

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee – 24 March 2017

**Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations  
Arising from the Review of Scottish Literature held on 23 March  
2016**

Ms Jane McAllister, Clerk to the Review Panel

**Conclusion**

Scottish Literature holds a unique position in terms of Scottish, UK, and global contexts due to its status as the sole academic unit dedicated wholly to teaching and research in Scottish literature. This provides a core distinctive strength in its offering that is reinforced by a small but strong team of staff who are committed to providing a positive, stimulating, and supportive learning environment for their students. Given this position and the high quality of the provision on offer in Scottish Literature, the Panel had expected to find a more sustained and developed outward-looking approach to collaboration and partnerships. Several of the recommendations below are made with a view to encouraging this. The subject demonstrates excellent responsiveness to student feedback and was highly praised by the students who met with the Review Panel. This is confirmed by impressive NSS satisfaction rates (whichever subject group the Subject is reported in). In its SER, the Subject articulated a very clear, coherent, and distinctive set of pedagogical aims and strategies, and throughout the review, the Panel was pleased to find good evidence of the Subject being engaged in a continual process of reflection and evaluation with regard to all aspects of their practice.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been made to support Scottish Literature 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**.

***Postgraduate Taught Provision***

**Recommendation 1**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject explore and give consideration to alternative models of postgraduate taught provision including those that might appeal to alternative markets of potential students. For example, as well as exploring the potential to contribute to the development of the School of Critical Studies “Hub and Spoke” model of PGT provision [see para 4.2.6], consideration might include possibilities for joint programmes either internally to the University or with national or international partners, alternative modes of delivery such as those involving the accumulation of credit over longer periods, and investigation of new potential markets that might find alternative formats more accessible. It was suggested that the Subject’s stated intention to develop their MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) offering in future could contribute to this. [Paragraph 4.2.8]

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

**Response:**

As outlined in the Subject's PSR report, the issue of PGT provision has been much in discussion in Scottish Literature over the past several years. After careful consideration, the Subject decided to withdraw its PGT provision which had consisted of two MLitt PGT degrees: one in Scottish Literature, and one in Scottish Studies (delivered jointly with colleagues in Scottish History, School of Humanities). This decision was made following very low recruitment numbers and an awareness that other Scottish Literature/Scottish Studies programmes across the country were failing to recruit the number of students required to make their courses viable. As a result, the Subject has focused on PGR recruitment, and runs very successful MPhil, MLitt (PGR) and PhD programmes. It has also been very effective in attracting PGR scholarships from the AHRC and the Carnegie Trust, and currently hosts a Lord Kelvin Adam Smith PhD scholarship.

Colleagues in the Subject Area are not convinced that designing a new PGT programme in Scottish Literature should be a priority. We have therefore chosen to take a new specialist route for PGT (see next paragraph), and to begin discussions regarding joint PGT options outside the School of Critical Studies (SCS). SCS's new 'hub and spoke' MLitt in English Literature, which features pathways for particular specialisms, has now been introduced. At the moment, this course features only English Literature specialisms and is geared towards ensuring that recruitment meets target for existing English Literature PGT courses.

Since the PSR, the Subject has been concentrating on developing and delivering blended, online and distance-taught UG and PGT initiatives, including a pioneering blended learning Honours option; a MOOC, which runs twice per year; and the School's first Distance Taught, outward-facing online course. These options – all on Robert Burns, his work, life and legacy – were funded in part by GU's MOOC and BOLD initiatives and are run jointly by Scottish Literature and Scottish History. This Distance Taught course on Burns offers a new PGT option for distance learners; it also forms the basis of plans for a future Scottish Studies Summer School, and may lead to new, shared PGT options. In its first iteration, the Distance Taught course on Burns recruited 14 mainly international students, and received very warm feedback from this first cohort. This signifies a new PGT route for the Subject Area which is ripe for further development in future iterations; the course will run annually.

The Subject is also investigating the possibilities of joint PGT provision with overseas institutions, and has begun discussions with Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. The Head of Scottish Literature is also in discussions with colleagues in the School of Humanities regarding future contributions to the new PGT MLitt in Ancestral Studies.

