

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 25 May 2007

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Report of the Review of the Department of Philosophy held on 2
March 2007**

Mrs Marjory Wright, Clerk to the Review Panel

July 2007

Panel Members:

Professor Andrew Nash	Clerk of Senate [Convener]
Professor David Archard	External Subject Specialist, Lancaster University
Dr Jacqueline Atkinson	Senior Senate Assessor on Court
Professor Chris Berry	Member of Cognate Department [Department of Politics]
Dr Sarah Mann	Learning and Teaching Centre
Mrs Marjory Wright	Senate Office [Clerk]
Miss Amber Higgins	Senate Office [Observer]

A. Introduction

- A.1 The Department of Philosophy was formed in 1984 following the amalgamation of the Departments of Logic and Moral Philosophy. At the time of amalgamation, the Department was the second largest philosophy department in the UK with c. 25 staff members. The Department currently has 12.5 members of staff and this 50% reduction, together with an increased student FTE load, has necessitated a complete revision of all the Department's courses and many of its teaching and administrative practices.
- A.2 The quality of educational provision in the Department of Philosophy was reviewed by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council in December 1995 and was judged to be excellent.
- A.3 In March 2001, the Department was subject to an internal review. The Review Panel recognised the Department's considerable strengths and highlighted a number of areas of good practice, whilst also recommending improvements that could be made in some aspects of the Department's operation.
- A.4 In 2001 the Department moved from its traditional home in the West Quadrangle to its current premises at 65-69 Oakfield Avenue, which is also home to the Department of Classics.
- A.5 The Department had provided a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documentation in accordance with the University's requirements for the Review of

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment. The SER had been written by the Acting Head of Department and the Departmental Quality Assurance Officer and had been subject to discussion by all staff at Departmental Meetings. The Review Panel found the SER to be informative and helpful and welcomed the Department's frankness in identifying both its strengths and weaknesses and in highlighting matters on which it would welcome advice.

- A.6 The Review Panel met with Professor Elizabeth Moignard, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Dudley Knowles, the Acting Head of Department, Professor Richard Stalley, the Departmental Quality Assurance Officer and a former Head of Department, seven members of academic staff who had prominent roles in teaching and learning provision, and the departmental secretary. A written submission had also been received from a senior member of staff who was on study leave.
- A.7 Concurrent meetings were held with probationary staff and with Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). The Senior Senate Assessor and the External Subject Specialist met with the Department's two probationary staff who had also been present at the meeting with key staff, whilst the remaining Panel members, led by the Convener, met with four of the Department's GTAs.
- A.8 The Review Panel met with twelve undergraduate students representing Levels 1, 2 and Junior Honours. The student group included home and overseas students, mature students and a student with a disability. However, the Panel found it disappointing that no Senior Honours students were present. The Panel identified a common set of topics to discuss with undergraduate students. Thereafter the students were divided into two groups, which met concurrently. The Panel also met with six postgraduate taught students from both home and overseas.
- A.9 The Review Panel met separately with two members of staff from the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) who were responsible for the provision of two optional courses for Honours Philosophy students and for the provision of three Level 3 philosophical studies courses.
- A.10 The Review Panel also met with three students undertaking Level 3 philosophical studies courses.
- A.11 Students had been told that the Review was taking place but had not been advised of the nature or purpose of the review.
- A.12 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the Department:
- M A (Single and Joint Honours in Philosophy)
 - M A (General Humanities)
 - M Litt 1
 - M Litt 2
 - Continuing Professional Development
- A.13 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by HATII:
- Two Honours options
 - Three Level 3 courses, which contribute to the MA (General Humanities)
- A.14 The Review Panel was impressed with the quality of learning and teaching of the overall provision.

B. Overall aims of the Department's provision

- B.1 The overall aims of the Department's provision are reflected in the Department's mission statement, namely, "the Department of Philosophy aims to foster excellence in teaching and research in all areas of Philosophy". The Panel considered the mission statement to be appropriate and the aims to be met in respect of learning and teaching.

C.1 Undergraduate and Taught-Postgraduate Provision

C.1 Aims

- C.1.1 The Review Panel noted that each course offered by the Department of Philosophy had its own set of aims, which were included in the relevant Course Handbooks. The Panel was content that the undergraduate degree programme effectively realised its stated aims and learning outcomes and that these, along with the outlined curriculum, were fully congruent with the national Philosophy Subject Benchmark standards.

