

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**Academic Standards Committee - Friday 23 November 2007**

**Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures held on 1 and 2 March 2006**

**Ms Jane McAllister, Academic Policy Manager, Senate Office**

**February 2008**

**Conclusions**

The Review Panel commended the School on the overall quality of its provision and its maintenance of standards under adverse conditions. The Panel urged the Faculty to support the School and to act upon all opportunities to lower the levels of stress being experienced by its staff. The Panel was pleased that the meeting with key staff showed that staff remained committed to their Sections and their subjects and were increasingly positive about the future of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Glasgow through the formation and development of the School.

The Panel also commended the School for its collective input into the Self-Evaluation Report and was appreciative of its open and frank approach to the review.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations summarised below were made in the spirit of encouragement to the School of Modern Languages and Cultures to continue to evolve and overcome the difficult circumstances of the past few years. The recommendations are grouped by the areas for improvement/enhancement noted above and are ranked in order of priority.

**Assessment Practices**

**Recommendation 1:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School take an overview on the administrative practices related to assessment and explore the potential for harmonisation e.g. common policies for late submissions, common approaches to the prevention of plagiarism, School level co-ordination of assessment schedules to spread student workload where possible. [*Paragraph C.3*]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

This was remitted to the SMLC Undergraduate Studies committee. A common formulation of SMLC's attitude towards plagiarism was quickly agreed and has now

been incorporated in the standardised cover sheet which is submitted with every piece of coursework submitted for summative assessment, as well as in course handbooks. Other items require more discussion in order to implement as they depend on differing teaching practices and time-tabling within SMLC. Now that common credit patterns have been established progress is being made. Common agreement on penalties for late submission is nearly secured. Proving particularly knotty is coordination of assessment dates for course-work to spread student workload. Not surprisingly most course tutors look for a significant piece of work to be submitted at the end of the course and it becomes a matter of some diplomacy to achieve agreement over which ones should be submitted earlier than others. With the stimulus that the move to the new University academic year brings it is hoped to resolve this over the current session.

### **Recommendation 2:**

The Panel recommended that the School consider introducing some minimum requirement for academic work during the Residence Abroad to encourage students to remain engaged with their studies and to introduce a level of consistency of experience across the different activities. The School should also take a more proactive approach to maintaining contact with students while they were away to ensure that they have access to assistance should they need it; a regular email with standard text should be sufficient. [Paragraph C.4.3]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

#### *Response: From the School*

The recommendation that the student year abroad should involve a minimum level of academic work was welcomed in principle by the SMLC Management Committee. Nevertheless there was considerable discussion as to whether or not such work should involve assessment and, if so, for which year of study (the year abroad, or the Junior Honours year). The nature of the work to be undertaken and the need to be able to minimize the risks of plagiarism were also issues which require further thought. The matter has therefore been remitted to the SMLC Undergraduate Studies committee though it was realised that should changes to the assessment pattern be required there would need to be substantive discussion within the School at large for proposals to be put to Board of Studies. Meanwhile, each Section has taken steps to maintain contact with those of its students who are abroad, particularly by corresponding with them over work to be undertaken on return to the Junior Honours year.

### **Recommendation 3:**

The Panel **recommended** that the Faculty ensures that guidance on compulsory dissertations for session 2006-07 is provided to students through handbooks and other means in a clear, consistent and timely manner. The School should also clarify and communicate to students, the situation as it relates to session 2005-06. [Paragraph C.4.4]

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

#### *Response: From the Dean of the Faculty of Arts*

Although this was an action point for the Faculty, which is in the process of evolving a final position which will include practice across Faculties where it shares joint degrees as well as across internal Departments, it was agreed within SMLC that a common set

of words was required. Deadlines, as well as the length and weighting of the dissertation would be harmonised across the School.

By the time SMLC had been able to discuss the detail at its Management Committee the 06-07 coursebooks had already been printed and it was too late to put into effect to the common set of words concerning Joint Honours' students and dissertations - though each Section had made the position clear to their students. And as far as we are aware there was no confusion among the students this time round.

