

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**Academic Standards Committee - Friday 29 May 2009**

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:  
Report of the Review of Theology and Religious Studies held on 5  
March 2008**

**Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel**

***Conclusions and recommendations***

The Review Panel concluded that the Department's provision was of a high quality and it was impressed by the evident enthusiasm and commitment of staff and students. The Panel commends the Department's awareness of its areas of weakness and the fact that work was underway to resolve outstanding issues. However, the Panel wishes to emphasise the importance of seeing this work through to completion, particularly in areas highlighted in previous reviews, such as the support and administration of Graduate Teaching Assistants and the redrafting of Intended Learning Outcomes.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. It is important to note that the majority of these recommendations refer to tasks or issues identified by the Department for action either prior to the Review or in the SER.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are ranked in order of priority.

**Response from Department:**

The Department welcomes the DPTLA Report and considers it to be a helpful document containing many perceptive observations and useful recommendations. The Report has been considered by the full Department Meeting on two separate occasions and specific recommendations have formed the agenda for successive meetings of the Teaching Committee. Students have been engaged in reflections on the report via their representatives on these bodies. Furthermore, various aspects of the Report have been taken up by the three student bodies in the Department and these have made a number of supportive suggestions as to how specific recommendations might be implemented

Since the Review the Department has been engaged in a comprehensive re-evaluation of priorities in teaching. This debate has taken place partly in response to the Review but also reflects a growing awareness that the context in which we are now operating is very different from that in which the current curriculum was planned.

- It has been recognised that whilst the Department has rightly sought to maintain the full breadth of its provision in Theology and Religious Studies it has been attempting to deliver too many separate courses particularly at introductory levels. This has caused problems for staff in terms of workloads and research. It has also placed unsustainable demands upon other limited resources.
- We have become increasingly aware that there are now many students in other Departments and Faculties<sup>1</sup> who wish to explore options in TRS but have been unable to do so because of the regulations that govern our current degree structures.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important to recognise that there is a renewed interest in the study of religions in the current political/cultural context.

- The Church of Scotland and other faith communities are actively seeking new forms of training designed to prepare people more specifically for pastoral and professional practice. The traditional forms of the BD and BD Min do not adequately meet their articulated needs.

In response to these issues a comprehensive examination of our teaching provision is now underway and significant decisions will be made in forthcoming Department Meetings. We are considering full participation in the Arts degree (MA) - with the option of joint and single honours in TRS and retaining the BD/BD Min<sup>2</sup> degrees specifically to meet the needs of those preparing to work in faith based organisations and voluntary bodies.

As well as being a year in which a great deal of reflection has taken place upon departmental priorities is also important to note that in the period since the Review there have been considerable changes in the Department. We have a new HoD, two key staff members have accepted positions in other universities and two senior colleagues will retire this summer. Despite the fact that this has been a period of great flux there is a very positive and optimistic spirit within the Department. We look forward to appointing a replacement Professor in Religious Studies and a replacement lecturer in New Testament before the end of the academic year. Whilst some anxieties remain in relation to our provision in key areas (particularly Church History and World Religions) we are grateful for the support and encouragement of the Faculty in enabling us to move forward on many strategic goals in this transitional period.

As the responses to the review indicate much has been achieved in relation to teaching within the past twelve months and initiatives are underway which are intended to lay secure foundations for future developments.

*Recommendation 1:*

The Panel recommends that the Department produce a comprehensive strategic plan that prioritises its different activities and aspirations, and that this be supported by a business plan and workload model. [paragraph 2.8]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The strategic plan is attached as an appendix to this document together with details of funding arrangements to support our new initiatives.

*Recommendation 2:*

The Panel recommends that the Department continue its work in developing a robust and comprehensive workload model, in order to promote transparency and equity, and to further encourage staff to see their part in the overall aims and objectives of the Department. [paragraph 2.9]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

---

<sup>2</sup> It is expedient to retain the BD and the BD Min because current arrangements with the Scottish government mean that the BD Min is the subject of special financial support that is only available to recognised candidates in training for the ministry of the Church of Scotland. The BD is a similar degree in structure but is open candidates of all religious affiliations and none.

**Response:**

The Department recognises the need for an agreed an effective workload model. It is participating in the piloting of the new Arts Faculty model but it is rather too early in this process to give detailed comments upon the efficacy of this scheme.

