

**University of Glasgow****Academic Standards Committee – Friday 24 November 2017****Summary of Undergraduate College Annual Monitoring Summaries  
2016-17****Dr Richard Lowdon, Senate Office****1. Process**

As in previous years, the Undergraduate Annual Monitoring Summaries for each College were submitted to the Senate Office two weeks in advance of the November meeting of ASC. The College summaries have been reviewed by the Senate Office in order to identify any common themes. These are presented below. Following its consideration of the College Annual Monitoring Summaries, ASC is asked to confirm that the themes identified below are an accurate reflection of the issues raised by the Colleges. The Senate Office will then seek updates and responses from the relevant sources to these University-wide matters.

**2. Key Themes**

There were a number of common issues reported through the Undergraduate summaries. These related to the following themes:

- Suitability and quality of teaching spaces
- Student mental health
- Staffing
- EvaSys
- MyCampus
- Moodle
- URKUND

**3. Suitability and quality of teaching spaces**

This was the most prominent issue highlighted in the College Summaries. Concerns focussed on the location and condition of teaching spaces and the facilities available in these rooms.

*i) Location and allocation of teaching spaces*

“The main issue is that when teaching consecutive hours, staff have to move buildings, often across campus. This has a negative impact on teaching as well as student and staff satisfaction”. (Social & Political Sciences)

“The failure of the room-booking system to take location into account or to prioritise local rooms for the use of subject areas. Local room use maximises ability to use in-house resources such as class libraries, and minimises loss of teaching time caused by cross-campus travel, as well as fostering a sense of community among staff and students. It was expressed by one subject, offering a bespoke class to visiting study abroad students, that ‘student experience is crucial for the continued success of the programme. Therefore, it would be better to be able to showcase the best Glasgow has to offer in terms of facilities than to cram students into cramped rooms’”. (Critical Studies)

“Teaching spaces for classes scheduled back-to-back are not proximate, resulting in disruption and waste of time. The distance between teaching spaces continues to present problems for both staff and students, particularly those students with disabilities or who have to attend consecutive classes across campus”. (Critical Studies)

“Regarding room bookings, multiple lecture theatres were assigned for the same course, sometimes in distant parts of the University (resulting in issues arriving and departing); lack of notice from CTT on room assignment; double bookings; and even cancellation of lectures due to insufficient space. This often resulted in negative comments from students, and was demoralising for staff”. (Humanities)

“Allocation of rooms in St Andrews building continues to cause problems for both staff and students, making it difficult to arrive and depart on time due to distance between it and other teaching spaces”. (Modern Languages & Cultures)

“Once again, it would appear that in preparing the room allocations, the previous year’s allocations are ignored and a fresh start is made. Why is there is no memory in the system?”. (Science and Engineering)

“Allocation of teaching accommodation needs to be fit for purpose, and more consistently assigned. Students may have specific needs (e.g. fitting their studies into a tight schedule; mobility needs; transport needs). Extend the criteria for allocating teaching accommodation (e.g. Languages needs rooms with movable furniture; the noise levels of languages classes prohibits the use of partitioned rooms)”. (Open Studies)

*ii) Room facilities*

“Lack of recording facilities such as Echo 360; inappropriate facilities and/or lack of equipment for courses; and poor room layout. This has also had an impact on student feedback”. (Humanities)

“Overflow rooms with video links cannot function if it is not possible for the overflow classroom to communicate technical difficulties receiving video feed to main theatre”. (Critical Studies)

“Provision of electrical sockets in lecture theatres inadequate”. (Veterinary Medicine)

“Air conditioning in Hunterian Lecture Theatre and Hetherington 118 are not effective”. (Modern Languages & Cultures)

“Technology requires upgrading and in some cases does not function, e.g. the board in Hetherington 317 together with projection screen is not fit for purpose”. (Modern Languages & Cultures)

“Adequacy and reliability of equipment available, particularly lecture recording facilities”. (Critical Studies)

*iii) Suitability and maintenance of teaching spaces*

“Suitability of some teaching spaces for a 21st (or a 20th) century learning experience. Acoustics in some large halls (Kelvin Gallery is a standout case) is appalling and unacceptable”. (Life Sciences)

“Temperature in teaching spaces, both high and low, especially at times of high stakes examinations”. (MVLS)

