

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee – Summer Powers

Periodic Subject Review: Review of English Literature held on 17 March 2016

Ms Helen Clegg, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith	Assistant Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching), Panel Convener
Professor Susan Bruce	Keele University, External Subject Specialist
Dr Carl Goodyear	Senate Assessor on Court
Mr David Guthrie	Student member
Dr John Richards	School of Culture and Creative Arts, Cognate member
Dr Amanda Sykes	Learning and Teaching Centre
Ms Helen Clegg	Senate Office, Clerk to the Panel

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Subject of English Literature ('the Subject') is one of four subjects that make up the School of Critical Studies ('the School'), the others being English Language, Scottish Literature and Theology & Religious Studies. The School of Critical Studies is one of four Schools in the College of Arts. The Schools and College were formed in 2010, when a major restructuring exercise reshaped the University from nine Faculties to four Colleges.
- 1.2 The Subject last underwent full internal review in March 2009 as the Department of English Literature, when it was one of three Departments in the Faculty of Arts' School of English and Scottish Language and Literature. The outcome of that review was positive in terms of student satisfaction, staff commitment and the quality of provision. Indeed, the Panel at that time noted that the Department appeared to downplay its strengths and achievements, which the Panel considered to be substantial.
- 1.3 The Self Evaluation Report (SER) was produced by Dr Vassiliki Kolocotroni (Head of Subject) with input from Professor Jeremy Smith (Head of School), Subject and School Learning & Teaching conveners, members of academic and administrative staff, Graduate Teaching Assistants and student representatives.
- 1.4 The Self Evaluation Report offered a large amount of information about the Subject's activities, though tended to be descriptive rather than reflective. The Review Panel was impressed by the examples of good practice indicated in the report though considered that more evidence to support them would have been useful.
- 1.5 The Review Panel met with Dr Vassiliki Kolocotroni (Head of Subject), Professor Jeremy Smith (Head of School), Dr Wendy Anderson (College Deputy Dean of Learning & Teaching), twenty three members of staff, five early-career staff members, four Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), eight Postgraduate Taught students and nineteen

undergraduate students across all levels. One further undergraduate student provided written comments.

1.6 The School is located mainly at numbers 4 and 5 University Gardens on the Gilmorehill Campus, although some staff members are located at Lilybank Gardens (the Creative Writing team) and The Square (the Postgraduate Office). Accommodation includes a dedicated teaching/social space and the STELLA laboratory at 13 University Gardens which is accessible to all School members. Some staff offices are large enough for small group teaching, but most do not have disabled access.

2. Background information

2.1 Students

Student numbers for the current session are as follows:

Level 1	375
Level 2	301
Honours (level 3 and 4)	428
Ordinary (level 3)	22
Undergraduate Total	1126
Postgraduate Taught	89
Total students	1215

2.2 Staffing

The Subject's academic staff, represented as FTEs, are as follows:

Professor	4.4
Senior Lecturer	9.5
Lecturer	11.2
University Teacher	0.5
Total FTEs	25.6

Additionally, the Subject has a full time Subject Administrator and a full time Administrative Assistant, as well as access to the School's administrative teams.

2.3 Range of provision

The following range of provision offered by the Subject was considered as part of the review:

- MA (Hons) English Literature (Single)

- MA (Hons) English Literature (Joint)
- MA General Humanities
- MLitt Creative Writing
- MLitt Fantasy
- MLitt Modernities
- MLitt Victorian Literature

The Subject also convenes the intercalating BSc (MedSci) (Hons) in Medical Humanities.

3. Context and Strategy

3.1 Context and Vision

- 3.1.1 The Subject's overall range of provision was similar to that offered at the time of the last review, with an additional Masters programme being introduced – the MLitt Fantasy, which was believed to be the only degree of its kind worldwide. Reform of the Honours programmes was also underway and, in addition to the standardisation of credits, these would include new courses in creative writing. The Head of Subject indicated that this was a much-demanded development, with prospective applicants frequently asking at Open Days about creative writing opportunities. She added that the Subject had gone through a period where creative writing had become a distinct unit, focused on postgraduate provision, but that there were now clear efforts to integrate it into the undergraduate curriculum with provision already embedded into Levels 1 and 2. It was hoped this would have a positive impact on recruitment and equip students with scholarly and critical skills and enhance their creative engagement. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on its commitment to the development of creative writing in the curriculum.
- 3.1.2 The Subject's objectives were listed in the SER. These included the development and delivery of innovative, inspiring and sustainable programmes, provision of a first-class student experience, and support for students in achieving and articulating their critical and creative expertise. The Subject sought to deliver excellence as standard in teaching and learning, improve its performance in the National Student Survey, and expand its international portfolio.
- 3.1.3 The Panel asked the Head of Subject about the distinctiveness of the Subject's provision. She stated that the Subject's vision was rooted in its legacy and pedigree, its outstanding scholars in the creative world, and its dedicated teachers. She added that the Subject's commitment to small-group teaching, despite the challenges this presented, was also a distinctive aspect and one highly valued by students and staff alike. The staff group made it clear that the preservation of small group teaching at all levels was a priority, as small groups were ideal for engaging in teaching and providing meaningful feedback. Staff recognised that students valued the personal interest in their learning that was afforded by this format. They added that small-group teaching was only possible because of the excellent group of GTAs teaching level 1 and 2 classes; GTAs were reported to undertake around three-quarters of level 1 and 2 teaching, apart from lectures. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on its commitment to small-group teaching despite the challenges presented by this.
- 3.1.4 The Panel was interested to hear more about the Subject's vision for the future, as this was unclear from the SER. The staff group reported that the Subject's strategic

plans over the last two years had focused on Honours reform and credit standardisation, and that larger issues had been shelved as a result. They told the Panel that work on these reforms had required a huge amount of time and effort, and had resulted in a number of implications for staff – for example, additional teaching loads for all staff would result, although no additional funding would be available. Staff reported several initiatives they would like to focus on – for example, developing the Medical Humanities provision, expanding PGT provision by offering new pathways, exploring collaboration opportunities with the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery – but could not spend time doing so at present. Although staff were positive about the reforms, and were confident improved provision would be offered as a result, there were concerns about the increased workload and the potential impact on learning and teaching. Additionally, staff felt the additional workload might make it difficult to recruit new staff. The Head of Subject acknowledged these concerns and agreed the task had taken a great deal of staff time. However, she added that it had given the Subject an excellent opportunity to consider its priorities and decide where to concentrate its future efforts. She believed the reformed curriculum that had been arrived at was excellent and the task overall had been constructive. The Head of School added that some staff workloads were “incredible” and that a workload management policy was in development.

