

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 30 September 2016

**Periodic Subject Review: Updated Responses to
Recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 8 arising from the Periodic Subject
Review of History held on 13 March 2015**

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** less reliance on final exams by introducing a wider range of assessment methods across the curriculum as it was their view that the current requirement for UG course assessment to consist of minimum 60 percent unseen final exam and a maximum of 40 percent for other modes of assessment was too prescriptive. [paragraph 5.2.7].

Action: Head of Subject

For information: Head of School

Response:

The acquisition of knowledge is a crucial objective in any Honours programme in History. The History Benchmark Statement (2014) notes:

History programmes do not impart knowledge and skills to be passively absorbed: questioning, reading, discussion and writing, along with engagement, exploration and discovery through independent learning on the part of the student are essential. But the importance of historical knowledge must be stressed [paragraph HBS, 2.11].

Given the nature of historical knowledge and historical inquiry it is important to acknowledge the central place that examinations have in the assessment regime of any History programme and to stress that unseen examinations can be and are designed in a variety of ways.

That said, having discussed current practice, the experience of comparable institutions, and History's curriculum ambitions, and having explored the weighting of coursework and examinations with the Staff Student Liaison Committee, the Teaching & Learning Convener, supported by a motion from the Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee [T&LC], recommended to the History Subject Area at its meeting in 27 January that the current requirement for course assessment be changed to specify a minimum of 50 percent unseen final exam except in particular instances where the convener makes a convincing case for an alternative regime. [History currently has a small number of courses that currently have no examinations whatsoever, and others where the examination element emerges from a seen paper.] This was approved. Given the implications that dropping the exam element below 50 percent has for second-marking and external examination, and to ensure against a sharp break in practice which, we have found, creates problems in ensuring an equivalent student experience across large cohorts, the History Subject Area was not minded to go further at this juncture. It was further recommended that in order to ensure comparability across Special Subjects and to ensure progression towards and comparability of attainment at Level 4, the assessment of all Special Subjects will require in the future, as now, an unseen examination element normally weighted at 60%.

Colleagues have been and will continue to be encouraged to utilise the full range of assessment practices in their approach to teaching and learning: many examples of best practice in this regard currently exist and have been evident in new proposals and changes going to the Board of Studies in 2015-16.

History notes and welcomes the initiative of the School of Humanities in hosting an assessment workshop in 2016 and notes its appreciation of a recent paper from the School's Teaching and Learning convener, offering exemplars of assessment regimes that illustrate best practice in the weighting and diversification of summative assessment.

Updated Response – September 2016

ASC indicated that the initial response did not fully satisfy the recommendation that the Subject Area review the range of assessment methods. Whilst the Subject Area had adjusted the percentage of assessment set for exams from 60 to 50 percent, it had not addressed fully the aim of the recommendation which was to encourage the Subject Area to search for greater variation and flexibility within their modes of assessment. ASC requested an update on this recommendation.

By emphasising the adjustment of weightings of the examination element it was our intention to flag up that we have now created greater flexibility for exploring new assessment mechanisms. We are explicitly committed to using this flexibility to deploy new assessment routes in keeping with the Benchmark statement in History. We are pleased to report that staff have responded to this new flexibility by proposing new courses with diverse forms of assessment and amendments to existing courses in which coursework has been increased in weighting with new forms of assessment. These include poster assessments, seminar portfolios, reflective exercises on skills, seen papers and web-related exercises. We have encouraged staff to engage with diversity of assessment through a School workshop on assessment (20 April 2015). The practices showcased at this workshop included formative peer assessment of oral presentations used by two History courses. In addition, the subject has invested £1000 in a L&T project allowing the dissertations convenor to rethink this assessment, including the possibility of including placements as part of the dissertation.

Recommendation 2

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject build on the work already done as part of the LEAF project and existing good practice to map courses, programmes and progression so that course development is coherent and allows for the curriculum to foster diversity of pedagogic and learning practices [paragraph 5.1.8].

Action: Head of Subject

Response:

Ensuring progression within and across courses is central to the design of all History courses and – given the structure of single and joint Honours programmes in the Arts – History courses are particularly sensitive to meeting the quite distinct academic challenges that mark the transition of students into the Honours programme. The conveners of the compulsory suite and optional course at levels 1 and 2 have designed each course with the knowledge, skills, methods and theoretical understanding acquired or as yet to be acquired on other courses very much in mind. We are thus quite confident that pedagogic practices across all courses are very well attuned in levels 1 and 2 to where learners are 'at'.

