

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee – Summer Powers 2016

Periodic Subject Review: English Language held on 11 March 2016

Mrs Ruth Cole, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor Frank Coton	Vice Principal (Academic and Educational Innovation), Panel Convener
Professor Susan Fitzmaurice	University of Sheffield, External Subject Specialist
Dr Sheila Kidd	School of Humanities, Cognate member
Mr Sven Maier	Student Panel Member
Professor Paul Younger	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Jane MacKenzie	Learning and Teaching Centre

1. Introduction

- 1.1 English Language is located in the College of Arts, as one of four subject areas in the School of Critical Studies.
- 1.2 In the REF 2014, English at Glasgow (incorporating English and Scottish Language and Literature) was ranked first in Scotland and third in the UK. The National Student Survey (NSS) 2015 showed an overall satisfaction rating of 91% for the study of English at Glasgow.
- 1.3 The majority of English Language staff are based in a terrace of Victorian houses in University Gardens at the Gilmorehill campus, and the administrative staff are located across two sites in University Gardens and one in the Square. A range of accommodation across the campus is allocated for teaching, though the subject also benefits from the two key resources of the STELLA (Software for Teaching English Language and Literature and its Assessment) Digital Humanities Lab and the GULP (Glasgow University Laboratory of Phonetics), both located in University Gardens.
- 1.4 Student numbers for 2015-16 are as follows:

Undergraduate	
Level 1A	319
Level 1B	301
Level 2A	80
Level 2B	81
Honours	188
Postgraduate Taught	8

- 1.5 English Language has 17 members of teaching and research staff (13.6 FTE). Academic administrative support is drawn from the School of Critical Studies.

Range of provision

1.6 The subject area offers one undergraduate degree which can be taken as a single or joint honours programme. Currently one PGT programme is offered, the MSc English Language and English Linguistics, though this did not run in sessions 2013-14 and 2014-15. The MSc provides research training that is ESRC accredited.

1.7 The Review Panel therefore considered the following range of provision offered by English Language:

Undergraduate

MA in General Humanities

MA Honours in English Language (Single)

MA Honours in English Language (Joint)

Postgraduate

MSc English Language and English Linguistics

Context of current PSR

1.8 The previous review of English Language was the Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) review, which took place in February 2009. That review concluded that English Language provided high quality teaching in a welcoming and supportive environment, where the enthusiasm of staff for research and teaching was strongly communicated to, and shared by, the students.

Self Evaluation Report

1.9 The Self Evaluation Report (SER) for the current review was led by Professor Jennifer Smith, the Head of Subject, with contributions from members of staff from both English Language and the School of Critical Studies. Feedback was invited in a variety of formats from students, GTAs and staff and a draft of the document was circulated widely for comment.

Review visit

1.10 During the one day visit (11 March 2016) the Review Panel met with: The College Dean (Learning & Teaching), Dr Don Spaeth; the Head of the School of Critical Studies, Professor Jeremy Smith; the Head of Subject, Professor Jennifer Smith; and 11 other members of academic and administrative staff. The Panel also met with 12 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), six postgraduate students and 16 undergraduate students. All the meetings were extremely positive, and those with the GTAs, PGT students and undergraduate students were particularly lively and informative.

1. Context and Strategy

2.1 The teaching of English has a long history at the University of Glasgow, with a department of English Language formally established in 1948. Prior to University restructuring in 2010, English Language existed as a Department in its own right and contributed to the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature (SESLL).

2.2 The SER referred to the importance of English Language's position as part of the School of Critical Studies, in maintaining the links fostered by SESLL (this represented the relevant unit for REF and subject benchmarking), but the SER also highlighted broader links existing across the College and wider University.

Vision for future development

2.3 In discussion with the Head of School and Head of Subject, the Review Panel explored the subject area's vision for future development. The place of English Language in contributing

to other degrees (e.g. English Literature) was established but, given the breadth of coverage of English Language, there was the potential and the willingness to further links with a number of different areas of the University, in the Arts and Social Sciences, as well as some areas from the Sciences (e.g. Psychology). This would to some extent be driven by developments in the discipline itself, and also would continue to reflect the research being undertaken by staff within the Subject Area. The Panel noted that there was strength and breadth in that research, with two members of staff having acted on sub-panels for the recent REF. In the longer term, the subject area was looking forward to connections that it was hoped would arise from co-location with colleagues across the College of Arts following the campus redevelopment.

Proposed renaming of Subject Area

- 2.4 One key future development was the proposed renaming of the subject area as English Language and Linguistics. This was intended to give a better representation of the breadth of the subject so that it would be more recognisable nationally and internationally. The Head of Subject described to the Review Panel how the English Language curriculum encompassed significant breadth at Levels 1 and 2 but then allowed students to pursue their own areas of interest in the later stages of their degree. A broad grounding in the subject allowed them to make pertinent connections throughout their studies.

Honours restructuring

- 2.5 Another significant current development was that English Language was in the process of restructuring its Honours programme with a view to introducing in 2016-17 courses of 20 credits rather than 30 credits, to come in line with a standard credit structure for the College of Arts. Over the course of the Review it became clear to the Review Panel that this process of restructuring had been embraced by the Subject Area as a positive opportunity for reflection on many aspects of the undergraduate programme (see further at paragraph 4.4).

