

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 30 September 2016

Periodic Subject Review: Updated Responses to the
Recommendations Arising from the Review of Economics held on
19-20 March 2015**Recommendation 1**

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.

Updated Response – September 2016:

Staff have been advised to explain to students why some of the teaching material (e.g. slides, lecture notes, tutorial solutions) will only be made available at a certain time (or not at all) where this makes sense from a pedagogical point of view. The subject recognizes that diversity in teaching methodology and style is a positive attribute and should be maintained.

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 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 four 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.

Updated Response – September 2016

Graduate attributes across the School have been mapped by Ms Karen Clancey (Undergraduate Learning and Teaching Administrator) and while the mapping has not been fully examined yet, the information so far has been very useful for Economics. Review of assessment is a continuous process and changes will be implemented gradually over the coming years. So far, we have introduced a number of measures. More formal presentation opportunities are being provided to improve verbal communications skills with visual aids and public speaking. Dr Spaliara has introduced this in her course in FMCF. In her course students are also given opportunities to improve graduate skills in dealing with financial data. A formal presentation has also been introduced in the course Natural Resource Economics (Prof Ewald, Dr Navrouzoglou and Dr Pocher) as part of formative assignment following the coursework. Dr Kushwah has introduced an assessment in International Trade, where students have to search and find relevant data, analyse and report the findings, obtaining many transferable skills relevant in a post graduate world. In her course Economics of Inequality, Dr Selvaretnam asked students to think creatively of an idea which would reduce inequality and present this proposal convincingly.

In the coming year, students in the compulsory course Government and the Economy will have an opportunity to produce a poster and present results from group work to an audience of fellow students and academics. We are thinking further of introducing an additional assessment where students will get the opportunity to write a reflective piece about their degree experience (or a part of it – eg: the group assessment). Dr Selvaretnam (UG Convenor) is currently in contact with Dickon Copey from Careers in regards to this. Staff from Careers has agreed to provide talks for our Government and the Economy students addressing graduate skills.

We are further planning to use take home exams as an alternative for in course/class exams. This has become necessary, as central services will not provide the necessary requirements for room bookings anymore. It is however also an opportunity as the take home variants of the exams allows more in-depth thinking and research before finalising the answer, which is more in line with what would be expected from a graduate employee.

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.

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.

Updated Response – September 2016:

As indicated in our previous response, our existing office hour policy will be clearly communicated at the beginning of lectures in September. The number of office hours has been increased significantly addressing demand, in particular at level 1 and 2.

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.

Updated Response – September 2016

The Business School's policy is still to not allow GTA's to hold office hours on their own, and the Economics Subject will respect this decision. Further discussions about this will take place within the Business School executive. For the moment core academic staff are making up for the loss of GTA office hours by providing additional office hours to students.

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.

Updated Response – September 2016:

Colleagues in the economics subject have engaged in the estates development project for ASBS in five ways:

- By serving on and contributing fully to the re-visioning and then project development board
- Contributing to the workshops with architects
- Addressing detailed questions and providing comparator evidence as to preferred teaching rooms and configurations for both UG and PG programmes, for example as to requirements for large group and break-out facilities, behavioural labs - that could support joint teaching with other subjects, uses of Bloomberg suite
- Arranging for designers to sit in on teaching, and ensuring an appreciate sample of teaching to be considered for this observation and familiarisation.
- By volunteering to co-locate one of the economics clusters, microeconomics, in the new office accommodation, drawing together a group that had no previous close connectivity, assisting in one of the cluster roles of ensuring research-informed and research-led teaching. Also, as part of the initial move, now allowing further re-configuration of space to allow for co-locating another cluster, the one for macroeconomics