C.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- C.2.1 The Review Panel noted that each course offered by the Department of Philosophy had specific ILOs and that it was normal practice to include these in the relevant course handbook.
- C.2.2 Undergraduate students demonstrated an awareness of the course aims and ILOs although they did not profess to consult them very often.
- C.2.3 Postgraduate taught students were aware of the ILOs for their programme of study though none could recall the specifics. They confirmed that they were encouraged by the Department to adopt appropriate learning methods to enable them to achieve the ILOs. All agreed that the learning pathway that they had embarked upon on entering the M Litt programme had greatly enhanced their critical thinking capabilities and their analytical skills, and, in some cases, these skills had contributed positively to wider aspects of their lives. The Review Panel had a slight concern about how some of the ILOs for the M Litt 1 programme were expressed, as they were defined only in terms of examination requirements and were therefore somewhat circular. The Panel **recommends** that these ILOs be revisited, with a view to making explicit what students are expected to learn and how they might demonstrate this new learning.

C.3 Assessment

- C.3.1 The Department's courses were predominantly assessed by both essay and examination. As a result of a significant reduction in academic staff, the Department had had to adopt a strategy of single marking essays. A second marker was appointed for each essay assignment, who read a proportion of the essays and compared marks with the first marker. Mark sheets were also moderated and looked at statistically.
- C.3.2 The assessment scheme for each course was clearly set out in the relevant course handbook together with comprehensive guidelines for preparing and writing a philosophical essay. Course handbooks also contained a comprehensive section on plagiarism and students appeared to understand the boundaries of plagiarism. The Department indicated that it had concerns

about the level of detection of plagiarism, and future plans included the inclusion in handbooks for pre-Honours students of a warning that "severe plagiarism may be penalized by a refusal to give credit for the course".

- C.3.3 The Review Panel noted from the SER that the Department complied with the University Code of Assessment (CoA) and was pleased to learn that it had experienced a smooth transition to the 22-point scale of assessment and that evidence, so far, suggested that this had helped the Department to give more marks in the higher grades, as intended by Senate. It was equally pleasing to note that undergraduate students had found the introduction of the 22-point scale and the publication of the secondary bands within Schedule A of the CoA to be an improvement on previous practice. Students reported that they had found the secondary bands particularly helpful. The Panel was pleased to note that the Department provided further guidance to assist students' understanding of the assessment criteria through the inclusion of a section in Level 1 and 2 course handbooks, entitled '*What do I have to do to get a ...?': criteria for Bands*'.
- C.3.4 The Review Panel explored the Department's assessment strategy with both staff and students with a view to ascertaining whether it provided students with sufficient opportunities for the active practice of philosophy. Members of staff advised the Panel that they had experimented with a wide range of assessment methods in the past but that other methods, such as group presentations had not proved successful.
- C.3.5 Undergraduate students advised the Review Panel that they acquired very different skills from the two assessment strands. Examinations encouraged them to engage with all aspects of the course and gave them an opportunity to demonstrate breadth of knowledge, whilst planning and writing a philosophical essay enabled them to explore a topic in depth and to learn how to develop an argument.
- C.3.6 Undergraduate students perceived the absence of feedback on performance in end-of-course examinations as the main drawback to this type of assessment since it reduced the prospects of identifying their areas of weakness.
- C.3.7 The Department had recorded prominently in the SER that the amount of formative assessment had diminished significantly over the last 15 years for both pre-honours and honours, largely due to factors over which it had no control. The problem had reportedly been discussed in the 2001 review, but the Department had been unable to solve it in subsequent years. The Department had also recorded in the SER that it was now in a position where the only examinations that students took were degree examinations, and scripts were not returned to students with written comments from the marker, as had been the practice hitherto for class examinations, because of regulations, as they understood them. The Review Panel noted that it was therefore possible that some students might not receive any formative assessment of their examination performances in the course of their University career and **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>).
- C.3.8 Junior Honours students raised the issue of essay submission dates with the Review Panel. They did not understand why they had to submit all their summative essays on the same date and would have preferred submission dates to be staggered. The Review Panel discussed the matter with academic staff who explained that the deadline was set to enable essays to be returned to students in good time. The Review Panel suggested that the Department

might wish to consider whether some of the essays might be submitted a week later.

