

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 22 March 2019

**Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations
Arising from the Review of Law held on 20 and 21 February 2018**

Dr Richard Lowdon, Clerk to the Review Panel

The Review Panel concluded that the School of Law is committed to enhancing the quality of teaching provision across its programmes. In particular, the Review Panel recognises the School's commitment to recruit students from the University's REACH and Access programmes and to support its students through the co-adviser system. The School has also taken effective steps to promote internationalisation and enhance the student learning experience through the use of multiple learning styles, formative assessment and the re-introduction of a detailed Undergraduate Student Handbook. Furthermore, the Panel recognises the commitment of Diploma tutors, the outstanding quality of administrative support and the strategies of inclusion and community building by which the School has attempted to ensure that all staff are committed to supporting the student experience. The Review Panel makes a number of recommendations, identifying opportunities for the School to further enhance the quality of its learning and teaching provision. However, these recommendations should not detract from the Panel's overall view of Law as a successful School within the University.

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

Teaching strategy and curriculum development

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School's curriculum places greater emphasis on developing students' graduate attributes (including their application writing, interview, problem solving and note-taking skills) during the early stages of the undergraduate degree programme, particularly for accelerated LLB students who have less time to nurture these skills. [Paragraph 3.4.3]

For the attention of: The Head of School and Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service

Response:

The School has established a Working Group to review the Accelerated LLB. For 2018/19 we have introduced more guidance on note-taking skills and invited all new LLB students in week 3 and 4 to make an appointment to review their note-taking with a graduate teaching assistant. There was an additional and free-standing lecture on problem-solving for Year 1 students this year. Two new events, with a focus on the different types of law firm and on commercial awareness, are being held in semester one of the present academic session. The first of these is particularly targeted at Accelerated students.

The School's Employability team works closely with the Careers Service in the area of application writing and interview technique and will continue to do so. We are also considering

the introduction of a reflective diary for year 1 students to help them focus on skills development. This would be aimed at the cohort undertaking the four-year programme to assist them in the adjustment to University study.

We are conscious of the need to avoid overwhelming new students with information, particularly in the first semester, and the need to focus on core skills development. At the same time, we recognise that the Accelerated LLB cohort, as graduates, have distinctive needs related to their stage of academic and personal development. In their case, early attention to application-writing and interview skills is desirable, however this must be introduced carefully so as not to detract from the need to develop the core subject-specific skills which all new law students require. We are developing plans to introduce a new 'Legal Skills for Graduates' type course on the accelerated LLB (Scots law) programme which would complement the Professional Skills course for LLB (Common Law) students and attempt to include coverage of such matters.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School continues to develop an academically driven and co-ordinated e-learning strategy with a view to further embedding the use of technology and blended online-learning (including lecture recording) in learning and teaching across the School's curriculum. [Paragraph 4.1.4]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Response:

E-learning is seen as a key tool in learning support across the LLB and we will continue to build on existing developments, particularly where we can use technology in order to offer new opportunities for feedback and skills enhancement. In 2018/19 we introduced an online lecture and note-taking guidance in Year 1 to help new students make the transition to University study. We will aim to enhance problem-solving by means of online exercises and also to develop methodologies to assist students in the transition to Honours study.

The Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP) uses blended online learning across all 15 courses. The DPLP has 50 summative assessments in total, and 49 of these involve online uploads and / or feedback. All written formative assessments are uploaded online, with feedback provided using Moodle. The DPLP uses online quizzes as a means of self-testing and assessment. Most courses incorporate e-modules and videos, and allow students to access various resources online. In January 2019, the DPLP is introducing an optional course: Legal Innovation and Technology, which will be delivered online in its entirety. Most lectures on the DPLP are recorded, and the recordings are made available automatically for all students.

The School is currently collaborating with the University of Leuphana in Germany on the development of an online executive masters in International Investment Law. This builds on the existing collaboration for delivery of a dual masters degree in International Economic Law and will facilitate exchange and development of online techniques with an experienced online provider.

Recommendation 3

To improve student attainment in first and second year, the Review Panel **recommends** that the School reviews their grade descriptors, assessment criteria and Intended Learning Outcomes to ensure greater consistency across courses and enhance students' assessment literacy. [Paragraph 4.2.4]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: College of Social Sciences Dean of Learning & Teaching and Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service

Response:

The School recognises that there is inconsistency of outcome across courses. At the same time, Law as a discipline includes a broad range of subjects which are compulsory for the degree. These subjects can test a variety of different skills. It is also recognised that students do improve over the academic year, and between years, as they develop the skills required to articulate and apply concepts and legal rules effectively.

Achieving greater consistency in outcome presents a significant challenge. Partly this is because of the imbalance in the academic year. Students have 600 learning hours in semester one which, including the entire examination diet, amounts to 13 weeks (an average of 46 hours per week). The 600 hours in the second semester are spread over a longer period prior to examination, giving students more time to consider and reflect upon course content. Unlike most subject areas, Law cannot reduce the core content of courses because that content is prescribed by professional bodies. It is also the case that, consciously or not, markers are aware during the marking process that performance in core courses reflect the achievement of prescribed competences for legal practice.

