UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 24 MARCH 2017

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to Recommendations arising from the Review of English Language and Linguistics held on 11 March 2016

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusion

The members of the Review Panel very much enjoyed their engagement with English Language. A lasting impression was formed of a subject area where staff effectively communicate passion for their subject, and students feel welcomed into a vibrant learning community.

The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that, at the time of the Review, programmes offered by English Language were current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and of practice in its application.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support the subject area 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 **ranked in order of priority**.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that English Language, in conjunction with the School, continue its efforts to promote recruitment to the undergraduate study of English Language at Glasgow, exploring means of: involving current students and recent alumni in this task; harnessing social media and the internet; and following up contacts made at Open Days. [*Paragraph 3.6*]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***
*For information: **Head of School***

Response:

In line with the recommendation, in 2016-17 we have trialled working with current students for recruitment, which has broadly-speaking worked well, although there are issues we need to resolve regarding preparation and selection of students. This involved a call asking current students to attend Open/Applicant Days and work alongside teaching staff, with staff giving information about the course and then asking 'would you like to speak to a current student?', passing the applicants then to the student helper to speak one-on-one to the applicant without the teaching staff member nearby, to get honest feedback. We found this worked well, although the administration of registering a number of students as workers has been challenging, as is the timing of many Open Days, given that students often work weekends or that Open Days often coincide with either vacation or periods of student workload pressure.

Staff have been further encouraged to follow up contacts made at Open Days, and we have held informal tours and discussions with some contacts. Our Social Media convener is on study leave at present, but when she returns we have plans for Twitter and Skype sessions for applicants (dedicated times when lecturers will be available to answer questions about the courses). We have worked with Brooke Gordon in the College of Arts on redeveloping and redesigning our webpages for applicants, and all teaching staff on our first year course have been involved in rewriting the content of these pages. Finally, we are also working with current students to use and post from our social media channels, and the School has developed further its Facebook presence.

Furthermore, we are at present (February 2017) advertising for a new colleague, and their intended administrative contribution to the subject area is to convene our outreach and recruitment efforts, with a particular emphasis on what we can learn from that colleague's relevant previous experience. A target for this, although not explicitly discussed in the recommendation, is the use of school visits and talks; the new post focuses on the Scots language, which we already know from previous projects to be a popular topic in Scottish schools. We will also explore the possibility of using student ambassadors at school-focused events.

Recommendation 2

Recognising the strategic importance of ESRC accreditation which is linked with its current PGT programme, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language proceed with its planned review of PGT provision with a view to establishing this on a sustainable footing, investigating opportunities for shared provision across the School and College, and exploring strategies for strengthening recruitment. [*Paragraph 2.10*]

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***

Response:

We formed a PGT Working Group following the PSR recommendations, chaired by Professor Jane Stuart-Smith, who receives a workload allocation for leading PGT reform. This group has met a number of times and has had a GTA allocated to it to undertake comparative market research. Innovative proposals came from this group to the English Language and Linguistics staff meeting in January 2017 for a new structure to our PGT programmes, based on a review of PGT provision elsewhere. These proposals were discussed in detail and a new way forward for these programmes was identified; Professor Stuart-Smith is now in discussions with MaRIO about market assessments, consultations, and our necessary next steps. Following advice from experienced colleagues, our timescale aims for a refreshed PGT programme to operate from 2018-19, with consultations complete by June 2017, PIP forms for new courses by September 2017, and then advertising our new programme(s) from September onwards.

Recommendation 3

Recognising the broad range of educational backgrounds from which PGT students come, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language review its induction and orientation process, particularly for those who have not previously studied at Glasgow, to cover the structure of the programme and what is expected of the students, and to support continuing orientation throughout the early stages of the programme. [*Paragraph 3.13*]

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Response:

The Working Group discussed above has considered the new-student issue (particularly regarding the structure of the present programme) and will take it into account when redesigning the new programme offerings, in order to ensure robust and clear orientation is part of each core element of the new programmes, throughout the teaching semesters. For the present session, the programme convener has been in contact with students throughout the year to be available for orientation queries. The Head of Subject, with some other staff, will also organise an informal lunch with current PGT students at the end of semester 2 to check they feel prepared for their dissertation work and to hear any feedback.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Deans of Learning and Teaching in Arts and Social Sciences consider and then implement an approach that achieves best alignment between the generic coverage of statistics and qualitative measures provision and the specific needs of Arts PGT programmes.   [*Paragraph 4.7*]

For the attention of: ***Deans of Learning and Teaching, Arts and Social Sciences***
For information: ***Head of Subject***

Response:

PGT programmes in Arts and Social Sciences fall within the remit of the Dean of Graduate Studies rather than the Dean of Learning and Teaching. This response has been prepared in consultation with the Deans of Graduate Studies in Arts (Dr Barbara Burns) and Social Sciences (Dr Duncan Ross), and the Director of the Social Sciences Graduate Training, Dr Philip Leifeld.

If the students are ESRC funded then there is a requirement that they undertake the training. If the subject area is unable to provide this themselves, then the generic training is what they need to do. That training is, of course, generic, and to that extent there is a difficulty for all the students who undertake it. There is much to be gained, however, from working with students from a range of disciplines. The CoSS Graduate School is aware of some of the issues around delivery, and has recently appointed a new Director of Graduate Training who is overhauling its research training programme. Pending approval, the following changes will be made to the structure of the programme: Social Science Statistics 1 and 2 will be replaced by "Research Design" and "Quantitative Data Analysis." "Research Design" will fill an important gap at the introductory level and will serve to provide the missing link between the quantitative and qualitative training. This will especially benefit those students who struggle at the beginner's level and students from a range of different backgrounds. "Quantitative Data Analysis" will be an introductory statistics course up to the level of linear regression. There will be many changes to the delivery of this course, including a better integration of software training, completely revised training materials, and an improved integration of the tutorials. "Qualitative Methods" will be modified in order to accommodate these changes. The new research training programme will continue to meet the ESRC guidelines. Together with this major revision of the structure of the training programme, a number of lessons around delivery and communication will be applied in the new courses in order to improve the learning experience and student satisfaction.

