

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee – 5 October 2018

Periodic Subject Review: Review of Short Courses held on 1 and 2 May 2018

Robbie Mulholland, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor Neal Juster	Senior Vice-Principal and Deputy Vice Chancellor, Panel Convener
Professor David Finkelstein	University of Edinburgh, External Subject Specialist
Professor Lindsay Farmer	Senate Assessor on Court
Ms Hannah-May Todd	Student member
Dr Matthew Williamson	Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Services (LEADS), Cognate member
Dr Vicki Dale	Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Services (LEADS)
Mr Robbie Mulholland	Senate Office and Clerk to the Panel
Dr El Spaeth	LEADS, Observer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Short Courses¹ is one of nine teams in the External Relations Directorate and is a part of University Services. It is located in the St Andrews Building (SAB), 11 Eldon Street and shares the building with the School of Education. The Short Courses' Information Office and the Access and Guidance Manager are based on the fourth floor of the north wing of the building, and other staff offices are located on the fourth and fifth floors. Short Courses does not have its own teaching accommodation and teaching rooms are allocated by University Central Timetabling (CTT).
- 1.2 Following the restructuring of the University in 2010, the Department of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE) transferred from the School of Education to University Services and changed its name to the Centre for Open Studies. As part of the restructuring of University Services in 2017, the Centre for Open Studies became Short Courses. Ms Stella Heath, the current Director of Short Courses, took up post in September 2014.
- 1.3 Preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was led by the Director, assisted by senior academic and administrative staff from within Short Courses. Short Courses

¹ Throughout this report, the term Short Courses (upper case) will refer to the Short Courses unit, and short course/s (lower case) will refer to the short courses taught by the unit.

staff and a group of 17 students were invited to comment on the draft document. The Panel was **pleased** to note that the SER had therefore been the subject of wide consultation.

- 1.4 The Review Panel met with the Director, six academic staff; five part-time tutors from across different Subject Areas; five Management Professional and Administrative (MPA) staff; and fifteen students from the current/previous Access programme and current/previous students undertaking short courses. Some of the students participating in the Review were currently on, or had recently completed, other main programmes of study elsewhere in the University.

2. Context and Strategy

2.1 Staff

Short Courses comprises 19 people, including 4.5 FTE academic and 10.8 FTE MPA staff. In addition, at any one time, there are between 150-200 part-time tutors employed on zero-hours or casual worker contracts. The support staff in Short Courses includes a Directorate Administrator, Senior Recruitment Marketing Officer, Senior Administrator, Quality Officer and an Access and Guidance Manager.

The profile of academic staff is:

Senior Lecturer: 3; Lecturer: 1; Subject Specialist: 2

2.2 Students

Student numbers for 2016-17 are summarised as follows:

Total no. of students (P/T) registered on courses belonging to Short Courses is:			
Credit-bearing courses = 2046			
Non credit-bearing courses = 2541			
Total: 4587			
Students (p/t) registered on Access courses (see below). (NB – each Access student in each subject cluster takes 2 times 20 credit courses.			
Access to Science, Engineering and Nursing: Biology	33	Access to Arts & Social Sciences: Medieval History	19
Access to Science, Engineering and Nursing: Chemistry	33	Access: Philosophy	16
Access to Arts & Social Sciences: Classical Studies	13	Access to Science, Engineering and Nursing: Physics	36
Access to Arts and Social Sciences: Economics	20	Access to Arts and Social Sciences: Politics	24
Access to Arts & Social Sciences: English Literature	48	Access to Arts and Social Sciences: Psychology	49
Access to Arts & Social Sciences: History of Art	13	Access to Arts & Social Sciences: Scottish History	18
Access: Law	27	Access to Arts and Social Sciences: Social and Economic History	25
Access to Science, Engineering and Nursing: Mathematics	53	Access to Arts and Social Sciences: Sociology	49
Access to Arts & Social Sciences: Theology &	11		

Religious Studies			
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2.3 Range of Provision under Review

The provision under review is outlined above in section 2.2. The Panel observed that, normally, only *credit-bearing* (and not *non credit-bearing*) provision is included in Periodic Subject Review. However, in the course of the Review, the Panel met a number of students on non credit-bearing courses and, in view of this and the nature of Short Courses' provision, it was content to make a number of recommendations that encompassed both categories. Recommendation 5 relates specifically to non credit-bearing courses and has been made with a view to enhancing the overall student experience in Short Courses.