***Graduate Teaching Assistant Training and Support*****Recommendation 2**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject evaluate GTA training provision to identify whether there is scope to improve its structure and to ensure the support GTAs receive is timely and helps them be fully prepared for teaching before they begin.  
[paragraph 5.7.8]

**For the attention of: The Head of Subject**  
**For information: Learning and Teaching Centre Academic Development Unit**

**Response:**

The Subject is very happy with the level of support and training offered to GTAs in Scottish Literature and in the School more widely. Indeed, GTA support forms part of our Subject Area National Student Survey action plan under the banner of 'student satisfaction'. Following the PSR, we discussed the issue of training with our cohort of GTAs, and those

consulted were equally satisfied. In addition to the training provided by the SRC at University level, SCS offers a detailed and highly-praised GTA training course, which runs across both semesters. New GTAs are trained in student support, pastoral care, assessment and feedback, procedures for suspected plagiarism, and much more. The School's training course also features a shadowing programme for those beginning GTA work in the next session or semester, in which they sit in on experienced tutors' classes, and look over their shoulder when marking. The shadowing scheme has proven very popular with the School's population of GTAs. This all happens in advance of GTAs beginning teaching. Subject level support can only come in once GTAs have been appointed. Course conveners hold regular team meetings with GTAs to allow tutors to air concerns or share good practice. These meetings (for which GTAs are paid) happen three times per semester: once, in the week before teaching begins to allow proper preparation; again in the middle of the semester for marking moderation; and one wash-up meeting at the end of the semester. Course conveners are always on hand to provide advice and/or support. The Subject is particularly proud of its marking moderation procedures, where all teachers on a given course have the opportunity to moderate and check each other's marking, and to air any difficulties with the process. This system has been in place since before the PSR and continues today. The Subject would, however, be happy to hear how they might improve this provision without duplicating School training and in the absence of sufficient GTA budgets. Finally, the School is currently hosting a GTA Working Group to see if procedures/training can be improved; Scottish Literature is fully involved with this initiative.

### **Recommendation 3**

Noting that the staff and the GTAs value the autonomy the GTAs are given, the Review Panel recommends that the Subject and GTAs explore the structures that support GTAs working autonomously, including possible options for a more formal arrangement for GTA photocopying and communication of such arrangements to ensure that they are clear to all GTAs. [Paragraph 5.7.9]

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

### **Response:**

As noted, the Subject places strong emphasis on GTAs' autonomy, believing that this is the best training for future employment. GTAs do not, however, have full autonomy: weekly topics for seminars are assigned by the course convener at the beginning of each semester, and established tutors share their lesson plans with new GTAs. This means that although the timetable of seminars is set, GTAs have autonomy in terms of discussion questions and emphases. GTAs are, in addition, appointed according to their research specialisms, and should be sufficiently familiar with the material before beginning teaching. The structures described in the previous response are specifically designed to support GTAs working autonomously and to build their confidence as teachers, again giving them excellent and realistic opportunities for career/skills development. As a School, we are making efforts to minimise photocopying in order to cut consumables costs. Therefore, all course material is, wherever possible, scanned and made available via course moodles. If, on the rare occasion that a GTA needs to photocopy materials for their class, they are aware of procedures. They are informed at the start of each teaching semester that they are to do so in the School office with the assistance of our Subject Administrator, Helen McLaughlin. Having said this, and considering the often unnecessary cost of photocopying and paper, we would always encourage our GTAs to make their teaching materials available online if at all possible, as we do with permanent colleagues.

**Recommendation 4**

The Review Panel recommends that the Senate Office forward comments on GTA contracts to Human Resources for information. [Paragraph 5.7.9 & 5.8.1]

**For the attention of: Senate Office  
For information: The Head of Subject**

**Response: Senate Office**

The relevant paragraphs have been forwarded to Human Resources for information.

