



University
of Glasgow

Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of Theology and Religious Studies held on 6 March 2014

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the subject area of Theology and Religious Studies. *Periodic Subject Review* is an internal subject review focused on the quality of provision as experienced by students. The review looks at the range of programmes, course content, the teaching methods employed, assessment, facilities and much more.

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_357283_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/periodicsubjectreview/>

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel was impressed by the spirit and enthusiasm of staff and students and the strong mutual respect in building the subject area's dual approach to theology and religious studies. It commends the strong culture of co-teaching and interdisciplinarity within the subject, as well as its breadth of provision. The Panel also noted: the good range of assessment tools; variety of teaching methods and initiatives such as Honours taster day and job shadowing for GTAs. However, the Review Panel identified some area of weakness which are addressed in the Recommendations below.

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

- The broad range of assessment tools used, including: examinations; essays; presentations; group projects; creating Wikipedia pages; and reflective journaling. [paragraph 3.3.1]
- The choice provided to students over whether to undertake an examination or extended essay in one of their courses and to be able to set their own essay titles in some Level 3 and 4 courses. The choice of assessment methods was extremely positively received by the students the Panel spoke to. [paragraph 3.3.2]

Student Progression, Retention and Support

- Innovative initiatives such as the Honours taster day for level 2 students to gain a better understanding of honours options. [paragraph 3.6.2]

Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

- The 'Academic Study Skills' guide which covers a range of topics including: making lecture notes; referencing; and *plagiarism*. The Panel commended this guidance for students (and recommended it be made available to all students within the subject with updated guidance on referencing. [paragraph 5.1.2] (See below))

Curriculum Design, Development and Content

- The exemplary breadth of provision which reflects national Scottish priorities and a balanced curriculum attractive to a diverse student body. [paragraph 3.4.1]
- The strong culture of co-teaching and the collaboration between the dual pathways in the subject which students appear to find compelling. [paragraph 2.1.1]

Resources for Learning and Teaching

- Adopting a strategic approach to staff recruitment during an acute period of staff restructuring which reflected a commitment to continuing traditional subjects in theology and to meet increased student demand for courses in religious studies. [paragraph 1.2.2]
- Introduction of a 'shadowing scheme' for GTAs aimed at providing GTAs with ongoing support and guidance in improving their teaching. [paragraph 3.8.4]

Areas to be improved or enhanced

Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

- Agree minimum standards for timeliness and level of detail provided in assessment feedback. [paragraph 3.3.4]

¹ Numbers refer to the paragraphs in the full report that contain the relevant discussion.

Student Progression, Retention and Support

- Provision of a single agreed approach to referencing to be included in the Academic Study Skills Guide [paragraph 5.1.2]
- Review the timeliness of materials being made accessible on *Moodle*, especially where this is to support students with a disability, to ensure the approach supports student learning. [paragraph 3.6.4]
- Review the variability of engagement with Moodle between each course and provide standard approaches to referencing, to ensure high standards and high-levels of satisfaction recorded in some areas are replicated across all provision. [paragraph 3.7.1]
- Review the available University-wide resources to ensure that students in Theology and Religious Studies benefit from the broad-range of student learning support mechanisms available beyond the subject. [paragraph 3.6.5]

The Quality of Learning Opportunities

- Engage more fully with the *Graduate Attributes* agenda by reviewing current course and programme information to articulate them more explicitly. [paragraph 3.2.2]

Curriculum Design, Development and Content

- Progress the re-development of PGT provision which identifies and capitalises on Glasgow's distinctive provision and expertise, and builds on interdisciplinary links across Schools and Colleges. [paragraph 1.4.3]
- Reflect on the distinctive nature and synergies of its dual, cohesive approach to theology and world-religious studies in articulating an explicitly international curriculum, for example in their programme offerings and their external marketing. [paragraph 3.4.2]

Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

- Develop innovative ways of encouraging internationalisation of the student experience including: increasing opportunities for outward learning experiences, such as dissertation research visits and restructuring honours courses to facilitate longer exchanges. The Subject should consult with the *Recruitment and International Office (RIO)* and the *Dean of International Mobility* in revising their approach to student mobility. [paragraph 3.6.3]
- Review the approach to *Staff-Student Liaison Committees* to ensure that the broader student body are engaged in identifying issues for, and are informed of outcomes from, formal staff-student liaison meetings as well as informal discussions between class representatives and staff. Ensuring SSLC minutes are an accurate record of the meeting and actions are carried over to following meetings. [paragraph 5.1.3]

Overall aims of the Department's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan

- Engage effectively with University strategies, strategic priorities and University wide initiatives; ensuring staff have a strong understanding of University and subject priorities so that they can effectively implement them in their teaching. [paragraph 2.1.3]
- Build on the inherent interdisciplinary nature of theology and religious studies and proactively builds stronger interdisciplinary links across the University through joint courses, joint teaching and joint programmes. [paragraph 2.1.1]

Resources for Learning and Teaching

- Reflect on the extent and quality of support provided to GTAs to ensure that they are appropriately trained, inducted and provided with sufficient guidance and ongoing feedback and support to carry out their duties. *[paragraph 3.8.6]*

Maintaining the Standards of Awards

- Establish a Quality Enhancement review cycle to realise the benefits from the enhancement aspect of quality processes. This includes engaging in ongoing discussions about teaching and learning by reflecting on and sharing good practice identified (e.g. in *external examiners'* reports); reviewing pedagogical practice and student learning; identifying areas for development as part of the cycle of a quality enhancement process and ensuring the feedback loop to GTAs and students is effectively closed (see 3.8.5). *[paragraph 4.1.1]*

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Dean of International Mobility

The Dean leads the development of the University's Student Mobility Strategy: intended to promote the benefits of study abroad and work experience for home students; providing opportunities to experience a variety of ideas, cultures, and education systems. This also prepares students to be "global citizens"; maximising recruitment opportunities of talented students.

External Examiner

External Examiners are appointed by the University Court on the recommendation of Senate based on advice from the relevant School. The role of External Examiner is a very important part of quality enhancement and assurance to maintain academic standards at the appropriate level and to ensure that student performance is properly judged.

Graduate Attributes

[Graduate attributes](#) are the skills, knowledge and qualities or attitudes developed by individuals through their programme of study that they will use to contribute effectively in work or other aspects of society in the future.

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators are students, usually research students, who assist with teaching in the form of tutorials, labs and other activities that are part of undergraduate programmes in the subject/school. They are paid an hourly rate by the University.

Moodle

Moodle is the University's supported Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Periodic Subject Review or PSR

The University has a six yearly cycle of review of the Subjects/Schools within it. The PSR is one of the main ways by which the University assures itself of the quality of the provision delivered by Subjects/Schools.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as the submission or presentation of work, in any form, which is not one's own, without acknowledgement of the sources. Special cases of plagiarism can also arise from one student copying another student's work or from inappropriate collaboration.

Recruitment and International Office (RIO)

The Recruitment and International Office (RIO) provides applicants, parents and teachers with a single point of contact for information and advice on the range of programmes available at the University of Glasgow. The Service also develop, implement, co-ordinate and monitors widening participation initiatives within the University and with other partners. The Recruitment and International Office (RIO) is situated in the Fraser Building.

Staff:Student Liaison Committee or SSLCs

Staff:Student Liaison Committees are Subject/School committees which provide a formal opportunity for Student Representatives to discuss matters with, and give feedback to their subject area.