- C.3.9 The Review Panel was impressed with the innovative assessment methods utilised in the Level 3 courses offered by HATII. Students spoke enthusiastically about the skills that they were acquiring in the course of their learning. These included web design, preparing and delivering a presentation, understanding the theories behind rhetoric and opportunities for peer assessment.

C.4 Curriculum Design and Content

- C.4.1 The Department had recently undertaken a thorough review of the structure of its undergraduate teaching and, as a result of this, had moved from six Level 1 courses to two.
- C.4.2 The Review Panel was confident that the Department's structures ensured that teaching was informed by current research in philosophy, and that this could be sustained, even with changes in academic staff.
- C.4.3 The SER explained how academic and intellectual progression was achieved through the design of a "ground-floor"¹ curriculum, which serves as a propaedeutic² to further study. At Level 2 and above the knowledge and skills base is widened and deeper problems are introduced and pursued. Progression is carefully structured in logic and reasoning with courses of increasing sophistication from Level 1 through to Honours. The Honours course is specifically designed to ensure progression through the two Honours years.
- C.4.4 There are two broad-based philosophy courses at Level 1 and two at Level 2. Level 1 courses consist of four lectures per week and a fortnightly tutorial, whilst Level 2 courses consist of four lectures per week and a weekly tutorial. The Level 1 courses attract large numbers of students. In order to meet demand, the class is split into two groups and each lecture is delivered on two occasions. Following a review of its provision, the Department had come to the conclusion that it would be risky to reduce the Level 1 intake to remove the necessity for double teaching as there was no way of predicting the impact of such a course of action on throughput to Honours. [With hindsight, the Panel considers that the requirement for departments to engage in repeat teaching is undesirable, both from the consistency of delivery aspect and staff overload, and therefore the possible acquisition of a 600-700 seat auditorium should be pursued as quickly as possible.]
- C.4.5 The Honours programme is available as both single and joint Honours. The structure of the programme is clearly set out on the Department's website. Single Honours students are required to take six 20-credit courses per year whilst joint Honours students must take three courses. Each course is assessed by an essay (30%) and final examination (70%). The dissertation is undertaken in the Senior Honours year and is also worth 20 credits. For students who entered Senior Honours in 2006-07, the dissertation is optional but, from 2007-08, it will be compulsory for single Honours students and for joint Honours students not undertaking a dissertation in their other subject.

¹ The term "ground-floor" refers to the common core curriculum followed by Level 1 Philosophy students.

² *Encarta* defines "propaedeutic" as "a preliminary course of study that introduces more advanced instruction".

Fortnightly tutorials in groups of no larger than four are held for Junior Honours courses, whilst Senior Honours courses have larger group seminars.

- C.4.6 The Review Panel queried whether, given the Department's staff profile, it might be more efficacious to offer six basic Junior Honours courses which all students would follow rather than nine optional courses and to limit the opportunity for specialisation to the Senior Honours year. The Acting Head of Department acknowledged that the Department might be forced to go down this route if the staffing situation worsened.
- C.4.7 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. In addition, this approach would ease workload issues by reducing the number of courses that students were required to undertake.
- C.4.8 Honours students have the option of spending their third year of study abroad, typically in North America or Australia, but there have also been exchanges with two European Universities. Students advised the Review Panel that study abroad was an attractive option but that it was essential to apply early to be sure of a place. The Review Panel **commends** the Department on its strategy of assigning specific responsibility to a member of staff for liaising with students who are planning, and who subsequently undertake, study abroad to ensure that appropriate curricula are followed and that assessments are appropriate.
- C.4.9 Single Honours students may select courses totalling up to 60 credits from another subject area, with the approval of both departments involved. The two Senior Honours Philosophy options (Kant and Consciousness), offered by HATII, fall within this category. There was some confusion about the ownership of these courses but, in discussion with Philosophy staff, it became clear that the Department's understanding was that the responsibility lay with HATII since the associated resources were assigned there. This accounted for the absence of specific information about these options on the Department's website, which had been a matter of concern for the Course Leader who currently had to draw Honours students' attention to her options via e-mail. The Acting Head of Department advised the Review Panel that he was happy to redress any concerns by providing the details of these courses on the Department of Philosophy website. The Review Panel learned from the Course Leader that it had been agreed by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts that the Kant and Consciousness options would be recognised as courses offered within the Honours Philosophy curriculum for a period of two years until September 2007. 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.
- C.4.10 During a recent revision of the General Humanities designated degree, the Faculty of Arts introduced a small number of Level 3 courses specifically designed to meet the needs of students not progressing to Honours and to enhance their employability. The Level 3 Philosophical Studies courses offered by two members of staff in HATII fall within this category and provide students with excellent opportunities for acquiring transferable skills.

