

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 15 April 2016

**Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations
Arising from the Periodic Subject Review of Urban Studies held on
4 and 5 March 2015**

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusion

The Review Panel enjoyed a constructive engagement with the subject area of Urban Studies, which was facilitated in large part by a reflective and positive approach, adopted by staff and demonstrated in the SER.

The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that, at the time of the Review, programmes offered by Urban Studies were current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and of practice in its application.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support the Subject in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. The Review Panel recognises that several of the recommendations relate to issues that the subject area itself had highlighted for further development in the course of the review or in the SER. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are grouped together by the areas for improvement/enhancement and are ranked in order of priority within each section.

Recommendation 1

In the course of the review, the Panel noted a number of issues related to Learning and Teaching which were to some extent inter-related and would benefit from an over-arching vision. The Review Panel therefore **recommends** that, on publication of the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy 2015-2020, Urban Studies develop a coherent learning and teaching strategy, articulating its vision for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and addressing such issues as widening access, internationalisation, and recruitment both to the University and to the latter stages of the undergraduate programme. [*paragraph 2.1*]

Action: Heads of Subject

For information: Head of School

The University Learning and Teaching strategy 2015-2020 was agreed by Senate on 1st October 2015 and subsequently made available on the website. Its stated vision is:

Our vision is a learning culture that places teaching at the centre of what we do. Our learning and teaching shapes and is shaped by our research rich environment. Our motivated, vibrant, diverse community of learners and teachers to work in partnership to develop motivated, skilled and highly valued graduates with the confidence to make positive change in society.

Urban Studies will work to develop a coherent learning and teaching strategy for Undergraduate and Postgraduate provision through this academic year, with a view to

producing a statement that allies with the vision expressed above and the ambitions and strategies within that document, has buy-in from staff and matches the aspirations of our diverse student body. We propose to pursue a consultative process that aims to produce this strategy by June 2016.

As reflected in our SER we would consider that we already do much that is strong in relation to creating reflective, responsive curricula that are research-led, forward-looking and responsive to the needs of an increasingly international student body. All provision is subject to regular (5-yearly) review, and for the professionally accredited programmes this requires explicit mapping of course content against core competencies and learning outcomes. Much of our teaching is explicitly focused on the ways in which positive change can be effected in society.

Our provision and our student body have been significantly internationalised in recent years and we have willingly pursued opportunities presented by MaRIO for partnerships at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels to collaborate with a range of Universities in China (including significant developments with Nankai) and Korea for example. In order to produce our strategy we therefore propose to:

- Consult with MaRIO as to the current targets set for Urban Studies recruitment, the priorities for Internationalisation and reflect on how Urban Studies can best contribute to these priorities.
- As part of that consultation, we will also consider strategic priorities for widening access, building on positive current practice which includes offering PG Certs as entrance routes to Real Estate and Planning programmes and the recruitment to PG Diploma for professional housing programmes explicitly tailored to students who do not have conventional entry qualifications. Our postgraduate programmes are also explicitly designed to allow part-time study.
- Our pre-honours and honours numbers have grown considerably this year and we will consult with our undergraduate students as to how we might consolidate that growth and further enhance the attractiveness of the honours years. We will also consider strategies to offer relevant honours options more widely within the school and elsewhere (including current discussions with Education with respect to plans to develop honours provision for their Community Development programme for example)
- Following these consultations a draft strategy will be developed for discussion at the Teaching Forum in semester 2 (February), and in the staff student liaison committees in that semester. The Teaching forum will also explicitly reflect on the University's Teaching and Learning strategy to consider how the evolving Urban Studies strategy allies with its aims and ambitions. The Head of School will also be invited to comment on the draft Teaching and Learning strategy.
- A final draft of Urban Studies teaching and learning strategy will be agreed at a full staff meeting and once agreed by Head of School, submitted to Senate.

