

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 24 March 2017

**Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations
Arising from the Review of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies
held on 22 and 23 March 2016**

Ms Fiona Dick, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusion and Recommendations

The School has developed considerably in the last couple of years and this was reflected in the growth in student numbers, the consolidation of programmes, and the move away from a liberal arts-based curriculum to one that was more focused on the requirements of the market. The School's overarching strategic goal to 'become an internationally recognised school that reaches the highest academic standards while also serving the social and economic regeneration of the region' was considered a laudable goal but one that had significant implications around staffing requirements and maintaining the student experience. The sustainability of resource provision is dependent on further growth in student numbers, which will require a shift in the delivery model of learning and teaching currently employed within the School.

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

The following recommendations have been made to support the School of Interdisciplinary Studies in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. 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.

Enhancing the Student Experience

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that the School liaise with Student Learning Service to provide an appropriate level of support with academic writing and language skills for international postgraduate students, including the potential of utilising expertise available by video-conferencing colleagues at the Gilmorehill campus [Section 4.3.6].

**For action: Head of School
For information: Student Learning Service**

Response:

As a School we have worked hard to ensure that our international students have access to an appropriate level of support with academic writing and language skills and believe we now provide a comprehensive support package.

Over the past year we have worked closely with the College of Social Sciences International Student Learning Officer (Gayle Pringle Barnes) in order to improve our level of academic support to international students. Gayle now delivers extra sessions on campus (at least

three in total across the academic year) which are timetabled to enable maximum uptake. Gayle also provides one-to-one support via email.

Since 2015 we have extended the undergraduate Academic Writing Skills programme to PGT students who are *encouraged* to take the diagnostic test and to attend the classes (no matter how well they get on in the test). The uptake in 2015 and 2016 has been good, with several international PGT students engaging with the programme. PGT convenors have recently determined that international students on their courses will be *required* to sit the diagnostic test anticipating that this will encourage greater numbers to attend the classes.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of this level of support and make adjustments if/where shortcomings are identified.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel recommends that the School undertakes a review of course selection procedure to ensure that course descriptors/titles accurately reflect content, and that students are aware of the various support and information available to help them with their choices [Section 4.3.4].

For action: Head of School

Response:

During the 2016 and the 2017 annual catalogue checking process particular efforts were made / are being made by the Chair of the School Learning & Teaching Committee to ensure that the course descriptions are appropriately informative.

During induction week for AY 2016/2017 we trialled a dedicated 2 hour session in which Level 1 course convenors were available for students to talk to about course details so that their choices would be better informed. This was a partial success; staff presence was good but student engagement less so. For 2017-18 we are considering different approaches e.g. brief formal presentations about each course and brief, on-line videos that students can easily access.

We have created an Advising Administrator post which will provide first-line support to students struggling with curricula choices. The post-holder will be trained in the use of Mycampus and equipped to respond to students' queries around course enrolment.

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these initiatives and make adjustments if/where shortcomings are identified.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel recommends the School undertake a review of the operation of the Staff Student Liaison Committees, to improve student engagement, with the postgraduate taught cohort in particular, and ensure that actions are clearly identified, progressed and outcomes reported back to students [Section 4.4.12].

For action: Head of School

Response:

The School regards the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) as one of its most important forums for the free exchange of information and ideas between students and staff. In line with the recommendation, a review of SSLC's membership and operations was undertaken at a meeting of the School Academic Strategy Forum. This led to a successful drive to recruit a 'student Chair', student representatives from all year groups on each UG

program and PGT, PGR and international student representatives. Membership has been opened to all staff.

As a result, SSLC meetings are now well attended and feature lively discussion. Actions are identified, progressed and fed back to students at the following meeting. However, while this process for feedback is working well we are currently exploring options with the students to increase the speed with which responses and other information is provided – including brief monthly newsletters from HoS to all students.

Additionally, a new forum for PG students has been created in which the Head of School, PGT/PGR Directors, PGT Program Convenors and PG students come together for informal discussion relating to all aspects of the students' experience. Actions are identified, progressed and fed back to students via email or at the next meeting.

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel recommends that the School reviews feedback on assessment to develop a consistent approach in the delivery of feedback of assessment, both written and verbal, which should include engagement with the student body [Section 5.1.11].

For action: Head of School

Response:

The School has taken the following actions with respect to consistency in turn-around times and transparency:

- As recently required by the University and informed by the work described under *recommendation 5* we have put into place a feedback calendar that will keep track of when assessments are returned to students. This is monitored by the Head of School.
- Students are currently informed of expected return dates for their course assessments via course handbooks and Moodle. To improve on this, the process of informing the student body as to how well the School as a whole is meeting its targets is currently under discussion. One proposal is to provide summarised updates at each meeting of the SSLC.

