



Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of Politics held on 4 and 5 March 2013

Report Summary

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

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

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

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Panel was impressed by the positive feedback for teaching and administrative staff, from both undergraduate and *postgraduate taught* students about the teaching at the University of Glasgow and their experience in Glasgow. However the Subject was confined by resource constraints which presented significant challenges: in terms of a phased reduction of academic and administrative staff whilst supporting increasing pre-Honours student numbers. There was also a sense of disenfranchisement following restructuring within the School and College which had multiple negative impacts including: high *Staff:Student Ratio*; accommodation issues; low staff morale; over-reliance on *Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)* and sessional teachers, and over-burdened administrative staff, all of which could potentially undermine the student learning experience. Panel members were very concerned that the current approach was unsustainable and required careful utilisation of resources and continued investment from the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences. The Panel recommends that the School and College urgently work with the Subject to: address resourcing concerns; ensure the Subject has a better understanding of College and School strategies and; supports the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the subject

which draws on both its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure.

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Assessment

- the diversity of assessment methods on offer, meeting the varying needs of student abilities/expectations and professional criteria in the development of *transferable skills* [paragraph 3.3.2].
- the use of reflective journals in the Politics Honours module developed to encourage students to consider the nature and quality of their communication and to reflect on the relationship between theory and practice, potential issues and their own learning process and [paragraph 3.3.2].
- formative feedback scheme developed by Dr Katherine Allison [paragraph 3.3.6].

Enhancement of the Student Learning Experience

- the recording of Level 1 and 2 lectures that are provided online via *Moodle* to facilitate the learning opportunities for a diverse student cohort with differing backgrounds, cultures and physical needs [paragraph 3.7.2].
- the success of its *Study Abroad* programme [paragraph 3.4.15].

Curriculum Design and Content

- the wide range and challenging suite of courses that addresses core areas within the subject discipline and offers flexibility in terms of specialisation and focus [paragraph 3.4.1].

Learning and Teaching Resources

- library facilities including the Russian and Eastern European collection that is world-renowned and commends access for students and staff to major research library, facilitated by Dr Kay Munro, who also attends *Staff Student Liaison Committee* meetings [paragraph 3.8.19].
- conscientious and reflective approach of skilled and *research-led* teaching staff operating at maximum capacity [paragraph 3.8.1].
- professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm of sessional teachers [paragraph 3.8.11].
- the Subject's support and mentoring arrangements to integrate *probationary* members to body of staff [paragraph [paragraph 3.8.9].
- the professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of Graduate Teaching Assistants who were committed to their students and teaching role [paragraph 3.8.12].
- the development and mentoring of Graduate Teaching Assistants supporting the Politics 2B course, which includes weekly coffee mornings to discuss their teaching requirements/best practice by Dr Cian O'Driscoll [paragraph 3.8.13].

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

- the skilled and dedicated subject-level administrative staff, and in particular Mrs Margaret Murray, who support academic staff and students [paragraph 3.8.10].

Recruitment

- the recruitment of highly qualified students at undergraduate level [paragraph 3.5.1].
- engagement with the *widening participation (WP)* agenda and in particular the number of Diploma students recruited through a variety of initiatives [paragraph 3.5.8].

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

- the *Self Evaluation Report (SER)* for its collaborative and reflective approach, which delivered an honest, self-critical analysis of the Subject's activities, including numerous examples of innovation and good practice, and opportunities emerging from significant challenges the Subject had encountered in the bedding down of new arrangements within the School of Social and Political Sciences [paragraph 1.1.5].
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Areas to be improved or enhanced

Student Progression, Retention and Support

- introduces pre-Honours induction for junior honours students, timed appropriately, to guide and support undergraduate students in the transition to Honours [paragraph 3.6.4].
- undertakes a review of tutorials to both reduce tutorial class sizes for honours students and ensure that provision is meeting the needs of international undergraduate students [paragraph 3.7.1]
- extends plans in relation to online essay submission and with a view to reducing the administrative burden, to include all written work through *Turnitin*, Moodle or similar, in consultation with the College of Social Sciences and *the Learning and Teaching Centre*. The Subject should also consider the scheduling of submission deadlines to manage the load on IT systems and minimise the risk of system breakdown [paragraph 3.3.7].
- take steps to reconcile student needs for improved feedback on assessment with the variable practise across the subject area, drawing on appropriate examples of good practice from within the Subject [paragraph 3.3.5].

Curriculum Design and Content

- engages with students, through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, in a review of course descriptors that accurately reflect course content [paragraph 3.2.1].
- make transferable skills more explicit to students, via *Programme Aims/Intended Learning Outcomes* through links with initiatives and good practice available in the School of Social and Political Sciences, College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre [paragraph 3.4.7].
- liaises with the *Recruitment and International Office (RIO)* to engage constructively with appropriate colleagues in the College and School in the consideration of the viability of current and new PGT programmes, which respond to student needs and build on the strengths of the subject [paragraph 3.5.5].

- engages directly with staff from Learning and Teaching Centre and through online support available (see Guidance Notes: http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_106193_en.pdf) to ensure a consistent approach in the communication of assessable Intended Learning Outcomes to students [paragraph 3.2.1].
- fsto engage with internal and external stakeholders to develop a strategy and plan for embedding applied learning (*employability*) and reflection *Personal Development Planning (PDP)* within the *Graduate Attribute framework*. Where appropriate the approach adopted should involve the Careers Service, Club 21, the Politics Society, potential employers and alumni, together with good practice initiatives in the College of Social Sciences [paragraph 3.4.14].
- liaise with course lecturers to ensure the inclusion of sufficient subject-specific examples, particularly for the mandatory Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Social Sciences courses, to meet the needs of Politics students in cross-discipline teaching provision [paragraph 3.4.3].