- 3.1.5 The Panel considered that the Subject would be assisted in achieving its aspirations if it could develop a more succinct and clear vision for the future direction of the Subject. Although commendable and achievable objectives had been set for the short term, there was a lack of clarity in terms of long-term vision. It was evident that there were constraints in terms of staffing resource, primarily as a result of the substantial effort being focused on the reform of the Honours programmes, but the Panel believed that these constraints were limiting the Subject’s strategic vision and its ability to ensure all Subject staff were working towards the same goals. The Panel also believed that the Subject was significantly under-selling its strengths, as it had in the previous review. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject forms a clear vision for its future shape and direction, aligned to the School’s and College’s strategic plans for the future and capitalising on the ambition articulated by staff in relation to internationalisation, PGT and cross University collaborations.
- 3.1.6 The Panel heard unanimous praise from both student groups in relation to the approachability and supportiveness of staff. It was reported that any student could approach staff members with questions or problems and they would be given appropriate help and support. Students valued this greatly and a strong sense of community was apparent. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on providing such an open, friendly and supportive environment for its students.
- 3.1.7 It was noted from the SER that the Subject had a high staff:student ratio compared to comparable subject areas in other Russell Group institutions, though the Panel saw no evidence that this was adversely affecting the student experience.

3.2 Strategic approach to enhancing learning and teaching

- 3.2.1 The Panel noted that the Subject’s aims were in line with the College Learning & Teaching Plan, but without a clear vision for the subject area it was not clear how these aims would be achieved. It was also unclear which of the activities described in the SER were considered to be strategic priorities for the Subject.

3.2.2 The Subject's strategy included an expansion of its international portfolio, and several examples of how this might be achieved were provided in the SER. These included the development of three new Erasmus agreements, and ongoing discussions regarding possible bespoke links with institutions in India, China and Canada. The Head of School added that the use of technology was facilitating links with universities in India and Scandinavia, with videoconferencing being used to share teaching and promote interaction between learners. He reported that there was interest from some students at the University of Delhi, arising from the shared teaching, in coming to Glasgow. There was a possibility that this might develop into an exchange scheme but that a robust support system for incoming and outgoing students would need to be established first.

4. Enhancing the Student Experience

4.1 Admissions, Retention and Success

4.1.1 It was evident that the Subject concentrated a good deal of effort on attracting applicants through open days and visit events. In the SER it was noted that a large group of student volunteers played a key part in recruitment activity, advising and speaking to potential applicants and their parents. Student-produced films were also used for recruitment and were also available on social media.

4.1.2 The Subject's commitment to widening participation was evident from the SER and from the meeting with undergraduate students. The Widening Participation Summer School had been extended and enriched, leading to a large number of registered participants. Around half went on to enrol in the Subject. The Summer School was designed and taught by three GTAs, and participant feedback had been extremely positive. The Panel sought information on the support mechanisms in place for students who enrolled with the Subject after completing the Summer School. At the meeting with undergraduate students, the Panel heard from one of the students that the Summer School was instrumental in her decision to study in the Subject area. She reported being impressed by the commitment and passion of staff, enjoyed having the opportunity to hear visiting speakers, and felt very well supported in the transition from Summer School to full-time study. She believed a good deal of care had been taken in ensuring the process was as robust and supportive as possible. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject for the care taken to ensure the Widening Participation Summer School is as interesting and encouraging as possible, and that appropriate support is in place for Summer School students transitioning to full-time study. The Head of Subject added that more tailored support could be provided to students once registered for full-time study, but this would need to be agreed with the students as the Subject did not wish to highlight the Summer School students as requiring extra support. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject make contact with the Widening Participation team to discuss support for students joining study from the Summer School.

4.1.3 The Subject was also involved in a mentoring partnership scheme with two secondary schools with low university entry rates. This involved two visits to the University for students preparing for their Advanced Higher English dissertations. Student mentors gave guidance on locating and scrutinising source material, and

discussed the dissertation content. As well as providing useful advice for school pupils, the mentors gained mentoring and classroom experience.

- 4.1.4 A Creative Writing course was to be added to the International Summer School, with the aim of attracting international students to the undergraduate programme. This would be accompanied by the addition of new creative writing options at Honours levels.
- 4.1.5 The staff raised concerns about PGT recruitment, noting that sometimes programmes did not run because of small student numbers. This meant that applicants accepting a place on those programmes had to be offered an alternative which may not appeal to them as strongly. In turn, the dormant programmes never had the chance to become established and attract larger student numbers. The staff were unclear as to why minimum numbers were in place, stating that they might receive a small number of outstanding applicants but be unable to accommodate them on the programme they wished to follow. It was hoped that the move to a PGT 'hub and spoke' system with a number of specialist pathways would help resolve this situation. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject hold an event (such as a Subject away-day or facilitated workshop) to discuss the possibilities for the development of PGT provision and the management of student numbers and develop an approach to this that is sustainable and fits with the School and College targets and priorities.
- 4.1.6 It was reported in the SER that, on average, 86% of Home/EU students in the Subject progressed from level 1 to level 2. From level 2 to 3, the figure was 108.5% (exceeding 100% due to inward transfers). The figure increased to 250% from level 3 to 4, due to Erasmus and Junior Year Abroad students joining Honours.
- 4.1.7 The latest available figures showing graduates' first employment destinations indicated that 38% of English and Scottish literature graduates had found full time employment, and 19% had moved into further full time study. This last figure was a reduction from around 25% in the previous two years, and the Subject suggested that financial challenges posed by fee increases were a factor. Around 9% had not found employment.
- 4.1.8 The Panel noted that the proportion of first class Honours degrees was high (33% in 2014). The Head of Subject was asked to comment on this. She suggested that one reason was likely to be the change in the relative weightings of examinations and continuous assessment, as students tended to perform better in continuous assessment. She also stressed the high quality of the Honours cohort given the progression threshold of a B grade in year 2.