The Department of Philosophy had no involvement in the provision of these courses.

- C.4.11 The Department currently offers two M Litt taught programmes. The M Litt 1 is a one-year conversion degree programme designed to enable students who do not have a background in academic philosophy to switch to the subject. Students are required to undertake 6 taught courses and a supervised Dissertation. Where appropriate, M.Litt 1 students are encouraged to select four of their taught courses from the wide range of existing Honours options. In common with Honours students, M Litt 1 students are required to submit an essay, but there is an extended deadline to take account of additional Masters level requirements, and each student receives one-to-one tutorials with a Lecturer and has an opportunity to discuss drafts of the essay. M Litt 1 students are not required to undertake the examination component of Honours level courses. Students informed the Review Panel that they found the breadth of the curriculum attractive and were impressed by the diversity of subject matter available to them and the ease with which they could pursue topics of particular interest to them. Students spoke enthusiastically about the Department and were appreciative of the one-to-one tutorial support that they received from staff.
- C.4.12 The M Litt 2 is designed to prepare students who already have a degree in Philosophy for doctoral research. The number of students undertaking this programme has traditionally been small and, in view of the University's drive to improve recruitment to postgraduate taught programmes, and also in anticipation of the rewards that increased fee income might bring in terms of staffing, the Department had recently taken steps to enhance postgraduate recruitment by introducing a new Masters structure from September 2007. The new structure centres on four core courses which can be "mixed and matched" to create seven discrete degrees and would operate alongside the current M Litt 2 programme so that students would continue to have an opportunity to pursue an interest outside the seven main pathways. There appeared to be a lack of clarity amongst staff about the new postgraduate provision and the Review Panel questioned the wisdom of this strategy given that, if successful, it could result in increasing staff teaching loads and administration whilst not necessarily generating sufficient income to guarantee the additional staff appointments that the Department hoped for. The Panel judged that an increase in numbers would effectively prohibit the current mode of individualised instruction and took the view that similar enhancements could be achieved by introducing a generic Masters programme with compulsory core courses and a range of options from which candidates could select the courses associated with the specialist pathway of their choice, and graduate with an M Litt degree ascribed to that pathway. 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.
- C.4.13 The SER drew attention to the Department's commitment to extending access to the University. In recent years the Department had offered courses at Levels 1 and 2 to evening students who watched a video recording of the lectures in the company of a member of staff or GTA who also took tutorials at weekends. Unfortunately these have had to be withdrawn as a result of the cessation of the funding from the University Wider Access Programme. The final Level 2 class was being run in the 2006-07 session. The Review Panel

suggests that there might be merit in having discussions with the Department of Adult and Continuing Education to explore a joint approach to delivering these evening courses.

- C.4.14 The Department has had close involvement with the development of courses at the Crichton Campus and is happy to accept students who wish to transfer from Crichton Campus.
- C.4.15 The Department has also been actively involved in developing the teaching of Philosophy in schools and two members of the Department have been in the forefront of developing a new CPD course for teachers of Philosophy which will contribute to chartered teacher status.