*Recommendation 3:*

The Panel recommends that the Department's work on rationalising courses at honours and postgraduate level be completed. *[paragraph 4.4.1 and 4.4.2]*

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

Reflections upon provision at Honours and Postgraduate level must be placed in the context of developments currently underway in the Department (see Introduction). Our entire undergraduate provision is likely be subject to radical revision during the next twelve months and Honours courses will be included in this process. It is intended that taught postgraduate courses will be examined in the academic year 2110/11.

*Recommendation 4:*

The Panel recommends that the Department revise its practice in relation to the provision of feedback, with agreed timescales being communicated to all involved in the process, with active monitoring to ensure that punctual feedback is adhered to, so that students can be confident in their expectation of timely and constructive feedback, which forms an integral part of the learning process on the course. *[paragraph 4.3.7]*

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department recognises that providing timely and appropriate feedback to students is an area which the Review correctly identified as requiring attention. Our practice has been better during this academic year and late return of essays has not been the source of anxiety it was experienced to be in the past. The office is now taking a much more proactive role in reminding lecturers of return deadlines and informing students re: the progress of marking. This initiative has made a significant impact but it is still the case that we have not yet achieved the targeted goal of returning all work to students within a month. We recognise that a number of staff remain under undue pressure and struggle to return work within the designated period. Reducing the turn around time for marking will remain a priority in the coming academic year.

*Recommendation 5:*

The Panel recommends that the Department, with assistance from the Learning and Teaching Centre, revise its Intended Learning Outcomes to bring them into line with University requirements and ensure that they are readily available to students. *[paragraph 4.2]*

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

As the curriculum is revised effective ILO's will be put in place for all courses. We have sought the support and participation of the Learning and Teaching Centre in beginning this process.

*Recommendation 6:*

The Panel recommends the implementation of transparent appointment procedures for Graduate Teaching Assistants, a formal system of support, and robust administration that ensures all students comply with the necessity to complete statutory training. [paragraph 4.8.2]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

With considerable help from the Postgraduate Student's Council a new system from the appointment and training of Graduate Teaching Assistants has been put in place. The new procedures were implemented last academic year and appear to working well.

*Recommendation 7:*

The Panel recommends that the Department, in consultation with the faculty contact in the Learning and Teaching Centre, take forward its planned work on PDP, employability and transferable skills across the curriculum. [paragraph 4.6.1]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

A small group, including an advisor from the Learning and Teaching Centre, has met to discuss PDP and ways in which this can be enhanced within the current structures. PDP will be an integral part of our planned curriculum revision.

*Recommendation 8:*

The Panel recommends that the Department continue its work in broadening the range of assessment methods, aligning this with the articulation of transferable skills. [paragraph 4.3.3]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department has a wide range of assessment methods in place but this area will be one we seek to further enhance as we revise the curriculum. We understand that we must also make more clearly evident the correspondence between assessment methods and transferable skills in the redesign of our courses.

*Recommendation 9:*

The Panel recommends that the Department adopt a more rigorous practice in relation to annual monitoring at course and programme level, involving the Quality Assurance Officer, and that the Learning and Teaching Centre be asked to advise on improving the instruments being used to obtain student feedback. [paragraph 6.2.1]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department has agreed to move away from its former practice of focusing entirely on individual courses in the monitoring process to a system in which the programmes themselves are reviewed at various levels. It is expected that this will be a more efficient process and will reveal the larger issues with greater clarity. Individual courses will continue to be monitored by both the course questionnaire and the staff/student meeting. The availability of Moodle for all undergraduate courses will improve

our monitoring procedures by offering students the opportunity to comment upon their courses on-line.

*Recommendation 10:*

The Panel recommends that the Department's Quality Assurance Officer be a member of staff whose workload can accommodate the amount of work necessary to carry out the role effectively. [paragraph 6.2.2]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

During this academic year the Department has engaged in a comprehensive administrative review. Particularly this has entailed devolving new areas of work to our administrative staff who are now taking a much more proactive role in departmental structures. Quality Assurance is one of the areas in which we our administrators are now playing an enhanced role. The Head of Department is also taking specific responsibilities for Quality Assurance at the current time - although this is likely to be devolved once the new appointments are in place.