PGT provision

- 2.6 English Language currently offered one postgraduate taught programme, the MSc English Language and English Linguistics. It was running in 2015-16 with eight registered students but in the previous two sessions it had not recruited the required minimum number. The Review Panel discussed with the Head of School and Head of Subject the place of PGT provision within English Language. It was noted that Glasgow graduates of English Language tended to progress to the MPhil (R) or MRes rather than a taught masters as the undergraduate programme prepared them well to embark on research and, for Glasgow graduates, there would be some repetition in the MSc as currently constituted. There was variability in what graduates from other universities had covered in terms of research skills so it was necessary for the MSc to cover some of these basics. English Language did not have sufficient resources to be able to present a different masters level programme geared towards Glasgow graduates. Several of the PGT students that the Panel met said that they were hoping to progress to a PhD and confirmed that they saw the masters programme as providing the relevant preparation for research. The external subject specialist on the Panel noted that the challenges associated with graduates coming from a variety of disciplines and different institutions and thus differing levels of background knowledge were familiar from her own institution.
- 2.7 The Review Panel discussed with the Head of School and Head of Subject the sustainability of the current programme and the scope for broadening PGT provision, either through developing new optional components from a common core or by drawing in material from different parts of the School or the wider University. The Head of Subject advised that there had been dialogue with the Marketing, Recruitment and International Office (MaRIO) about the scope for such possible future developments. A proposed programme with the School of Education had not recruited. MaRIO colleagues had

provided advice about potential markets overseas, for example in China and India. However, staff recognised that for a small department, pursuing this kind of development would represent a very significant commitment. The Panel suggested that College-level support might be available to assist with this. The Panel also noted that markets evolved over time and demand from South East Asia, for example, may just be starting to grow. Targeting specific institutions with which Glasgow already had links was most likely to be fruitful and from this start the subject's profile in the region could develop.

- 2.8 There was strategic significance to English Language's MSc programme, as this facilitated ESRC accreditation. While accreditation had continued on the strength of the MPhil programme while the MSc did not run, it was uncertain that this would be viable in the future. The Head of Subject expressed the view that to lose accreditation would be to 'remove yourself from the game'.
- 2.9 Staff were open about the fact that they did not fully understand the factors affecting recruitment to the current MSc, noting that marketing of the programme for 2015-16 had not been any different from that in previous years. Of the eight students currently registered, seven were international. It was clear to the Review Panel that there was aspiration within the Subject to increase student numbers. At the meeting with key staff it was noted that if they were successful in their bid for an additional member of staff, recruitment to PGT would be a focus of the new role. The Head of Subject also advised the Panel that in the coming year there would be a full review of the issues relating to PGT provision.
- 2.10 Recognising the strategic importance of ESRC accreditation which is linked with its current PGT programme, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language proceed with its planned review of PGT provision with a view to establishing this on a sustainable footing, investigating opportunities for shared provision across the School and College, and exploring strategies for strengthening recruitment.

2. Enhancing the Student Experience

Recruitment to undergraduate study

- 3.1 The recruitment of undergraduate students to the study of English Language at the University was highlighted in the SER as an on-going challenge, an issue that had also been prominent in the DPTLA in 2009. The SER noted that in the last three years there had been a decrease in the number of Level 1 students (2013: 1a 374, 1b 374; 2014: 1a 352, 1b 341; 2015: 1a 319, 1b 301) though Level 2 numbers had in fact increased.
- 3.2 The majority of undergraduates came from Scotland, where the study of English Language was not a formal part of the school curriculum; thus attracting applicants to the study of the subject was particularly challenging. A number of recent awareness-raising initiatives undertaken by the subject were described in the SER. For example, in partnership with Education Scotland, staff had been involved in the development of materials about place names in Scotland to be delivered in schools. English Language had also contributed to the SQA Scots Language Award (introduced in August 2014) which it was hoped might foster interest in the study of English Language.
- 3.3 Some of the undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel spoke about the lecture at Open Day which had opened their eyes to what the study of English Language was. Several of the students told the Panel that they had not come to Glasgow intending to study English Language or even really understanding what it was about, but they had been 'won over' by the passion and enthusiasm of the staff in Level 1 and by the breadth of the subject matter covered. The students' view was that the proposed renaming of the subject area to English Language and Linguistics would be very positive in terms of awareness-raising for potential applicants. It was clear that even English teachers had a patchy understanding of what was covered in English Language at Glasgow. The Panel suggested

that there might be scope for the subject to host events for teachers, which would potentially have a bigger impact than individual visits to schools. Key staff told the Panel that they hosted occasional events for teachers, although CPD activity generally had somewhat fallen away since restructuring.