Given these factors, it has consistently proven to be very challenging to improve student outcomes, particularly in first-year courses. Improvements in e-learning, particularly in terms of the provision of support in problem-solving, and adjustments to the teaching schedule to provide more time for reflection and examination preparation towards the end of semester one, have been identified as relevant strategies that will help to make a difference.

In the past the School has used a local gloss on the University's general grade descriptors in order to articulate as clearly as possible for students and staff how those descriptors relate to intended learning outcomes in Law and subject-specific skills. We will update the gloss to ensure that it reflects the university's general grade descriptors in a tailored and subject-specific way to provide greater clarity and specificity for markers and students. This will be added to both the Staff handbook and the Student Handbook. We will also do more to explain assessment criteria in the Student Handbook so that students have a point of reference.

Feedback on assessments and student feedback

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaises with LEADS to provide further support and guidance for Diploma tutors (particularly in relation to assessment and feedback) and develop a system for moderating marking and feedback to ensure greater consistency. [Paragraph 4.2.3]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service

Response:

The recommendation that we “develop a system for moderating marking and feedback to ensure greater consistency” implies that no system is in place at present, which is not the case. New tutors are trained by LEADS, tutor training is provided each semester, tutors are provided with grade descriptors and marking guidelines for each assessment, Senior Tutors undertake a robust moderation process for each assessment and samples are sent to External Examiners.

However, it is accepted that there is an issue with consistency in marking on the DPLP given we rely on around 150 external practitioners. The Director and Deputy Director of the DPLP met with a representative from LEADS to discuss this issue and, as a result, LEADS had an input into the tutor training session for academic year 2018/19.

It should be noted that part of the difficulty revolves around student expectations, which differ from the LLB. DPLP students, quite rightly, have high expectations, but occasionally some students who have excelled in academic assessments on the LLB find it difficult to accept that their performance on the more practice-based assessment on the DPLP is not at the same level.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel urgently **recommends** that the School revises its procedures and updates the Student Handbook to reflect the University’s policy of returning feedback to students within 15 working days of submission. [Paragraph 4.2.5]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Senate Office

Response:

The Student Handbook was updated in regard to this in time for session 2018/19 and now fully reflects University policy.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaises with the Senate Office and consults the good practice guide on the Senate Office Website to develop a strategy for increasing student response rates for EvaSys surveys. [Paragraph 3.4.1]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Senate Office

Response:

Since the PSR Review the School has put in place a recommended practice for the completion of EvaSys survey with a view to increasing response rates. This is set out below. Where the recommended practice does not suit the course, it may be modified. However, it is not acceptable to rely solely on email reminders and student initiative, which have proven ineffectual. Staff are encouraged to continue the use of distributing minute papers mid-term: this allows problems to be solved more quickly and will likely improve (subsequent) EvaSys feedback.

Recommended practice:

- a. Course convenors should select a survey day at the beginning of term and announce it via Moodle. The recommended survey day is usually the final meeting of students,

whether lecture or seminar, but any other day near to the end of term is acceptable. The QA Administrator will configure the survey to be available on the survey day.

- b. Before the survey day, course convenors should again announce the survey day via Moodle. This will remind students to bring an electronic device to class on the survey day, and will tell the students where the link is to be found (the students' inboxes).
- c. On the survey day, the course convenor will allow students 5–10 minutes to complete the survey at the beginning of the session.
- d. Reminders will be sent to non-completing students on the following day.
- e. Surveys will remain open for two weeks after the end of the teaching session.

Student support

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School provides undergraduate students with more information (and communicates existing information more effectively) about internship deadlines and greater assistance in securing placement opportunities during the first two years of their degree programme, and that efforts should be particularly focussed on providing early support for students undertaking the two-year accelerated LLB. [Paragraph 3.4.2]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Careers Service

Response:

Plans are in place to improve our focus in Year 1 of the accelerated LLB programmes (see the response to recommendation 1). The School's Employability Moodle pages have been significantly improved for 2018/19 and they are now more simple to navigate and presentation has been significantly improved. There is an impressive library of resources contained within the site and students are regularly updated with information about deadlines as it becomes available. The School of Law Employability team have secured placement opportunities exclusively for law students with Shelter Scotland, MECCOP, JustRight Scotland, Govan Law Centre, Legal Services Agency and Citizens Advice Bureau. So far in session 2018/19 we have placed 35 students. We work in partnership with the Internship Hub and with the CoSS Employability team on this. Students are able to attain academic credit for these placements upon completion of 100 hours and the Graduate Skills Programme.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaises with External Relations to compile performance data on Widening Participation and Access students which can be made available to School staff responsible for supporting these students. [Paragraph 3.2.1]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: External Relations

Response:

External Relations have agreed to provide more information to the School so that more detailed performance data on Widening Participation and Access students may be compiled to assist School staff responsible for supporting these students. The School is also investigating how MyCampus flags might be more effectively employed to identify student needs and assist in the allocation of students to appropriate advisers.