C.5 Student Recruitment, Support and Progression

- C.5.1 The Review Panel noted from the SER that the Department did not have a strategy for the recruitment of undergraduates since students are admitted to the Faculty in the first instance. That said, the Department collaborated enthusiastically in such activities as Open Days and Applicants' Visits and continued to be very successful in attracting students to its Level 1 courses.
- C.5.2 The Department's M Litt programmes attracted high calibre candidates from diverse academic backgrounds but numbers were smaller than the Department would wish. As well as offering a stand-alone qualification, both programmes provided a gateway to PhD study. The Department was now encouraging its graduates to pursue PhD study at the University of Glasgow although, hitherto, it had encouraged them to go elsewhere, believing that they would be better served and progress more swiftly by meeting new people and taking on new challenges in a different environment.
- C.5.3 There was evidence that the Department encouraged postgraduate taught students to pursue their chosen fields of interest and provided them with one-to-one supervision akin to that enjoyed by research students. The students clearly valued this approach and spoke very highly of their experience of being a student of the University of Glasgow. However, the Review Panel recognised that this pattern of supervision might not be sustainable within the new M Litt programme (see C.4.12).
- C.5.4 The Department was keen to improve taught postgraduate recruitment and believed that the availability of dedicated Philosophy scholarships would make studying in the Department more attractive. 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.
- C.5.5 The Review Panel was attracted by the concept of the M.Litt 1. They viewed it as a distinctive degree, which had economy built into it and offered a unique experience to students without requiring additional teaching. However, the Panel strongly encourages the Department to consider rebadging it with a more attractive title for international marketing purposes. The 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.

- C.5.6 Undergraduate students were aware of the entry requirements for Honours Philosophy but were generally unaware of the availability of Level 3 Philosophical Studies courses despite the information provided on the Philosophy website. Students also advised the Review Panel that they were conscious that research in certain aspects of Philosophy demanded familiarity with an associated foreign language but that no details were available to them. They indicated that it would be helpful if the relevant information were flagged up to them at an early stage in their University career to ensure that they were not precluded for progressing to PhD study as a result of the lack of an appropriate language qualification. The Review Panel would regard it as beneficial if students' awareness of further opportunities for philosophical study could be enhanced by drawing attention to them and any associated prerequisites by means of a section in course handbooks.
- C.5.7 Students reported that the Department's support for students with disabilities was excellent and that staff were very helpful. Although the Department had appropriate disabled access, students with a disability did have some problems with access to certain buildings in the University, especially older buildings, but they became used to this.
- C.5.8 Students raised concerns about the lack of use of invigilators for those who required scribes in examinations, which they felt could potentially put them in a difficult situation. The Review Panel was well aware of the potential difficulty for both student and scribe in the absence of a third party and **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)).

C.6 *The Effectiveness of Provision*

- C.6.1 The Review Panel found the programmes reviewed to be effective in the delivery of learning and teaching. This view was borne out by the results of the 2006 National Student Survey where Philosophy at Glasgow (together with Theology and Religious Studies) achieved an overall score of 4.1, having scored particularly well on teaching, academic support and learning resources.
- C.6.2 The Department offered a judicious balance of themed and historical courses allowing students to appreciate the distinctive topics of the subject and at the same time to familiarise themselves with the work of major figures in the history of the subject. The Review Panel noted that a course on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason was delivered outwith the Department.
- C.6.3 The Department raised concerns about the forthcoming retirement of Professor Stalley, whose expertise lies in the works of the Greek philosophers. Reassurance was sought that this aspect of Philosophy, which had been offered by the University of Glasgow for c. 500 years, would not be lost from the Department's portfolio. The Review Panel agreed to draw this concern to the attention of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and 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.
- C.6.4 Course documentation was of a high standard and its provision to students on-line was viewed as **good practice**. Most students found the on-line

handbooks more useful than paper versions as they were easier to search than a paper document.

