

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 20 May 2016

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations
Arising from the Review of Economics held on 19-20 March 2015

Mr Daniel Chandler, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusion

It was clear to the Panel that the Subject and School were making efforts to provide excellent teaching and student support, faced with the challenge of a very high student to staff ratio and specific issues relating to a large mono-cultural / linguistic cohort at PGT level. The School and Subject were beginning to show a greater commitment to teaching, post-REF, through its revised Work Load Model and recruitment strategy. The unusual but necessarily high reliance on ancillary teaching (by GTAs and adjunct staff) proved not to be an area of weakness, with the Panel impressed by the commitment of the staff interviewed and the good feedback from students. External dissertation supervision was seen as an exception here and it was felt that there was more work to do to review this and reduce reliance on external staff.

The international character of the Subject (both in terms of staff and students) was seen as both a strength and a potential weakness. Whilst this brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Subject, there was a need to ensure a greater level of consistency across teaching delivery and assessment practice, especially at undergraduate level.

Related to this was a need to create a more integrated 'community' in the Subject through greater staff involvement in student-led networks and initiatives. The limiting factor of social/interactive space, however, mainly beyond the control of the Subject and School, was acknowledged by the Panel.

The Panel concluded that the PGT provision was very good in range and content and reputationally strong in the international market. There was an impression, however, that some undergraduate students had differing expectations about their programmes to those of the Subject and staff. The Subject had clearly responded to the issue of mathematics in the curriculum but beyond this, the Panel believed that there was more scope to vary the curriculum and assessment methods and staff were overly hesitant about academic and logistical constraints. In this respect, innovative use of e-Learning technology as a response to dealing with large class sizes could be further explored by the Subject.

Recommendations

The following recommendations should be taken forward by the Head of Subject and should be noted by the Head of School, for information. Recommendation 11, however, would be more appropriately led by the Head of School.

Recommendation1

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject provides additional guidance and support for staff with a view to achieving greater consistency in delivery and also considers developing a clearer central policy for how teaching is delivered across the curriculum. Where variation in delivery exists for valid pedagogical reasons, staff should justify this to the Head of Subject and the reasons for variation in teaching delivery should be clearly explained to students (para. 3.2.3).

Response:

The issue has been discussed at learning and teaching committees as well as subject meetings. In consequence all teaching staff has been advised to brief students at the beginning of each course on matters of course delivery (lectures, tutorials, notes, handouts, solution sets etc.) as well as assessment with the aim to explain why a certain form of delivery has been chosen. Some lecturers have chosen to provide additional tutorial solution notes, where students had requested these. We think it is important to maintain a level of diversity in how courses are being delivered, but will focus further on how courses are delivered consistently over time and to provide more transparency to the students.

Recommendations 2

The Panel **recommends** that the staff engage more with student-led initiatives, building on the networks students have developed themselves as a mechanism to enhance the cohesiveness for the Subject as a community (para. 4.5.2).

Response:

We introduced a rota system which required each staff member to take part in at least two social events for students, including Ceilidh, Graduation Ball etc. However, the events soon became rather popular among staff, and staff attendance had not been a problem at all since. We engaged with the two Economics student societies (ASES and GURWES) to organize two student run conference (GEF 2015 and 2016) which proved a major success. We run a seminar series jointly with the Management subject in which the GURWES society takes a lead role. A number of events had also been organized at the School level rather than the subject level, these include the first Business Simulation Workshop for PG students as well as the first ever University of Glasgow Business Case Competition, where staff members participated as judges. Additionally, we introduced a number of events which we share academic and social functions, such as the newly introduced dissertation fair.

Recommendation 3

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers revising the curriculum to add more Graduate Attributes in terms of 'soft skills' (e.g. presentation skills and group work) (para. 4.6.2).

Response:

At the UG level quite a large amount of this is already being done. For example, we have group work, presentations of briefing notes, portfolio trading games and econometric analysis. Nevertheless, we will take steps to further improve on this. A review of all assessments will be carried out over the this year for all UG courses.

At the PG level, starting from the academic year 2015-16, our students benefit from a range of activities which clearly enhance their Graduate Attributes and soft skills. These activities are organized centrally for all PGT students of the School and are grouped under the banner of the Adam Smith Business School Graduate Award. Students need to take part in at least 4 activities in order to qualify for the award.