“Staff commented in 2016-17 upon a marked deterioration in the maintenance of rooms and the equipment provided therein. Janitors seemed in some instances not to be able to assist, computers not infrequently failed, the Gilbert Scott Conference Suite had no wireless, and sound files could not be played in several teaching locations. In one particular case, a room divider had to be erected by lecturing staff while a class continued in the adjacent room”. (Critical Studies)

“Heating/ventilation system in Gilmorehill building continues to be a severe problem”. (Critical Studies)

“Requests for more spaces designed for interactive teaching, noting that large lecture halls are not amenable to discussion and that students ‘often complain about this aspect of University accommodation’”. (Modern Languages & Cultures)

iv) *Room booking*

“The room booking system is not satisfactory; for instance, rolling over as a default would make more sense than starting from scratch every year; checking the bookings is unnecessarily complicated as teaching staff are asked to operate on worksheets which do not include actual calendar dates and the entries are in a seemingly random order. In addition, the parallel use of timetabling weeks and teaching weeks (instead of calendar weeks or *actual dates*) adds to the confusion. This is not only time-consuming but also makes the system prone to errors”. (Life Sciences)

v) *Exam timetables*

“Exams out of normal working hours: The School of Humanities draws attention to this issue, which disproportionately affects carers and students from low-income backgrounds. It is also bad for work-life balance. In addition, Registry does not collect exam scripts from exams halls outside of normal teaching hours.” (Humanities)

“The examination timetable generates a lack of time between the exams and the deadline for publishing grades, marking can be achieved in this period but the final stages of checking are often so tight that mistakes can be made. The University is urged to put back the latter deadline to allow an extra week for marking; bringing forwards the start of the exams must be avoided as this would both disadvantage students in terms of reducing revision time and create difficulties because of the need to run field classes in the Easter period”. (Science & Engineering)

#### **4. Student mental health**

The issue of student mental health was highlighted in several College AMSs. Concerns were raised about the difficulties students faced accessing the University’s Counselling Service, and the resources available to support students experiencing mental health issues.

“A very significant rise in the number of students making Good Cause applications on the basis of mental health issues. The School is already taking measures to provide additional support to students in this regard, through the development of a new peer-to-peer support network, but concerned to note that a number of students reporting difficulties in accessing the University’s Counselling Service. Adequate resourcing for that service seems like a crucial priority at present”. (Social & Political Sciences)

“Funding and resource available for student counselling and support of students with mental health issues”. (Medicine, Dentistry & Nursing)

“Student anxiety is seen by staff as an ‘increasingly problematic’ area”. (Critical Studies)

## 5. Staffing

Staffing and marking workloads were highlighted as key concerns.

### *i) Staffing and workload*

“More MPA staff to support L&T assessment analysis and review. This issue is further exacerbated by prolonged recruitment periods following posts becoming vacant and the release of time limited posts (6 month) which has a negative impact on quality of subsequent applicant and thus recruitment success”. (MVLS)

“Shortage of clinically experienced staff to meet teaching demand”. (Veterinary Medicine)

“Lack of flexibility in terms of employment is restricting how we can use Graduate Teaching Assistants in relation to teaching and assessment (BVMS1) and the HR processes involved in creating contracts for GTAs can be prohibitive”. (Veterinary Medicine)

“Teaching staff are (and have been) working at absolute capacity for a number of years. Increasing student numbers without new staff appointments has worsened this problem (all Schools). This problem is exacerbated by the administrative burdens placed on staff by inadequate systems (MyCampus / EvaSys) and inappropriate policies (EvaSys / Good Cause Claims)”. (Science & Engineering)

“In SCS, staff note that heavy marking loads for large courses need to be reflected in the workload model”. (Critical Studies)

### *ii) Administrative support*

“Appropriate staffing in all job families to support teaching and facilitate succession planning”. (Medicine, Dentistry & Nursing)

“Concerns were raised about recruitment in Medical Humanities; although the programme is successful and has been consistently praised by staff and students, it cannot be more widely advertised, grow its enrolment or be internationalised without addressing the administrative issues that persist as a result of the programme lacking the appointment of a dedicated administrator”. (Critical Studies)

## 6. EvaSys

EvaSys course evaluation software was associated with issues in all College AMSs. While most Schools recognised that it was a valuable tool, concerns were raised about student engagement with course evaluation surveys, and the management and dissemination of EvaSys data.