In light of the PSR recommendations, however, it was concluded that essay feedback mechanisms at levels 1 and 2 be revised to nurture the growing academic independence of students and foster a clearer understanding of standards. This is ongoing, and currently at a stage when new feedback templates are under discussion.

The challenge at Honours is of a different magnitude and nature. History, as one of the largest Subject Areas in the College of Arts boasts a very extensive range of Honours courses that have – quite appropriately - grown both strategically and organically over the

years and relate directly to the research expertise of a changing cohort of academic practitioners. A document recording only the aims and ILOs of all courses and special subjects taught in Session 2015-2016 amounts to over 340 pages.

History endorses the aspiration of more comprehensive curriculum mapping practices in the Arts, and the current Convener of T&L examined the outputs of the LEAF project and spoke to those involved in it.

Current course approval practices in the College of Arts, however, do not easily facilitate curriculum mapping. PIP forms at present do not explicitly demand the articulation of the ways in which a new course either addresses an omission in the curriculum or how it interfaces with teaching and learning in other courses: Subjects are relied upon to ensure that duplication is avoided and progression supported (this is certainly the case in History), although paperwork rarely records this process.

The Arts Board of Studies is also resistant to Subject Areas employing a standard suite of ILOs that could facilitate comparison across courses and the identification of potential weaknesses in the curriculum.

Action on these matters at College and Senate level could greatly enhance our ability to map large programmes.

The History Subject Area would also respectfully point out that knowledge in this discipline is widely acknowledged to be cumulative rather than sequential. The History Benchmark Statement emphasises that, in terms of learning:

Qualitative advances may be achieved in a number of ways, for instance through increasing conceptual sophistication, increasing interpretative skill, increasing ability to pose, refine and pursue historical enquiries, increasing capacity for sustained written and/or oral analysis, greater independence of learning, and so on [HBS, paragraph 5.1].

Such concerns are very much to the fore in ongoing discussions at Subject level, and were critical in informing recent discussions in the T&LC which has recommended a new essay feedback sheet for Honours which explicitly utilises grade-related criteria aligned to the aims and objectives of the Honours programme as set out in the Honours Handbook.

Updated Response - September 2016:

ASC queried the Subject Area's assertion that the current course approval practices in the College of Arts did not easily facilitate curriculum mapping or that the Board of Studies was resistant to the Subject Areas employing a standard suite of ILOs. ASC understood that the College of Arts followed University practices, as detailed by the Senate Office, and that it was not the role of the Board of Studies to review ILOs from a range of courses. ASC requested an update on this recommendation.

The Subject recognises the value of curriculum mapping in encouraging diversity of assessment. As part of History's participation in the LEAF project in 2013-14, the research assistant for LEAF mapped History's assessments across Pre-Honours and Honours. This demonstrated how History assessments are calibrated to produce progression in knowledge, skills and graduate attributes, including oral presentations from year 2, more demanding written and oral argument at Honours, extensive small-group work in the fourth year Special Subject and independent research in the dissertation. Within this, it was recognised that History's forms of assessment relied heavily on essays and essay exams. Since 2013, the subject has been moving towards greater diversity in teaching and assessment methods. The subject's relaxation of its requirements for examination assessment represents an important cultural shift arising from this curriculum mapping exercise. The particular comments above on Board of Studies no longer apply as the approval of courses now rests with the School. As ASC notes, it is the role of the subject to review ILOs against programme

aims. In doing so, History will continue to entertain pedagogical diversity within its curriculum. The subject would welcome the opportunity to update the curriculum mapping conducted by LEAF, to capture course assessments approved since 2013. This will be pursued as part of a School L&T project to map assessments for History and Archaeology, in response to PSR recommendations relating to mapping for both subjects.

The History Group are content that at present the curriculum at Glasgow both meets best practice for an academic unit of this type and is sufficiently agile to respond to new developments in the field. We are not resistant at all to curriculum mapping of the type detailed in the ASC response above if there is a demonstrable need for it, and indeed have reviewed the practice of other Subjects in this regard (e.g. the successful CILIP accreditation of the MSc Information Management and Preservation and the Digital Media and Information Studies Hons programmes in 2014). We would welcome any advice about systematising current practice, but we would respectfully draw attention to the massive undertaking this might entail.

Recommendation 4

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject develops initiatives to enhance learning and teaching through the use of technology [paragraph 5.1.14].