The activities organized include, among others:

- Workshops for academic writing
- Workshops for communication and language skills
- Leadership workshop
- Presentation and communication workshop

- Alumni meetings
- Business simulation
- Guest speaker events
- Student competitions
- And many more...

In addition a review of all PGT programs has been conducted and further elements of group projects and presentations have been included in some PGT courses.

Recommendation 4

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject considers a longer term strategy in relation to mathematics in the UG degree programme and its recruitment of, in particular, Home students (e.g. should Higher/ A level mathematics be required for admission?). The Subject should also communicate to prospective students better, the mathematical demands of its programmes (para. 5.2.2).

Response:

Initial steps had already been taken, by incorporating maths into the 1st year of studies in addition to the 2nd year. The semester 1 Introductory Mathematical Economics course is optional, designed for students who have not studied Maths to the level of SQA Higher or equivalent.

We recently reviewed the performance of Economics 2A students, comparing those that took this optional course in 2014-15 to those that did not. The findings were highly encouraging. Students who took the course out-performed other students in all 2A assessment, including the maths question in the degree exam.

In addition, we have proposed an optional maths course for honours students. This has been approved by the College Board of Studies and the course will be taught in 2016/17 for the first time. The introduction of this course is partly in response to students' requests for a more advanced curriculum, and students who found it difficult to enter PG degrees at other institutions, which required content that had not been previously part of the Glasgow curriculum.

The relevance of maths will be communicated to prospective students at Open Days and more emphasis is being made to stress the importance of maths at the beginning of the level 1 and 2 courses. Student satisfaction at these levels has improved significantly.

The introduction of a maths entry requirement, e.g. Maths A/ B at Scottish Highers, GCSE/ AS/ AL, has been discussed at various committees within the subject and school and is generally supported by the College. However, it is acknowledged that such a change would need to reflect further consideration and be implemented over a longer period with an extended transitional period, particularly as it could affect the intake of Home/rUK students as well the overall intake into the MA Social Science. We would need guidance by Senate and the College on how to make these changes.

Recommendation 5

The Panel **recommends** that staff more widely engage in new learning and assessment technologies. All staff should use Moodle and where necessary, take ownership of those sites. In the longer term, the Subject should investigate learning technology as one avenue for dealing with large student numbers (for example, online formative assessments and Peer to Peer assessment; reportedly suggested by the SSLC). These

investigations may even lead to a 'blended' learning approach in the future (para. 5.3.3).

Response:

All staff members do use Moodle in some way or another, but the aspect of ownership has been stressed to staff. Staff are expected to attend the School's Learning & Teaching Forums that highlight learning and assessment technologies. The College and the School encourages staff to engage with TELT (Technology enhanced Learning and Teaching) initiatives. The subject is looking into online formative assessments, especially for 1st and 2nd year students, and some initial steps had been taken, but it is fair to say that this requires a longer term horizon and strategy. The School is developing a Teaching Excellence project that will focus on student engagement and using feedback to support learning. University and Senior University Teachers across the School are involved in the project.

Recommendation 6

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject ensures that its policy on timing of feedback is consistently met across its provision. The Subject should also review the use of Teleform to ascertain how far this system is improving the quality of feedback generally. The Subject should fully engage with the external LEAF Project in this respect (para. 5.4.5).

Response:

The administrative staff sends reminders of the deadlines to students as well as staff when an assignment comes in. Staff members are constantly reminded of the importance of this. All feedback has been returned in time, except for a very few cases where there had been exceptional circumstances. Some difficulties had been encountered this year (15/16) at PGT level, due to the Business School's decision to move final exams for semester 1 courses into the December diet, introducing a peak workload for marking that some staff found difficult to cope with. Students liked the delivery mechanism for feedback through the TeleForm process. The UG convenor attends LEAF events representing Economics and communicates relevant information at the staff meetings where these are discussed.

Recommendation 7

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject reviews office hours in general and how these are communicated to students and take measures to improve staff – student engagement outside of formal contact time. This should be achieved by helping staff in general to take a more proactive lead in engaging with students outside of formal teaching (para. 4.5.3).

Response:

Office hours are posted on all course Moodle sites. Handbooks strongly encourage students to use office hours instead of emails to communicate with staff re academic/course content issues. Additionally all staff has been advised to make clear when and where they hold their office hours at the beginning of each course. A number of staff members have voluntarily increased the numbers of office hours they hold (up to four a week for a particular level 1 course). Staff have also been advised to use the lecture breaks and the time after the lectures to engage with students on academic issues, where this is possible. More informal meeting spaces have been created, see Response 2, in particular the dissertation fair is relevant here.