With respect to other areas where consistency can be improved, including the quality and quantity of feedback, a number of proposals are currently under consideration by the School Learning and Teaching Committee and the School Executive Group. These include:

- Processes to enhance the School's in-house quality assurance procedures that are geared to identifying un-remediated trends.
- A proposal that responsibility for moderating the quality and quantity of feedback becomes part of a newly strengthened Programme Leader (PL) role. This would see PLs work closely with the Quality Officer to ensure a more robust 360 degree Annual Monitoring process (see response to *Recommendation 12*) and together, work with relevant staff to ensure that the university guidelines for good practice in assessment and feedback are adhered to.
- Greater peer review of feedback.

The School will continue to trial, evaluate and roll out as appropriate alternative methods of feedback including, for example, feedback vivas, electronic and recorded oral feedback.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel recommends the Convener of the School's Learning & Teaching Committee develops a calendar of assessment activities, clarifying bottlenecks/peaks, to clearly identify submission, marking and feedback information for more effective planning, and which is shared with staff and students for transparency [Section 5.1.11].

For action: Convener, School Learning & Teaching Committee

Response:

In the summer of 2016 the School employed an intern to assist with a project that had two core objectives:

- To ensure that our undergraduate students experience a wide range of assessments in their curriculum as a whole, while avoiding over-assessment and minimising the clustering of assessments.
- To review assessment preparation and feedback practices within the School.

These objectives are intended to contribute to improving the student experience and enhancing graduate attributes, improving student results, improving our teaching and improving staff experience through, for example, reducing the time spent on marking.

To achieve these goals all undergraduate courses were surveyed to establish: the number and types of assessments employed; how students are prepared for these assessments (e.g. embedded advice on essay writing and referencing and advice/training on oral delivery); and, the timing of assessments (i.e. when they fall during the teaching period).

The survey method gathered information from the course specifications on PIP and through discussions with courses convenors. This data was presented in the form of a spreadsheet with assessment and feedback information on all courses; a calendar showing which assessments fall in each week of each semester, and hypothetical profiles of student careers (five from each degree) to indicate what typical students would encounter across their degree in terms of assessment types and timings.

Anticipated Project Outcomes

- Assessments types / quantity on courses have been/are being restructured to ensure that students encounter a wide range of assessment types **across their degree program** with the expectation that this will reduce the number of assessments on **courses** while maintaining diversity across **programmes**. Where appropriate, assessments not currently employed within programmes will be introduced to improve diversity and efficiency.
- Mitigation of the clustering of assessments and the expectation of improved student performance.
- Dissemination of information gathered on feedback practices to staff (via email and in an Academic Strategy Forum).
- An evidence base to assist programme leaders with curriculum mapping exercises.
- An evidence base to assist course convenors make decisions about the timing of assessments.
- Development of Feedback calendars.
- Assisting L&T Committee in ongoing scrutiny of course and programme changes.

- Enhancement of Student Advisers' ability to provide guidance on course choices (e.g. avoiding clustering of assessments and improving graduate attributes through a wide range of assessment types).

We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these processes and make adjustments if/where shortcomings are identified.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that the School considers the electronic submission of assessed work in a review of the process that is cognisant of the needs of students commuting long distances to the Dumfries campus [Section 5.1.10].

For action: Head of School

Response:

At a recent meeting of the School Academic Strategy Forum staff agreed in principle that electronic submission should be accepted as sufficient for formal submission and implemented across the School for 2017-18.

Under the auspices of the School Learning & Teaching Committee a short-life Working Group was established to consider the options and protocols for submission of assessed work in this way, and to generate guidelines for approval following consultation with staff and students.

Engaging and Supporting Staff

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that the Head of School develops a strategy for streamlining effective administrative processes to support teaching delivery [Section 5.2.8].

For action: Head of School

Response:

The recommendation to develop a strategy to streamline effective administrative processes within the School to support teaching delivery is being addressed as part of a broader strategy to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of support within the School. The Head of School Administration is developing the full strategy and within this, the Head of School PA / Administrative Officer now has a key role in leading the School Office, with particular focus on identifying areas where processes could be adjusted to better support academic activities.

Through the Performance and Development Review process, individual and team objectives were agreed (and are being taken forward) which will bring a standardised approach to teaching support through developing and implementing standard procedures and templates, e.g. for attendance monitoring and assessment result recording and calculations whilst allowing flexibility where courses have a specific need. Training and development needs have been identified to support these objectives.

A rota has been implemented within the School Office to ensure that generic tasks (e.g. photocopying and counter duty) are shared within the team. This allows a more focussed period on teaching support work when not on the rota.

Academic colleagues are encouraged to feed back any concerns regarding the support they receive to ensure this is addressed as quickly as possible.

A new post – Administrative Officer (Advising and Placements) is currently being appointed and will provide key support for the advising and placement functions. This will contribute to the enhancement of student experience whilst releasing academic colleagues' time to allow them to focus on teaching and research. In addition, the role will support Programme Leaders in updating regulations and ensuring compliance with them.

The effectiveness of these actions will be reviewed on a regular basis and adjustments made as appropriate.

Recommendation 8

The Panel recommends the School develops a clear and transparent process regarding the appointment, development and support of Graduate Teaching Assistants [Section 5.2.7].