***Study Abroad*****Recommendation 5**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject, with the support of the School, explore the possibilities around the opportunities for short period of study abroad, with a range of preferred partners (to assure duty of care can be discharged) where there are opportunities for wider comparative studies that can be related back to the study of Scottish Literature. [Paragraph 5.1.4]

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

**Response:**

The Subject remains committed to allowing students opportunities to study abroad and has, to this end, begun developing a list of 'preferred partners' so that students (particularly those undertaking Single Honours) can keep up their studies in Scottish Literature while away. In addition, our Internationalisation Officer is part of a group (including Jim Murdoch) currently in discussions to set up a partnership with Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. Semester-long exchanges with Radboud are planned, as are shorter periods of study abroad and summer schools.

As the Subject is the only teaching unit dedicated to Scottish Literature, it is the natural home for those wishing to specialise. However, we recognise that other institutions, particularly in North America, have some, very limited coverage of Scottish texts. To make the best of this situation, the Subject has set up a study abroad agreement with Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, and is investigating other institutions that may be 'preferred partners'. We remain open to the possibility of one-semester periods of study abroad and are continuing discussions with MaRIO as to the mechanisms available to us. We have one student poised to take up a Junior Year Abroad at Simon Fraser University in 2017-18. We are also exploring institutions which teach 'national literatures' other than English Literature; this work is ongoing. The appetite for study abroad is low in Scottish Literature compared to other Subject Areas; anecdotally, this is because our students appreciate that they are part of a specialist unit. We are, however, gathering intelligence from our student body to understand the reasons.

**Recommendation 6**

The Convener was concerned to hear feedback that a University regulation might be blocking study abroad opportunities and, therefore, recommends that the Senate Office clarify the Subject area's concerns and review University regulations on outside papers. The conclusions of this review should be shared with the Head of Subject and the Head of School. [Paragraph 5.1.2]

**For the attention of: Senate Office**

**For information: The Head of Subject & the Head of School**

**Response: Senate Office**

The Senate Office has reviewed the generic undergraduate regulations for the College of Arts and the supplementary regulations for the MA (hons). Nothing has been identified that could be blocking study abroad. Work is underway to identify other possible sources of the issue.

***Graduate Attributes*****Recommendation 7**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject consider ways to engage other students with the outputs from the 'Memorialising Scottish Literature and Culture' course for added learning experience. [Paragraph 4.5.2]

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

**Response:**

As 'Memorialising Scottish Culture and Literature' is one of many Honours options available to our students, we are reluctant to single it out as 'special' in some way. Students who undertake the course enjoy shared placements and work-based teamwork, and are able to present their placement projects to each other within the course. This makes sense pedagogically and in terms of discipline. We would not share coursework from any other Honours course with the wider body of students, and 'outputs' from the 'Memorialising' course are students' individual pieces of assessed work. On the panel's recommendation, we have been investigating the possibility of sharing the content of students' placement projects more widely in advance of the next run of the course in January 2018. However, this is time-consuming: sharing of outputs must be done on a case-by-case basis and requires the permission of the students themselves, the copyright/collection holders and placement hosts. To address Graduate Attributes in a more meaningful and inclusive way, the Subject has introduced an annual Careers Evening for all Honours students. This event features a range of speakers who undertook a Scottish Literature degree in recent years and have gone on to various places of employment, allowing current students to ask questions and understand their Graduate Attributes in a 'real world' sense.

### ***Interdisciplinary teaching***

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Review Panel recommends that the School should review the potential for new collaborative courses given examples of courses between subjects working well elsewhere. [Paragraph 4.2.9]