2.4 Strategic Approach to Enhancing Learning and Teaching

2.4.1 The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) (p.2) states: "The aim of Short Courses is to enhance the University's civic profile and support public engagement by delivering high quality and financially viable short courses, which provide a gateway to the University and support access to excellence." One of Short Courses' key goals is to support the higher education aspirations of the wider community, at both a local and national level, while at the same time working towards key institutional objectives regarding widening participation.

2.4.2 Short Courses underwent a significant restructuring in 2015, one result of which was the discontinuation of a number of subject areas and a reduction in staffing costs. At that point, Short Courses was faced with a very challenging income target but in the period since has moved from a position of operating a structural deficit to being on course to break-even by 2019-20. The Panel noted that all courses now operate on a commercial basis and do not run unless enrolments meet minimum financial thresholds. Short Courses took a strategic decision in 2014-15 to move the emphasis of its provision away from leisure courses to more academic courses. This was aimed at distancing itself from similar leisure course provision offered by its main competitor while capitalising more fully on the University's strong academic brand. It also opened up opportunities for credit-bearing provision which could contribute to Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education qualifications and has resulted in approximately 200 credit-bearing courses becoming available (about one-half of all Short Courses provision). At the moment, Short Courses provision comprises three main threads, namely: the Access Programme; credit-bearing courses and non-credit-bearing courses. Short Courses' ambition is to eventually become a provider of qualifications and to establish a fully coherent qualifications framework for short courses. The Panel acknowledged that Short Courses had been through a time of significant change over the last few years, but, nonetheless, in that period had addressed its deficit and moved steadily towards a position of break-even. At the same time, Short Courses had retained a loyal student base with many of its students returning year after year to take short courses. The Panel **commends** Short Courses for its success in taking the unit from a position of financial uncertainty to near break-even and establishing itself as a key educational asset for both the University and the wider community. The Panel also **commends** Short Courses for successfully balancing commercial imperatives along with the learning needs of its students.

3. Enhancing the Student Experience

3.1 Admissions, Retention and Success

Admissions

3.1.1 In line with Short Courses' commitment to open access to higher education, it does not operate a selection or admissions process for most courses and student enrolment is automatic on application (class size permitting). The Access programme has no stated selection process but does require student numbers to be managed and staff support for students is required with subject choice. Access courses in Chemistry and Mathematics have pre-requisites and the COSCA ('Scotland's Professional Body for Counselling and Psychotherapy') course requires a telephone interview with a course tutor. Since 2016, short courses applicants have applied through Accessplanit, an online course-management platform and enrolment system. This facility allows students to book and pay for courses round the clock through the University's website. Staff reported that Accessplanit has eased the manual burden on staff considerably compared with the previous admissions process. The students the Panel met with reported that they found the system straightforward to use and efficient. From February 2018, applicants to Access programmes have also used Accessplanit. At present, the number of applicants applying to credit-bearing and non credit-bearing courses is about even, while the split had been approximately one-third credit-bearing and two-thirds non credit-bearing when the Director first took up post. The Panel considers the adoption of an online course-management platform to be **good practice**.

Retention and Success

3.1.2 The Panel heard that student cohorts in Short Courses were very diverse and, in many regards, it was difficult to draw comparisons between them and the general undergraduate population across the University. Short Courses' students brought varying levels of qualifications, experience and motivation to their studies. The majority of students were admitted without going through a selection process and any one short course could contain students who held no post-16 qualifications through to those with postgraduate degrees. With regard to students in subjects such as languages, many attend with a view to furthering an existing interest and take courses with no intention of seeking credit, however each year around 60% of language students undertake and pass all the required assessments in order to receive credit. Some students undertake formative assessment but not summative assessment, and some courses are credit-bearing and some non credit-bearing. By comparison, students on the Access programme often view their studies as the first step on a recognised pathway into higher education. The Panel observed that the retention and completion rates among Access students had stayed around 44-50% in the three sessions from 2014-2017. It was evident that the progression rate of approximately 50% mirrored completion rates of other similar open entry courses elsewhere in the sector. It was also apparent that many Access students did not complete for non-academic reasons that were often linked to financial and/or personal circumstances. The Panel was advised that in session 2015-16 due to circumstances beyond their control during restructuring, Short Courses was forced to drop face-to-face meetings with Access applicants and the progression to full-time degree courses for that cohort dropped from 50% to 44%. For session 2018-19, face-to-face meetings will continue to be offered along with group information sessions. Students the Panel met with acknowledged the invaluable support they receive from Short Courses staff, and in particular, the Access and Guidance Manager who acts as Adviser of Studies for all Access and short courses students who wish to apply to University through UCAS. The Panel recognised that the

excellent support that all its staff offered to students on the Access programme was one of Short Courses' **key strengths**.

