

## University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee – Friday 17 April 2016

**Periodic Subject Review: Updated Responses to  
Recommendations 7, 11 and 13 Arising from the Review of  
Philosophy held on Wednesday 12 and Thursday 13 March 2014**

Mrs Catherine Omand, Senate Office

**Recommendation 7**

The Subject commented, within the SER, on student concerns around the weighting of assessment methods. The Panel recommends that the Subject reconsider the balance of the assessment methods used and whether there is merit in reducing the amount of credit awarded on the basis of assessment by examination, particularly at Honours. The Subject should explore the balance of assessment methods used in cognate subjects to determine current practice in other parts of the University. [Paragraph 3.2.7]

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

**Response – May 2015:**

Consideration of the balance between essays and exams at Honours level was postponed pending a College level discussion of the same issue. Once any College recommendations are received, the subject will implement these as required or take them into account when we re-start discussions. It is certainly our intention to explore this issue further with a view to increasing the weighting of essays and reducing the weighting of exams.

**Updated Response: Head of College – February 2016**

At its November 2014 meeting, CMG discussed a paper by the Dean of Learning & Teaching on the diversity of assessment practices across the College, based on data from PIP. This confirmed that Philosophy had the most traditional pattern of assessment in the College, relying primarily on examinations and essays. The diversification of assessments as a means of enhancing students' employability skills was agreed as a priority for the College. It was also agreed that this would be taken forward at College LTC and School Management Groups. College LTC discussed the data and alternative forms of assessment at its meeting in January 2015.

**Updated Response: Head of School – February 2016**

**Diversity of Assessment practices is a key objective for the School Learning & Teaching Committee in line with College strategy. The School L&T officer is liaising with the Subject L&T officer regarding greater diversity of assessment practice as part of the School's commitment to this issue and the School Assessment Workshop in April 2016 will consider and cascade a variety of assessment methods**

**Recommendation 11**

The Panel recommends that the Subject in liaison with the School of Humanities consider how further progress may be made in reducing the student to staff ratio within the Subject Area. [Paragraph 3.9.2]

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

For information: **Head of College**

### ***Response – May 2015:***

The Subject area has discussed the SSR with the Head of School in the light of two reviews of teaching (this PSR and the previous DPTLA) which recommended exploring ways of reducing the staff-student ratio. At that stage (May 2015) there were no immediate plans to provide additional staff to Philosophy (though it is noted that Philosophy accrued a post in 2014 as a result of the significant growth in student FTEs in 2013-14). Staffing in the Subject was subsequently impacted by the long term illness of one member of staff and the retirement of a senior colleague. The Subject Area was recommended to wait for the outcome of the REF Review and to shape its staffing strategy in response to the Review's recommendations though the Subject is very concerned that a more urgent response to the staffing issue is required.

### ***Updated Response: Head of Subject – February 2016***

The staffing situation in Philosophy remains under pressure on account of the retirement of a senior member of staff (G 10) and the resignation of 2 staff FTE (and another 0.5 FTE due to resign before end of this session). The pressure on remaining staff has been exacerbated by an increase in student numbers.

The senior (G10) colleague retired on medical grounds in June 2015. A temporary replacement was appointed for the 2015/16 academic year. Philosophy would like to replace the Gr 10 with two junior lectureships to start to address the poor SSR. The Head of Subject agreed with the Head of School during the summer of 2015 that a business case would be put forward to address the staffing shortfall but unavoidable School staffing issues (involving an incoming Acting Head of School) and awaiting the outcome of the Philosophy REF Review meant that there were some delays in putting together business cases to the College.

A G8 lecturer resigned from his appointment in January 2016. We have appointed a temporary (6-month) teaching assistant for this term to cover teaching. We very much hope that the College will approve a business case that is currently being drafted for a replacement lecturer to cover the teaching covered by this member of staff. Without a replacement the ability of Philosophy to deliver the teaching required for our degrees is very much in doubt.

The REF Review of Philosophy proposed: an early career appointment to the Centre for the Study of Perceptual Experience (to be pursued through the LKAS Fellowship route and consideration to be given to filling the Chair of Moral Philosophy. A business case for the LKAS post was submitted to College and will be reconsidered for the next round. A business case for the chair of Moral Philosophy is also drafted. Appointment to this post, if it comes \*in addition\* to replacements for the retired member of staff and the colleague who has resigned, would help to relieve our poor SSR.

Our SSR has increased on account of our increasing student numbers since 2013-14. Although our 1st year numbers have remained fairly constant comparing 2013-14 (the year the self-evaluation report for the PSR was submitted) to 2015-16 our 2nd year numbers have increased significantly. The self-evaluation report for the Philosophy PSR records a Level 2 FTE of 61.2 for 2013-14. This has now increased to 76.6 in 2015-16. Our Junior Honours numbers have increased rather dramatically from an FTE of 52.8 in 2013 -14 as cited in the self-evaluation report in the PSR to 85 in 2015-16 (and given the increase at Level 2, there is reason to think that a future increase is likely). I haven't been given Senior Honours numbers by the School, but an informal tally suggests some increase in these numbers too, but not a great as that of Junior Honours, although that will occur next year as the Junior Honours year progresses.