Those involved in teaching these classes report that English Language students have performed well, and that lectures and assignments acknowledge areas of interest commensurate with Language studies. For example, lectures in Qualitative Methods include research on the performative elements of language.

Supplementary Response from Head of Subject:

A new colleague, Dr Clara Cohen, joined English Language and Linguistics in January 2017 and has a background in teaching statistics and quantitative methods for linguistics. Additional PGT sessions on this, run by Dr Cohen, are planned for session 2017-18, and we would be very happy for these to be opened to students from across the College of Arts, where relevant.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel **recommends** that the VLE Governance Board is asked to consider the limitations of providing feedback within Moodle and, if appropriate, to identify other more effective means of facilitating the provision of feedback to students on their assessed work. [*Paragraph 4.19*]

For the attention of: ***Chair of the University VLE Governance Board***
For information*: **Head of Subject***

Response:

Online assessment and feedback is currently being considered by four groups within the University, including the Assessment and Feedback Working Group (chaired by Moira Fischbacher-Smith), the E-Assessment Working Group (chaired by John Davies), the University-wide Agility Workstream, and the VLE Development Board, which I chair. The Board has received an Enhancement Request from MVLS which has also raised concerns about the limitations of current facilities for providing feedback through Moodle. The Board has agreed that progress in this area is needed, and is in discussions with ITS and the other groups named above about how best to provide this. ITS and MVLS are also considering the Moodle ULCC Coursework plugin, in particular for its provision for multiple markers, which may provide improved functionality.

One of the reasons we are currently reliant upon Moodle in this area is due to the decision to switch from Turnitin to URKUND for originality checking. Turnitin comes with GradeMark which provides a better environment for online marking than Moodle does. However, problems with the Turnitin-Moodle interface led the University to move away from this software, although we continue to have a licence. LEADS is currently conducting a review of the originality checking power of these two packages, after problems were encountered with URKUND, and it is possible that this will result in a return to Turnitin. Although this would not be done primarily for GradeMark, it would nonetheless enable its continued use. I would be reluctant to recommend a return to Turnitin/GradeMark while its future remains uncertain, but that is an option.

The current Moodle functionality cannot be improved without substantial investment. We will be making improvement of tools for assessment and feedback a major part of the VLE strategy which is currently being prepared.

Supplementary Response from Head of Subject:

We strongly support recent moves to return to TurnItIn for both originality checking and marking. We believe this would assist greatly with the issues referred to in paragraph 4.18 (and Urkund's problems with detecting plagiarism).

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that English Language ensure that upgrading of the computers in the STELLA lab is pursued in accordance with the standard upgrading cycle, in order to ensure that this valuable learning and teaching resource is optimised. [*Paragraph 4.38*]

For the attention of: *Head of Subject*

Response:

The computers in the STELLA lab were replaced as scheduled in summer 2016. Central IT Services, not the subject area or the College, sets the upgrade schedule for all computer labs; we have fed back that we would like this upgrade cycle to be faster. Also, we are investigating moving certain highly computationally-intensive tasks from running on local machines to being server-based, and have already moved some teaching onto web services as opposed to local software.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language continue to explore the range of possible means for students to benefit from an international experience during the course of their studies at Glasgow, including options available to students for whom the traditional session-long or semester-long experiences would be impracticable. [*Paragraph 3.21*]

For the attention of: *Head of Subject*

Response:

This recommendation parallels others in the School of Critical Studies (and no doubt elsewhere), and we are in discussions about these shorter options with colleagues across the School. Possibilities we have discussed locally include virtual international experiences (this would be assisted by further availability of TEAL space, or the development of "virtual classroom" teaching space which colleagues have observed in other institutions), such as have happened in our programme in the past with students on our Honours "Culture and English Language Teaching" course engaging with counterparts in Brazil and Taiwan. Our new Honours programme (including 20+ new Honours courses) ran for the first time in 2016-17, and as this becomes established we have further opportunities to embed international opportunities. In 2017-18 we will offer a one-semester independent dissertation (alongside the more traditional full-year dissertation), which should enable fourth year students to engage with short periods of internationalisation (such as spending semester one abroad and returning to undertake their dissertation in semester two) without disrupting their independent research period. We would be open to explore opportunities which would combine one teaching semester abroad with some time in the vacation to give students a longer period away than just 11 weeks, particularly given the different teaching schedules in partner institutions abroad. In line with the recommendation, we continue to explore these possibilities, and we would welcome further initiatives from the Centre – particularly in the areas of easing the financial pressures on students which time abroad can cause.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language clarify to students the role of GTAs and, in particular, the fact that queries arising from seminars led by a GTA should be directed to the course convener rather than to the GTA. *[Paragraph 4.30]*

For the attention of: ***Head of Subject***

Response:

This point is now clearly stated in the student handbooks and the seminar material booklets, was mentioned as part of student orientation in semester 1 2016-17, and as part of our GTA briefings (at the start of semester 1) for Level 1 and Level 2 we have asked GTAs to call students' attention to this in their first seminars. The point was further emphasised to GTAs to make sure they redirect student queries where appropriate.