4.2 Equality and Diversity

- 4.2.1 The SER contained very little information on equality and diversity issues. It was reported that Disability Officers within the School and subject were advised about the needs of individual students registered with the Disability Service. It was also noted that the Subject's distance learning provision (at postgraduate level) was particularly suited to students with disabilities, and from overseas. The Subject indicated it intended to use some of the techniques used in its distance learning provision to support students on campus.

4.2.2 It was reported in the SER that the GTA training included a session on equality and diversity issues and that the GTAs were invited to complete the University's 'Equality and Diversity Essentials' online course. The Review Panel **recommends** that, given the amount of teaching undertaken by GTAs, the University's 'Equality and Diversity Essentials' online course be mandatory for GTAs, and that the GTAs are paid for the time taken to complete the course.

4.3 Supporting Students in their Learning

4.3.1 The Widening Participation Summer School was a key means of supporting students in the transition from secondary school to university, and feedback on the summer school had been extremely positive. Additionally, the Subject had spent a year redesigning its Level 1 courses, paying particular attention to the move from school to university.

4.3.2 The undergraduate students in the later years of their degree stated that the transition from year 2 to year 3 had been challenging. The Subject provided pre-Honours induction sessions, giving information on course content, student requirements and sources of information for students. Additionally, the Subject had acted on student feedback about the lack of connection between the Subject and the student body, and had held an Honours-wide social event. This had been very successful and further events were planned. The undergraduate student group said they would value having a lecture at which Honours course conveners gave a presentation about their course, in order to help students choose their options. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject formally organises an event for students approaching Honours, at which course conveners provide information about their courses, in order to assist students in selecting their Honours options.

4.3.3 Postgraduate inductions were also in place, which included presentations from the School and Subject, as well as detailed introductions from the relevant Programme Conveners and a welcome 'bring your own' lunch. It was reported in the SER that feedback on the induction was very positive and was found to be an important part of cohort building at an early stage. The postgraduate student group echoed this, though suggested the early stages of their study could be improved by having a list of all students and their programme of study available in order that students could identify their peer group.

4.3.4 Ongoing study support was described in the SER and included writing and study skills assistance provided by the Student Learning Service, in-class guidance on essay preparation and revision strategy, and formative writing exercises. The Subject's Moodle pages also provided a range of resources for student use. Additionally, the GTAs had identified student needs in particular areas and offered drop-in sessions, for example, on referencing. Postgraduate students were provided with Research Skills training and an academic writing workshop. For the Victorian Literature and Modernities programmes, a Dissertation Symposium was held, where students could receive detailed feedback from staff and peers before embarking on the formal writing up period.

4.3.5 Support mechanisms were in place to monitor attendance and performance of students, and any student deemed 'at risk' would receive an email from the relevant tutor followed by, if necessary, a further email from the Course Convener or Head of Subject. Learning and teaching methods (such as group work and Moodle

discussion forums) also offered support to students, and staff operated an open-door policy as well as office hours when students could approach them for support. Staff also offered a weekly consultation hour where students could seek pastoral support. The undergraduate student group spoke highly of the office hours system and open door policy. They said they could use these options to clarify any aspect of teaching they had not understood, to raise any concerns, or to seek pastoral support.

- 4.3.6 Specific support was in place for international students. For example, alternative assessment was available to visiting students in order that they could attend for one semester without any requirement to stay for examinations. Social events were organised, to help international students meet and integrate with their classmates.
- 4.3.7 Students enrolling from the Widening Participation Summer School also received particular support. Specific bursaries and scholarships were available, and a student orientation event was organised where the students could meet with current students and advisers. Students joining from the Summer School were monitored and supported as they progressed through their degree, and the GTAs involved in the Summer School also taught Level 1 classes, which had been found to make a positive contribution to the transition and the students' sense of belonging. It was noted that additional, specific support was also in place for care leavers.
- 4.3.8 The advising system had been restructured in 2015, with a small Arts Advising Team now being in place for students across the College, instead of particular School staff acting as Advisers. In the SER it was reported that the Subject's Learning and Teaching Administrators were often students' first point of contact, and that they also alerted the Arts Advising Team to any student who appeared to be struggling either academically or personally. The undergraduate students reported that the Advising Team system did not work as well as the previous system whereby their Adviser would have had a clear understanding of their programme of study. Some reported not having had any contact with an Adviser so far in the session. The students stated that they could speak to any staff member about any concerns they had, so they did not feel neglected in any way, but they made it clear they preferred the previous advising system.
- 4.3.9 It was clear from the student meetings that all students particularly valued the open-door policy of staff within the School. Students reported that they were encouraged to speak to any staff member about any issue they experienced in their studies, and that they had found them immensely approachable, supportive and helpful. The Panel was impressed by the approachable and supportive staff. This environment was highly valued by students and **commended** by the Review Panel.

4.4 Student Engagement

- 4.4.1 It was evident to the Panel that the student groups were highly engaged in their learning. Students reported that learning material was interesting and challenging, and valued the individual skills and expertise of staff. In particular, they enjoyed seeing staff perform their own work, for example, through the use of dramatic readings and performances. The Panel noted that the range of learning and teaching methods was excellent, and a number of unusual and interesting formats were used – for example, performances as described above, 'open mic' sessions, debates, poetry readings and film screenings. Survey feedback indicated that students commended staff for their 'passionate' and 'stimulating' lectures. The

Review Panel **commends** the Subject on the interesting range of learning and teaching methods, and staff commitment to these, which clearly has the effect of engaging students with the material and enhancing their enjoyment of the subject.