For action: Head of School
For information: Vice Principal and Head of College of Social Sciences

Response:

GTA colleagues are appointed on contracts, or as casual workers depending on the number of hours they will be working and the frequency of that work.

During academic session 2015-16, the School implemented a new recruitment process for the appointment of GTAs. This adheres to guidance from Human Resources and matches the process being followed by other Schools within the College. This process ensures: the identification of GTA teaching needs at an earlier stage in the AY; enables all PGR students to promote themselves and apply for GTA work; facilitates the matching of individuals to opportunities at an earlier stage; gives transparency to those applying; and, enables more effective workload planning within the School.

GTA recruitment for 2017-18 teaching will be monitored with a view to ensuring that all PGR students who have expressed an interest are offered a minimal amount of GTA work in a relevant subject area.

In relation to GTA development and support, the School has historically worked closely with the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (formerly the Learning and teaching centre) and facilitates any training that is offered locally, both that specifically focussed for GTAs and other academic CPD-type training that is offered to all academic colleagues.

A Senior Lecturer (LT&S) within the School has been tasked to work with the HoS to 'devise and implement appropriate mentoring, training and support systems for the School's GTAs - as means of supporting their personal development and ensuring an enhanced student experience.' This will include: mentoring; bespoke training delivered on-campus by specialists from within LEADS; opportunities for peer review of teaching styles, reflection on feedback; and, on the nature and purpose of assessment and feedback. As a first step, GTAs have been consulted to ensure that they are fully involved in identifying their development and support needs, how they would like to work as a group (workshops, group meetings for discussions) and how they would prefer to communicate and be represented. A Moodle forum is being developed and will include relevant information for areas such as administration, programme information, peer feedback and student evaluations.

Historically, when a GTA was appointed the Course Convenor acted as a mentor for the GTA for that work. Mentoring for GTAs is also being reviewed and developed.

Resources for Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that the School develops a strategy for enhancing the student experience, primarily learning provision, by tapping into existing expertise of colleagues at Gilmorehill and elsewhere [Section 5.3.2].

For action: Head of School

Response:

The School is in the process of setting up a more structured approach to working with LEADS. In the first instance a day long CPD session run by the Academic Development Unit has been organised for 1/3/17. This will cover, among other things, issues around TEAL and large classes, and will provide an opportunity to consider future School-centred CPD needs.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel recommends that the School liaise with the Learning & Teaching Centre to clarify the pedagogical issues, including teaching space and infrastructure requirements, around increasing student numbers and to provide of a series of pedagogical workshops to facilitate discussions with School academic staff [Section 5.3.2].

For action: Head of School

For Information: ADU, Learning & Teaching Centre

Response:

The HoS has been in contact with LEADS (formerly the Learning & Teaching Centre). As a result, staff from LEADS will deliver the first of a bespoke series of pedagogical workshops in March 2017. The occasion will also be used to identify additional needs and to plan future workshops.

A review of teaching accommodation has been undertaken and a bid for funding for upgrading has been made. If successful, guidance on layout and furnishings etc. will be sought from LEADS.

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel recommends that the School liaises with the College of Social Sciences in a review of the operation of their Workload Model [Section 5.3.3].

For Action: Head of School

For information: Vice Principal and Head of College of Social Sciences

Response:

The School is actively liaising with the College of Social Sciences in reviewing the operation of the workload model. The School has nominated two School representatives onto the reformed College Workload Model Group (Natalie Anderson, Head of School Administration and Professor Sean Johnston, Depute Head of School). This group is currently defining areas which will be reviewed with the aim of increasing the consistency of approach and workload allocations across the College, including areas where programme administration can be enhanced and defining the role of Programme Leader.

The School will have fully implemented the University workload model platform (Cognos) by the end of academic session 2016-17. Additional support team training in the use of Cognos will take place on 27th February 2017. The use of this platform will ensure that the School is using the preferred University workload solution. This, in turn, will allow for more transparency at both an individual and management level, enabling more effective workload planning and management.

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Recommendation 12

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School undertakes a review of its Annual Monitoring process, in compliance with University's Guidance available through the Senate Office at:

www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_453751_en.pdf [Section 6.2].

For Action: Head of School

Response:

The School's new QA Officer has reviewed the relevant UoG document 'Guidance on Annual Monitoring' and explored and instigated amendments to our AMR process as follows:

- In order to ensure timely reflection and action, emergent insights from QA processes will be analysed and discussed immediately after the end of each semester (HoS & QA Officer) with information on emergent issues given speedily to relevant individuals.
- Following consultation with the staff group the School will continue to use the 'alternative' group approach to the AMR process (as it has for the past 2 years) but on a separate programme review session (rather than accommodated within the annual School Away Day).
- Following review of the mechanics of data collection for the end of semester student feedback a set routine has been established to include: distribution of questionnaires as late as possible in the course; completion at the start of the teaching session; sufficient time for thoughtful completion allowed; information given to the students at the start of the process establishing the rationale and aims of QA.
- The role of the Programme Lead in managing and responding to QA matters will be formalised.