- 3.4 English Language had no policy on the use of social media as part of a strategy on recruitment. The Head of Subject acknowledged that there was scope to develop this, noting that the current twitter feed had an internal focus. There was also interest in developing an enhanced web presence. Key staff noted that such activities were, unfortunately, relatively low on their priorities given their intense workloads. It was clear that significant efforts went in to making Open Days successful including opening the STELLA and GULP labs. There was discussion about how to optimise the impact of such events, for example by involving current students or recent graduates, and making contact after the event with those who had attended.
- 3.5 Noting the enthusiasm of the undergraduates that attended the Review (see paragraph 4.1), the Panel asked them whether they would be willing to have some involvement in recruitment. Other areas of the University involved current students in school visits and Open Days, and in some cases this activity was credit-bearing. The undergraduates responded very positively to the suggestion that there was the possibility of such activity in English Language and immediately recognised the potential value for them in terms of developing graduate attributes. Key staff were pleased to hear about this reaction but noted that finding a way of including credit-bearing activity in the new Honours curriculum could be challenging. Even so, the Panel noted that there might be SRC recognition of such activities for inclusion on the student transcript.
- 3.6 The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language, in conjunction with the School, continue its efforts to promote recruitment to the undergraduate study of English Language at Glasgow, exploring means of: involving current students and recent alumni in this task; harnessing social media and the internet; and following up contacts made at Open Days.

Progression

- 3.7 The SER noted the very healthy progression rates for English Language students: of those students taking Level 1 in their first year, approximately 90% continued to take English Language Level 2, and approximately 80% taking English Language Level 2 progressed to Honours. However, some students elected not to take English Language Level 1 until their second year, which meant that they were then unable to take English Language Level 2, and progression to Honours depended on a very good performance in Level 1. The ideal was for students to take English Language Level 1 in first year but the fact that this did not happen appeared to be linked in part to a lack of understanding of in-coming students about the subject area. This highlighted the importance of communicating to students at the outset what was covered by English Language. There was a role here for Advisors of Study but their input was limited.
- 3.8 The SER highlighted the emphasis placed in English Language on supporting students to progress through the different stages of their studies. The Review Panel noted that all prospective Honours students attended an individual meeting with the Honours convener in the spring of second year. The undergraduate students who met the Panel spoke about the fact that from an early stage in their studies staff highlighted where topics would lead to in Honours, referring also to their own research where appropriate. The students appreciated this approach and felt that it laid the foundations for real rapport between staff and students, indicating the hope that students would pursue the subject. Staff confirmed that they sometimes 'looked forward' in the course of a lecture series or at the end, and that more information on how the topic would be developed at a later stage was included in course documentation. Students in Level 1 and Level 2 were also invited to information sessions on the next stages in the subject. (See commendation at paragraph 3.17.)

Equality and Diversity

- 3.9 The SER noted that the School Disability Officer belonged to the School's Learning and Teaching Committee, promoting awareness of relevant issues and embedding equality and diversity in the consideration of developments in learning and teaching. The Review Panel **commends** this approach to mainstreaming Equality and Diversity. Equality and Diversity was included in the School's GTA training programme.
- 3.10 The Review Panel noted the accessibility issues associated with English Language accommodation in University Gardens, in common with many of the other older parts of the University estate.

Supporting Students in their Learning

- 3.11 The SER described various forms of support offered to students at different stages of their time at the University, both for those completing a full degree and for visiting students. In the meetings with undergraduate and postgraduate students it was very clear to the Review Panel that the students felt well supported. They described staff as friendly, encouraging, approachable and very responsive to their requests for help and willing to offer one-to-one time on request. A number of the undergraduates who came to Glasgow with little background knowledge of English Language said that staff made the subject accessible so they did not feel at a disadvantage. The students believed that staff were focused on supporting them to achieve their full potential. The comment was made that English Language was somewhere that students wanted to be 'a part of', with a very positive atmosphere existing between students and teaching and administrative staff, this being established at a very early stage with key staff being introduced to students in person at lectures.

PGT

- 3.12 The Review Panel discussed with PGT students their experience of studying at Glasgow so far. While they were all enjoying the programme, some of the students who had not previously studied at Glasgow said that the system was very different from that at their previous institutions and that the start of the course had appeared to be disorganised, with a lack of clarity about what was expected of them. The Panel noted that similar comments were made in the feedback gathered in advance of the PSR. There had been problems with some courses not being available and classes not being in the correct rooms. However, on reflection, the students wondered if their sense of disorientation arose mainly from the expectations they had brought with them from their previous education. There had been a week-long induction programme but this had involved a great deal of information to take in in a short period of time and they felt that it had taken them a longer period to adjust to postgraduate study at Glasgow.
- 3.13 Recognising the broad range of educational backgrounds from which PGT students come, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language review its induction and orientation process, particularly for those who have not previously studied at Glasgow, to cover the structure of the programme and what is expected of the students, and to support continuing orientation throughout the early stages of the programme.

Attendance monitoring

- 3.14 Staff told the Review Panel that attendance was monitored at workshops/seminars in Levels 1 and 2 and at Honours lectures. Those with poor attendance were contacted, though staff felt that there was less time to do this now than there had been in the past and the comment was made that any technological tools that could assist with this activity would be welcome. It was noted that the level of activity on Moodle was also a useful indicator of the degree to which students were engaging with their studies. The SER explained that the monitoring of attendance was considered to be an important general support mechanism for students in English Language though there were also some sessions that were considered very important for students to attend because of the nature of the material

covered, for example classes at which plagiarism was discussed. Feedback from students gathered in advance of the PSR indicated that they viewed the monitoring of attendance positively.