Learning and Teaching Resources

- the Subject, School and College work closely and urgently to: address resourcing concerns; gain a better understanding of College and School strategies; and support the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the subject which draws on its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure [paragraph Conclusion].
- the College of Social Sciences urgently takes appropriate steps to reduce the staff student ratio, liberating staff to be more creative and to spend more effort in the provision and enhancement of the student learning experience [paragraph 3.8.6].
- the College of Social Sciences and the University address serious accommodation issues by offering alternative or additional teaching space that meets the needs of the Subject [paragraph 3.8.17].
- formalises its engagement with Graduate Teaching Assistants through *Annual Monitoring*, Course Review and representation at Staff Student Liaison Committee and supports the development of their role by facilitating a dialogue around teaching requirements/best practice and providing opportunities for feedback on their performance [paragraph 3.8.14].
- the School of Social and Political Sciences liaises with the Subject, in the provision of discipline-specific training for Graduate Teaching Assistants which complements the generic training provided by Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), in compliance with Senate Regulations. (see guidance available through LTC website: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/taughtcourses/graduateteachingassistantstutorsanddemonstratorsstatutorytraining/>) [paragraph 3.8.16].

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Annual Monitoring (of courses)

Annual Monitoring is a process undertaken at the end of each session by Course or Programme Leaders designed to encourage reflection on the operation of course and programmes – what went right, what could be improved, what students did and didn't like etc. – with a view to enhancing the student experience next year. The work done by the course or programme leaders is followed by a full reporting process through Schools and Colleges to Senate, with responses being made, as appropriate, at each level. The reporting procedure is designed to ensure that issues arising from monitoring are properly considered and responded to, and that enhancements and the sharing of good practice are promoted. Annual monitoring reports are reviewed by Periodic Subject Review Panels as part of the documentation provided by the Subject(s)/School.

Employability

Employability is about more than being able to get a job after University. It is about acknowledging and being able to demonstrate achievements, understanding and personal attributes that will contribute to success both during, and after, University.

Graduate Attributes

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

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

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

Intended Learning Outcomes or ILOs

Intended Learning Outcomes or ILOs describe what all students should be able to do or demonstrate, in terms of particular knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes when they successfully complete the course or programme that the ILOs relate to.

Learning and Teaching Centre

The Learning and Teaching Centre is a University Service whose role is to “help implement and develop the University’s Learning and Teaching strategy, identify, assess and disseminate new developments and good practice which serve to enhance the student learning experience, and will work with colleagues throughout the University to bring about change”.

Moodle

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

Periodic Subject Review or PSR

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

Personal Development Planning or PDP

Personal Development Planning or PDP is a way to promote reflection on learning, performance and achievements and to plan for personal, educational and career development. Each School/College at the University offers different types of PDP activities.

Postgraduate Taught or PGT

Postgraduate Taught refers to taught programmes at postgraduate level, usually Masters.

Probationary Staff

Lecturers/Teachers, on appointment are required to serve a period of probation to ensure that a new lecturer/teacher has an opportunity of familiarising him or herself with the academic environment; it also provides the University with an opportunity of ensuring that the lecturer/teacher is capable of undertaking the work for which he or she has been employed.

Programme Aims

Programme Aims are the broad intentions and orientation of the course or programme of study. They express what the programme/course offers students.

Research-led Teaching

Research-led Teaching can mean different things in different disciplines. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the ways that the current research of staff can positively influence and support student learning and promote the development of research skills and attributes in students.

Recruitment and International Office (RIO)

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

Self Evaluation Report (SER)

A Self Evaluation Report is a document prepared by the Subject(s)/School in advance of a PSR Review. Its purpose is to provide the Review Panel with an insight into the Subject(s)/School's view of itself, its strengths and areas it would wish to develop. It is normally prepared by the Head of School in conjunction with other staff but students should also be offered the opportunity to comment on whether or not it reflects the Subject(s)/School they know.

Staff:Student Liaison Committee or SSLCs

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

Staff:Student Ratios

The Staff:Student Ratio describes the number of students to each member of staff, either in the Subject/School, College or University.

Study abroad

Study abroad is a term that is often used to refer to several programmes that offer opportunities for students to study in a European University, or one further afield, for a term, semester or year as part of their undergraduate degree programme. (The University's "Study Abroad Programme" is specifically designed for visiting students who elect to come to the University of Glasgow.)

Transferable Skills

Skills which can be applied in a variety of different contexts: e.g. Communication (oral, written and the ability to summarise); Self-motivation (time management), self-regulation and self-assurance; Team-working; etc.

Turnitin

Turnitin is a remotely hosted, web based service that compares submitted material, e.g. a student's essay, with a wide range of sources and produces an originality report. It is intended to be a tool which can support students in their understanding and avoidance of plagiarism and can be used to quickly and efficiently locate sources of material in cases of suspected plagiarism. Turnitin originality reports can be used to highlight to students, with real examples, the exact meaning of the term plagiarism.

Widening Access or Widening Participation

The objective of widening participation is to develop, implement, co-ordinate and monitor initiatives which further: the increased recruitment of students to Higher Education from those areas and groups where there is low participation; the provision of educational support for all students once they have entered the University in order to improve student retention and to facilitate the successful completion of students' programmes of study; and the flexible provision of learning opportunities. More information can be found at the Widening Participation at Glasgow website. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/wideningparticipation/>.