- 4.4.2 It was stated in the SER that the Subject promoted students' intellectual freedom and independence of mind, as well as offering a historical breadth of material. It was clear from discussion with the student groups, and particularly the Creative Writing students, that this was highly valued.
- 4.4.3 For tutorial and seminar work, the Subject offered students the opportunity to discuss the material in Autonomous Learning Groups (ALGs), and through individual and group oral presentations. Small group teaching was considered by the Subject to be a particular strength, and a continuing priority going forward. The undergraduate students agreed that small-group teaching was highly valued, though presented mixed views about ALGs. Some students found them very useful and believed the Subject should encourage their use as much as possible. However, others reported less positive experiences, noting that practice was variable, and often depended on the guidance of the tutor involved. It was noted that there was sometimes resistance from students and, without the full commitment of all members, ALGs would not work effectively, particularly if students simply failed to turn up to group meetings. The staff group acknowledged that ALGs did not always work well, though noted some ALGs were naturally evolving, particularly among students living locally. However, this could also have the effect of excluding students who lived further away or had other responsibilities. The Review Panel **recommends** that, if the Subject intends to pursue the use of Autonomous Learning Groups, clear guidance is given to students to ensure they understand the benefits, structure and requirements of such groups in order to promote engagement. Moreover, a consistent approach is required from staff in explaining and actively supporting the practice of ALGs if the benefits are to be fully appreciated and realised.
- 4.4.4 New Honours courses in creative writing had been introduced in response to student demand, and students could also complete their dissertation in creative writing. Informal feedback on the new courses had been very positive, and a number of current Honours students were pursuing postgraduate opportunities in creative writing.

The development of graduate attributes and employability

- 4.4.5 The development of graduate attributes was embedded throughout the curriculum, with an emphasis on developing intellectual, critical, creative and professional skills. The Subject had been working on curriculum development in this regard and was piloting a project focused on framing skills as graduate attributes and raising awareness of graduate attributes. It was hoped that the initiative would be rolled out across the College of Arts as best practice after being extended beyond the pilot group.
- 4.4.6 Students had the opportunity to take the Honours course 'Humanities in the Classroom'. It was designed for students interested in a career in teaching or education. The course included a placement period within a school, college or educational charity, lectures by visiting speakers, lesson planning, and reflective learning. The course assisted students in deciding whether to pursue a career in education, and offered useful skills for progression to a teaching qualification. Even

for those not proceeding to a teaching career, the transferable skills gained (such as presentation and organisational skills, and reflective practice) were considered to be very beneficial.

- 4.4.7 Creative Writing students were provided with a range of employability measures to assist them in engaging with the literary and creative industries. For example, writers, agents, publishers and broadcasters were invited to give guest presentations, and students were required to complete an editorial project from conception to launch. Creative Writing students also took a course, Editorial & Publishing, which included weekly visits by publishers in an effort to help students have their work published.
- 4.4.8 The postgraduate students on programmes other than Creative Writing believed that the majority of employability and careers advice available tended to focus on students intending to move into academia. However, they added that they were free to attend any of the events organised for and by the Creative Writing group. They found the events very interesting and refreshing, and believed they helped build a positive social community. It was reported that the students had set up a Facebook page which listed all upcoming events including speaker events, performances, film series, etc. An email was also sent containing the same information, as not all students used Facebook.
- 4.4.9 The undergraduate students in their Honours years told the Panel that they had recently received a lecture about graduate attributes, but had not been familiar with the term prior to that. They reported that little information about possible career opportunities was provided, and felt they would benefit from the use of guest speakers on this matter, throughout their studies. They reported that students in Theatre, Film and Television received a substantial amount of careers guidance and they would welcome a similar approach. They reported that careers fairs were often not relevant to them.
- 4.4.10 It was stated in the SER that a pilot project was underway with regard to graduate attributes and skills for employment. This would be rolled out to further years. The Review Panel **recommends** that the work being undertaken at Honours level with regard to the embedding of graduate attributes, and raising students' awareness of graduate attributes, be implemented at all levels of provision. This work should be undertaken during 2016-17 and be implemented fully by 2017-18.

Internationalisation

- 4.4.11 It was noted that undergraduate students had the opportunity to take their junior Honours year abroad, and interest in the scheme was strong. An annual information event was held for students interested in pursuing their Junior Honours year abroad, and a dedicated Moodle page set up. Support was given to interested students throughout the process, and those going abroad were invited to speak to the new applicants about their experience on returning. The Review Panel **commends** this informative and supportive approach. It was stated in the SER that the students who went abroad for their junior Honours year were overwhelmingly positive about the experience. Two new agreements had recently been completed and a range of locations across Europe and worldwide were available. The Subject also welcomed incoming students annually, and the staff group reported that the quality of class discussions and the student experience was improved as a result. They added that

many of the incoming Erasmus students returned to the Subject for postgraduate study.

4.4.12 The Head of Subject advised that the Subject was currently considering new teaching partnerships with institutions in China and Canada.

The effectiveness of feedback mechanisms

4.4.13 It was stated in the SER that mechanisms within the Subject for student feedback were in operation, including School Staff/Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings, at which a student representative from each level of each Subject was present. School-level matters, such as annual monitoring, course and programme changes with a School-level impact, and learning and teaching initiatives, were typical business at these meetings. A Subject-level SSLC was also in operation, with each seminar group electing a representative. Discussions focused on Subject-related matters, including course and programme design. Creative Writing had a separate SSLC, to allow for specific discussions to take place about its particular content and structure in response to feedback. Minutes of all SSLC meetings were available for all students and staff to consult. It was reported that action was normally taken immediately (where appropriate) or in the following academic year. The Subject saw student feedback as a valuable means of informing improvement of the students' learning experience and development of the curriculum.

4.4.14 Students were informed about changes and initiatives in several ways. They were consulted on course and programme proposals, which were also discussed at SSLC meetings, and other matters were posted on Moodle as well as being emailed to students. Students reported that they also set up class Facebook groups. The open, approachable environment in the Subject also allowed for much informal discussion of issues.