- C.6.5 Students at all levels were unanimous in their enthusiasm about the Department's provision and the Review Panel heard from the various student groups that they met with, that the Department was highly regarded. Two of the undergraduate students advised the Panel that they had originally intended to pursue science subjects but that they had found the Level 1 Philosophy courses such a good introduction to the discipline that they had decided to switch to Philosophy.
- C.6.6 The Review Panel found evidence of a strong sense of community amongst postgraduate taught students and **commends** the Department on the quality of the learning environment that it has provided for postgraduate students. The students' praise for both M Litt programmes and for the staff of the Department was unequivocal and they drew favourable comparisons with international institutions, citing the demands of the Glasgow programmes and the level of debate to be higher than in the USA. There was particular praise for the Honours courses on the Philosophy of Language and the Philosophy of Mind and the prominent part that they played in the development of philosophical and communication skills amongst students undertaking the M Litt 1 conversion course.
- C.6.7 The Review Panel found the Department of Philosophy to be a cohesive unit with able, enthusiastic and committed staff who were mutually supportive of each other and were keen to move the Department forward. Despite the concerns that had been raised in the SER and the high workloads carried by all staff, morale in the Department was good, although it was described as fragile. The Department had been honest in the acknowledgement of the negative aspects of its provision, such as less staff attention to students than both would like, loss of breadth and flexibility of choice, decreased frequency of tutorials in Level 1 and their concern that feedback, especially formative, had been compromised as a result of the diminishing staff complement. However, the Department had welcomed the review of its provision as an opportunity to take stock and to reflect on positive ways of bringing about improvement. In relation to the reduction in formative feedback, the Review Panel suggests that the Department might wish to consider building appropriate tasks into tutorials to assist students with the development of philosophical skills.
- C.6.8 Since 2002, the Department had operated without the benefit of a formal management structure but had managed most aspects of its business reasonably successfully by means of fully inclusive staff meetings. However, as indicated in the SER, the Department was fully aware that there was a need to undertake a careful review of its organisational and communications structures in order to stabilise and improve the quality of teaching provision and to enhance the educational experience of its students. The Review Panel believed that since the Department now had a relatively stable staff complement, the institution of a formal departmental management structure would strengthen the department's provision and provide the infrastructure to facilitate teaching developments and foster the assurance and enhancement of quality, eliminating the likelihood of management oversights (see para E3 below). 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.

- C.6.9 The Department's concern about the decrease in the frequency of tutorials at Level 1 was echoed by GTAs who raised concerns about the impact that this could potentially have for the development of philosophy skills. The Review Panel was impressed with the commitment of the Department's GTAs and noted that they were willing to provide additional tutorials but that the Department was constrained by the budget available for this purpose. 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.
- C.6.10 The Department organised reading parties for its Honours students. Although these were very successful at Junior Honours level in helping students to bond, both as a group and with the Department, the Review Panel had noted that attendance at these had proved problematic for joint Honours students as they took place during the week when they might have classes in their other subject. Staff had considered how this difficulty might be overcome but had realised that there was no easy solution since a weekend reading party would be equally problematic for the increasing number of students who had to undertake paid employment, and for staff with family commitments.
- C.6.11 The Level 3 Philosophical Studies SER had flagged up the absence of administrative support for the courses provided by staff located in HATII. The Review Panel explored this with the two members of staff who delivered the courses and learned that the Course Leader personally undertook all the administration associated with these courses. Pressure of work sometimes led to forgetfulness and there had been occasions when student feedback questionnaires had not been issued at the appropriate time and feedback had had to be elicited by means of e-mail, with the resultant loss of anonymity in the responses received. The Review Panel had concerns about the Course Leader's administrative overload and about the reliance placed on a single member of hourly-paid staff to support the delivery of the courses. The Panel was aware of the reasons for these courses being offered outwith the Department of Philosophy but questioned whether HATII was the ideal location for philosophical studies courses and whether there was an adequate strategy in place to ensure that course provision would not be compromised if the Course Leader were to be absent for any length of time. The Panel has commented further on this in the *Conclusions* to this report.
- C.6.12 In discussion with GTAs the Review Panel learned that GTAs did not receive any training from the Department although a commendably comprehensive GTA Handbook was provided. 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. GTAs also advised the Panel that they received the feedback from student questionnaires and found this helpful, together with the formative feedback on marking that they received from staff. They would, however, welcome more feedback from staff to help them improve. The Acting Head of Department expressed a willingness to facilitate this.
- C.6.13 In the course of discussion with Probationary Staff and with the Acting Head of Department, the Review Panel learned that both members of probationary staff had a wealth of teaching experience as a result of which both had been exempt from undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. However, there was a lack of clarity about when the probationary periods

were due to end. Both members of staff had the respect of their peers and currently carried a full academic workload with responsibilities beyond the norm for probationary staff. The Panel was impressed with the leadership and maturity demonstrated by both members of staff and could see no valid reason for prolonging either of these probationary contracts. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the Department seek clarification from Human Resources and the Dean 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.

