



Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies held on 22 and 23 March 2016

Report Summary

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

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_484833_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

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

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The School has developed considerably in the last couple of years and this was reflected in the growth in student numbers, the consolidation of programmes, and the move away from a liberal arts-based curriculum to one that was more focused on the requirements of the market. The School's overarching strategic goal to 'become an internationally recognised school that reaches the highest academic standards while also serving the social and economic regeneration of the region' was considered a laudable goal but one that had significant implications around staffing requirements and maintaining the student experience. The sustainability of resource provision is dependent on further growth in student numbers, which will require a shift in the delivery model of learning and teaching currently employed within the School.

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

Key Strengths (Commendations)¹

Enhancing the Student Experience: Supporting Students in their learning

- The School's success in maintaining its identity and a sense of community during a period of significant challenges due to restructuring [Section 3.2.4].
- Teaching which was mostly delivered in two-hour slots to enable diversity of classroom practice (through lectures, small group work, debates, technology-enhanced learning, and a wide range of seminar practices that include informal presentations, peer review of assignments, debates, and problem-based learning) [Section 5.1.1].
- The availability of some staff members to support students despite challenges of increasing student numbers [Section 4.3.5].
- The School's *Widening Access* strategy, which includes an articulation routes with Further/Higher Education [Section 4.2.2].

Enhancing the Student Experience: Graduate Attributes and Employability

- The School's engagement with *graduate attributes*, which are continually developed across a broad range learning opportunities and which include reflections on practice, to ensure students are equipped for the world of work [Section 4.4.5].
- The range of assessment approaches utilised by the School, which are closely linked to Graduate Attributes and *employability*. [Section 5.1.7]
- The wide range of work-based learning opportunities (placements, field courses and projects) offered by the School, which were valued by students and seen as beneficial for future employment [Section 4.4.4].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Assessment and Feedback

- The Feedback Viva, which was valued by students, and facilitated learning through reflective dialogue to embed knowledge and consolidate learning [Section 5.1.11].

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching: Range of PGT provision

- The strong postgraduate taught provision which emphasises an interdisciplinary approach and includes emerging subject fields, clear links to future employment, and flexible module assessments that were tailored to meet the needs of part-time students in employment [Section 4.1.3].

Context and Strategy

- The Academic Strategy Forum, which provides staff with opportunities to consider pedagogical issues through constructive discussions and meaningful information sharing [Section 5.2.11].
- MA in Primary Education programme's successful *reaccreditation* in 2013 by General Teaching Council (GTC), which was the first in Scotland to be reaccredited twice, with no changes or conditions attached [Section 6.3].

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

- School plans to seek 'dual certification' through the General Teaching Council for Scotland [Section 6.4].
- The Teaching Garden initiative which provides a focus for teaching ecological skills for students, staff members and members of the public [Section 5.3.10].

Areas to be improved or enhanced

Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

- Review feedback on assessment to develop a consistent approach in the delivery of feedback of assessment, both written and verbal, which should include engagement with the student body [Section 5.1.11].
- The Convener of the School's Learning and Teaching Committee develops a calendar of assessment activities, clarifying bottlenecks/peaks, to clearly identify submission, marking and feedback information for more effective planning, and which is shared with staff and students for transparency [Section 5.1.11].
- Consider the electronic submission of assessed work in a review of the process that is cognisant of the needs of students commuting long distances to the Dumfries campus [Section 5.1.10].

Enhancing the Student Experience

- Undertake a review of course selection procedure to ensure that course descriptors/titles accurately reflect content, and that students are aware of the various support and information available to help them with their choices [Section 4.3.4].
- Liaise with *Student Learning Service* to provide an appropriate level of support with academic writing and language skills for international postgraduate students, including the potential of utilising expertise available by video-conferencing colleagues at the Gilmorehill campus [Section 4.3.6].
- Undertake a review of the operation of the *Staff Student Liaison Committees*, to improve student engagement, with the postgraduate taught cohort in particular, and ensure that actions are clearly identified, progressed and outcomes reported back to students [Section 4.4.12].

Engaging and Supporting Staff

- Develop a strategy for streamlining effective administrative processes to support teaching delivery [Section 5.2.8].
- Develop a clear and transparent process regarding the appointment, development and support of *Graduate Teaching Assistants* [Section 5.2.7].

Resources for Learning and Teaching

- Develop a strategy for enhancing the student experience, primarily learning provision, by tapping into existing expertise of colleagues at Gilmorehill and elsewhere [Section 5.3.2].

- Liaise with the *Learning and Teaching Centre* to clarify the pedagogical issues, including teaching space and infrastructure requirements, around increasing student numbers and to provide of a series of pedagogical workshops to facilitate discussions with School academic staff [Section 5.3.2].
- Liaise with the College of Social Sciences in a review of the operation of their *Workload Model* [Section 5.3.3].

Academic Standards

- Undertakes a review of its *Annual Monitoring process*, in compliance with University's Guidance available through the Senate Office at:
http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_453751_en.pdf [Section 6.2].

Glossary

Accreditation

Accreditation is a 'seal of approval' given to a programme by a professional body, association or other organisation. It has potential benefits for students, such as a recognised fast-track route for graduates seeking professional status or exemption from certain professional examinations.

Annual Monitoring (of courses)

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

Employability

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

Graduate Attributes

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

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators are students, usually research students, who assist with teaching in the form of tutorials, labs and other activities that

are part of undergraduate programmes in the subject/school. They are paid an hourly rate by the University.

Learning and Teaching Centre

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

Staff:Student Liaison Committee or SSLCs

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

Student Learning Service (SLS)

The Student Learning Service (SLS) provides advice on academic skills to enhance students’ learning experience and to help achieve full academic potential.

Periodic Subject Review or PSR

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

Widening Access or Widening Participation

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

Workload Model (Staff)

A workload model is a means of describing the workload of all members of staff and should be used by Schools to ensure that staff workloads are manageable and allocated fairly with different types of work appropriately distributed.