4.4.15 Course questionnaires were also used as a student feedback mechanism, containing multiple choice questions and space for free comment in line with the University's new Course Evaluation policy. In addition to these, the Subject asked Level 2 students to complete a 'traffic light questionnaire' in order to gauge what aspects of provision students would like more of (or indeed less). The forms used by the Subject and School contained a section for reporting how previously-raised issues had been resolved.

4.4.16 NSS results were discussed at Subject meetings, and views fed back to the School Executive and Learning & Teaching Committee. A Subject Area Action Plan was then devised for inclusion in the College plan. Discussions took place each year to discuss the actions taken as a result.

5. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

5.1 Learning and Teaching

Curriculum Design

5.1.1 The Subject stated in the SER that it was in the process of restructuring its Honours provision in line with College credit standardisation to 20-credit courses. The revised provision would go forward for approval in 2016-17, and take effect in 2017-18. This timescale was agreed in order to allow adequate time to ensure students – particularly those following a joint Honours programme - would not be

disadvantaged. It was reported in the SER that the process of Honours reform had given the Subject the opportunity to completely review its course provision. This had led to the planned introduction of new courses to take account of staffing changes and areas of expertise. It was noted that curriculum review would extend beyond the planned implementation of Honours revisions in 2017-18.

- 5.1.2 The Subject provided a number of examples of enhancement and development of the curriculum. For example, the reform of Honours described above would allow Honours students to choose from a greater variety of options. Additionally, final examinations would be removed from junior Honours courses, a change which was expected to be welcomed by students and to improve the profile of Honours classifications achieved.
- 5.1.3 Three new Honours courses in creative writing had been introduced following consultation with students. The Head of Subject explained that creative writing opportunities had been desired by undergraduate students who, until now, could only pursue creative writing at the dissertation stage. The undergraduate student group were very positive about this development, and stated that they were very keen to have the opportunity to take these courses.
- 5.1.4 It was reported in the SER that the Subject made great efforts to keep material engaging and, to support this, offered a wide range of reading and discussion groups, 'work in progress' seminars, competitions and guest speaker events. These were valued very highly and it was apparent from the meetings with students that they substantially enhanced the student experience. The Review Panel **commends** this.
- 5.1.5 The undergraduate students made very positive comments about the content of the courses they studied. One suggestion for consideration by the Subject was that more detailed poetry work would be useful. Students stated that they would like to study the different forms and types of poetry, rather than simply analysing a piece. They considered that this would be very useful early in their studies. The Subject is encouraged to discuss this possibility further with students in order to inform the ongoing review of Honours.
- 5.1.6 Staff reported that a key strength of the Subject was the opportunity for staff to develop courses and programmes based on their own research areas. This had led to the introduction of the MLitt Fantasy programme, which was the only programme of its kind worldwide. Staff involved in this programme reported that students were very engaged and were delighted with the range of material they could cover.
- 5.1.7 Revisions were planned to the PGT programme structures, with a move to a 'hub and spoke' model, allowing students to either graduate with a generic degree or with a specialised pathway. This was expected to have the benefit of attracting students who did not wish to follow a specialist route, as well as creating more flexibility to introduce and run new pathways, even with small student numbers.
- 5.1.8 Students on the MLitt Modernities indicated that their second semester was rather prose-focused, and that they would welcome a mix similar to that of the first semester. The Subject is encouraged to discuss this possibility further with students and decide whether changes should be made for next session. Students on the MLitt Fantasy programme were extremely positive about the content of their programme, and about the very clear structure and objectives. They reported having

to read several novels each week. They recognised that all of the reading material was relevant, and stated that it opened up new avenues of work they would not otherwise have explored, but the volume meant they found it difficult to engage fully with the content. They had spoken to the Programme Convener about this concern and reported he was considering how it might be addressed.

- 5.1.9 The staff group considered that one of the strengths of the undergraduate provision was the breadth of material covered, and stated that this was often remarked upon by students and external examiners.

Intended Learning Outcomes

- 5.1.10 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were made explicit in course and programme documentation, which was provided to all students, as well as on Moodle sites. Documentation was reviewed annually. It was stated in the SER that all ILOs were related to at least one form of assessment and this was a clear requirement of all new courses being proposed and approved.

Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

- 5.1.11 The Subject reported that Moodle was used extensively in all years. Moodle sites included teaching notes, topics for further research, discussion points and other relevant materials.
- 5.1.12 The distance learning MLitt in Creative Writing was delivered by video-conferencing and Moodle. Workshops, seminars and other events were at set times, but were recorded for students to watch at their convenience. It was noted that students also set up their own Facebook groups.
- 5.1.13 A new initiative with the University of Delhi had recent been introduced, whereby English Literature courses could be shared by video-link between Glasgow and Delhi. As well as lectures, real-time Q&A sessions have been offered via Skype.
- 5.1.14 The Subject reported it was trialling PeerWise, a question databank to which students submitted questions. The setting and answering of questions by students themselves was expected to be a valuable study resource.

5.2 Assessment and Feedback

- 5.2.1 The Subject employed a range of assessment methods including essays, seminar presentations, examinations and dissertations. At Honours levels, there was additional variety and, in addition to the mode of assessment listed above, students were also assessed via annotated bibliographies, poetry anthologies, close readings, etc. A document describing the various assessment types was provided to Honours students to assist them in understanding the requirements and purpose of each. Most methods were used to provide both formative and summative assessment and feedback. The undergraduate students reported that they particularly enjoyed the more unusual forms of assessment, such as annotated bibliographies and mini-conferences.
- 5.2.2 Examinations were used throughout undergraduate study and, following feedback from External Examiners, examination durations had been shortened. As noted above, examinations would be removed from junior Honours but would still be a feature of senior Honours. The undergraduate students generally supported this

move, stating that they put a good deal of time and effort into continuous assessment and did not feel it was weighted sufficiently highly at present. The students believed continuous assessment more appropriately demonstrated their skills, though some reported that they preferred examinations and believed they were still a relevant means of assessment.