The full recommendation will be implemented for the coming session.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School should reflect on the achievability of its ILOs and take action to ensure that students were offered alternative activities where circumstances, such as low student numbers, could prevent the desired outcomes being met. [Paragraph C.2]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

#### *Response: From the School*

This recommendation arose as a result of small numbers enrolling on taught postgraduate courses. Developments at a University level between the Review and its Report have meant that the four MLitt programmes then in force have been replaced by two new taught MLitt programmes designed to maximize student numbers and minimize dependence on particular members of staff. The point has therefore been addressed independently of the Review process.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School should consider revising its aims and ILOs to follow a standard pattern using consistent terminology and to ensure they are easily accessible to students through consistent placement and formatting in all handbooks. [Paragraph C.1]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

#### *Response: From the School*

It was recognized that there was a link between this and recommendation 4 and that there was a need to progress in this direction. The recommendation was referred to the UG Studies committee. As a first step the Committee has concentrated on producing a standardized course handbook working to a common template including consistency of placement, formatting and utilization of common blocks of material. The first version of this was implemented in 2006-07. The consideration of standardizing aims and ILOs forms part of that process. See also Recommendation 9.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School consider providing all staff involved in marking (including NLAs and GTAs) with a further briefing session to update them on the recent changes to the Code of Assessment (e.g. 22-point Scale) and to refresh their knowledge of how the School wishes them to apply the Code. The School should

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also ensure that the most up-to-date information about the Code of Assessment is published in a consistent manner in all course handbooks. [Paragraph C.3]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

The Management Committee agreed that there should be an annual briefing session at School level with GTAs and the University Native Language Teachers [UNLTs, formerly NLAs] and steps were taken to ensure that the current assessment scale be published in the same format in course documents. Longer term it was felt a set of SMLC-wide grade related criteria at least for language learning might be evolved based on those figuring in the current French honours course document. Undergraduate Studies Committee has been asked to consider this.

### **Recommendation 7:**

The Review Panel **recommended** that the School develop a mechanism for monitoring responses to External Examiners reports at School level to allow the Head of School to manage and maintain an overview of the completion of the process. [Paragraph D.1]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

The Management Committee agreed that the Head of School should be invited to all meetings at which reports were discussed and that he should be copied into all relevant correspondence.

## **Annual Course Monitoring Reports**

### **Recommendation 8:**

The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School ensure that Annual Course Monitoring Reports are completed in compliance with the University's procedures in future and encouraged the staff to use the ACMR process to record positive as well as negative feedback from students and external examiners. [Paragraph E.2]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

The Head of Department undertook to ensure the reports were submitted. All Class Conveners have been reminded of the positive role which ACMRs can play in course review.

## **Communications with students and others**

### **Recommendation 9:**

The Panel **recommended** that, to promote the School as a single, cohesive unit, the School should adopt a common style for its handbooks with standard structure and content to form the basis of the individual documents. The School should also consider

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providing students with paper copies of the handbooks, as well as online versions, to emphasise the importance of this document as a source of information. [Paragraph F.1]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

For session 2006-07 onwards a common template for course handbooks was devised working to a common structure and a shared block of common material (e.g. on student support services etc.). Given the numbers of students involved and the considerable moves which had been made to providing information to students in electronic format the SMLC Management Committee felt that the provision of handbooks in paper format at all levels of study would be unduly expensive and go against the main thrust of developments in other areas of the University (e.g. through Moodle). However it recognised the need to ensure that all students be clear of the importance of course handbooks as a source of information. Hence it recommended that all first year students be provided with a paper copy of the document. As second and subsequent years would have been educated in the web as a tool for dissemination of class information it was felt that a summary paper document, referring the student to a fuller version available on the web, would be a suitable compromise.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School take steps to emphasise to students that all advertised options may not be available in a particular year. Efforts should also be made to ensure that information supplied to PGT students prior to arrival is as accurate as possible to avoid confusion and disappointment on arrival. The Panel acknowledges that the unplanned changes in staffing as a result of the University's Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process may have exacerbated the situations reported by the students in session 2005-06. [Paragraph C.5.1]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

This recommendation arose mainly from PGT courses existing at the time of the Review and has been largely superseded by subsequent developments. Between the SER and the Report of the Panel the former four PGT degrees of the School have been replaced by two new generic PGT degrees. Both have been designed to minimize dependence on the availability of particular individuals for their delivery while still providing meaningful pathways through the degree.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School ensures that it has in place robust administrative processes to enable it to deal with enquiries, applications and reception of increased numbers of PGT students before the introduction of its new generic postgraduate taught programme. [Paragraph C.5.2]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

As there was a delay between the Panel's drawing up of the Report and its publication this particular point had already been actioned before the Report was approved. There is now a clear path for dealing with enquiries, applications and reception of new students, and a clear understanding of the responsibilities of the relevant Programme Conveners.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School consider how its definitions of Team, Partnership and Research-led Teaching could be expressed more clearly. [Paragraph C.5.2]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

These terms were ones which were used in the Self Evaluation Review document to explain the operation of courses rather than in course documentation distributed to students. However, both the SMLC Undergraduate Studies and Graduate Studies Committees have been asked to devise suitable definitions which could be put into course documentation.

