

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 30 May 2008

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Responses to the Recommendations Arising from the Review of
Philosophy held on 2 March 2007**

Mrs Marjory Wright, Clerk to the Review Panel

May 2008

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Review Panel concluded that the Department of Philosophy's provision was of a high quality overall and student satisfaction was evident. This was particularly impressive given the uncertain staffing situation in recent years and the Department's very high staff:student ratio. The Panel's overwhelming impression, however, was of a Department under enormous pressure as a result of the high workloads imposed on them by staff shortages and the Department's perception that it lacked the support of the Faculty and the University. The Acting Head of Department was to be congratulated on maintaining staff morale following the absence, through illness, of the Head of Department, and the staff as a whole were to be complimented on not letting the pressures that they were experiencing impact on the student experience. The sense of vitality amongst the staff was evident and without exception, staff were committed to moving the Department forward and were willing to take advice on how they might do so.

It was stated in the SER that the Department did not consider its accommodation to be ideal but this was not discussed in detail.

The Review Panel noted that the Department had a high percentage of relatively young, high quality staff members who might be expected to seek promotion in the near future, possibly outwith the Department, but no staff at the middle level, which left the Department vulnerable to change. The Department had already considered capping Honours entry as a result of staff shortages but, fortunately, had not yet had to do so.

The Panel had concerns about the impact of the pending retirement of Professor Stalley who was a former Head of Department and the Department's Quality Assurance Officer, and would strongly **recommend** that a proleptic appointment be made to the Department of Philosophy at an early stage to avoid further erosion of the staff complement and an increase in the already high student : staff ratio.

The Review Panel was impressed by the excellence of the three Level 3 courses provided by former members of the Department of Philosophy staff, now based in HATII, but had serious concerns about the wisdom of delivering these courses in isolation, both from the point of view of the well-being of the individuals concerned and of the risks that the absence of administrative support posed for the maintenance of quality assurance processes. The Panel was aware of the great potential of these courses and the benefits that they could bring to the Department of Philosophy if more

formally linked to the Department's provision, both in terms of innovation and of clarifying for students the full extent of philosophy provision. At present, students may discover these courses by accident rather than by design.

The Review Panel therefore strongly **recommends** that both the Dean and the Department consider the position of the Level 3 philosophical studies courses as they currently stand, with a view to possible change. However, in the last analysis, any change must meet with the approval of the Department and other relevant personnel.

Recommendations to the Department/Faculty

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report, and summarised below, are made in the spirit of encouragement in order to enhance the already high standards in the Department of Philosophy and in the courses offered by staff based in HATII. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the corresponding sections of the report, and are ranked in order of priority.

Department Response

The Department of Philosophy is grateful to the Review Panel for the care with which the review was conducted in March 2007 and for the helpful recommendations which were delivered. Most have these have been accepted by the department, as will be evident from the details of the responses we give.

Recommendation 1:

The Acting Head of Department expressed a wish to initiate an improved management structure prior to the appointment of the next Head of Department. The Review Panel therefore strongly **recommends** that the Department consider the development of a formal management structure at the earliest opportunity. (*Paragraph C.6.8*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

Following a series of staff meetings, the department established a formal management structure, involving a number of new committees with appropriate administrative posts. These are detailed below:

(a) Director of Teaching

Remit:

- (a) Convener: Learning and Teaching Committee
- (b) Establish/maintain staff/student committees
- (c) Conduct annual (post-exam) Teaching Review
- (d) Co-ordinate Annual Course Monitoring Process
- (e) Administer Course Approval Process

(b) Learning and Teaching Committee

Convener: Director of Teaching

Membership: Head of Department, Pre-Honours Convener, Honours Conveners, Pre-Honours Course Conveners, Departmental Quality Assurance Officer, Student Representatives from Honours and Pre-Honours Courses.

Notes: (i) Other staff members are invited to discuss specific items of business which concern their administrative duties, e.g. Moodle administrator, dissertations convener.

(ii) This committee is not a policy making instrument. It meets three times per year, reporting to the Departmental Meeting.

(iii) Members may wear more than one hat – thus the Director of Teaching may double as Honours Convener, as at present.

(c) Postgraduate Studies Committee

Convener: Director of Postgraduate Studies

Membership: Convener of PGT courses, Postgraduate Research Convener, Convener of Research Committee (HoD).

(d) Research Committee

Convener: Head of Department

Membership: 1 elected member of Staff, 1 nominated Professor, Research Seminar Convener, Director(s) of Research Centre(s).