Advising system

- 3.15 A new advising system had been introduced in 2015-16. Staff told the Review Panel that it appeared to be well organised but it was too early to say what impact there would be, if any, on student retention. There was anecdotal evidence that some students regretted that advisers were less likely to have a relevant subject specialist background, but the intention was that they should be more experienced at providing non-subject related advice and support. The view of staff was that at Honours, the Honours Convener was an obvious first point of contact and, more generally in English Language, administrative staff dealt very effectively with a wide range of queries. It was noted that currently there was no Senior Adviser from the School of Critical Studies, but an appointment was anticipated.

Student Engagement

- 3.16 The SER outlined a range of activities offered by English Language in order to enhance student engagement in their studies, including supporting the choice of honours dissertation topic to be in an area of the student's own interest despite possible workload implications for staff. Reflecting on a number of different aspects of the subject area's approach to their students (e.g. students being encouraged to attend research seminars, SSLC minutes being provided to all) the Panel concluded that there was a strong culture of promoting student engagement in English Language.
- 3.17 The Review Panel **commends** English Language for its success in engaging students in their studies, through embedding at an early stage connections with the Honours curriculum and with staff's own research, and through the evidently inclusive attitude of staff. (See also paragraph 3.8)

Graduate Attributes

- 3.18 The SER noted a number of initiatives providing students with opportunities to develop graduate attributes in the course of their undergraduate studies, though the Review Panel's view was that there appeared to be a strong focus on research-related skills. Enhancing Academic Skills in English Language (EASEL) was a programme for Honours students focusing on a range of academic topics but also on the development of transferable skills and career planning. At PGT, employability was embedded in the training delivered at School level.
- 3.19 The Review Panel was pleased to note at the meeting with undergraduates how quickly they identified the potential for developing graduate attributes through possible future involvement in recruitment activities.

Student mobility

- 3.20 The University's strategic target was for at least 20% of students to experience a period of outward mobility. At the meeting with key staff the Review Panel heard that approximately 11% of English Language students in junior honours were involved in student mobility in the current session and that applications for study abroad in 2016-17 had increased. Staff were aware of the barriers to mobility such as the additional expense for students who usually lived at home in term time. The Head of Subject spoke about the fact that the College now had a group of preferred partners. There was a discussion with the Panel about the known benefits of a period of study abroad. English Language staff made great efforts to promote outward mobility and large numbers of students attended the initial information sessions but many dropped away with time. There was a lot of work involved in arranging a suitable curriculum for English Language students. There was a discussion with the Head of School and Head of Subject about the increasing range of experiences being promoted by the University and being made available at overseas institutions, such as summer schools, and the potential for raising the profile of such activities to students in English Language.

- 3.21 The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language continue to explore the range of possible means for students to benefit from an international experience during the course of their studies at Glasgow, including options available to students for whom the traditional session-long or semester-long experiences would be impracticable.

3. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

Curriculum Design

- 4.1 The undergraduate students told the Review Panel that staff were passionate about what they were teaching, as if everything they taught they found fascinating and wanted students to as well. The approach to teaching was inclusive, with students feeling strongly that staff genuinely wanted them to continue with the subject. The view expressed by the undergraduates was that the wide range of courses meant that there was something for everyone. (See commendation at paragraph 3.17)
- 4.2 Students coming in at Level 1 had a range of different backgrounds: Scottish students who had no formal background in English Language; English students who might have studied English Language at A or AS level; and international students with a wide range of possible background knowledge. This created some issues for the curriculum in Levels 1 and 2. Of the undergraduates who met the Review Panel, a number had undertaken some previous study of the subject before coming to Glasgow, including A Level English Language, while some had come with no prior knowledge. Of those who had studied the subject previously there were two views: on the one hand that there was quite a lot of overlap in first year with what they had been taught before and, on the other, that while there was overlap the lectures quickly took them beyond what they were familiar with, including early reference to staff's own research in the relevant topic. The students reflected that such differences in background knowledge were not unique to English Language as there was, in any event, something of a gap between the skills and knowledge of those who had previously taken Advanced Highers compared to those with only Highers.
- 4.3 As noted above (paragraph 3.7) students sometimes elected to take Level 1 English Language in second year and if they then decided that they wished to take English Language to Honours they required high grades. The undergraduates reflected on this, feeling that there was a large jump from Level 1 to Level 2, so to progress directly from Level 1 to Honours was very challenging. The Review Panel heard from one student who had done this whose view was that, while challenging, it was achievable. The Head of School and Head of Subject raised the possibility of students with A Level English Language being admitted direct into second year, but they noted that there were important core skills taught in Level 1 that would not necessarily have been covered in A Level, depending on the exam board.

Restructure of Honours curriculum

- 4.4 As noted at paragraph 2.5, English Language had been undertaking a review of its Honours curriculum with a view to introducing the revised structure in 2016-17. The review had been prompted by the College-wide move to a standard framework of 20-credit, rather than 30-credit, courses. The SER described this as a positive exercise which had presented the subject with the opportunity to reflect on the current research interests of staff, the best way of developing graduate attributes, and recent developments in the subject area. At the meeting with key staff, the Review Panel heard that this had been a challenging process. While there had been the opportunity to develop new courses, staff had been careful to ensure that they did not allow a proliferation of them. The undergraduate students told the Panel that they had been consulted as part of the review process. It was clear that they were positive about the proposed changes as they believed that the new structure would offer more choice and flexibility.

