



University
of Glasgow

Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of Sociology held on 25 and 26 February 2014

Report Summary

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

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_357284_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

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

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel highly commends the Subject Area for the overall quality of its provision and the dedication of the staff team in providing a rewarding and supportive student environment. The *research-led teaching* is a major strength and the Subject Area is to be commended on the wide and varied range of courses made available for the students, although the Review Panel has concerns regarding the sustainability of the current provision. The areas that require attention are listed in the Recommendations below. These have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer.

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Student Progression, Retention and Support

- The level of support provided by staff to students. [paragraph 3.6.2].

Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

- The General Paper was considered an impressive and innovative form of assessment aimed at encouraging and developing students' ability to think synoptically. [paragraph 3.3.1].
- The Panel acknowledged the challenges that the Subject Area faced with regard to feedback, particularly in view of the size of the Level 1 cohort and the ensuing demands on staff time, and commends the Subject Area for continuing to provide the level of feedback which, despite the drop in the *NSS* score, remained good overall. [paragraph 3.3.3].
- The broad and impressive range of courses offered and the level of research-led teaching conducted by staff which allowed for diversity and flexibility within the Honours programme. [paragraph 3.3.4].

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- Providing clearly articulated *ILOs*. [paragraph 3.2].

Areas to be improved or enhanced

Curriculum Design, Development and Content

- The Subject Area and School engage at College level to review the content of the generic Research Methods courses as a matter of urgency. [paragraph 3.4.3].
- Level 2 courses required greater coherence and connection to the overall programme and the s a review of the Level 2 provision to address these concerns should be undertaken. [paragraph 3.4.2].

Student Progression, Retention and Support

- Review and develops a policy with regard to staff availability for students via *Moodle* and email to manage student expectations. [paragraph 3.6.2].

Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

- *Graduate Attributes* should be made more explicit to the student body to ensure their awareness of this important area of activity. [paragraph 5.6].
- Consult *Recruitment and International Office (RIO)* and the *International Dean (Student Mobility)* in revising its approach to student mobility [paragraph 5.5].

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

- The Graduate School develops ways of improving the interaction between College representatives and taught postgraduate students to develop clearer and more coherent lines of communication. *[paragraph 5.2]*.
- Explore options in order to develop a cohesive postgraduate community. *[paragraph 5.8]*.

Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

- Reviews the range of assessments across the programmes, utilising the opportunities provided by *the Q-Step project* in collaboration with the relevant member of *the Learning and Teaching Centre*, and incorporating alternative methods of assessment such as report writing and reflective diaries. *[paragraph 3.3.2]*.
- Arrange for training through the GTA Development Coordinator within the Academic Development Unit of the Learning and Teaching Centre on essay marking and feedback for all GTAs. *[paragraph 3.3.3]*.

Student Recruitment

- Give serious consideration to capping Level 1 student numbers for forthcoming sessions in order to sustain the quality of current levels of provision. *[paragraph 3.5.1]*.
- Undertakes a review of the taught postgraduate programmes' provision to ensure sustainable student numbers. *[paragraph 3.5.3]*.

Resources for Learning and Teaching

- Along with the School and College review the Subject Area's staffing structure to identify, if possible and appropriate, where staff appointments and contracts could be increased and/or made permanent to address the SSRs currently being experienced in the Subject Area. *[paragraph 3.8.1]*.
- Pursue the possibility of using off-campus teaching accommodation for the Subject Area. *[paragraph 3.8.7]*.
- Review the CPD opportunities for GTAs with regard to extending their role, including an exploration of the possibility of providing support to undertake examination marking, and to appoint a senior GTA to mentor the more junior GTAs. *[paragraph 3.8.4]*.
- Consideration be given to the review of the preparation time and payment of GTAs. *[paragraph 3.8.3]*.
- Revisit the administrative procedures in relation to payment with GTAs in order to clarify the processes. *[paragraph 3.8.5]*.

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

- Discussions take place about resources with the School and College to support the achievement of the Subject Area's long term vision for learning and teaching. *[paragraph 2]*.

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Continuing Professional Development or CPD

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can be defined as learning activity that is: self-financing; developmental; and vocationally relevant. A wide range of activities are included, from conferences, seminars, very short courses (even lunchtime meetings) to credit-rated and award bearing programmes such as MBAs, MScs and other more traditional postgraduate taught (PGT) courses spread over a number of months/years for part-time students. They are normally undertaken by professionals who are already in work but are open to other interested people.

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.

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”.

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.

International Dean of International Mobility

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

Moodle

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

National Student Survey (NSS)

The NSS is a national initiative that has been conducted annually since 2005. The survey asks students in their final year of a programme to provide feedback on their student learning

experience. There are 22 questions in all, this can be found at:
<http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>

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.

Q step project

Q step is a £19.5 million project funded by the Nuffield Foundation, ESRC and HEFC in quantitative social science skills. It is designed to promote a “step-change” in quantitative social science training. From 2013, 15 universities across the UK are delivering specialist undergraduate programmes sharing expertise and resources across the higher education sector forging links with schools and employers. Q step was developed as a strategic response to the shortage of quantitatively-skilled social scientist graduates.

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.

Staff:Student Ratios (SSRs)

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