Remit:

- (i) Formulation of Departmental Research Strategy
- (ii) Allocation of Study Leave
- (iii) Preparation RAE (or equivalent) strategy
- (iv) Distribution of Conference Funding
- (v) Promotion of Research Funding Applications

Meetings of all these committees have been held regularly this session and are scheduled to articulate with Departmental Meetings, which are held at least three times per session (August/September, November/December, March/April) with other meetings convened as necessary by the Head of Department. The new structure has been working well to date. The Department plans to review its effectiveness in September 2009.

Recommendation 2:

The Review Panel strongly **recommends** that the Department introduce a formal Staff-Student Liaison structure to comply with the University's recently introduced Code of Practice on Student Representation, and further **recommends** that the minutes of Staff Student Liaison Committees be published on the Departmental website to facilitate the closing of the feedback loop. (*Paragraph E.2*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response

The Department has reviewed its system of student representation. As before, student representatives are appointed for each pre-Honours course and for each Honours year. A staff-student meeting is held for each sub-honours course, and also for Honours. The sub-honours meetings are held during lecture hours, which ensures a large attendance. In addition, all student representatives are invited to the meetings of the Learning and

Teaching Committee (see 1(b) above), which therefore plays a dual role as departmental staff-student liaison committee. The students (honours students in particular) put items on the agenda and are already contributing usefully to the discussions. Minutes of all Staff-Student meetings are published on the Departmental Moodle web-pages.

Recommendation 3:

The Review Panel strongly **recommends** that, in anticipation of Professor Stalley's retirement, a proleptic appointment be made to the Department of Philosophy to avoid further erosion of the staff complement and an increase in the already high student : staff ratio, and that consideration be given to the Department's wish to maintain a profile in Greek Philosophy. (*Paragraph C.6.3; Conclusions*)

Action: Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Response:

Following the appointment of Professor Weir as HoD, and some further changes in staffing in the latter part of 2007, the department is intending to appoint three new members of staff before the end of this session; it is hoped that one of these will have the interest in Greek Philosophy which will continue Professor Stalley's contribution to the Departmental profile.

Recommendation 4:

The Review Panel strongly **recommends** that both the Dean and the Department consider the position of the Level 3 philosophical studies courses as they currently stand, with a view to possible change. However, in the last analysis, any change must meet with the approval of the Department and other relevant personnel. (*Conclusions*)

**Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts/
The Acting Head of Department**

Response Head of Department:

The Department looked closely at the position of the Level 3 courses which students may include as elements of General (Philosophical Studies) Degree. It concluded that it was unable to take responsibility for these courses for the following reasons:

- (a) They are primarily interdisciplinary courses.
- (b) They develop skills (and incorporate concomitant assessment) e.g. web-page writing that are not philosophically based. The Department cannot commit itself to teach or to recruit teachers of these skills.
- (c) Given present student-staff ratios (over 30:1 over the last three sessions), the Department is not in a position to take on further teaching duties.

The department is willing to discuss the possibility of administrative support on a good-will basis should an approach be made.

Response Dean:

See 5 below

Recommendation 5:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Dean review the original agreement in relation to the Senior Honours Kant and Consciousness options and provide clarification for

both the Course Leader and the Department of Philosophy as to whether these courses may be offered beyond September 2007. (*Paragraph C.4.9*)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Response:

Both these recommendations have been considered, and an accommodation reached; long-term resolution may depend, at least in part, on the upcoming new appointments.

Recommendation 6:

In the light of the decreasing academic staff complement and the Department's resultant reliance on GTAs for the provision of tutorials, the Panel **recommends** that the Faculty consider increasing the Department's GTA budget with a view to reinstating a more acceptable level of tutorial provision to meet the educational needs of Level 1 students. (*Paragraph C.6.9*)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Response:

The staff complement is increasing again, as noted above; the GTA budget is subject to the pressures inherent in the larger financial picture, but we have tried to respond sympathetically to representations from the Department where we recognise the need.

Recommendation 7:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department keep its postgraduate strategy under review and that it seek advice from the Faculty about the critical mass required for a viable programme, and that it prepare a business plan if one does not already exist, to ensure that its chosen strategy is the optimum means of achieving the desired objective. (*Paragraph C.4.12*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department is encouraged by the significant increase in students on PGT courses this academic session compared to last session, in brackets. These total 16: MLitt1, 10 (6); MLitt2, 6 (5). Although numbers are small, we judge that this improvement in our position is a consequence of the new PGT structure we have introduced (seven new specialist MLitt2 degree programmes) together with the advertising strategy pursued by Dr Fiona Macpherson at that time postgraduate convener.

So far as concerns our business plan for PGT courses we note that Departmental costs are heavily weighted towards wages and salaries. They have been fixed and inelastic in respect of any increase or contraction of postgraduate student numbers we have encountered. Since variable costs are a small fraction of departmental expenditure, and taught postgraduate courses incur a small fraction of these, all business plans show a significant financial return on the marginal costs of this mode of teaching.