*Recommendation 11:*

The Panel recommends that the Postgraduate Taught Convener in liaison with the Teaching Committee oversee more closely the management and operation of all aspects of taught postgraduate provision. [paragraph 4.8.4]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department recognises that there is the need for more proactive management of our postgraduate provision. A new Postgraduate Convenor has been appointed and the Teaching Committee is much more mindful of its responsibilities in relation to taught postgraduate provision.

*Recommendation 12*

The Panel recommends that the Department develop its use of Moodle, seeking input and support from students, the Learning and Teaching Centre and the Faculty. [paragraph 4.7]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department piloted Moodle on a number of courses this year. We have agreed to introduce it for all undergraduate courses from the beginning of the academic year 2009/10.

*Recommendation 13:*

The Panel recommends that the Department monitor the level of cancelled classes and improve its practice for communicating changes to timetabled classes. [paragraph 6.7]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department is monitoring cancelled classes. Whilst cancellations are very unusual we recognise they are extremely disruptive for students and we have put in place protocols to make sure that students are informed as soon as possible if a cancellation is unavoidable.

*Recommendation 14:*

The Panel recommends that the Department and the Dean pursue opportunities for inter-departmental and inter-faculty collaboration. The Panel suggests convening a committee at faculty level to develop such areas. [paragraph 4.4.8–4.4.10]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department and Dean***

***Response: Department***

See the response of the Dean to this point. Conversations have taken place between the HoD and senior members of cognate departments on a number of issues. These have not yet resulted in initiatives that will support teaching but we are open to, and will actively pursue, such developments in the future. We are particularly keen to foster closer academic ties with the Department of Religious Education

***Response: Dean***

We have discussed a number of strategies for promoting collaborations at cross-Faculty and inter-Departmental level; to date these have been conducted on an informal and opportunistic basis, but have not been lost sight of, not least those which involve the Education Faculty, and our Graduate School

*Recommendation 15:*

The Panel recommends that a Postgraduate staff–student liaison committee be introduced, and that its remit be developed in conjunction with a review of the operation of the undergraduate staff–student committee. [paragraph 6.3]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

***Response:***

The Department recognises that such a body would be a useful forum for sharing ideas and discussions are underway as to its precise remit and constitution.

*Recommendation 16:*

The Panel recommends that the Department (through its Recruitment and Publicity Committee) and the Dean take forward the work on student recruitment to develop a sustainable strategy on recruitment. [paragraph 4.5]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department and Dean***

***Response: Department***

See the response of the Dean. The Department has not been proactive in this area for a number of years. A new publicity and recruitment body was formed in January and is meeting monthly and has already begun work on a number of targeted initiatives to raise our profile amongst potential students and encourage those who have received offers from us to take up their courses. The new Research and Development Co-ordinator has a major responsibility for work in this area.

***Response: Dean***

The Department and the Faculty have continued discussion and action on sustainable recruitment strategies, particularly at postgraduate level, in line with Faculty action and policy.

*Recommendation 17:*

The Panel commends the move towards team-taught courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and recommends that in forward planning and recruitment the Department seek to ensure that each staff member has at least one colleague whose areas of expertise overlap with her/his own to offer support in teaching and assessment. [paragraph 4.4.1 and 4.4.2]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department is in favour of team teaching whenever possible. We do not yet have 2 staff members in all key areas and in Church History we face a serious staffing problem at the current time.

*Recommendation 18:*

The Panel recommends that the Department explore CPD courses for clergy, chaplains and teachers as a niche area with potential for further exploitation. [paragraph 4.4.3]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

The Department has agreed to fund (via endowments and support of Trinity College) a two year part time post which will investigate the provision of CPD at all levels. Furthermore, we intend to introduce a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology in 2010/11.

*Recommendation 19:*

The Panel recommends that the Department consider further how taught provision might cater more for the specific requirements of various other Churches and religious communities. [paragraph 4.4.7]

*For the attention of: **Head of Department***

**Response:**

We are engaging in conversations concerning our revised curriculum and CPD with a number of partner bodies. The Church of Scotland is supportive of moves towards a greater inclusiveness and ecumenical involvement as it believes this will enhance the educational experience of ministerial candidates. We should also like to stress that through our Centre for Inter-faith Studies and links with the Scottish Inter-faith Council we are developing good relationships with representatives of a number of other religious traditions in Scotland.