This process will be led by the subject Teaching & Learning Head, in close co-operation with Head of Subject and key programme directors as was the process to oversee the Periodic Subject Review process.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that a formal management structure be established to support the performance and development of GTAs and early career staff engaged in learning, teaching and assessment, to address issues including:

- (GTAs) the identification of a key member of staff to whom to address general issues of concern; appropriate recognition of their contribution to the work of Urban Studies; succession planning.
- (Early career staff) management of workload.

[*paragraph 4.3.9*]

Action: Heads of Subject

For information: Head of School

Response:

Following the PSR we quickly identified the Undergraduate Programme director as the appropriate person to act as GTA manager and the clear point of contact for GTA staff, if they wished to raise any issues between formal meetings either by email or in one to one meetings. This was communicated to staff in the first GTA team meeting. Level 1 and 2 course co-ordinators hold team meetings with GTAs at the start of each semester to discuss key issues including the expectations for the format and content of tutorials, approach to student support and so on. Course co-ordinators meet GTAs to discuss their marking and student feedback on assignments in the process of moderation of marks.

The Undergraduate Programme Director will be asked to confirm in Semester 2 which GTA staff intend to continue and therefore identify whether there is a need to encourage new recruits to apply for the following academic year. Succession planning is achieved through maintaining a lively cohort of PhD students and discussing possible career development opportunities in regular (typically monthly) supervisions. The first year review also provides an ideal point in the PhD career where research students are reminded that teaching is a possible opportunity for them in the second year. The School of Social and Political Studies has instituted a formal application process for those who wish to be GTAs in any part of the School. SPS has also recently instituted a cross-School GTA committee that will feed directly into the School Executive committee, allowing any issues GTAs encounter to be considered by senior School staff. We already have a GTA nominee for this committee and it will also be attended by the Undergraduate Programme convenor.

Early career staff workloads are formally discussed as part of the PDR/Early Career Development Programme annual review (normally conducted by the Head of Subject). Increased transparency in workloads was achieved by producing an overview analysis of the distribution of workloads in Urban Studies when annual data were received by Head of Subject. This allows teaching staff to see where their own measured workload lies in relation to other staff members. Given the complexity of the factors captured in the SPS workload this is likely to give a more accurate view of relative fairness than a 'norm' (e.g. of the number of courses that are delivered on average for example).

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** that Urban Studies implement a turnaround time for assessment feedback on postgraduate courses of three weeks in accordance with the University's Assessment Policy. Recognising the difficulties already identified by Urban Studies in achieving a four-week turnaround time, the Panel notes that this may require careful planning regarding the allocation of marking, awareness of competing commitments of markers, contingency planning, and adopting a norm as to the levels of feedback to be provided. [*paragraph 4.2.14*]

Action: Heads of Subject

For information: Head of School

Response:

This was identified as an issue for some of the large PGT courses, and not an issue for the UG Programme where GTAs help manage the large volumes of marking. We have adopted a 3 week turnaround target for postgraduate assignments this year (2015/6). Very careful thought was given to the timing of proposed assignments from the earliest stages of the planning process, starting in December 2014 when scheduling classes for room booking purposes. The timetable was rearranged so that most PGT students will have a very early assignment in the academic year so that they get a sense of the standards we set and deadlines are carefully staggered so that students should not have any need to request rescheduling (as happened in the previous year). All staff were provided with a full schedule of hand-in deadlines in May 2015 and urged to note dates in their diaries: course co-ordinators for Semester 1 were also reminded of dates in early September when preparing their course handbooks. This will be repeated for semester 2 course co-ordinators in November. We have explored the possibility of bringing in some appropriately skilled GTA help with the largest PGT classes. The turnaround target will remain a challenge, particularly within very specialised aspects of teaching (so very few members of staff are able to mark work confidently), but we aspire to meet the target as far as possible within our available resources.