- 4.5 The Review Panel was pleased to note from the SER that a working party was now in place to review English Language Levels 1 and 2 following on from the changes being made at Honours, but also to take account of changing patterns of recruitment and the range of prior knowledge of entrants.

Qualitative methods teaching

- 4.6 The PGT students who met with the Review Panel spoke positively about their studies. However, those taking the 'ESRC' route, which involved two courses from the Social Sciences Research Methods Programme (Statistics 1 and Qualitative Methods) had experienced problems. They said that they had encountered difficulties getting staff to respond to their concerns, and course evaluations had not been completed. The students' view was that as these were generic courses for Social Scientists they were not well suited for the English Language programme and that it would be better to have practical sessions in the subject area's own lab. They also felt that there was a lack of guidance on the course from lecturers. The Head of School and Head of Subject acknowledged that ideally this material would be delivered within English Language, but this was not feasible with such low student numbers.
- 4.7 The Review Panel **recommends** that the Deans of Learning and Teaching in Arts and Social Sciences consider and then implement an approach that achieves best alignment between the generic coverage of statistics and qualitative measures provision and the specific needs of Arts PGT programmes.

Undergraduate seminars

- 4.8 A number of the pre-Honours undergraduate students who met with the Review Panel raised a concern about the seminars, some feeling that tutors were not always well prepared or comfortable with the subject matter, relying solely on the accompanying booklet. Some had also experienced unevenness in the material covered: in one week finding that the session was very rushed and in another that the material seemed to have been covered in the first 20 minutes. The Panel suggested that this merited some investigation by English Language, particularly in view of the GTAs' comments about how well prepared they felt for seminars (see paragraph 4.25).
- 4.9 Some of the PGT students told the Review Panel that they had found it confusing to have different members of staff delivering classes on the same course and struggled at the time to see the cohesion. Generally though the group felt that by the end of the course they had gained a helpful overview of the subject matter informed by different perspectives, including insights from the lecturers' own research. This indicated to the Panel that clearer sign-posting at the start of such courses might be helpful.

Approach to Intended Learning Outcomes

- 4.10 ILOs were set out in the relevant documents and were generally appropriate, though it was noted that at Level 1 these were embedded within the text and could have been more prominent in order to make them easier for students to identify. The PGT handbook stated that assessment was against ILOs, but did not state what these were.

Assessment

- 4.11 The SER described a range of formative and summative assessments used in English Language. Formative exercises were available on Moodle for Level 1 students and the introduction of similar exercises at other Levels was anticipated. The use of Moodle in this way was beneficial for students in receiving quick feedback and less input was required of staff.
- 4.12 The undergraduate students raised a concern that when they sat the end of course examination on English Language 1A they had received no feedback on any written work.

On 1B they had had some short essay practice but still felt that they needed more preparation for essay writing. However, they also acknowledged that very useful essay plans were made available for first years on Moodle. The Review Panel suggested that English Language should consider whether any feedback on written work could be provided at an earlier stage.

- 4.13 The undergraduate students referred to the diverse components of assessment made available on some Honours courses, saying that they felt that these methods supported the deep understanding of the subject matter needed at this level and contrasted this with less varied assessments that they had experienced in other subject areas. They accepted that for some English Language courses, the assessments were generally written essays as this reflected the nature of the relevant subject matter. The students also referred to an exercise where they gathered their own data as part of a group exercise and then wrote it up, which they had found to be helpful preparation for writing their dissertations. They also made particular reference to the assessment for Sociolinguistics having been changed for the current session in response to feedback that had been given by the previous cohort.
- 4.14 The Review Panel learned that English Language was broadening the range of assessments as part of the revision of the Honours curriculum. Some courses were maintaining the more traditional combination of coursework and final exam whereas others were introducing a more varied pattern including lab reports and small research projects. Some courses would have no exam. The external examiners had been consulted on the proposals and had responded very positively to the increasing diversity of assessment. The undergraduate students and GTAs who met the Panel had also been consulted and were enthusiastic about the proposed changes. Staff told the Panel that they recognised the importance of evaluating the new assessments in due course.
- 4.15 The Review Panel **commends** English Language for the approach adopted in reviewing assessment as part of the wider review of the Honours curriculum. The diversification of assessment schemes was ambitious and wide-ranging, and resulted from careful planning and consultation.

Feedback on assessment

- 4.16 The Review Panel noted that NSS scores in relation to feedback on assessment were lower than scores for other aspects of the student experience (58% agreed with the statement 'feedback on my work has been prompt', 75% with the statement 'I have received detailed comments on my work'). The Head of Subject said that this had been something of a surprise as the staff considered that feedback was thorough and prompt. Key staff also felt that the NSS scores did not match what students themselves had told staff. This was now a strategic issue in the College of Arts, with an Action Plan in place. Because staff suspected that the low scores in part reflected the fact that students did not always recognise what constituted feedback, the statement 'this is feedback' was now included on returned work, and the various forms in which feedback was provided had been explained on Moodle (including, for example, staff availability in office hours, e-mail responses from staff). Across English Language the format of feedback on submitted work had been standardised in the current session, with a set of common headings as well as open comments. Students would be asked at the next staff--student liaison committee meeting for their views on these changes.
- 4.17 It was hoped that these recent developments would have a positive impact on NSS scores concerning assessment feedback in 2016. The Head of School described to the Panel how, more broadly, they were engaging students in thinking about enhancing their academic skills particularly at Honours, asking students to reflect on their own academic practice by using a variety of resources, e.g. a video exploring aspects of plagiarism, and staff discussing what an essay was for, how they go about marking it and what they were looking for. The GTAs felt that the resource made available on Moodle on how to write for English Language ('Good Style, *A Guide to Writing Essays and Examinations in English Language*') was excellent. This was provided shortly before students started writing their first essays. The GTAs also told the

Panel about a new seminar in Level 2 on how to prepare for exams, which included a discussion of marking criteria.