D The Maintenance and Enhancement of Standards of Awards

- D.1 The Review Panel found clear evidence of a commitment to provide and maintain standards of excellence in teaching and was confident that the Department was operating effective measures to maintain and enhance the standards of its awards. The SER indicated that the procedures used to ensure that standards were maintained and, where necessary, enhanced included the quality control of assessment procedures, including second marking of Honours examinations, monitoring and moderating of all coursework, studying, reporting and discussing External Examiners' comments, and comparing grade profiles across the Department and the Faculty in the present and over a number of years - all of these in full awareness of the Benchmark Statements.
- D.2 The Department had been aware for a number of years that its grades, especially at A and A/B had been well below the Faculty average for Levels 1 and 2. With the External Examiner's approval, the Department had recently conducted a normalisation exercise for its Level 1 and 2 courses and had shared the findings with the Review Panel. The effect of lowering grade boundaries for a Level 1 course by half a point at the A/B, B/C and C/D borders had been determined. This had brought the results quite closely in line with Faculty averages, and, with the approval of the External Examiner, the normalised results had been implemented. Further consideration was required as to whether normalisation might be adopted at Level 2 because of possible implications for Honours entry.
- D.3 The Review Panel had confidence in the standard of the Level 3 courses offered by HATII and had noted that the Course Leader had received a University of Glasgow Teaching Excellence Award in Session 2005-06.

E. The Maintenance and Assurance of Quality

- E.1 The Review Panel was pleased to note the External Examiners' reports, which were highly satisfactory for both the Department's programmes and the courses offered by HATII. Any issues that had arisen had been dealt with appropriately and due account had been taken of the advice provided by the External Examiners. The Panel noted the concerns expressed by one External Examiner in relation to the Department's very high student-staff ratio (>30:1) and its resultant strain upon members of the Department.
- E.2 The Review Panel had concerns about the effectiveness of the Department's approach to Staff-Student meetings. The Panel heard from students that, at the end of the last course lecture, there was a Staff-Student Meeting that all students were eligible to attend. The minute of the meeting was circulated to the class representatives for comment but students were not aware of it being distributed more widely thereafter, and they were not aware of any mechanism being in place to advise them of how the

issues that they had raised had been resolved. 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.

- E.3 There had been recent hiatuses in the production of Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) at some levels of the Department's provision. The Review Panel believed that this was symptomatic of the Department's current management structure which lacked a middle level to enable prompt compliance with such procedures, and took the view that the reintroduction of an appropriate committee system would resolve this difficulty (see paragraph C.6.8 above).

F. Enhancing the Student Learning Experience

- F.1 The Level 1 and 2 students in both groups of Undergraduates who met with the Review Panel expressed a desire for the opportunity to submit a formative assignment to help them develop their skills in philosophical writing. One group felt that the 40% weighting attached to the essay, without an opportunity for prior formative feedback, put an additional burden on students to perform well in the examination if they had not adequately grasped the principles of philosophical writing and scored badly in the essay as a result of this. The second group suggested that the opportunity for practice in forming a good argument by, for example, "e-mailing a paragraph or two to a GTA for informal feedback", would be invaluable. Junior Honours students assured the Panel that they had adequate opportunities for enhancing their philosophical writing skills but understood that the Department did not have sufficient staff resources to extend formative marking to the larger first and second year classes. The Review Panel urges the Department to consider how they might increase the amount of formative feedback provided to Level 1 and 2 students without overburdening academic staff.
- F.2 Students undertaking Level 1 and 2 courses advised the Review Panel that the effectiveness of tutorials varied depending on the individual tutor and that some tutorials were spent going over lecture content rather than engaging in philosophical discussion. Staff explained that students were expected to prepare for tutorials and that they were given the opportunity to submit a written paper for comment but that, so far, only one student had done so this year. Staff also explained that they were piloting a scheme of voluntary tutorials in the 1M course in semester 2 of Session 2006-07 and that it would be extended to other courses if there was sufficient interest from students and the pilot was successful. Junior Honours students were satisfied with all aspects of tutorials.
- F.3 The Department of Philosophy had introduced Moodle, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), relatively recently and it was used by a number of courses in a variety of ways, some more successful than others. Students advised the Review Panel that they found it very useful and Junior Honours students said that they used Moodle as a discussion tool and that it helped them to go to classes with ideas well formed. Moodle appeared to be used less effectively at Levels 1 and 2 and students suggested that it might be used to supplement tutorials.
- F.4 The Department had recently transferred the Philosophy Forum to Moodle. Students used the Forum for a variety of purposes and there was evidence that staff responded swiftly to issues addressed to them via the Forum. The Review Panel believed that the Philosophy Forum had the potential to become an effective focus for philosophical discussion between students and staff if properly utilised, and

encourages staff to consider ways of promoting the Forum as a means of assisting students with the development of philosophical arguments through peer and staff interaction and providing them with the learning experience that they might otherwise get from formative feedback.