Recommendation 8

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject introduces greater variation in assessment and reduces the reliance on traditional examinations. Greater use of learning technology should be explored as means to introducing more innovative assessments. The Subject should also map individual students' experiences of assessment across the years of the UG programme and review where variation in assessment needs to be placed in the individual student's 'journey' through the programme (para. 5.4.5).

Response:

Our aim is to introduce more diverse forms of summative and formative assessment. This is obviously a longer term objective where things need to develop gradually. However, we have already included an element of project presentation with following formative assessment as well as portfolio trading games in a number of courses. The feedback on these had been mixed, ranging from extremely positive to distracting. Reflecting that different students prefer different forms of assessment, a significant proportion of students are favouring the more classical style with in-course exam or essay and written final exam. There is some evidence coming from the employing sectors that this is what employers want to see in graduates too, at least with regards to the summative part of assessment. Formative assessment offers wider opportunities of course, and as already indicated under 5, we look into additional forms of online formative assessment. Our continuing program reviews will track the students' experience of assessments across the years and this will guide further changes.

Recommendation 9

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages GTAs more in the internal Subject discussions. It should also review GTAs' workload and time allocated to marking, specifically to ascertain if inadequate time to produce feedback is contributing to low student satisfaction on timing and/or quality of feedback (para. 5.5.9).

Response:

Almost all GTA's have now been moved to fractional contracts. In the process of this, their workload and time allocated for marking has been carefully reviewed. Where GTA's provide feedback, this is being reviewed by faculty prior to release, but in the great majority of the cases, the feedback has been found to be of high standard. GTA's (as fractional staff) attend subject meetings and are fully involved in the discussions that take place at subject level.

A decision had been taken at the School executive, to not allow GTA's to hold office hours. This has created some issues for the Economics subject, of specific relevance to the Level 1 and 2 provisions, where large student numbers make it difficult for two or three course convenors, to meet the demand for office hours. A student complaint has resulted from this. We aim to bring this issue back to the executive for further consideration.

Recommendation 10

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject reviews dissertation supervision to fully understand the resource requirements and the amount of external supervision that will be required and its possible effects on the student experience. In the longer term, more innovative ideas should be considered to alleviate the labour intensive nature of traditional dissertation supervision, including consideration of alternative types of independent study where academically possible (para. 5.6.2).

Response:

At UG level all dissertations are now supervised internally. Almost all staff supervise between 2 and 4 students each. The allocation is made on the basis of matching the topic to the research interests of a particular staff member through the UG dissertation convenor. The newly introduced dissertation fair, where among many other things staff members provide a short summary about their research activities, supports this process. The current form of UG dissertation supervision is sustainable with current staff and student numbers and hence does not require any changes.

At PG level, the situation is slightly different. The cap of previously 6 PGT supervisions for each staff had been increased to 12 in 2014/15 with the aim to supervise the majority of the more than 500 PGT students internally. This had been achieved, but many staff have found it difficult to cope with this high load and saw the quality of the supervision compromised. We have now moved back to six supervisions, but apply much stricter scrutiny and control in the selection of external supervisors. In the medium to long term, we aim at changing the supervision process in a way to reduce staffing resources and a working group has been put in place to explore ideas, which involve alternative types of independent studies. In the short term we have put greater emphasis on matching students topics with the research interests of the supervisor and in the same way as for UG have introduced a dissertation fair.

Recommendation 11

The Panel **recommends** that the School and Subject engage in the future re-design of the Gilbert Scott building to create interactive space for its students and Staff (para. 3.1.5).

While the Business Case for the ASBS Revisioning project is currently being finalized, the Business Case highlights the need for teaching rooms that are equipped to support active learning and the enhanced use of technology for teaching delivery and assessment. Production rooms to record lectures, develop podcasts and work on VLE enhancements, for example, are included in the business case as essential. Teaching space to support case studies, mock board rooms and investment trading suites are also included as essential, allowing staff to develop and integrate new methods of teaching.

Update required in 6 months:

4.2.1 The Panel noted the strong international diversity in the staff but regarded this as both a strength and possible area for concern (see 3.2.2). The Panel noted from the School documentation the gender imbalance in staffing but did not have time to explore this theme during the review.

Response: Senate Office

This had been a request rather than a recommendation. An update had been sought but a response is still awaited. A reminder has been sent to the Subject.