We also propose to release UG exam marks (as provisional marks) following marking of the December diet rather than following the exam boards.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that Urban Studies institute a formal approach to the dissemination of good practice through the proposed Learning & Teaching Forum and develop other mechanisms to develop and promote a broad-based culture of teaching enhancement. [paragraph 2.7]

Action: Heads of Subject, Convener School Learning and Teaching Committee

For information: Head of School

Response:

This recommendation has been implemented: meetings of the Learning & Teaching forum take place each semester (last meeting 4th November, next scheduled for February 2016) providing a space in which to reflect on our learning and teaching practice, good practice and innovations in practice, and evolving School, College and University policies that relate to teaching and learning. It is also an opportunity to reflect on any future developments of the content and structure of existing undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and consider any new developments that may be underway or desirable.

Recommendation 5

In view of comments made by both undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding a lack of clarity in relation to the place of guest lecturers and the overlap of material covered by different lecturers, the Panel **recommends** that Urban Studies ensure that there are robust mechanisms in place to deliver a coherent and integrated curriculum, while continuing to incorporate the pertinent contributions from active researchers and practitioners in relevant areas. [paragraph 4.1.10]

Action: Heads of Subject

For information: Head of School

Response:

As indicated in the SER, some of our courses benefit greatly from having specialist contributions from researchers (from within Urban Studies or elsewhere) or external professional experts and practitioners. Where there are external contributions or team teaching within courses it is clear that course co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring that contributors are well-briefed and that the course content is coherent and attains the learning objectives. The Learning & Teaching forum has provided an opportunity to reflect on the PSR recommendations generally and to re-emphasise this key responsibility to all course co-ordinators. Moodle is an effective way in which course co-ordinators are enabled to review in detail material not delivered personally to ensure that they are able to make the appropriate connections. Student feedback received through the Evasys system and in Staff Student Liaison committees are also important mechanisms by which course co-ordinators and programme convenors are able to judge the success of their efforts and to make adjustments as appropriate in subsequent years. As indicated above, regular reviews (5 yearly for RICS) are required by the professional accrediting bodies to map course content against core competencies and required learning outcomes.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that Urban Studies develop a strategy for increasing the number of home undergraduate students who participate in study abroad. [*paragraph 3.4.19*]

Action: Heads of Subject, College Mobility Officer and Dean of International Mobility

For information: Head of School

Response: Head of Subject

The Honours co-ordinator will liaise with the College Mobility Officer and School Exchange officer to make sure that the opportunities for studying abroad are conveyed to the students, both through moodle and at the advice briefings given in year 2 for students progressing in to their honours year. We will invite students who have enjoyed a study abroad year to talk to our second year students about their experience of living and studying abroad. As our Honours numbers have historically been relatively modest, it is perhaps not surprising that numbers participating in study abroad have also been small, but there is scope to be more proactive in promoting these opportunities and this may increase numbers in the future. The honours co-ordinator will also review the partnerships we have with overseas institutions and consult on how attractive and appropriate they are for our students.

Response: Dean for International Mobility

I have been invited to a meeting with the subject area. The 'historically modest' point is one shared across other subjects, and I shall discuss the possibility of the subject actively making use of the new 'GlasGOW Global' implementation plan for increasing short-term and study exchange at some early point.

I can report further once this meeting takes place.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that action be taken to address the issues relating to teaching accommodation identified in this report which either prevent the delivery of teaching or have resulted in an environment which is not conducive to effective learning and teaching:

- The lack of accessible teaching accommodation which has compromised the ability of Urban Studies to accommodate students with disabilities thus undermining

established relationships (e.g. Students sponsored by the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living taking the Housing Studies programme).

- Tutorials being timetabled in lecture theatres, the layout of which inhibited discussion amongst the group.
- Classrooms in which there were no tables.
- Three hour teaching sessions being interrupted by the need to change location.

[paragraph 4.4.9]

Action: *Vice Principal Learning & Teaching*

For information: *Heads of Subject, Head of School*

Response: Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching)

The current teaching estate is severely stretched in terms of capacity. Our ability to resolve this in the short term is limited but we are, nevertheless, taking steps to address the situation both in the short and longer terms.

We have added additional teaching capacity by bringing additional rooms into play for teaching activity over the last two years. We have also recently completed a major development at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital that has seen a significant proportion of medical teaching moving off the estate. This will again increase capacity for other teaching. In the longer term, we have committed to the construction of a major Learning & Teaching Hub as the first project within the campus redevelopment. This will contain additional teaching capacity of around 1800 seats.