- 5.2.3 For Creative Writing students, discipline-specific assessment criteria were used, focusing on the value of the application of critical and creative skills in creating work. It was explained in the SER that understanding of this approach, as well as recognition of experimental forms of writing, made the Creative Writing discipline distinct from English Literature.
- 5.2.4 It was stated in the SER that students received feedback on coursework within fifteen working days, and on oral presentations within one week. A standardised feedback form was used, containing a grade and commentary. Students were given documentation explaining what they should expect in terms of the timeliness and type of feedback provided. It was also made clear to students that they would likely receive informal feedback in a number of ways (for example, at seminars, or through dissertation supervision), not only through the more formal mechanisms.
- 5.2.5 The undergraduate students were generally content with the timeliness and content of feedback they received, though stated it could be variable depending on the staff member. They reported that not all staff members provided feedback on presentations, and they considered this to be very important, even though the presentation was often a small element of the assessment. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject takes steps to ensure that all students delivering assessed presentations receive feedback on the presentation, in line with the Subject's statement that feedback on presentations will be provided within one week.
- 5.2.6 The undergraduate students added that the quality and quantity of feedback from staff was variable, with some markers providing more detailed comments than others. They also reported that they would appreciate feedback that indicated to them how they could improve their grades. They said that the criteria for each grade were sometimes vague and it was not always evident to students what they needed to do to improve and achieve a higher grade. A small number of students also suggested that feedback on the eventual Honours classification their grades indicated would be useful, as this was difficult for them to calculate. The staff group explained that the use of peer assessment assisted students in understanding how their grades were arrived at, and how they could be improved. However, it was added that not all students had the opportunity to carry out peer assessment, because of the workload involved in organising and monitoring it. The Panel suggested that Aropä (a web-based system designed to support peer review activity) could be used effectively with large numbers of students and the workload implication would be minimal. A lecture could be provided by the Student Learning Service to explain to students how to use Aropä and provide guidance on reviewing other students' work. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject make contact with the Learning & Teaching Centre for guidance on using Aropä to facilitate student peer assessment.
- 5.2.7 In English Literature 1B and 2B, detailed feedback on essays was emailed to students a week before the essays were returned. It was reported in the SER that

students had unanimously welcomed this and that, although staff workload was increased, it was considered very worthwhile given the benefit to students that had been observed. The undergraduate student group supported this view.

- 5.2.8 Creative Writing students received oral and written feedback, as well as one to one tutorials throughout the year. In the SER it was explained that the role of trial and error, and consequently the importance of ongoing feedback, were key to the student's development as a writer.
- 5.2.9 The postgraduate student group reported that they were impressed by the substantial amount of careful, thorough feedback on their work and also by how promptly it was provided – sometimes within one week. The MLitt Fantasy students told the Panel that one-to-one sessions were available for feedback provision and that staff were open to discussing students' work at any time. The MLitt Modernities students added that they received two sets of feedback, as their work was double marked. They found this very valuable.
- 5.2.10 Feedback was provided to students on their written examinations in two ways. Firstly, generic feedback on exam performance across the group was provided by email to all students together with their grade. Secondly, students were able to request sight of the External Examiners' comments on each question attempted.

Code of Assessment

- 5.2.11 The Subject adhered to the University Code of Assessment, and the School Learning & Teaching Committee had produced a staff handbook to ensure staff were up to date with, and adhering to, regulations.

5.3 Engaging and Supporting Staff

Probationer and Early Career development support

- 5.3.1 A number of staff members were currently participating in the Early Career Development Programme (ECDP). These staff members were assigned a mentor and career objectives were drafted with line managers. The School of Critical Studies had also appointed an ECDP Champion to facilitate liaison between the College of Arts ECDP Champion, Human Resources staff and School colleagues. It was reported in the SER that there was 'considerable disquiet' about the ECDP, with concerns in particular surrounding the lack of consistency of treatment and expectations. Early career staff might expect to be reviewed under the probationary process, the EDCP, or Performance & Development Review, and this caused a great deal of anxiety.
- 5.3.2 Staff members on the ECDP were required to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP), and were assigned a senior staff member as a mentor. Informal support and advice was available from other staff members.
- 5.3.3 Early career staff reported that their workload during teaching period was very high, and not all of them received a reduced teaching load. They also reported that the experience of the ECDP had been a negative one, which had not assisted them in developing their careers. They reported that the ECDP was a punitive process, with particular markers requiring to be met by prescribed times which were considered to be unachievable. There were serious concerns among early career staff about the consequences of not meeting the requirements – for example, being demoted or even dismissed. The early career staff also noted that they were treated

inconsistently depending on their contract type, with the Teaching Fellows being ineligible for the PgCAP or other training that could help career progression. It was reported that the processes were not transparent and it was difficult to obtain clear answers to queries. Staff within the Subject and School had been offering guidance and advice to early career staff, helping them negotiate the process. The Head of School confirmed he was aware of the issues and that the process was extremely difficult for staff to navigate. The Head of School added that Human Resources staff within the College of Arts had become overwhelmed and that the amount of bureaucracy in the process was unmanageable, particularly as the large number of parties involved meant that staff did not know who to contact. This was creating huge amount of stress and confusion for all staff involved. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject and Head of School raise with the Head of College and Human Resources the issue of the profound disquiet being expressed by staff participating in the ECDP, so that consistent advice and guidance can be provided to those staff members and their mentors.

- 5.3.4 Despite the concerns relating to the ECDP, all of the early career staff said they felt supported by the Subject in running their classes, and felt they could ask for support from a range of staff members besides their allocated mentors.
- 5.3.5 The early career staff on Teaching Fellow contracts reported that they did not have mentors allocated, and did not have induction. They believed induction would have been helpful, for example, in familiarising them with University processes, understanding acronyms, and so on. They believed there had been an assumption that they had not needed guidance as they had completed their PhD studies at the University. They added that they had been employed for two months before being paid, which had been very problematic. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject liaise with the Learning & Teaching Centre in order to ensure access to support for scholarship is provided for staff on Teaching Fellow contracts, and that induction and mentoring for these staff is also provided.
- 5.3.6 Early career staff advised that staff within the Subject gave them guidance and assistance in writing research applications, and gave feedback. They felt supported and encouraged by staff in this regard.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

- 5.3.7 Training for GTAs was provided at the beginning of the academic session. This included the University's mandatory GTA sessions, and the School's own training which comprised five hour-long sessions. Within the Subject, regular briefing sessions were run, as well as training sessions on marking. The Subject also provided a GTA shadowing programme, whereby a prospective GTA would be paired with an experienced GTA and shadow at least two small-group classes. GTAs were mentored throughout the year and this was reinforced by teaching team meetings. It was reported in the SER that feedback from GTAs undertaking training had been positive. Creative Writing GTAs received specific training, undertaking a course in Practical Pedagogy, which trained them in teaching creative writing. The course also allowed those GTAs to teach a syllabus developed by themselves, with their teaching being observed and evaluated. The GTAs explained that, although they were given set texts to teach, they also had access to additional resources and could organise and design their own teaching.

