



Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of Urban Studies held on 4 and 5 March 2015

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the Subject area of Urban Studies. *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_419597_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 enjoyed a constructive engagement with the subject area of Urban Studies, which was facilitated in large part by a reflective and positive approach, adopted by staff and demonstrated in the *SER*.

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

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Enhancing the Student Experience

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

- Supportive community where staff are perceived to be responsive to students and to be generous in sharing their time and expertise.

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

- For initiating a comprehensive review of postgraduate and undergraduate provision and for implementing wide-ranging changes, noting early evidence to suggest positive impact.
- The means of promoting student engagement with 'real world' issues used by Urban Studies, such as field trips and Service Learning courses.
- The evident success in communicating to students key messages in good academic practice.
- The Review Panel considered the SER to be exemplary: it effectively highlighted examples of innovative practice and was reflective, openly acknowledging issues of on-going challenge and identifying areas for further enhancement. The Panel commends this.

Areas to be improved or enhanced

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

- Implement a turnaround time for assessment feedback on postgraduate courses of three weeks in accordance with the University's *Assessment Policy*. Recognising the difficulties already identified by Urban Studies in achieving a four-week turnaround time, the Panel notes that this may require careful planning regarding the allocation of marking, awareness of competing commitments of markers, contingency planning, and adopting a norm as to the levels of feedback to be provided.
- Action be taken to address the issues relating to teaching accommodation identified in this report which either prevent the delivery of teaching or have resulted in an environment which is not conducive to effective learning and teaching:
 - The lack of accessible teaching accommodation which has compromised the ability of Urban Studies to accommodate students with disabilities thus undermining established relationships (e.g. Students sponsored by the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living taking the Housing Studies programme).
 - Tutorials being timetabled in lecture theatres, the layout of which inhibited discussion amongst the group.
 - Classrooms in which there were no tables.
 - Three hour teaching sessions being interrupted by the need to change location.
- In view of comments made by both undergraduate and postgraduate students regarding a lack of clarity in relation to the place of guest lecturers and the overlap of material covered by different lecturers, the Panel recommends that Urban Studies ensure that there are robust mechanisms in place to deliver a coherent and integrated curriculum, while continuing to incorporate the pertinent contributions from active researchers and practitioners in relevant areas.

- Institute a formal approach to the dissemination of good practice through the proposed Learning and Teaching Forum and develop other mechanisms to develop and promote a broad-based culture of teaching enhancement.
- A formal management structure be established to support the performance and development of *GTAs* and early career staff engaged in learning, teaching and assessment, to address issues including:
 - (*GTAs*) the identification of a key member of staff to whom to address general issues of concern; appropriate recognition of their contribution to the work of Urban Studies;
 - Succession planning. (Early career staff) management of workload.

Enhancing the Student Experience

- Develop a strategy for increasing the number of home undergraduate students who participate in study abroad.

Context and Strategy

- In the course of the review, the Panel noted a number of issues related to Learning and Teaching which were to some extent inter-related and would benefit from an overarching vision. The Review Panel therefore recommends that, on publication of the University's Learning & Teaching Strategy 2015-2020, Urban Studies develop a coherent learning and teaching strategy, articulating its vision for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, addressing such issues as *widening access*, internationalisation, and recruitment both to the University and to the latter stages of the undergraduate programme.

Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Code of Assessment

The University's Code of Assessment (implemented 2002-03) is designed to provide a fair and rational means of assessing students' performance. It provides instructions to staff on how assessment should be designed and carried out. It sets out verbal descriptions of each of the eight grades from A to H. Students' work is judged against these descriptions in terms of how well they have met the stated intended learning outcomes of the course or other assessed component and the corresponding grade is awarded. A guide to the Code of Assessment for students is available from the Senate Office website.

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.

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.

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.

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/>.