- F.5 There was evidence that Moodle was used effectively in the Level 3 Philosophical Studies courses.
- F.6 The Review Panel explored with the staff whether they had considered the introduction of peer assisted learning (PAL). Staff explained that the Department had previously made use of PAL but that the requirement for individuals who had contact with students under the age of 18 to undergo Disclosure had made this increasingly difficult and the practice had now largely ceased. The Panel advised that concentrating students under the age of 18 in one or two groups would allow the PAL scheme to continue with fewer individuals required to undergo Disclosure. The Department is encouraged to consider this suggestion.
- F.7 Level 3 students praised the innovative uses of technology within their courses to support active learning and promote transferable skills. The Level 3 courses were more interdisciplinary in nature and students described them as being “Philosophy in the real world” and spoke enthusiastically of an assignment which required them to write website contents and links, the outcome of which had been something akin to a revision course and resource for fellow students to use.
- F.8 The Review Panel was disappointed to discover that none of the Student Representatives in the Department of Philosophy had undertaken the Student Representative Training provided by the Students’ Representative Council and urges the Department to promote the benefits of this training to its students with a view to enhancing the lines of communication between students and staff.
- F.9 None of the students who met with the Panel was familiar with the term “Personal Development Planning” (PDP) and none was aware of the Employability agenda. Though there was clear evidence that some students recognised they were developing a range of transferable skills, they had little awareness of the value of these in terms of future employability. 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.
- F.10 The M Litt students spoke enthusiastically about their interaction with staff. It appeared that their small numbers obviated the need for regular formal staff : student structures. However, the ongoing review of postgraduate taught provision (see C.4.12) should also examine whether increased numbers will require more formal administrative arrangements.

G. Summary of Key Strengths and Areas to be Improved or Enhanced in relation to Learning and Teaching and Conclusions and Recommendations

Key strengths

- The Department’s strategy of assigning specific responsibility to a member of staff for liaising with students who are planning, and who subsequently undertake, study abroad to ensure that appropriate curricula are followed and that assessments are appropriate (**commended**)

- The quality of the learning environment that the Department has provided for postgraduate students (**commended**)
- The quality of the overall provision of learning and teaching
- Clear evidence of a commitment to provide and maintain standards of excellence in teaching
- Able, enthusiastic and committed staff, who are mutually supportive of each other and keen to move the Department forward
- The commitment of the Department's GTAs
- The commendably comprehensive GTA Handbook
- The judicious balance of themed and historical modules allowing students to appreciate the distinctive topics of the subject and at the same time to familiarise themselves with the work of major figures in the history of the subject
- The provision of on-line course handbooks which was appreciated by the students
- The provision of additional guidance to assist students' understanding of the assessment criteria through the inclusion of a section in Level 1 and 2 course handbooks, entitled '*What do I have to do to get a ... ?': criteria for Bands*
- The provision of reading parties for Honours students
- Student satisfaction with Philosophy as evidenced by the strong results in the 2006 National Student Survey
- The distinctive M Litt 1 degree which offered a unique experience to students without requiring additional teaching
- The strong sense of community amongst postgraduate taught students
- Innovative uses of technology in Level 3 courses in support of active learning
- The innovative assessment methods utilised in the Level 3 courses offered by HATII
- The attainment of a Teaching Excellence Award by a member of the Level 3 course team

Areas to be improved or enhanced

- The student : staff ratio is a matter of concern
- Management structures within the Department
- Communication, administration and academic links between the Department and the small team based in HATII
- Student awareness of progression routes in Philosophy and Philosophical Studies within the University of Glasgow
- Student awareness of the concepts of PDP and the Employability agenda
- The level of support afforded to the Department by the Faculty of Arts
- Aspects of the premises occupied by the Department
- Greater encouragement to students to undertake PhDs in Glasgow

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.

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

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

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: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recommendation 15:

The Review Panel found the number of credits (20 credits) allocated 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

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

Prepared by: Janet Fleming, Senate Office

Last modified on: Thursday 12 July 2007