

**University of Glasgow**

**Academic Standards Committee – Friday 6 October 2017**

**Periodic Subject Review: Updated Responses to Recommendations  
2 and Arising from the Review of Scottish Literature held on 23  
March 2016**

**Ms Catherine Omand, Senior Academic Policy Manager, Senate Office**

***Graduate Teaching Assistant Training and Support***

**Recommendation 2**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject evaluate GTA training provision to identify whether there is scope to improve its structure and to ensure the support GTAs receive is timely and helps them be fully prepared for teaching before they begin. [paragraph 5.7.8]

**For the attention of: The Head of Subject**  
**For information: Learning and Teaching Centre Academic Development Unit**

***Response:***

The Subject is very happy with the level of support and training offered to GTAs in Scottish Literature and in the School more widely. Indeed, GTA support forms part of our Subject Area National Student Survey action plan under the banner of 'student satisfaction'. Following the PSR, we discussed the issue of training with our cohort of GTAs, and those consulted were equally satisfied. In addition to the training provided by the SRC at University level, SCS offers a detailed and highly-praised GTA training course, which runs across both semesters. New GTAs are trained in student support, pastoral care, assessment and feedback, procedures for suspected plagiarism, and much more. The School's training course also features a shadowing programme for those beginning GTA work in the next session or semester, in which they sit in on experienced tutors' classes, and look over their shoulder when marking. The shadowing scheme has proven very popular with the School's population of GTAs. This all happens in advance of GTAs beginning teaching. Subject level support can only come in once GTAs have been appointed. Course conveners hold regular team meetings with GTAs to allow tutors to air concerns or share good practice. These meetings (for which GTAs are paid) happen three times per semester: once, in the week before teaching begins to allow proper preparation; again in the middle of the semester for marking moderation; and one wash-up meeting at the end of the semester. Course conveners are always on hand to provide advice and/or support. The Subject is particularly proud of its marking moderation procedures, where all teachers on a given course have the opportunity to moderate and check each other's marking, and to air any difficulties with the process. This system has been in place since before the PSR and continues today. The Subject would, however, be happy to hear how they might improve this provision without duplicating School training and in the absence of sufficient GTA budgets. Finally, the School is currently hosting a GTA Working Group to see if procedures/training can be improved; Scottish Literature is fully involved with this initiative.

***Updated response – October 2017***

The Critical Studies GTA Working Group consisted of representatives from all Subject Areas across the School, as well as Administrative colleagues with responsibility for managing GTA payroll. It worked with the results of consultation with the School's body of GTAs, and

its aim was to provide consistency of GTA experience across the School; formerly, Subject Areas had distinct practices.

- It was noted that there was disparity in marking payment rates across Subject Areas; through discussion with Heads of Subject and Learning and Teaching Conveners, the group achieved good, but not total<sup>1</sup>, consistency in payment rates for marking different types of assessment.
- There was also disparity in the way that GTAs were recruited across the School's Subject Areas. The Working Group initiated and implemented a recruitment process – including a yearly application process for all GTAs and interviews for new GTAs – which is now in place and functioning well across all Subjects.
- GTAs were sometimes unclear on exactly what their responsibilities were and where the boundaries were drawn. The Working Group initiated the production of a School GTA Handbook which makes all of this clear. This handbook is given to all GTAs when they are appointed.
- Although the School already had a good GTA Training Programme, the Working Group used its time to revisit the Programme to strengthen it. After discussion, it was decided that a new session on how to deal with pastoral issues would be introduced, publicising the various student services that GTAs can refer students to. The Training Programme now also features a shadowing scheme. In this scheme, first year PhD students who are intending to teach in Year 2 are encouraged to attend the training course in Semester 1. In Semester 2, they 'shadow' an existing and experienced GTA, giving them close-up experience of the responsibilities and day-to-day duties of the GTA.
- There was inconsistency across Subjects in terms of how GTAs were contracted. The Working Group introduced a transparent process for issuing contracts based on the number of hours being taught.

In Scottish Literature, all of these new processes have been introduced and are fully embedded in our practice with GTA recruitment and management.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Convener was concerned to hear feedback that a University regulation might be blocking study abroad opportunities and, therefore, recommends that the Senate Office clarify the Subject area's concerns and review University regulations on outside papers. The conclusions of this review should be shared with the Head of Subject and the Head of School. [Paragraph 5.1.2]

**For the attention of: Senate Office**  
**For information: The Head of Subject & the Head of School**

#### **Response: Senate Office**

The Senate Office has reviewed the generic undergraduate regulations for the College of Arts and the supplementary regulations for the MA (Hons). Nothing has been identified that could be blocking study abroad. Work is underway to identify other possible sources of the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to local assessment differences at Subject level, as well as diverse forms of assessment being marked across the School, the Working Group concluded that it would be impossible to enforce strict uniform marking criteria. For instance, 4 short largely-factual essays may be as easy to mark as 3 longer but more analytical essay.

### **Updated response from Subject – October 2017**

It seems there has been a great deal of confusion about this particular recommendation, both at our end and at the Senate end. I want to give our side of this particular issue again as we understand it, from colleagues in the Subject Area. It's not so much that a 'University regulation is blocking study abroad opportunities'; I'm not sure that colleagues' concerns have been picked up accurately here. The situation is that Scottish Literature is a unique Subject with a unique degree programme; we are still the only dedicated Scottish Literature Subject Area in the world. Students therefore come to the Subject to receive specialist, research-led teaching that is not available anywhere else. This means that, although we publicise study abroad opportunities and encourage our students to take them, we have fewer students wishing to go abroad than other Subjects. When Single Honours Scottish Literature students go abroad, they are almost entirely unable to take Scottish Literature courses in the institutions they visit. There are virtually no clearly labelled Scottish Literature courses in Europe or North America. If, as we have been doing, we abide by the 'outside papers' rule, which allows a student to take a certain percentage of their Honours papers outside their degree subject (See Calendar 16.4), a student who goes abroad for a full year (and does not have the opportunity to take courses in Scottish Literature) does not have the requisite number of credits in Scottish Literature for a Single Honours degree. This is the real problem, and we would be keen to hear the panel's or ASC's recommendations on how to deal with this issue. There is, as I noted in the initial PSR Response, no problem with Joint Honours students, nor with students wishing to go away for one semester. The fact that we offer a distinct experience at GU is our 'USP', and we are fully committed to the University's internationalisation agenda. Finally, Scottish Literature has NO courses which run across two semesters, and has not had these for many years now.

We have taken steps to address the issue in 2017, in response to a student wishing to go abroad in the coming session. She is due to visit Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in 2017-18 has gone to great lengths to put together directed study modules with a member of staff who specialises in 18thC Scottish literature, to maintain her interest and preserve subject specificity while away. While this is admirable, it will not be possible for all students who go abroad; SFU is a particular partner of Scottish Literature at GU, because of shared Scottish interests, both literary and historical. The Subject Area therefore proposes that students are encouraged to consider a one-semester block of study abroad, and that we continue to discuss the curricula of all outgoing students on a one-to-one basis as they apply. We also plan to discuss a number of 'preferred partner' institutions with Study Abroad candidates, so that they can keep up their specific studies in Scottish Literature while away.