### *i) Survey response rates*

“EvaSys – surveys produce extremely low return rates, which lead to a skewed picture of student feedback. As a result, they do not reflect the positive comments that the programme received through other modes of communication with students”. (Education)

“Inflexibility of and loss of detailed evaluation of individual teaching staff and issues with regard to dissemination of the evaluation that is available due to lack of student engagement with EvaSys”. (MVLS)

“TRS identify an urgent need to revise the means by which student feedback is encouraged and collected, and to investigate alternative options, such as its

recommendation of a paper-based questionnaire, which allows subject-level questions". (Critical Studies)

ii) *Management of EvaSys data and operation of the Course Evaluation Policy*

"Valid points being made through this system, what is the Senate procedure for disseminating these results? Clarity needed on the procedure for this and how these results are shared within School/College/University". (Education)

"EvaSys procedures appear now a largely ineffective means of obtaining feedback on many courses as the crucial information is not routinely available to the staff teaching the courses, it appears more designed to give indications of staff performance to management than enabling improvements to taught courses. It has been noted that the EvaSys policy changed apparently without consultation of relevant staff and this has exacerbated matters". (Science & Engineering)

iii) *Core Questions*

"Question 'Did you find the course stimulating' is not always helpful and some of our courses are compulsory requirements. We would prefer questions which focus on their level of learning. Closed questions are not always helpful". (Education)

"The feedback forms do not make it easy for students to give focused feedback". (Critical Studies)

## **7. MyCampus**

Concerns were highlighted around the administrative workload and technical issues associated with MyCampus. For example:

"Suggest publishing individual timetables on MyCampus as per common practice at other Universities, and avoiding confusion over which exam to attend where course names may be slightly similar". (Business School)

"School of Humanities advises that MyCampus should be developed to produce gradebooks in order to avoid subject-based spreadsheets". (Humanities)

"School of Humanities notes that it takes too long for course specifications to filter through to MyCampus after approval, e.g. in one case a name change was not enacted until after the examinations period". (Humanities)

"MyCampus continues to cause problems; little has changed since its introduction but staff feel that there is little point in continued reporting of problems because there is no institutional willpower to address the situation. Staff report that the micromanagement that MyCampus employs as a result of its coding is the direct cause of the administrative burdens teaching staff have". (Science & Engineering)

"A general comment in dealing with MyCampus is, 'Permission to follow a task through to completion to rectify problems has been splintered such that many people now need to be involved instead of allowing one person to solve the problem quickly'". (Science & Engineering)

## **8. Moodle**

Issues relating to the functional and technical limitations of Moodle were raised, along with the need to provide more support for staff and greater access to students.

“Students on non credit- bearing courses do not have access to University facilities such as the Library and Moodle; lack of access to Moodle has been raised by some tutors as a barrier to innovative teaching and learning”. (Open Studies)

“Better support for Moodle functionality e.g. Open badges functionality, and training in, Moodle”. (Life Sciences, Veterinary Medicine)

“The Moodle interface for marking remains unfit for purpose. It is both cumbersome and unintuitive. The unacceptable lag between use action and system response means that marking takes far longer than it should. Basic actions (such as saving a grade and moving on to the next student’s submission) require excessively long procedures. Failures to accurately render formatting in PDFs introduces errors in students’ submissions, and requires markers to go back through and correct original grades that were initially lower than deserved due to the improper formatting. All of these problems delay marking and delivery of feedback to students”. (Critical Studies)

“Core Moodle makes it difficult to hold a timed class exercise within the VLE”. (Critical Studies)

“The Moodle ‘Quiz’ plug-in does not allow for the application of the 22-point scale, marking and uploading of feedback is not currently possible within it, and its marking functionality is limited, in addition to the plug-in not interfacing with URKUND”. (Critical Studies)

## **9. URKUND**

Most of the College AMSs made reference to technical and usability issues associated with URKUND.

“URKUND: reports are not adequate when plagiarism is detected and requires staff to undertake this manually. The software compares poorly with Turnitin which also offered a good marking tool, absent in URKUND”. (Business School)

“Retain TURNITIN as a highly effective feedback tool that also happens to have powerful similarity searching capability. It is not an alternative to URKUND, it is different and has unique valuable capability”. (Life Sciences)

“Several Schools reported that electronic marking interfaces (URKUND), workflow management tools and assignment interfaces (Moodle and URKUND) were clumsy or unfit for purpose”. (Arts)