- 4.18 The submission and return of assessed work was now carried out entirely electronically, with feedback provided on Moodle through comments that were superimposed on the work. This process had not gone entirely smoothly, with students sometimes submitting the wrong item, and the system at times having been unable to accept submissions. Key staff and the GTAs referred to the frustrating limitations of marking in Moodle. There was a lack of flexibility in inserting comments and once 'sticky notes' were attached to the text, they could not be moved and it was then no longer possible to reveal what had been written under the note. Staff felt that the system was out-dated, laborious to use and excessively time-consuming, which in itself was likely to mean that the feedback provided was less comprehensive than it might otherwise have been.
- 4.19 The Review Panel **recommends** that the VLE Governance Board is asked to consider the limitations of providing feedback within Moodle and, if appropriate, to identify other more effective means of facilitating the provision of feedback to students on their assessed work.
- 4.20 The Review Panel discussed with the Head of Subject and Head of School the extent to which students appeared to engage with the feedback provided. There was a feeling that students were primarily concerned with their grade and rarely approached staff for more explanation of the comments provided. Time could usefully be spent in the seminar following the return of work reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of submissions. The Head of Subject told the Panel that students were asked to assess sample submissions, looking for strengths and weaknesses in the work. This appeared to be a valuable exercise.
- 4.21 Both the undergraduate and postgraduate students who met with the Review Panel said that the feedback they received on assessment was helpful and was returned promptly. The postgraduate students said that on receipt of written feedback they were able to seek further feedback from staff directly, and commented that after receipt of feedback on semester 1 work they had felt more confident in approaching their work in semester 2. One exception to this was the postgraduates who were taking the Social Sciences Statistics course. They said that the feedback on their work did not appear to follow the rubric and was variable in quality.

Engagement with the Code of Assessment and Assessment Policy

- 4.22 The SER confirmed that English Language was in full compliance with the Code of Assessment and the University's Assessment Policy. The Review Panel was particularly impressed with the willingness of the subject area to extend the range of assessments to be used in the revised honours curriculum.

Engaging and Supporting Staff

Probationer and early career support

- 4.23 At the time of the Review, English Language did not have any staff on the Early-Career Development Programme (ECDP). The SER outlined the process in place to support participants on the ECDP as appropriate, through line manager and an assigned mentor.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

- 4.24 The SER noted that GTAs in English Language completed the University's statutory training and the subject area's own programme. The School of Critical Studies also offered training. The Review Panel met with a very engaging and enthusiastic group of 12 GTAs. They explained that they taught at Levels 1 and 2, and some also taught at Honours. They said that they felt supported and well prepared for their work but that they also appreciated the fact that they were given some autonomy as they became more experienced. This meant that they were able to develop a variety of skills and experience which they believed would be of great value when seeking employment.

- 4.25 At Level 1, GTAs had meetings with the relevant lecturer every two weeks which helped them to prepare for tutorials and ensure that they aligned with what was being delivered in lectures. At Level 2 the meetings were less frequent. Both groups stated that they were provided with resources which explained what they were expected to cover in the tutorials. They said that as the materials were made available in good time, they were able to clarify things in advance so that when they came to delivering tutorials they felt well prepared. They found the conveners approachable and willing to answer questions. While they were gradually given more challenging work, they felt that this was never more than they could cope with.
- 4.26 The PGT students who met with the Panel commented positively on the opportunity to shadow current GTAs. The Panel believed that the subject area's supportive culture was reflected in the attitude of the GTAs themselves: they noted that as the material had stayed largely unchanged from the previous year those who had acted as tutors then were able to help new GTAs by reflecting on what had worked well.
- 4.27 The GTAs confirmed that they received feedback on their work, through student feedback that had been collated by staff. Overall, they said that they felt their work was valued.
- 4.28 A number of GTAs reported that they had had the opportunity to lecture to Honours students on their own areas of research. They very much appreciated being offered this opportunity and the fact that staff supported them in preparing for this role.
- 4.29 The GTAs were involved in the marking of coursework and some exams. Again they described this activity as being well supported. They said that at Level 1 very clear marking guidelines were provided and they attended a seminar on marking. They began by being involved in moderation or second marking and then progressed to being first markers.
- 4.30 The GTAs raised the issue of not being able to offer formal 'office hours'. This was a frustration because it was natural that students approached them with queries arising from material covered in seminars, particularly approaching assessment deadlines, and they were willing to provide the help sought. As it was currently, the GTAs did respond to queries but were not paid for this time.