International Mobility

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School continues to develop short term mobility opportunities accessible to students with caring responsibilities and that, wherever possible, workshops and events are held during normal working hours. The Review Panel also **recommends** that the School considers providing information about support and opportunities for students with caring responsibilities in the Undergraduate Student Handbook and via Advisers of Studies. [Paragraph 3.3.1]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Response:

Short-term mobility: we are continuing to discuss this with partners (most recently, in Oslo with GUILD law schools who also expressed interest in our proposals). Last session, some 55 students took up an opportunity to take part in short-term mobility (with c. 100 taking up study exchange).

'Workshops and events' this is already practice with the exception of the study abroad 'speed dating' event which requires – on account of timetabling and accommodation for level 2 potential outgoers and level 4 returning students – to be held at 1645-1800 (but there is a parallel information session run by central services in October).

The School will discuss support and opportunities for students with caring responsibilities in the Student Council and consider amendments to the UG Student Handbook.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that students are provided with more information about academic expectations at different overseas institutions before embarking on their study abroad opportunity. The Review Panel also **recommends** that the grade conversion process is reiterated when students return from their year abroad and that the School reflects on the students' perception that there were differences in the level of difficulty experienced at different international institutions. [Paragraph 4.1.2]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Translation of Grades Working Group

Response:

Academic expectations: this is an issue we have tried to address through (a) developing new Moodle pages; (b) for law with language students, via the 'European Legal Cultures' class; (c) via short-term taster visits; and (d) by putting students in contact with current students abroad and returning students. We are revisiting the idea of 'student leads' for each partner institution this session.

Grade conversion: as recommended, a session for returning students was held to reiterate the process of grade conversion in late September. Only some 40% of students abroad attended. The process is explained at length on the Senate website and in the Study Abroad Guide (as well as in sessions for outgoing students). We will discuss this further with student reps on the international team.

Teaching Accommodation

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaises with Space Management and Timetabling to investigate the possibility of prioritising particular teaching spaces for the DPLP. [Paragraph 4.3.2]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Space Management and Timetabling

Response:

The Director of the DPLP contacted the Director of Strategy, Performance and Transformation, to discuss this issue. The Directors had a meeting in July 2018. By that stage, it was too late to put anything new in place for academic year 2018/19.

Going forward, the difficulty is that the DPLP relies upon rooms with recording equipment (which, at present, really restricts the DPLP to the Sir Alexander Stone Building (SAS Building)). Also, it is beneficial from an administrative point of view, to have all students taught in the same building, particularly given the significant number of contact teaching hours. Further, having regard to the student experience, it is better for the students to feel that they are based in one building. Anecdotal evidence from students suggests that this is the case. With these points in mind, the Director of the DPLP agreed that the SAS Building is, on balance, the best location for tutorials.

The Director of the DPLP is investigating whether it is feasible to reduce class sizes. This would clearly have a knock-on effect in relation to the budget for tutor payments. Of course, much will depend upon student numbers as well: it may not be possible to reduce class sizes and remain in the building.

In order to improve the teaching space in the SAS Building, the Director of the DPLP has asked that the number of electrical sockets be increased in all teaching rooms, as this was an issue raised by students. At the time of writing, a report has been received, suggesting that there may be asbestos in some of the walls and so it may be unsafe to carry out this work. The DPLP team is currently liaising with Estates & Buildings in this regard.

Admissions

Recommendation 12

To enable the School to better resource future increases in student numbers, the Review Panel **recommends** that the School liaises with External Relations to ensure that undergraduate admissions data is provided to the School further in advance of the proceeding academic year and that direct access to the admissions database is provided to relevant staff in the School. [Paragraph 3.1.1]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: External Relations

Response:

During 2018-19 External Relations has been providing data earlier and more frequently to the School and has given the relevant staff in the School direct access to the admissions database. We expect that this will make it possible to establish likely intake numbers at an earlier stage in the year. We have also changed the practice on making decisions on applications for entry. In the past, decisions on applications for the 4-year degree were not usually taken until after the UCAS deadline. From the current session, we are making decisions on applications as

soon as we have both the UCAS application and the applicant's LNAT score. It is too early to say whether that will affect the prediction of numbers for the following session.

Recognition for Diploma tutors

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School considers the possibility of formally acknowledging the contribution of Diploma staff whose teaching is of a particularly high standard and that this might be achieved by nominating them for Teaching Excellence Awards. [Paragraph 4.3.1]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Learning Enhancement & Academic Development Service

Response:

The DPLP team will investigate the possibility of nominating a DPLP tutor(s) in academic year 2018/19.

Equality and Diversity training

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School ensures that all School staff, including Diploma staff, undertake the University's mandatory Equality and Diversity training. [Paragraph 4.2.3]

For the attention of: The Head of School
For information: Equality & Diversity Unit

Response:

Within the School, 83% of staff on open-ended contracts have completed E&D training. Completion of such training is now mandatory for sign-off of P&DR and so we expect all staff to have completed E&D training within the current academic year.

Since DPLP tutors are not subject to P&DR a different approach has been adopted. DPLP tutors who teach in semester one were asked to complete this training at the tutor training session in September 2018. Those who teach in semester two will be asked to do so at the tutor training session in January 2019. The DPLP team (Director, Deputy Director, Administrators and Interns) have all completed this training.