## **Departmental Strategic Plan Academic years 2008/9 and 2009/10**

### **Key Objectives**

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies has identified **5 key objectives** to be achieved in this two-year period. These are:

1. The creation of a new departmental structure to support our drive towards excellence in teaching and research.
2. Improved income generation via research funding applications and increased postgraduate recruitment.
3. The revision of the curriculum in order to reflect our position:
  - As a Department fully engaged in the teaching programmes of the Faculty of Arts
  - As a provider of Ministerial Training and Continuing Professional Development for the Scottish Churches.
4. Enhancement of the student learning experience.
5. The nurture and sustenance of a flourishing and outward looking academic community.

### **Strategy**

#### **1. New Departmental Structure**

The following actions have been agreed upon and are being implemented:

- Institute a full administrative review to create new committee structure which will serve *both* developmental *and* teaching needs of Department.
- Shift the administrative capabilities of our office away from a routine administrative cycle towards new student-centred initiatives (including Moodle and Turnitin) and research support.
- Allocate to all academic staff clear administrative roles for which they are responsible rather than administrative tasks to perform.
- Hold brief, monthly departmental meetings and create new forums for shared decision-making and debate. These will include subject cluster groups and regular away days.
- Improve mechanisms for receiving student feedback and extend student representation on Departmental Committees.
- Involve administrative staff fully in corporate and decision-making structures of the Department.

#### **2. Improved Income Generation**

A number of initiatives have been planned and are currently in the process of implementation:

- Create two major new administrative briefs for academic staff which are directly related to income generation.
- Designate a member of the office staff 'Research and Development Co-ordinator' with a job profile that includes responsibilities related to recruitment, publicity and research support.
- Compile a portfolio of grant applications and make reports on funding applications an integral part of the agenda of the departmental meeting.
- Create a working publicity committee with responsibility for revising the Department's publicity strategy, producing new advertising materials and re-organising the web site.



- Spend monies from accrued Departmental funds to:
  - a) support developmental work in the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts
  - b) develop new initiatives in Continuing Professional Development for workers in religious bodies and the voluntary sector.
- Make available GTA and research assistance to staff actively engaged in income generating activities.
- Target our resources in relation to scholarships for postgraduates more effectively and explore new ways of generating income to support postgraduate students.

### **3. Revision of the Curriculum**

The Department has engaged in a conversation on teaching priorities and is now in a position to move forward towards a revision of the curriculum.

- It has been decided to explore full participation in the Arts degree with the potential of joint/single honours in TRS. This will imply relinquishing the designated MA in TRS but maintaining an academically viable curriculum with opportunities for specialist subject study – including classical languages.
- A concurrent exploration of the training needs of the churches will also be implemented. It is expected that the BD/BD Min will be retained as a specialist degree for those wishing to work in faith communities/voluntary agencies. This degree is likely to use the core courses provided at levels 1, 2 and Honours in TRS but these will be supplemented with courses that are more directly focussed upon the professional requirements of pastoral workers.
- Consultations on CPD will continue (see above) and a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology will be explored as a means of extending professional training from undergraduate to doctoral levels.
- Revision of undergraduate provision will be prioritised in 2009/10; the taught masters courses will be scrutinised with a view to revision in 2010/11.

### **4. Enhancing Student Learning Experience**

The following actions have been agreed and are in the process of implementation

- Following pilots in 2008/9 Moodle will be introduced for all undergraduate and taught masters courses in 2009/10
- After a publicity and information initiative amongst existing students (March-June 2009) Turnitin will be introduced for all undergraduate and taught masters courses in 2009/10.
- A help desk will be set up in the student computer cluster to advise students on Moodle, Turnitin and other matters relating to the use of technology in learning.
- The departmental premises are in the process of being altered to provide a new, fully equipped lecture room capable of housing most teaching beyond level 1.
- A fully refurbished computer cluster will be provided for the use of undergraduate students with all new equipment and Wi-Fi access.
- The Department will prioritise improving our return rates on marked work in 2009/10 to meet university targets. Return rates will be monitored by the office and efforts made to provide students with accurate information concerning the progress of their submitted work.
- A working group has been formed which will advise the teaching committee/department meeting on:
  - a) ways in which Personal Development Planning (PDP) can be enhanced within the existing curriculum
  - b) how PDP can become an integral part of our new curriculum.

