step lectureships.

Response: Head of School

As noted in the Politics subject response, the course conveners for the School research methods classes have been working closely with the Head of School and Subject colleagues to identify and integrate examples from the subjects represented across the School in the School's methods courses. This has been quite successful and should improve student satisfaction. In addition, as the Q-Step programme further develops classes across the School, all module conveners will work with the Q-Step lecturers to integrate research methods and quantitative literacy into teaching materials and topics. Thus, we will be addressing this recommendation from two separate directions: (1) improving the range of examples used in the School specific research methods modules and (2) improving the coverage of quantitative and research approaches in subject specific modules (as appropriate).

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject formalises its engagement with Graduate Teaching Assistants through Annual Monitoring, Course Review and representation at Staff Student Liaison Committee and supports the development of their role by facilitating a dialogue around teaching requirements/best practice and providing opportunities for feedback on their performance [*paragraph 3.8.14*].

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

Response:

Since the School agreed to pay GTAs for attending course meetings two years ago, they have formally been invited to attend four meetings for each pre-Honours course. This includes a preparatory meeting before the course begins to discuss course aims and content, an essay marking meeting, an exam marking meeting and a final course review meeting after each course has finished to get their input on what went well and what can be improved upon. In addition in response to suggestions from the PSR panel, we invited GTA representatives to attend and participate in our staff teaching and student-staff liaison meetings this past year, which they did.

Further the Head of Subject, along with the Head of Subject in Sociology, submitted a proposal to the School to create a Head GTA position in the two Subjects to provide greater support, mentorship, coordination and Subject-specific training for the GTAs. For various reasons the School decided it could not support the creation of the post. In light of this decision we have tried to put in place some additional measures to support the GTAs based on the resources we have available to us. In particular we will create a formal GTA handbook with guidance on teaching, assessment and Subject procedures for all GTAs; informal guidance notes already exist but we will attempt to formalize and improve upon these materials. The pre-Honours course coordinators will also offer to observe GTAs upon request and offer feedback on their teaching; again this practice has been in place informally for a number of years. Given the number of GTAs that we employ, we simply do not have the resources to observe and offer feedback to every GTA as a matter of course as we would wish and think appropriate. As was highlighted in the PSR report, the course coordinators on our pre-Honours courses regularly make themselves available to GTAs when they have questions about teaching / marking.

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel **recommends** the School of Social and Political Sciences liaises with the Subject, in the provision of discipline-specific training for Graduate Teaching Assistants which complements the generic training provided by Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), in compliance with Senate Regulations. (see guidance available through LTC website: www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/taughtcourses/graduateteachingassistantstutorsanddemonstratorsstatutorytraining/) [paragraph 3.8.16].

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

For information: **Head of Subject**

Response: Head of Subject

As above, we proposed to the School that a Head GTA position be created. One of the duties of the post holder would have been to develop and deliver subject specific training for our GTAs. When the School decided that it could not support a Head GTA in Politics, it indicated that the course specific meetings we provide for the GTAs on our pre-Honours courses were sufficient to fulfil the subject-specific training requirement.

Response – Head of School

This issue has been discussed in the School Executive on several occasions following the Politics, Sociology and Economic & Social History PSRs. All three subjects have also engaged with the Learning and Teaching Centre to improve GTA training and support. The School has agreed to increase financial support for the training of GTAs and the Subjects now offer additional support and training beyond what was previously allocated. Here it should be noted that the School is forced to overspend its GTA budget to ensure that the appropriate resources are available for GTA training and support.

On further support, Politics and Sociology were not able to agree on the establishment of a Senior/Head GTA within the Subjects to increase support for the GTAs. It was instead decided that the course conveners would ensure that they target development activities and work to better engage with GTAs beyond the basic training. The School noted in a meeting to the School Executive that the issue could be revisited should Politics and Sociology develop an agreed, common approach. (To clarify, the School is regularly placed under intense pressure from College to ensure that common practices are used across the School.)