

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 12 February 2016

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to Recommendations Arising from the Report of the Review of the Subject Area of Classics held on 4 December 2014**Recommendations**

A number of recommendations are made in the report. The recommendations, and the subject area's response, are given below.

For the attention of Classics**Recommendation 1**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject develops a coherent strategic vision in terms of future growth and range of provision, working with the Head of School to produce a plan as to how to achieve this. [Paragraph 3.3]

Response:

In discussion with the School, the subject area has formulated the following statement of its vision for learning and teaching:

'The subject area of Classics aims to teach the discipline of Classics in as broad and inclusive a way as possible. It creates an environment for learning in which students are encouraged to engage with classical antiquity through a wide variety of methods and approaches and to understand the discipline as it has been shaped since antiquity by those who have studied it. The study of Latin and Greek is available at all levels without being compulsory at any (though very strongly encouraged at PG); the subject area acknowledges that engagement with texts in the original languages is only one way among many of studying the field. Students are encouraged at all levels to reflect on how as well as what they are studying and to develop skills of analysis, exposition and presentation of value within and outwith the academy. Teaching reflects the research interests and expertise of staff whilst embracing the idea that some texts and periods are canonical.'

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel recommends that attention be given to restructuring language provision with a view to providing a more progressive learning environment, possibly improving retention. [Paragraph 4.1.5]

Response:

The subject area has changed the curriculum at levels 1 and 2 in both Latin and Greek, so that some material is held over from level 1 to level 2, and the number of set texts at level 2 has been reduced from 4 to 3. Please see also our response to recommendation 5.

These changes were implemented in 15-16 and we are reviewing results and retention this session.

Recommendation 3

In relation to the MLitt Classics, to be compliant with the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) regulations, the Panel recommends the Subject consider increasing the overall credit to 190. This could possibly be achieved by either amending a current course credit or by adding an additional 10-credit course. Alternatively, the Subject reviews the Intended Learning Outcomes and summative assessment to ensure that these are consistent with SCQF11. [Paragraph 5.3.5]

Response:

We rejected the suggestion of increasing the course to 190 credits as unworkably complex and anomalous in administrative terms. Instead, we have changed the ILOs and assessment on courses LATIN5001, LATIN5002, LATIN5003, LATIN5004, GREEK5001, GREEK5002, GREEK5003, and GREEK5004 to ensure consistency with SCQF11.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommends that consideration be given to providing alternative provision to give all students access to the core skills gained by the Travel course, possibly the introduction of a number of shorter trips. Additional sources of funding should also be investigated at both Subject and School level. Alternatively, Intended Learning Outcomes should be differentiated between Single and Joint provision. [Paragraph 4.6.2]. In addition, the Panel recommends that the Subject and School ensure the core Travel course complies with the University's equality and diversity policies. [Paragraph 4.4.2]

Response:

We are surprised by this recommendation, as alternative provision is already in place, as was highlighted in the self-assessment document, and its existence is emphasised in the Classics Handbook (p.11, 'The tour may be modified if students have particular circumstances which make travel abroad difficult. Nonetheless, should travel prove impossible for medical or other reasons, we are prepared to consider waiving the requirement.') We are confident, therefore, that the course complies with the University's Equality and Diversity policies. We have been unable at, subject level, to identify any further sources of funding to support the travel requirement, but are confident that the course is feasible with existing levels of support. As we have undertaken the actions required by the first two sentences of this recommendation, we have ignored those in the third sentence insofar as it begins with a disjunctive 'alternatively'.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that the Subject considers the provision of further support for language provision, particularly for beginners, possibly introducing additional on-line resources to support beginners to Latin and Greek and address the concerns of students with no previous language experience. [Paragraph 4.7.4]

Response:

We have introduced language support at pre-honours over the summer vacation (on-line guided reading and exercises with GTA support online or face-to-face [one hour per week]). This project was funded for 2015 by an award from the Chancellor's Fund (£1042.36) and Classics will require additional resource if it is to continue. The subject area is running a weekly reading class in each language during semesters one and two for non-assessed support and practice, aimed at non-beginners.

Recommendation 6

The Panel noted that the Code of Assessment could be difficult to interpret and recommends that the Subject develops explicit Schedule A grade descriptors in relation to Classics in order to assist students to gain a better understanding of what was expected from them. [Paragraph 4.7.2]

Response:

We regard obscurity within the Code of Assessment as a matter for the University to address. The subject area has developed and agreed grade descriptors for translation from Latin and Greek to clarify expectations around this particular form of assessment and these will be in use from 2016-2017 onwards (discussion at subject area meeting 14.10.15, consultation with externals and final agreement by email) and is engaged in developing grade descriptors for other assessments for introduction in 2016-2017, following best practice which has been shared from other subject areas within the College of Arts.

Recommendation 7

No measures were in place to monitor workload in relation to the 'open door' policy and the Panel therefore suggests that 'office hours' be considered for all staff but recommends for GTAs. The Panel further recommends that GTAs be properly remunerated for their contact time with students. [Paragraph 4.7.1]

Response:

We are unable to fund GTA office hours, but have ensured that we have fully implemented the University's policy on GTA employment. We have considered 'office hours' for members of staff and have agreed to retain current flexibility (where it is up to individual members of staff to determine how they make themselves available to students, whether this involves an office hour or not).