Considering now each of the specific points mentioned above, I would make the following comment:

- Accessible teaching accommodation: We do have issues with accessible teaching accommodation on the estate. All new space is and will be fully accessible but some space on the existing estate cannot be converted. Nevertheless, we provide accessible teaching spaces to groups which contain students or staff with mobility issues. These situations should be flagged in advance to Central Timetabling who will source a suitable venue. I am unaware of situations where issues of this type have not been resolved but, should this circumstance occur, the subject area should contact me directly to ensure resolution.
- Tutorial Space: In addition to the measures described in the first paragraph, we are converting a number of teaching spaces into multi-purpose spaces that are equally suitable for lecturing and tutorials. Our intention is to progressively roll this out across the estate to create an environment for mixed mode teaching.
- Classrooms with Tables: All of the new and refurbished spaces are either being equipped with tables or seats with large integrated writing tablets. The feedback so far on the spaces we have converted and the new style of seat has been extremely positive. We are also changing the nature of lecture theatres to incorporate collaborative working spaces.
- Interruption to Three Hour Teaching: Central Timetabling are currently working to improve the efficiency of the timetable. At present the timetable is far from optimal and so we do not make the best use of available space. This is a long-term process that will evolve over time as it also links to curriculum considerations. This, together with the planned increase in teaching capacity on the estate will ease current problems and should allow us to accommodate different patterns of teaching more effectively.

Response: Subject

In the past, some Housing Studies programme students were sponsored by Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL). When the teaching rooms were allocated in the Adam Smith Building there was level access from the lifts. However, since CRB was centralised, it was made clear to Urban Studies staff that specific needs would only be met as and when they arose, and that at least nine months' advance notice would be needed. This meant that GCIL need to know almost a year in advance of who they might be sponsoring, which is impossible as they often do not know until August or September. Consequently, GCIL no longer sponsor people with mobility disabilities to attend this Housing Studies programme.

To avoid being allocated lecture theatres for tutorials, the undergraduate course administrator, when making room bookings for the teaching accommodation, will specifically request tutorial/ seminar rooms that have flat floors with moveable furniture.

CRB sent a member of staff to work with the PGT administrator in setting up the timetable for 2015/16, and a member of Urban Studies academic staff was also present as they worked through the room bookings. They specifically worked on specifying rooms where flat tables were required, ensuring three hour blocks were not split up and identifying classes where disability access was likely to be required. Where any requests were not fulfilled then the administrators and academic staff followed up with CRB to re-organise.

[Clerk's Note:

On receipt of the responses to the recommendations, the Convener noted with regret that Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL) was no longer able to sponsor people with mobility disabilities to attend the Housing Studies programme, due to a Central Room Booking requirement that it needed at least nine months' advance notice of specific needs. The GCIL was unable to do so, as it often did not know until August or September. Consequently, following receipt of the responses, the Vice Principal (Academic & Educational Innovation) had contacted Central Timetabling Team (CTT) for further information. Their response was as follows:

"We do encourage School timetablers to record the need for disabled access during the timetabling prep period (Feb-April) where this is known (e.g. staff requirements or students known to be progressing to particular courses). This is to ensure appropriate space is allocated from the outset and avoid the inevitable frustrations which would otherwise arise when the timetable is first published. However, there is always a significant degree of uncertainty with regards to student requirements, either in respect of new incoming students or course choices. Therefore, any requirement to change room as a consequence of a 'new' access issue is always addressed immediately and over-rides all other considerations (e.g. we will move other classes to accommodate an access requirement even where the class being moved doesn't want to).

There is a misunderstanding in relation to the view that CTT must have 9 months' notice – we encourage Schools to do so during the prep period. In this particular case, if it is more likely than not, that some students (or staff) will have access needs then it would seem sensible to request disabled access on all their events from the outset, thus providing a very simple solution."

This information had been forwarded on to the Subject and a fresh dialogue with CTT has begun.]