3.2 Equality and Diversity

- 3.2.1 The Panel was advised that Short Courses did not target particular applicant groups, except in the case of the Access programme where there was a specific remit to market to applicants in the MD20 and MD40 postcodes. As part of this activity, Short Courses works closely with colleagues in Widening Participation to take forward the University's Access agenda. Widening Participation makes promotional material available at parents' evenings at partner schools and plans are underway for Short Courses to run promotional events for parents which will build on these links. Short Courses plans to attend several family learning events in MD20 areas and hopes to involve former Access students in these events. The recent appointment of a Senior Recruitment Marketing Officer in Short Courses has allowed new web-based marketing initiatives and more targeted social media campaigns to take place. The age range of short courses students has traditionally been from older age groups but the new marketing initiatives have seen a 38% increase in the participation of students from the 18-26 age group since 2015-16. The Panel **commends** Short Courses on its support for students on non-traditional educational pathways and its engagement with the wider community. The Panel considers the innovative use of social media as a marketing tool to be **good practice**.
- 3.2.2 The Panel was informed that students who enrolled on a course and flagged that they had accessibility requirements were automatically sent an e-mail from Disability Services advising them of available support. In most cases, Short Courses could arrange appropriate teaching accommodation and access for this group but occasionally an applicant did not advise the unit sufficiently early and additional liaison with University Central Timetabling (CTT) and Disability Services was required. The Panel heard that as Accessplanit is a round the clock online booking system, course bookings can be accepted right up until a course commences. On occasion, this left staff with little time to address particular accessibility requirements and book alternative teaching accommodation. The Panel **suggests** that Short Courses keep the potential impact of late course bookings on teaching accommodation under review.
- 3.2.3 The Panel noted that Practical Art continued to be a very popular part of the Short Courses' portfolio, however, the availability of courses in this subject had been restricted owing mainly to the location of the art room which was inaccessible to wheelchair users. It was noted that the last PSR had recommended that discussions take place to identify more suitable, accessible accommodation for the Practical Art courses but no alternative accommodation on campus had yet been identified. The Panel **recommends** that Estates and Buildings continues to examine ways to ensure that all Short Courses' learning spaces are accessible to disabled students, in accordance with the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and the Equality Act 2010.

3.3 Supporting Students in their Learning

Access Students

- 3.3.1 Access students that the Panel met with reported that they received excellent support from Short Courses staff and felt part of a very strong learning community. From the beginning of the application process through their studies and, in some cases, on to preparatory work for University Level 1 study, they reflected on first class support at every stage. This group of students brought a wide range of prior knowledge and educational experience to their studies and, in general, were highly motivated. Given

the extent of this diversity, Short Courses staff ensured that Access students received wide-ranging support and extensive measures were in place to ensure their learning experience was a positive one. Access students receive comprehensive pre-arrival information and then, when on course, further support from the Academic Coordinator (Access) and the Access and Guidance Manager. This includes information and advice regarding funding eg. the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) part-time Fee Grant and the structure and academic requirements of the University's degrees. One-to-one meetings with the Access and Guidance Manager are also offered (in some instances) along with a variety of induction activities. The Access and Guidance Manager and Academic Coordinator (Access) also review and provide advice on all draft UCAS Forms (approximately 200 per academic session) that are prepared by Access students applying to University.