Recommendation 8

In relation to employability, the Review Panel recommends that the Subject clearly articulate the transferable skills acquired, such as those attained in the core Travel course, and communicate these to all students. [Paragraph 4.3.1]

Response:

Changes to delivery and assessment in Classical Civilisation 1 and 2, introduced in 2015-2016, emphasise transferable skills around reflection and presentation. We have agreed a section on Employability to be included in the Classics Handbook from 2016-2017 onwards: this articulates the transferable skills which our courses require. Classics is proud to offer opportunities to its students already from the first year of their studies to cultivate their employability skills and also to reflect on the development of these skills both through various means of formative and summative assessment and through extra-curricular activities within the subject-area. During their studies Classics students develop their ability to communicate their views orally in an articulate, confident, clear, and persuasive manner by doing oral presentations in courses from year 1 right through to Honours; this boosts their confidence at public speaking and enhances their chances in being successful at job interviews. They learn to think critically and to present their arguments in a structured and concise way by writing essays whose topics encourage critical engagement with primary and secondary sources. Through group presentations in courses at all levels they acquire the necessary skills of working in teams, of supporting each other, and of creating an intellectual community for themselves that gives them identity and purpose within an academic context. They are asked to take initiatives in planning their own essay themes, their own dissertation

topics, their own travel abroad to visit Classical sites and to manage projects based on these visits. Such initiatives cultivate time-management, budgeting, and organisational skills. Opportunities to participate in a Classics-related student society (the Alexandrian Society that runs events for students and is run by students) are not only major sources of fun and community-building occasions but also provide our students the chance to take leadership positions in their own discipline.

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject and the School work with the Dean of International Mobility to consider ways to promote interest in study abroad by highlighting the benefits and removing barriers to student mobility. [Paragraph 4.6.1]

Response:

At subject level, we use information meetings, particularly the Honours meeting in semester two, to emphasise the existence of study abroad opportunities. We note that our Core Travel Course ensures that all our single honours students travel abroad as part of this course and we have drawn Professor Murdoch's attention to this course.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommends that Classics explores with the Head of School possibilities for interdisciplinarity to provide more flexibility and opportunities for potential PGT students. [Paragraph 4.9.1]

Response:

Classics has launched in 2015-2016 its MLitt in Ancient Cultures, which offers students choice within a suite of courses drawn from Classics, Archaeology, TRS and Egyptology.

The School PGT convener Dr. Stephen Marritt has begun a process of consultation to identify how the School can use the hub-and-spoke method most effectively to promote interdisciplinarity within the School (School management group minutes, 18/11/15), including shared research training.

For the attention of the School of Humanities

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommends that the School re-instates formally recorded meetings of Subject course reflection and learning and teaching developments which should facilitate dialogue between Subject and School. [Paragraph 3.6]

Response:

Classics has reinstated subject area meetings in 2015-2016, which are clerked by a member of the School admin staff.

Recommendation 12

The Panel recommends that the School arranges a formal induction event for all new staff across the School to introduce them to relevant School and University procedures. [Paragraph 5.4.1] In addition, the Panel recommends that the School creates a staff handbook and/or webpage containing guidance on generic administrative processes and procedures across subjects, identifying central administrative staff roles and responsibilities. [Paragraph 5.6.1]

Response:

The School has recently introduced induction procedures for all new members of staff which includes a session with the School Operations Administrator to introduce new staff to School and University procedures. The School also has comprehensive webpages detailing administrative staff roles and responsibilities see www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/studentstaff/informationforstaff/

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel recommends that the School further develops a School identity by introducing appropriate inter-Subject forums to allow for discussion of common issues and provide opportunities for staff to meet with other colleagues. [Paragraph 3.4]

Response:

School fora regularly take place to discuss issues of cross-school concern (22/10/14, 18/02/15, 06/03/15, 21/10/15).

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel recommends that the School introduces a more formal induction programme for GTAs which should include training on assessment requirements, marking and provision of information on processes and procedures. [Paragraph 5.4.6]

Response:

A GTA training programme has been introduced by the School in 2015 which complements Subject specific training which is delivered by Subject Areas.

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel recommends that the School establishes appropriate support mechanisms for international students before and after arrival. [Paragraph 4.9.1]

Response:

The School has a limited role in the international student journey prior to arrival in Glasgow although MRIO have well established mechanisms in place to provide appropriate and relevant support to international students at all stages during the application process and immediate pre-arrival and. Once registered and enrolled international students are provided with professional support by appropriately trained staff in International Student Support Services.

While the School acknowledges the importance of having in place support mechanisms for international students, it is not the School's sole responsibility to establish such mechanisms although Subject course convenors, at pre Hons, Hons and PGT are always alert and responsive to the needs of international students.

The School is also interested in the effectiveness of the Buddy System currently being piloted within SMLC with a view to adopting this if appropriate. Within a Buddy System, an existing international student would be identified as a Buddy to a new student and a structure put in place to allow the existing student to support the new student in the early months of their study at GU; any buddy system would be intended to complement existing support activities offered by ISSS. There could be knock-on benefits for any student signing up for a formalised Buddy System in terms of recognition for this role via the HEAR and discussions with the Senate Office would require to take place to ascertain whether or not this could be an accredited activity.

In terms of the provision of an International Student Handbook, the School would be interested to know of custom and practice across the University so as not to duplicate effort and to ensure consistency of information.

For the attention of College HR

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel recommends the College HR Manager should clarify the position on remuneration for all work undertaken by GTAs and ensure this position is effectively communicated to Schools and Subjects. [Paragraph 5.4.8]

Response from College HR manager:

'The University has developed an Extended Workforce Policy (EWP) which revised what had previously been referred to as the "Atypical Worker Policy". The EWP revised (slightly) the guidelines around the engagement of GTAs, the terms of which College Management Group (CMG) agreed to implement as of this semester. A College GTA policy was also developed to ensure that the EWP was effected across all Schools as uniformly as possible. The policy does and has always specified rates of pay for the various elements of the GTA role. I understand that the subject area are developing a more detailed induction which will address any further ambiguities such as those detailed here. The College will also try to establish a more generic induction document based on School level examples that already exist in the College.'