- 5.3.8 The GTA group reported that they would be keen to undertake additional training – for example, to help them provide pastoral care for students, in first aid and, as noted in paragraph 4.2.2 above, equality and diversity. They added they would appreciate a dedicated Moodle site for GTAs. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject gives GTAs the opportunity to register for First Aid training and any other training course relevant to the provision of pastoral care, and investigates the feasibility of introducing a dedicated Moodle site for its GTAs to gather and consult resources, and discuss teaching.
- 5.3.9 The staff group praised the GTAs very highly, noting that small-group teaching – a priority within the Subject – could not be continued without them, as they taught around three-quarters of classes (other than lectures) at levels 1 and 2. The staff considered the GTAs to be a key part of the Subject’s teaching team and valued their contributions enormously. They explained that undertaking this teaching gave the GTAs essential experience for future employment, and allowed them to teach a broad range of material rather than focusing only on their own research interests. Staff reported that they offered as much support to GTAs as possible (for instance, through weekly drop-in sessions and advice on marking), but expressed concern that, for budgetary reasons, the amount of support they could offer was reducing.
- 5.3.10 The GTAs reported that they did feel like valued members of the teaching team, and that there was a sense of collegiality within the Subject. However, they advised that the amount of paid support time with colleagues to discuss content and teaching had reduced to one half-hour session per week. They did not consider this to be sufficient. The paid preparation time of half an hour per class was also not considered sufficient, given the material that might need to be read in preparation, nor the paid time allocated to marking. There had also been issues regarding GTAs not being paid on time. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject discusses with the School/College the various issues relating to payment of GTAs for preparation and marking time, and the timeliness of payment, with Human Resources, in order that GTAs are fully supported in their preparation and are paid on time.

Ongoing support and development

- 5.3.11 All staff members underwent Performance Development & Review (PD&R) to identify training and support need, and student evaluations were monitored to ensure any necessary action was taken with regard to staff performance. Support for staff was available through other University Services including Human Resources, the Equality & Diversity Unit, and the Learning & Teaching Centre.
- 5.3.12 It was reported in the SER that the PD&R process had caused concern among staff, who felt that the process and related strategies did not capture the overall performance of staff, focusing rather on financial indicators. This was considered to undervalue learning and teaching engagement.

5.4 Resources for Learning and Teaching

Staffing

- 5.4.1 It was noted that, due to research leave and management commitments, staffing was currently presenting a challenge. The Head of Subject reported that, even with

a full complement of staff, the Subject was arguably understaffed, with the student:staff ratio being higher than in most other Russell Group institutions.

- 5.4.2 A particular concern raised in the SER relating to staffing was the relocation of Subject administrators to a central office, and other administrators to different locations across campus. The Subject was reported to have been disadvantaged by the loss of a dedicated Subject-area office and communication was said to suffer.

Accommodation and equipment

- 5.4.3 The Panel was given a tour of the Subject's accommodations and viewed some small group teaching rooms.
- 5.4.4 The Subject reported in the SER that there were difficulties in using the University's Central Room Booking system, and that the quality of teaching rooms was often poor. Tutors had reported being allocated rooms which were poorly ventilated, uncomfortable and inadequately equipped. In some cases, there were insufficient seats. The loss of the Charles Wilson lecture theatre had led to allocation of an alternative which was a substantial distance away.
- 5.4.5 The lack of postgraduate study space, and the quality of available space, across the College of Arts was said to be repeated complaint by students. A PG Hub had been established but the Subject believed that further action was needed.
- 5.4.6 While the Subject's distance learning provision was very positively received, it was noted that resources (such as web-cams and microphones) were lacking and this meant the Subject could not take advantage of the large capacity for growth in that area.

6 Academic Standards

- 6.1 The Panel noted that there was a good deal of excellent teaching in the Subject's provision and that quality assurance procedures appeared to be in line with University policy and were applied effectively. It was clear that the staff members the Panel met were engaged in excellent teaching and were committed to ensuring the student experience was of the highest quality.
- 6.2 The Subject adhered to the University's processes for course and programme approval. Course and programme proposals were discussed in detail at Subject level, then by the School's Learning & Teaching Committee. Consultation took place with students and external examiners. The Subject had welcomed the simplified approval process introduced University-wide in 2015-16 and the changes to be introduced in 2016-17. These gave more authority to Schools and Colleges to approve proposals.
- 6.3 Annual Monitoring Reports were completed each year for all courses. The Subject reported that it favoured a 'holistic' Annual Monitoring system, and produced reports following team meetings. Guidance on this had been produced for staff by the School Quality Officer.
- 6.4 In addition to professional validation, External Examiners played an important role in ensuring standards were maintained, through scrutiny and feedback, and providing a means of comparison with other institutions. Comments made by External

Examiners were taken into account in various processes (examination paper setting, marking, curriculum review) and acted upon. External Examiners' reports had been generally positive about the Subject and its provision, and had praised the high quality of students' work.