At the moment our medium-term departmental strategy is to expand postgraduate taught courses and maximise this source of exogenous income, not least because these courses serve as recruiting sergeants for PG research candidates. The only significant limit concerns the amount of staff time which is invested in these ventures. We shall continue to keep a careful eye on how far this might compromise staff research, since from an autonomous business point of view the department sees little advantage in

generating financial surpluses which are swallowed up at faculty level as virement for deficits elsewhere or as an augmentation of the overall faculty contribution.

As part of the Strategic Plan submitted to the Faculty, the Department emphasised the distinctiveness and success of the MLitt1 course as one of the departmental strengths, noted increasing our doctoral and postdoctoral studentships as an opportunity and set increased PGR and PGT numbers and scholarships for international students as departmental strategic objectives.

The department has this year been in discussions with Ian Thomson of the International Office and Scott Mazuzan Glasgow's North American Representative on how to increase our intake of North American postgraduate students still further. One strategy we agreed on was to offer fee discounts to such students.

Recommendation 8:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Faculty support the Department in the pursuit of Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) postgraduate scholarships with a view to boosting recruitment to the Department's taught postgraduate programmes. (*Paragraph C.5.4*)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Response:

There has never been any suggestion that this was not a supported activity. That said, the new AHRC block grant system will need to bed in, and we are still in the process of drafting the preliminary bid. Philosophy should not be disadvantaged by the outcome.

Recommendation 9:

The Review Panel was of the opinion that the Department would do well to harness the enthusiasm of its M Litt 1 students as a marketing tool and **recommends** the development of a video depicting postgraduate taught students discussing their experience of the Department's postgraduate provision. The Panel further **recommends** seeking the assistance of the International and Postgraduate Service in marketing the degree internationally. (*Paragraph C.5.5*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

We recognize that the enthusiasm of our Master's Conversion Course students is an asset which we would do well to exploit, and have kept in mind the usefulness of making a video which the International and Postgraduate Service can employ when promoting the Department overseas. The Director of Graduate Studies has been actively engaged with the International and Postgraduate Service in exploring ways of exploring the international market for the Glasgow PGT courses in particular. The major challenge here is to target markets for our unique Conversion Course.

As remarked in the previous response, the Department has received assistance from the International Office on the marketing of all our postgraduate degrees. Moreover last year Dr Macpherson, then postgraduate convenor, initiated a major change in our marketing of those degrees. She and Dr Chris Lindsay, re-designed and completely overhauled the department's webpages on T4, one of the first departments to move to T4, adding a great deal of content to the postgraduate pages, both for existing and potential graduate students. Student testimonies were added and Dr Macpherson liaised with the Postgraduate office to include elements that they believe attract students such

as a section on what makes the Department unique. A graduate forum was introduced to our Moodle pages.

Using money from the Faculty provided for this purpose, Dr Macpherson oversaw the process of creating posters and brochures for our postgraduate degree courses and distributed them appropriately to the Postgraduate Office, to philosophy departments in the UK and to a list of international contacts. Our postgraduate courses were advertised on various external websites.

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department initiate appropriate in-house training for GTAs to complement the statutory training provided by the Learning and Teaching Centre, seeking advice from the Learning and Teaching Centre if necessary. (*Paragraph C.6.12*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department has been pursuing ways to supplement the GTA Training Handbook developed by the Pre-Honours Teaching Convener. In particular we are surveying GTAs who have been working with us this session to elicit their suggestions concerning training needs, and the implementation of effective training programmes. We have put in hand a process for regular revision of the Handbook at the same time that course materials are revised for the Course Moodle pages.

Recommendation 11:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department seek clarification from Human Resources as to what steps require to be taken to bring the periods of probationary service of its recently appointed staff to a close and that the outcome be communicated to the Probationary Committee in the form of a recommendation. (*Paragraph C.6.13*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department pursued the issue of the probationary status of two colleagues, arguing for one that it was absurd, given the responsibilities that this colleague had been given and the level of accomplishments achieved, that this person still be on probationary status. The Probationary Committee confirmed that the probationary service of this colleague should be regarded as completed, and s/he has been informed of this. The second issue is more complex as it involves an inter-departmental joint appointment. The other HoD knows the views of the Philosophy Department and the DPTLA Review Panel and will report these to the appropriate Faculty committee.