The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language clarify to students the role of GTAs and, in particular, the fact that queries arising from seminars should be directed to the course convener rather than to the GTA.

- 4.31 The Review Panel **strongly commends** English Language for the exemplary support and development of its GTAs (including opportunities offered to PGT students to shadow GTAs), and for the additional opportunities offered to GTAs such as lecturing on their own areas of research.

Resources for Learning and Teaching (staffing and physical)

- 4.32 The SER highlighted a number of issues concerning teaching accommodation, including the inflexibility of the room booking system which meant insufficient and sometimes inadequate accommodation being available.
- 4.33 The undergraduate students told the Review Panel that in one two-hour session on Sociolinguistics in semester 1 they had been required to break after one hour and move to a different teaching room for the second hour. They said that they were aware of staff unhappiness with some of the teaching accommodation provided. They also felt that on a number of occasions the accommodation provided was not fit for purpose, citing rooms in the Alexander Stone Building where no tables were provided for a class test. They also said that teaching rooms were often either too cold or excessively hot, and sometimes classes were in rooms with no natural light, which felt claustrophobic. The GTAs also referred to instances where the accommodation provided was not fit for purpose, for example a seminar group that had been booked in a lecture theatre. The configuration of seating hindered student interaction and this had undermined the purpose of the session. A more suitable location had, however, been provided in semester two. Staff told the Panel that students had reported that timetabling sometimes meant they were unable to get from one class to the next in a timely fashion so that they would chose to attend only one of the two. Staff

expressed their concern at the direct impact on the student experience of inadequate teaching accommodation. The Convener of the Review Panel acknowledged that there were many issues with the current estate but encouraged students to alert staff to the particular problems that they were encountering in order that they should be taken into account in future campus developments.

- 4.34 Staff members referred to the timetabling difficulties, stating that while timetabling staff were helpful, the requirements of the system were complex and this required much administrative time to navigate. They also expressed great anxiety about whether appropriate teaching space would be made available to support the new Honours structure as they were aware that the pressures on teaching space on campus would not be alleviated in the short term. The Head of Subject advised the Review Panel that a dialogue was already on-going with central room bookings, alerting them to the requirements of the new courses.
- 4.35 While staff were mainly located in 12 University Gardens, the SER referred to the fact that teaching took place across the campus and that the location of classes sometimes changed from week to week. Reference was made at the meetings with staff and students to the fact that there was no dedicated space for English Language students. While the undergraduates spoke about staff being welcoming and creating a sense of 'belonging' they felt the absence of dedicated study/social space for them. They contrasted first and second year, where they did not get to know many people, with Honours where many of their classes took place in University Gardens, which they believed contributed to the feeling of subject identity. The postgraduates had access to study space in the Alexander Stone Building and the PG Hub in the Square but said that these spaces were not used to 'hang out' as a cohort.

Administration

- 4.36 The SER referred to the fact that administrative staff for English Language were located in three different locations and that this brought challenges and inefficiencies. The Review Panel noted, however, that feedback from students and the external examiners on the administrative support for English Language was extremely positive. The Head of School and Head of Subject both believed that this success was a product of very hard work by the committed administrative team, including the member of staff who had twice received the Administrator of the Year award. The Head of School, Head of Subject and key staff referred to the proliferation of administration throughout the year, with most communication being undertaken by e-mail. There was a sense of regret at the loss of face-to-face contact, particularly as teaching staff, administrators and students were not physically located close together. At the key staff meeting there was reflection on the fact that there were only just enough staff to cover the various administrative roles. Outward facing roles were time consuming (i.e. enquiries from outwith the University). There was a general discussion about what created the administrative burden, with the Review Panel convener noting that a recent benchmarking exercise had found that at Glasgow there was a higher burden associated with teaching administration than at other Russell Group universities; this was being investigated. Key staff referred to the pressure that these tasks placed on their ability to deliver high quality teaching and maintain their research.

Technology-enhanced Learning and Teaching

- 4.37 The Review Panel enjoyed having the opportunity to visit the two dedicated English Language labs, STELLA and GULP. These labs were used for the teaching of students at all levels including the introduction of research activities. Specialist software was in use for a range of courses, some having been developed by Glasgow staff. The undergraduate students spoke positively about being able to use the labs outwith class time however they noted that the computers in the STELLA lab were extremely slow, with logging on taking as much as 15 minutes. While they recognised that the lab was potentially a very valuable resource, they were much less likely to use it because of the difficulty of using the computers. The GTAs also reflected these frustrations to the Panel and said that there was a direct negative impact on the learning experience for the students. It was the understanding of the Head of Subject that, according to the standard renewal cycle, the computers were due for imminent upgrade.

- 4.38 The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language ensure that upgrading of the computers in the STELLA lab is pursued in accordance with the standard upgrading cycle, in order to ensure that this valuable learning and teaching resource is optimised.
- 4.39 The students also found it frustrating that they were asked to leave the labs at 5 o'clock. Staff explained that this was because students could not be left in unstaffed buildings. The Review Panel noted that the University was hoping to move to less restricted student access on campus as technology for monitoring student safety improved.

4. Academic Standards

External Examining

- 5.1 The Review Panel noted the extremely positive nature of external examiner reports. These indicated that the externals had been consulted on proposed changes and that their comments had been taken on board and responded to. The reports confirmed that the externals fully supported the recent curriculum developments.