7 Summary of perceived strengths and areas for improvement

7.1 Key strengths

The following key strengths were noted:

- Commitment of staff to ensuring the student experience is high quality and engaging, in particular through the use of small-group teaching
- Good student support mechanisms, with helpful, approachable staff
- Innovative learning, teaching and assessment methods, and provision of meaningful feedback
- Supportive approach to recruitment, particularly through the Widening Access Summer School
- Commitment to research-led teaching
- Commitment of, and support for, the highly-valued group of GTAs
- The provision of an interesting and valuable programme of social and career-related events

7.2 Areas for improvement

The Review Panel highlighted the following areas as opportunities for improvement:

- The clarity of the Subject's vision, and its strategic objectives in moving towards this vision
- Support for early career staff
- Additional training for GTAs, including Equality & Diversity, and pastoral support, training, and additional support for GTAs in terms of teaching advice, preparation and marking time
- Further embedding of graduate attributes at all levels of provision
- A consistent approach to provision of feedback to students

7.3 Conclusion

The Panel was impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff and students, and with the firm focus on excellence in teaching and support for students. The student groups were enthusiastic and positive, and a credit to the Subject.

The Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that, at the time of the Review, the programmes offered by the Subject were current and valid in the light of knowledge and practice within the subject area.

The Subject demonstrated a number of strengths, as well as an awareness of the areas requiring improvement. The most substantive of these are reflected in the commendations and recommendations below.

Commendations

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

Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on its commitment to the development of creative writing in the curriculum [*Paragraph 3.1.1*].

Commendation 2

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on its commitment to small-group teaching despite the challenges presented by this [*Paragraph 3.1.3*].

Commendation 3

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on providing such an open, friendly and supportive environment for its students [*Paragraphs 3.1.6 and 4.3.9*].

Commendation 4

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject for the care taken to ensure the Widening Participation Summer School is as interesting and encouraging as possible, and that appropriate support is in place for Summer School students transitioning to full-time study [*Paragraph 4.1.2*].

Commendation 5

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject on the interesting range of learning and teaching methods, and staff commitment to these, which clearly has the effect of engaging students with the material and enhancing their enjoyment of the subject [*Paragraph 4.4.1*].

Commendation 6

An annual information event was held for students interested in pursuing their Junior Honours year abroad, and a dedicated Moodle page set up. Support was given to interested students throughout the process, and those going abroad were invited to speak to the new applicants about their experience on returning. The Review Panel **commends** this informative and supportive approach [*Paragraph 4.4.11*].

Commendation 7

The Subject made great efforts to keep material engaging and, to support this, offered a wide range of reading and discussion groups, 'work in progress' seminars, competitions and guest speaker events. These were valued very highly and it was apparent from the meetings with students that they substantially enhanced the student experience. The Review Panel **commends** this [*Paragraph 5.1.4*].

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support the Subject 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 grouped together by the areas for improvement/enhancement and are ranked in order of priority within each section.

Strategy and Vision

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject forms a clear vision for its future shape and direction, aligned to the School's and College's strategic plans for the future and capitalising on the ambition articulated by staff in relation to internationalisation, PGT and cross University collaborations [*Paragraph 3.1.5*].

Attention: Head of Subject
Information: Head of School, Head of College

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject hold an event (such as a Subject away-day or facilitated workshop) to discuss the possibilities for the development of PGT provision and the management of student numbers and develop an approach to this that is sustainable and fits with the School and College targets and priorities [*Paragraph 4.1.5*].

Attention: Head of Subject
Information: Head of School, Head of College

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject takes steps to ensure that all students delivering assessed presentations receive feedback on the presentation, in line with the Subject's statement that feedback on presentations will be provided within one week [*Paragraph 5.2.5*].

Attention: Head of Subject
Information: Head of School

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that, if the Subject intends to pursue the use of Autonomous Learning Groups, clear guidance is given to students to ensure they understand the benefits, structure and requirements of such groups in order to promote engagement. Moreover, a consistent approach is required from staff in explaining and actively supporting the practice of ALGs if the benefits are to be fully appreciated and realised. [*Paragraph 4.4.3*].

Attention: Head of Subject
Information: Head of School

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject make contact with the Learning & Teaching Centre for guidance on using Aropä to facilitate student peer assessment [Paragraph 5.2.6].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School, Director of Learning & Teaching Centre

Graduate Attributes

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the work being undertaken at Honours level with regard to the embedding of graduate attributes, and raising students' awareness of graduate attributes, be implemented at all levels of provision. This work should be undertaken during 2016-17 and be implemented fully by 2017-18 [Paragraph 4.4.10].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School

Student support

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject make contact with the Widening Participation team to discuss support for students joining study from the Summer School [Paragraph 4.1.2].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School, Widening Participation Team

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject formally organises an event for students approaching Honours, at which course conveners provide information about their courses, in order to assist students in selecting their Honours options [Paragraph 4.3.2].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School

Support for GTAs and Early Career Staff

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject and Head of School raise with the Head of College and Human Resources the issue of the profound disquiet being expressed by staff participating in the ECDP, so that consistent advice and guidance can be provided to those staff members and their mentors [Paragraph 5.3.3].

Attention: Head of Subject & Head of School

Information: Head of College, Director of Human Resources

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject discusses with the School/College the various issues relating to payment of GTAs for preparation and marking time, and the timeliness of payment, with Human Resources, in order that GTAs are fully supported in their preparation and are paid on time [Paragraph 5.3.10].

**Attention: Head of Subject, Head of Human Resources (College of Arts)
Head of School, Head of College**

Information: Director of Human Resources

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject liaise with the Learning & Teaching Centre in order to ensure access to support for scholarship is provided for staff on Teaching Fellow contracts, and that induction and mentoring for these staff is also provided [Paragraph 5.3.5].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School, Director of Learning & Teaching Centre

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel **recommends** that, given the amount of teaching undertaken by GTAs, the University's 'Equality and Diversity Essentials' online course be mandatory for GTAs, and that the GTAs are paid for the time taken to complete the course [Paragraph 4.2.2].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School; Director of Equality & Diversity Unit

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject gives GTAs the opportunity to register for First Aid training and any other training course relevant to the provision of pastoral care, and investigates the feasibility of introducing a dedicated Moodle site for its GTAs to gather and consult resources, and discuss teaching [Paragraph 5.3.8].

Attention: Head of Subject

Information: Head of School