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

#### **Response:**

Since the PSR, new developments with regard to the MA curriculum, led by the College's Dean of Learning and Teaching, will undoubtedly drive forward interdisciplinarity in line with the Review Panel's recommendation. In this regard, however, perceived 'funding competition' between subjects and Schools will need to be a major consideration going forward, and more work will need to be undertaken here. The Subject area would emphasise that we are already very much committed to collaborative teaching. We have collaborated with our colleagues in English Language on various courses throughout the Scottish Literature degree for decades. Currently, and based on a very long-standing relationship, English Language colleagues provide teaching on Scots and Historical Scots on our Level 1 and Level 2 courses (the latter of which incorporates assessment on Older Scots), and two compulsory Honours courses, 'The History of Scots' and 'The History of the Scottish Book'. In addition, we currently contribute heavily to a major course under the aegis of the Centre for Scottish and Celtic Studies: the successful Junior Year Abroad course, 'Introduction to Scottish Culture' is team-taught by colleagues in Scottish Literature, Scottish History, Archaeology and Celtic & Gaelic. Convening responsibility for this course rotates around the involved subject areas, and currently sits with Scottish Literature in 2017. Within Scottish Literature, two of our Honours courses ('Memorialising' and 'Robert Burns') are interdisciplinary, featuring contributions from our colleagues in Scottish History, but also from our colleagues in the heritage sector. 'Memorialising', in particular, has a guest lecture and seminar delivered by a Museums professional. Finally, our flagship 'Principia' teaching initiative is entirely interdisciplinary and collaborative, with the 'Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas and Influences' course, compulsory for all students visiting from the Principia consortium, being taught by colleagues from Scottish Literature, English Literature, History and Social and Political Sciences. We are, as always, open to collaborative opportunities in teaching as well as in research.

**Recommendation 9**

The Review Panel agreed that considerations related to financial administration should not be an obstacle to interdisciplinary teaching and, noting from subsequent clarification that mechanisms for the transfer of funding for courses with shared ownership or teaching were agreed and in place at College level, the Panel recommends that the Head of College Finance review these mechanisms with the Head of School to establish whether the reported barriers to collaboration within the College were a matter of perception or could be resolved by adjusting the relevant administrative processes. [Paragraph 4.2.10]

**For the attention of: The Head of Finance, College of Arts  
For information: The Head of Subject & the Head of School**

**Response:**

A revised process was introduced during the 2015/16 academic year whereby the Heads of School Administration and their respective Heads of School and relevant Heads of Subject discuss any courses which are 'shared' in terms of ownership or teaching. The level of ownership is discussed and agreed between the relevant Heads of School, normally via their respective Heads of School Administration. All 'shared courses' are then discussed before the start of the year with the Head of Finance with a record of the final share of income or cost, depending on the agreement reached at the local level, and once the final numbers for these courses are obtained, the College finance team will transfer the relevant income or expense. While the process now works and the income and costs are now being 'corrected' the Head of School believes there is still work to be done to encourage interdisciplinary collaborations.

***Administrative matters*****Recommendation 10**

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject review the assessment feedback form for currency and agree a consistent practice for its use. This should be done in full consultation with the students. [Paragraph 5.6.3]

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

**Response:**

This is underway in the current session for introduction and implementation in 2017-18. We are currently discussing the issue of effective feedback with our own cohort of students through Staff-Student Liaison Committees. We are also one of three chosen Subject Areas involved in a College-wide project running this session (2016-17) which asks students how they use and understand feedback. These discussions and initiatives are informing the design of the new assessment feedback form.

**Recommendation 11**

The Review Panel recommends that reference to the Academic Writing Skills Programme and other support available through University Services should be highlighted in course handbooks or in the Scottish Literature Moodle as a permanent source of the information and an easy reference point for students. [Paragraph 4.4.2]

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

**Response:**

As the Academic Writing Skills Programme is a gatekeeper offering early warning support for new students at the pre-enrolment stage, we would not refer to it in current student support materials. We are, however, committed to publicising the support on offer for writing, and do so through targeted e-mail-outs to individual course cohorts. We are also able to publicise the Student Learning Service via our general Scottish Literature moodle, to which all students, from Level 1 to Senior Honours, are signed up. This latter option would constitute a 'permanent source' for links to the information required. The closure of the Writing Centre and loss of associated student support is a matter of regret for the Subject Area. Beyond writing skills, there is a permanent link to 'Student Services' on the general Scottish Literature moodle, available to all students.