**Employability**

**Recommendation 13:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School take some time to present their existing practices in terms of employability as it believed that significant improvements in the perceptions of students, staff and employers could be gained with relatively little effort. [Paragraph C.4.5]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

There was general agreement that Sections should make clear in course documentation what the benefits of the School's courses were in terms of employability. Particular examples to be highlighted were skills gained and life experiences deriving from the year abroad, language skills, dissertation etc.

**Management and Status of Native Language Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants**

**Recommendation 14:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School develop a common job description for NLAs that reflects the current workload, describes the appropriate level of contribution and provides an additional paragraph or section to describe the role of the senior NLA or co-ordinator. [Paragraph C.6.3]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

This point was dealt with as part of the Modernisation Agenda. In order to enhance the standing of NLAs SMLC has altered their title to that of University Native Language Teachers [UNLT] and a common job description has been evolved for two categories of that grade.

**Recommendation 15:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School and the individual Sections attend to any lists they operate and that HR systems and the University Postmaster be consulted with regard to the possibility of including GTAs and other staff falling outwith the standard groups in the staff databases used to create automatic email lists. [*Paragraph C.6.3*]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**  
**Heads of Section**  
**Programme/Course Conveners**  
**HR Systems**  
**University Postmaster**

*Response: From the School*

The inclusion of GTA and similar staff as part of the standard e-mail systems has been put in to effect. It is now standard SMLC procedure in appointing GTA staff to request a university e-mail address at the point the relevant forms for appointment are processed.

*Response: From HR Systems*

There have been changes in employment legislation over recent years. It is implied that the General Teaching Assistants are paid under the 'casual workers' process. The Head of School should discuss with their HR Manager moving the General Teaching Assistants onto "zero-hour" contracts of employment. There is a general move in this direction away from purely 'casual' employment for a variety of contractual reasons, for example all Adult Education Tutors were transferred to zero-hour employment contracts, and then paid for hours worked. With employment status, individuals will automatically be entitled to an e-mail account, and included in the auto-generated email listings for staff. (An individual can choose to forward their emails onto another account accessed more regularly if required). IT Services are currently examining a standard method which will provide auto-generated lists not only for the School, but also for each section within it.

**Recommendation 16:**

The Panel **recommended** that the School consider removing any hierarchical lists of staff from noticeboards, handbooks, etc, and replace them with alphabetical lists of those involved in teaching the relevant programme or course, identifying those with key roles rather than a position or title to encourage the integration of GTAs as full members of the teaching team. [*Paragraph C.6.3*]

For the attention of: **The Head of School**

*Response: From the School*

The recommendation has been actioned.

## **Faculty and University support of the School**

### **Recommendation 17:**

The Panel noted that the Language Centre was not part of the Arts Faculty Resource Unit and **recommended** that, because of its importance to the function of the School, its remit should clearly state that such services are an integral part of its function and that any change in them must be negotiated with the Faculty and School. [*Paragraph C.6.5*]

For the attention of: **The Director of the Language Centre**

#### *Response: From the Director of the Language Centre*

The Language Centre recognises its importance to the function of the School of Modern Languages & Cultures. It is committed to support the learning and teaching of modern languages in the Language Centre. It has developed a good working relationship through regular contact with the Head of the School on the principles of service provision. Staff of the School and the Language Centre Librarian and Technician work together on a daily basis.

### **Recommendation 18:**

The Panel **recommended** that the Faculty of Arts place a high priority on the relocation of the School to an appropriate space and that the School be kept informed and consulted at an early stage of any alternative accommodation being considered for it, and in turn, the School should ensure that staff are informed of any discussions and have the opportunity, where appropriate, to provide input to reduce the potential for stressful and unsettling effects caused by lack of information. [*Paragraph C.6.4*]

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

#### *Response: From the Dean of the Faculty of Arts*

The Faculty has placed a high priority on co-location of the School in the Hetherington Building; a Capital expenditure template has been prepared for approval on the back of an Option Appraisal exercise, which has made some clear recommendations, duly explored with the interested parties, and accepted. We hope to receive approval from the Estates Committee to proceed soon.

### **Recommendation 19:**

The Panel **recommended** that the Dean of the Faculty Arts and the Head of School consult with the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) to make a decision on the future of the Synergy arrangements, taking into account financial arrangements, staffing issues and the impacts on Learning and Teaching of maintaining courses on two campuses. [*Paragraph C.6.6*]

For the attention of: **The Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching)**  
**The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**  
**The Head of School**



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*Response: From the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching)*

Following discussion with the HoD, Dr Donnelly and the Dean, Professor Moignard, I would like to report that there are no further plans at this stage to develop more partnership teaching between SU and GU. The Faculty and School are maintaining current links, and will review all aspects of their arrangements on a regular and ongoing basis.

*Prepared by: Janet Fleming, Senate Office*

*Last modified on: Tuesday 12 February 2008*