Action: Head of Subject

Response:

The Teaching and Learning Convener requested clarification on this recommendation and liaised with LTU and the Dean of Teaching and Learning for the College, Dr Don Spaeth, who has expertise in the area of technological applications in History. There being no specific initiative in the minds of the review panel, she then conducted a survey of all History staff as to how they currently use technology in their teaching in order to identify any areas of weakness. While improvements and innovations are always possible, and History is alive to new data-sets, data-bases and online resources, the survey showed that – in comparison with peer institutions – we are certainly exploiting a wide range of resources and generating our own, e.g.

- Prof Broun is internationally acknowledged to be setting the agenda for online research and teaching resources in the area of Medieval Scottish History. From Session 2016-17 onwards, he will lead a new Special Subject in which online outputs from major AHRC research projects will form the core of the teaching and learning experience. (See People of Medieval Scotland, www.poms.ac.uk/; Breaking of Britain, www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk/)
- History staff have recently been involved in the Future Learn MOOC on Robert Burns that attracted 7,500 subscribers and will be contributing to a new BOLD initiative with colleagues in Scottish Literature.
- All History courses are Moodle-enabled; History 1A led the way in piloting the new Library digital bibliography service; all coursework essays are submitted via Moodle.
- On many courses, starting from Level 1, students experience compulsory exercises relating to online data bases (e.g. The Making of Modern Societies [Hist 2B], pre-Hons students engage with the Old Bailey Proceedings Online: www.oldbaileyonline.org/). Elsewhere in the curriculum, online resources supplement traditional training in important historical skills (e.g. palaeography [<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latinpalaeography/>]); classes are held in computer labs to facilitate online interrogation of sources (e.g. The Making of the Union of 1707 [HIST4156], intensively uses the Records of the Parliament of

Scotland [www.rps.ac.uk]; and the research underpinning undergraduate dissertations almost invariably starts with online searches of sites such as Discovery (the National Register of Archives, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>).

Members of the History Subject, who are widely networked across archival, museums, heritage and digital humanities communities globally and are ably supported by an excellent Subject Librarian, Richard Bapty, keep up with new online resources and regularly undertake CPD on pedagogic and IT issues. There appears to be little need at present – beyond encouraging knowledge of and use of Moodle’s more interactive features - for a discrete initiative to take matters forward, although a watching brief will be maintained in this regard, and staff will be encouraged to investigate any interests they may have in the further integration of IT resources and applications in their teaching. History is to investigate the utilisation of part of its book budget for new online resources and services.

Updated Response – September 2016

In the Subject Area’s response, there was no reference to the involvement of the School TELT Officer in advising on learning and teaching initiatives through the use of technology. ASC would suggest that the Subject Area contact the School or College TELT contact for guidance on this recommendation and provide an update to ASC.

History has enjoyed the support of the TELT officer for Arts in recent School training on electronic submission on Moodle. The History Teaching and Learning convener has invited the School TELT Officer to visit the History Subject Group to discuss what more the subject could do with learning technology. We look forward to working with the recently appointed College of Arts E-Learning and Innovation Officer to explore further opportunities for development, including blended learning and the university’s new technology-enhanced active learning (TEAL) rooms. Dr Macdonald’s work on the Burns MOOC has helped to indicate the potential for this technology. Several members of the History subject are being trained as early adopters of the TEAL rooms.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School put in place procedures for a formal induction event including provision of a handbook for all new staff across the School to introduce them to relevant School and University procedures [paragraph 5.3.3].

Action: *Head of School*

Response:

Effective early induction of new staff is critical in ensuring colleagues settle quickly into their new roles. Although comprehensive University-level induction processes exist the School of Humanities is aware that the most effective induction can take place at local level with line managers and immediate colleagues. The School has already implemented a number of initiatives to augment induction processes including; providing all managers with an induction checklist; School-level induction meetings with the Head of School; provision of mentors for all new Grade 7 and 8 R & T staff; signposting to appropriate convener for information about teaching practices. The School also has immediate plans to develop a School-specific Handbook and intends to canvas recent new-starts with as to the value of potential shape of further School and/or subject level induction.

Updated Response – September 2016

ASC requested an update on the development of a formal induction event for staff.

School Plans for a dedicated induction event for new staff have been slightly delayed due to the departure of a key member of the administrative team in whom responsibility for this activity was vested. However, plans to recruit to this post on a permanent basis are now underway and the establishment of formal induction events at School and Subject level will be a key priority for the new appointee; this is considered a crucial activity given the recent high level of staff recruitment into the subject area and School more generally.