

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Thursday 21 May 2015

**Periodic Subject Review: Updated Responses to
Recommendations 1, 2, 6 and 10 Arising from the Periodic Subject
Review of Celtic and Gaelic held on 15 February 2013
Cover Sheet**

Mrs Catherine Omand, Senate Office

Recommendation 1:

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

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

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

Updated Response – April 2015:

We have addressed this issue locally in so far as we can. We have created a research leave plan for the next few years which takes account of normal expectations, and balances needed for the curriculum, to the best of our ability. Manifestly, we cannot at this stage foresee other issues which may challenge us, and have recently challenged us (maternity leave, long-term sick leave), but this is true for every subject area. We are now in a position whereby any leave forecast against externally funded projects has a clear plan with which it needs to articulate, and this should go some way to helping to avoid further bottlenecks in the future.

Recommendation 2:

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

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

Initial Response:

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

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

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

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

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

Updated Response – April 2015:

Staff members have been asked to consider assessment issues in any future course proposals or revisions, and reflect the panel’s views on this issue. The most recent new course to go through the approval process, an Honours course on “Gaelic Song in Performance”, has a healthy diversity of assessment types. We note, however, that a survey of assessment types done separately by the College of Arts show that, in fact, across our Celtic Civilisation and Gaelic programmes, we do have a diverse range of assessments, indeed, some of the most diverse in the College of Arts. (We attach the survey for

reference). This survey was undertaken in respect of a College-wide review of types of assessment and, needless to say, alongside the other subject areas within the School of Humanities, we will be playing our part in this review and the actions undertaken from it.

Recommendation 6

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

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

Initial Response:

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

Updated Response – April 2015

Awaited.

Recommendation 10

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

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

Director of RIO

Initial Response: Head of School

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

Initial Response: Director of RIO

Unfortunately the taking forward of a specific brochure for Celtic and Gaelic has been delayed owing to the departure of the College of Arts RCMO at the end of last year. However, a meeting has now been established with Dr. Sheila Kidd, Senior Lecturer in Celtic

and Gaelic, and Fiona Dunn, the University's Gaelic Language Officer, to progress the production of this marketing collateral. The meeting is due to take place on the 24 April owing to prior diary conflicts.

Updated Response: Director of RIO April 2015

Work is ongoing with the production of the Gaelic leaflet which will be produced in time for use at the September Open Day.