### ***5. Nurturing and Sustaining Academic Community***

We are committed to creating an academic community: supportive of the wellbeing of all those who participate in its life, fully engaged with the Faculty and University, actively seeking ways of contributing to the common good.

The following initiatives have been agreed upon and we are working towards their implementation:

- Support of staff development through Personal and Development Review processes, use of the Faculty workload model and the creation of an adaptable and supportive administrative structure.
- Encourage student development through PDP (see above), effective academic advising and enhanced learning support.
- Create attractive and functional social spaces. Refurbish the basement common room for undergraduate use and create a new common room for postgraduates and staff.
- Create attractive and appropriate study space for visiting academics and make co-ordinated efforts (via research committee) to ensure that academic visitors have opportunity to share expertise and socialise with a wide range of staff and students.
- Deepen our relationship with our traditional partners (Church of Scotland and Trinity College) and create new forums for interaction with other faith communities and voluntary groups in relation to training and CPD.
- Actively seek to discern in what ways our academic expertise might be used to enhance the work of groups with which we are already in conversation (e.g. Christian Aid, Scottish Inter-faith Council) and seek to discern whether we might be able to develop mutual relationships with other groups to our common benefit.
- Use endowments, particularly Robertson funding, in a targeted way to sponsor academic initiatives which serve the wider interests of the Department and also generate knowledge transfer.

## ***Appendix Two***

### **Supporting Financial Statement**

#### *Current Context*

The DTLA team requested a business plan to accompany the departmental strategic plan. At that time it was anticipated that the way forward for the Department entailed making a sound case for a new position in Eastern Religions and clearly articulating the reasons why this should be supported as a sound, economic investment. However, a good deal has happened since the Review including some important staff changes. Conversations with Faculty have emphasised the financial stringency under which we must operate during the coming period and the Department has reflected upon how it can re-organise its existing resources and use its endowment income to serve its developmental objectives. We are not currently seeking core funding for a second post in religious studies from the University but we are exploring various other funding possibilities in relation to our work in this area. However, we have very recently become aware that our request to extend Professor Hazlett's period of employment beyond the designated retirement date cannot be met by Faculty. This is a cause for some concern as we have no members of staff qualified to teach and supervise in the key discipline of Church History that is a required field of study for ministerial candidates as per our agreement with the Church of Scotland. We are currently engaged in conversations concerning the future of our work in this area but it is rather too early in this process to present a business plan as a number of options must be fully considered.

Two new positions have been created using accumulated endowment funding and money donated by Trinity College. Both are intended to support areas in which we believe exciting opportunities exist to build upon identifiable strengths and initiate new work. They represent a considerable investment by the Department in its corporate future.

#### *1. Professional Development and Ministry Training Co-ordinator*

This part time position is scheduled to be filled in Sept 2009 and is intended to support the initiatives currently underway to revise the curriculum for ministerial training, co-ordinate CPD and instigate planning for our new Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology. Monies for this post are coming from a £10,000 donation from Trinity College and the use of £34,000 of endowment funds. It is intended that the outcomes from this investment will be:

- Increased undergraduate recruitment due to ecumenical co-operation and enhanced provision for lay training via the new targeted BD and BD Min degrees. Exact numbers are difficult to predict at this early stage in planning.
- An increase in the numbers of ministers and lay workers undertaking our Masters programme. Target 4 extra part time students per year.
- A cohort of 6-8 part time doctoral students per year on the new professional programme. These figures based upon recruitment for this programme in several English universities.
- CPD initiatives organised in partnership with Faith Communities.

#### *2. Research Co-ordinator and Teaching Fellow Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts (see Appendix Two).*

This post beginning in September 2009 is intended to begin work on maximising the potential of the CTLA (described in the RAE as outstanding). The Centre currently has no funding or designated staffing and despite its success in attaching large numbers of postgraduate students has never been prioritised for investment by Department or Faculty. As well as work on grant applications and conference organising the new administrator will prioritise the

development of the taught masters programme. The £24,000 required to fund this post for 18 months are coming from endowments. While in post the co-ordinator will work with Professor Jasper and Dr Walton to produce a business plan aimed at consolidating and developing the Centre in the coming 5-year period.