In conclusion, staffing losses have meant that since the PSR the Philosophy SSR has worsened.

**Consolidated Update: following discussions between Head of College, Head of School and Head of Subject: April 2016**

**In order to address SSRs and staff resignations and following discussions with the Head of College, a business case proposal for 4 lectureships in Philosophy (plus an addition open post) is underway to be submitted to College in April.**

***Recommendation 13***

The Panel recommends that the Subject, together with the School of Humanities and the College of Arts, consider what options are available to secure an adequate, consistent and dedicated budget for the provision of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), conducts a risk assessment relating to the continued availability of GTAs and, if necessary, put in place sufficient mechanisms to minimise the risk of over-reliance upon GTAs. In undertaking this the Subject is encouraged to reflect on the College of Arts policy on the role of GTAs. [Paragraph 3.9.10]

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

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

***Response: Head of College – November 2014***

The GTA budget formula has been in place since 2010 but transitional arrangements were put in place to deal with large numbers in 2013, due to a Home/EU overshoot. We would expect to do this in exceptional years. In addition, the School of Humanities received four extra staff due to heavy recruitment. Therefore increased resourcing followed increased income: Schools are incentivised in R & T in accordance with the University's emerging strategic priorities. Both are done according to agreed formulae.

As regards the GTA formula, this can be changed at any time by CMG on the initiative of Heads of School. There are clear procedures which will allow Heads of School to bring this issue to the College Management Group. This is therefore an issue for discussion between the Subject and the School and this recommendation should be addressed by them in the first instance.

*In considering the response to recommendation 13 concerning the use of GTAs, it was agreed that a response should also be sought from the Head of Subject and the School of Humanities.*

***Response: Head of Subject - April 2015***

At present the subject does not receive enough in its GTA budget to cover all 1st and 2nd year tutorials. This is what the Subject would like to happen. Providing such cover would transform the teaching timetables of academics by spending just a bit of extra money on GTAs, freeing up time for research, impact and other activities. GTAs are incredibly good value from the point of view of hours of teaching per pound (10 times or more the value of a lecturer). Without at least the GTA budget that we receive at present we could not continue to teach the numbers that we do at first and second year level.

The present formula that the School uses to distribute GTA funds among the Subjects was agreed by the Subjects in the past as a better way of allocating the funds than had occurred previously. This formula is based on the FTEs for the Subjects and the number of staff in them. However, in our opinion, a better and fairer formula would be based on the level 1 and

level 2 FTEs, which is presumably the only level at which cover by GTA is sought by Subjects. It is unclear to us, however, whether, on any formula, the School Budget—funded by College—would allow us to cover all our 1st and 2nd level tutorials, and so we would urge the School and the College to find the money to ensure that this happens.

The subject recognises that it needs to take steps to ensure sufficient numbers of GTAs are available to teach our level 1 and level 2 students. This year we have been able to rely on present and former graduate students at Glasgow. However, in order to be sure that the numbers of GTAs will be sufficient, we intend to contact graduate students at Stirling and Edinburgh to see if they are available for teaching in future years.

***Updated response: Head of Subject – February 2016***

To my knowledge there have been no discussions on this issue between the School and the College.

***Updated response: Head of College – February 2016***

The University operates financially on a devolved budget basis: from University to College, and from College to School. Each School is involved in the agreement of the annual budget and is responsible for the achievement of that agreed budget. During the annual budget setting process there are numerous meetings and discussions around the setting of the budget and at no time has the School requested an increase in their total GTA budget for the year. The allocation of a School budget within a School is entirely at the discretion of the School and is normally agreed at School exec level. Early and full engagement of Subject Areas with School and College in terms of the Extended Workforce Policy is crucial for effective workforce planning and the effective use of GTAs.

***Response: Head of School February 2016***

The School believes that Philosophy receives a fair GTA budget (GTA budgets are calculated within the School based on staff and Student FTEs and SSR) and it should be noted here that unlike all other Subjects in the School, Philosophy staff do not teach pre-honours seminars (the GTA budget pays for all Philosophy seminar teaching at levels 1 and 2) suggesting that budgetary provision is adequate at present though GTA budgets are always kept under review.

***Update: Head of School April 2016:***

**The School is examining the GTA budget distribution across the School with a view to centralising the budget in the School for 2016-17. This will have the advantage of instituting School oversight of GTA spend and the implementation of a fair distribution of GTA funds across all 6 subject areas which in turn will be informed by: SSRs, student FTEs and workload distribution. In this way Subjects like Philosophy with a large pre-honours student cohort will benefit. At the same time discussions will take place before June 2016 between the HoS, HoSA and HoSub regarding the Subject's current deployment of GTAs for all pre-honours seminar teaching to address the over reliance on GTAs at pre-honours level in future and consistent with the College of Arts policy on use of GTAs.**