Recommendation 12:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Intended Learning Outcomes for the M.Litt 1 programme be revisited, with a view to making explicit what students are expected to learn and how they might demonstrate this new learning. (*Paragraph C.2.3*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department has committed itself to complete a review of all course and programme ILOs before the beginning of session 2008-9. We are in the process of making ILOs available on the Departmental web-pages, preferably on Moodle. This

will ensure that all MLitt 1 students can gain an explicit understanding of what they are to learn and how to demonstrate it. That said, we regard philosophy as a practical as well as a knowledge-based skill, and, as with cooking, there is a clear limit on how far these skills can be explained in advance of rolling up one's sleeves and getting on with it, after seeing how their teachers perform in classes and at research seminars.

Recommendation 13:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department adopt the practice of allowing students supervised inspection of their scripts as permitted by Policy No 03-03-E18024 (<http://senate.gla.ac.uk/academic/policies/inspection.html>). (*Paragraph C.3.7*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department has adopted this practice.

Recommendation 14:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure that an invigilator is present at all examinations as required by the Code of Assessment for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes (para 16.22(c)). (*Paragraph C.5.8*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department is making every effort to comply with this requirement and has so far succeeded. That said, we have given notice to the Clerk of Senate and the Dean of Arts that this requirement places us under pressures that we may not be able to bear, chiefly because of the number of students in the large classes of 500+ students who require individual facilities. For one examination in May 2007 we had to use every available staff member and GTA, together with both departmental secretaries, to meet the invigilation requirement, with *no-one* spare. We urge the University to either review this requirement or introduce centrally managed facilities to ensure that it can be reliably met.

Recommendation 15:

The Review Panel found the number of credits (20 credits) allocated to the Honours Dissertation to be lower than the norm for a piece of independent work and **recommends** that the Department consider increasing the number of credits allocated to the Dissertation to align the credit rating more closely with practice elsewhere in the University. (*Paragraph C.4.7*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department

Response:

The Department considered this recommendation with great care. For many years we required students to write a dissertation at a length appropriate for 40 credits. We reduced the length of dissertations to 5—8,000 words for the following reasons:

- a) In philosophy, we do not require students to show skills in writing at a greater length than 8,000 words or collecting and organizing a large amount of data.
- b) We do require students to demonstrate in a major project the following core philosophical (but also generic, transferable) skills, *inter alia*: careful, valid, argumentation showing control and display of the structure of a sustained

argument; relevance in identifying (and sticking to) germane topics for discussion; accuracy and concision in reporting the views of philosophers whose work is at issue; precision in stating core premises and conclusions; conciseness in expression; imagination but not prolixity in constructing examples.

- c) Experience taught us that students who were required to write at greater length were mostly writing just more of the same, or worse because of inevitable temptations: to multiply redundant examples, introduce irrelevant material, and repeat themselves in order to achieve the minimum word length. Only the very best students could make good use of a word length greater than 8,000.
- d) Too many students, including some very good ones, treated the dissertation as their life-time performance piece and spent far too much time on it. In consequence they compromised their performance in finals.

For these reasons, and more, the Department decided that a dissertation of 5—8,000 words at 20 credits was best for Philosophy students.

Recommendation 16:

The Review Panel **recommends** that both the Department of Philosophy and the Level 3 course team take advantage of the assistance offered by the Careers Service and the Learning and Teaching Centre to find ways of introducing students to the concepts of PDP and the Employability agenda at an early stage and of embedding PDP more explicitly in all courses. (*Paragraph F.9*)

Action: The Acting Head of Department; The Level 3 Course Leader

Response:

The department is keen to pursue the PDP and Employability agendas. There is some evidence to suggest that short-term unemployment is higher for philosophy graduates though we believe that in time most settle down to rewarding careers- recent reports from HESA show that the numbers of philosophy graduates in work 6 months after graduation has been rising faster than the average. But we recognize that we should be making efforts to tackle this problem since all the evidence suggests that degrees in philosophy are attractive to employers. Initiatives this session have included:

Dr Adam Rieger has received a grant from the Scottish Funding Council (via the Arts Faculty) for development of PDP/employability resources. He held a meeting on careers for philosophers (attended by around 30 undergraduates) and has placed resources and links on a new departmental webpage

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/philosophy/undergraduatestudy/graduatingwhatnext/>

He has also had meetings with Archie Roy and Karen McCluskey of the Careers Service and has plans for future events, including a session on careers for philosophers to be held by the Careers service in the Autumn.

The department has contacted the Philosophy Subject Centre in Leeds. We have e-mailed all Honours students with a downloadable Guide to Employment for Philosophy Students and received a good number of hard copies to distribute in the Philosophy Students Common Room.

With respect to the Level 3 team we can confirm, after discussions with Dr Susan Stuart, that she has apprised her Level 3 students of the assistance offered by the Careers Service and the Learning and Teaching Centre with regard to PDP and encouraged them to take advantage of these facilities. One Level 3 student is currently in receipt of a PDP grant from the Learning and Teaching Centre.

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