Student Feedback

- 5.2 The students who met with the Review Panel said that generally staff were very accessible and responsive, and that staff–student liaison committee (SSLC) meetings were effective in that staff were open to suggestions from students, and that where problems were raised there was a rapid response. The students felt that they were informed of changes and generally kept up to date with what was happening in the subject area. Minutes from SSLCs were made available on Moodle and it was clear to the Panel that these meetings were positive in tone, with time spent talking about the different courses rather than being a forum for complaints.
- 5.3 The Review Panel **commends** English Language for the open and responsive attitude of staff, demonstrated through effective consultation and rapid response to feedback or requests for support, attested to by students, GTAs and external examiners.

6. Summary of perceived strengths and areas for improvement

Key strengths

- Highly committed academic and administrative staff
- Teaching that is embedded in a strong research culture
- Exemplary training, support and development of GTAs

Areas for improvement

- Sustainability of PGT provision
- Direct recruitment at UG level

Conclusion

The members of the Review Panel very much enjoyed their engagement with English Language. A lasting impression was formed of a subject area where staff effectively communicate passion for their subject, and students feel welcomed into a vibrant learning community.

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

Commendations

The Review Panel commends English Language on the following, which are listed in order of appearance in this report:

Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** English Language's approach to mainstreaming Equality and Diversity, specifically through the School Disability Officer's belonging to the School's Learning and Teaching Committee, promoting awareness of relevant issues and embedding Equality and Diversity in the consideration of developments in learning and teaching.

[Paragraph 3.9]

Commendation 2

The Review Panel **commends** English Language for its success in engaging students in their studies, through embedding at an early stage connections with the Honours curriculum and with staff's own research, and through the evidently inclusive attitude of staff.

[Paragraph 3.17]

Commendation 3

The Review Panel **commends** English Language for the approach adopted in reviewing assessment as part of the wider review of the Honours curriculum. The diversification of assessment schemes was ambitious and wide-ranging, and resulted from careful planning and consultation. Staff demonstrated to the Panel an awareness of the importance of evaluating these changes following implementation in 2016-17.

[Paragraph 4.15]

Commendation 4

The Review Panel **strongly commends** English Language for the exemplary support and development of its GTAs (including opportunities offered to PGT students to shadow GTAs), and for the additional opportunities offered to GTAs such as lecturing on their own areas of research.

[Paragraph 4.31]

Commendation 5

The Review Panel **commends** English Language for the open and responsive attitude of staff, demonstrated through effective consultation and rapid response to feedback or requests for support, attested to by students, GTAs and external examiners.

[Paragraph 5.3]

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support the subject area in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. The recommendations have

been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer and are **ranked in order of priority**.

Recommendation 1

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
For information: **Head of School***

The Review Panel recommends that English Language, in conjunction with the School, continue its efforts to promote recruitment to the undergraduate study of English Language at Glasgow, exploring means of: involving current students and recent alumni in this task; harnessing social media and the internet; and following up contacts made at Open Days.

[Paragraph 3.6]

Recommendation 2

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***

Recognising the strategic importance of ESRC accreditation which is linked with its current PGT programme, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language proceed with its planned review of PGT provision with a view to establishing this on a sustainable footing, investigating opportunities for shared provision across the School and College, and exploring strategies for strengthening recruitment.

[Paragraph 2.10]

Recommendation 3

*For the attention of: **Head of Subject***

Recognising the broad range of educational backgrounds from which PGT students come, the Review Panel **recommends** that English Language review its induction and orientation process, particularly for those who have not previously studied at Glasgow, to cover the structure of the programme and what is expected of the students, and to support continuing orientation throughout the early stages of the programme.

[Paragraph 3.13]

Recommendation 4

*For the attention of: **Deans of Learning and Teaching, Arts and Social Sciences**
For information: **Head of Subject***

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Deans of Learning and Teaching in Arts and Social Sciences consider and then implement an approach that achieves best alignment between the generic coverage of statistics and qualitative measures provision and the specific needs of Arts PGT programmes.

[Paragraph 4.7]

Recommendation 5

*For the attention of: **Chair of the University VLE Governance Board**
For information: **Head of Subject***

The Review Panel **recommends** that the VLE Governance Board is asked to consider the limitations of providing feedback within Moodle and, if appropriate, to identify other more effective means of facilitating the provision of feedback to students on their assessed work.

[Paragraph 4.19]

Recommendation 6

For the attention of: ***Head of Subject***

The Review Panel recommends that English Language ensure that upgrading of the computers in the STELLA lab is pursued in accordance with the standard upgrading cycle, in order to ensure that this valuable learning and teaching resource is optimised.

[Paragraph 4.38]

Recommendation 7

For the attention of: ***Head of Subject***

The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language continue to explore the range of possible means for students to benefit from an international experience during the course of their studies at Glasgow, including options available to students for whom the traditional session-long or semester-long experiences would be impracticable.

[Paragraph 3.21]

Recommendation 8

For the attention of: ***Head of Subject***

The Review Panel **recommends** that English Language clarify to students the role of GTAs and, in particular, the fact that queries arising from seminars led by a GTA should be directed to the course convener rather than to the GTA.

[Paragraph 4.30]