- 3.3.2 The Panel considered the information in the Access student handbook to be generally good. It provided a sufficient level of detail on academic and student support matters and also provided good sign-posting to other University services. The students the Panel met with considered the course materials that they received to be, generally, excellent. The Panel considers the high level of engagement shown by its students to their studies to be one of Short Courses' **key strengths**. The Panel also **commends** Access programme staff on the way they scaffold the student learning experience and facilitate student transition at each stage of the learner journey.
- 3.3.3 The Panel was advised that, since February 2018, applicants to the Access programme have used the Accessplanit course-management platform. This system provides customised and automated communications and a range of other advanced functions. Applicants to short courses have used this system since 2016. Staff reported that Short Courses is now, in general, taking advantage of more centralised University IT systems rather than using less efficient (and less technically supported) local versions and this was appreciated by students. The Panel considers the adoption of centralised, rather than local, University IT systems, to be **good practice**.
- 3.3.4 The Access students the Panel met with considered induction activities to be very good. These activities included two library talks (organised in conjunction with the Library Student Support Team) and a Library video and Library presentation posted on Moodle. However, several students noted that they had never used the Library throughout their studies and some students told the Panel that they had not received information regarding access to the Library during induction. Some students reported that as part-time students from non-traditional education pathways they sometimes felt themselves to be on the periphery of University life and somewhat remote from both the institution and other students. The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses put in place additional support mechanisms to help Access students to integrate and feel more at ease with general University activities and the wider student body outside of Short Courses. Whilst acknowledging that Short Courses induction activities were very good, the Panel also **recommends** that Short Courses strengthens the information it provides about library access in the student induction process, and also incorporates online induction resources for Access students at point of need.

Students on Short Courses

- 3.3.5 As noted in section 3.1.2 above, the Panel heard that the support needs of short courses students were somewhat different from those of Access students. Many short courses students already held university-level qualifications and their enrolment in a particular course frequently stemmed from an existing interest in a specific subject, and the skills and knowledge gained were seen as an end in themselves. By comparison, many Access students viewed their study as a stepping-stone towards full-time higher education and degree-level study. The short courses students the Panel met with reported, in general, a high level of satisfaction with the support they

received. Indeed, many short courses students returned year after year to take other courses from the short courses portfolio. The Access and Guidance Manager acted as advisor of studies for all short courses and Access students and provided invaluable advice to students on matters such as accessing Moodle, identifying funding and engaging with University services such as Disability Services. A student who had taken a number of short courses over a period of years reported that part-time tutors, on several occasions, had 'gone above and beyond' to provide students with excellent learning materials. The Panel considers the commitment of Short Courses part-time tutors to effective student learning to be one of Short Courses' **key strengths**.

3.4 Student Engagement

Student Representation

3.4.1 The Panel was informed that Short Courses, until recently, had operated two Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) – one for Access students and one for students on other short courses. Due to declining student participation in the short courses SSLC, the two committees were merged and this had resulted in much improved student participation. The SSLC meets four times a year and is co-convened by a student and the Access and Guidance Manager. The membership is drawn from the student body, academic, and management, professional and administrative (MPA) staff. Students are also represented on Short Courses' Academic Planning and Management Group (APMG) and the University Services Board of Studies (through which Short Courses reports to the College of Social Sciences). The Panel considers the involvement of a student as a Co-Convener of the SSLC to be **good practice**.

Student Feedback Mechanisms

3.4.2 The Panel was informed that Short Courses utilised the EvaSys Course Evaluation System to obtain student feedback with survey results managed by MPA staff and distributed to course tutors along with a tutor feedback form. Tutors send completed feedback forms to the relevant Subject Specialist to upload feedback to Moodle. Feedback from students in respect of EvaSys questionnaires is frequently very low (usually no more than one third of the class). Both short courses' students and staff are part-time and this is generally seen to be a contributing factor to the wide-ranging levels of response to student surveys. Questionnaires are emailed automatically to students on the last day of the month that a course is due to end and remains open for two weeks. Some students the Panel met with considered that questionnaires were not open long enough and thought that better feedback would be obtained from students if questionnaires remained open for four, rather than two, weeks. The Director reported that these various aspects were currently under review within Short Courses. The Review Panel **suggests** that Short Courses review their current arrangements regarding student questionnaires with a view to increasing current response rates².

3.4.3 The Panel heard that following on from the restructuring and the greater focus on commercialisation, Short Courses had considered it extremely important that students continued to feel integral to its development going forward. Given the nature of Short Courses provision, however, which involved students attending courses only for a short period, the Panel recognised that it was an ongoing challenge for Short Courses to close the loop effectively on student feedback. Furthermore, some courses do not always run every year, either as a result of lack of demand or because they are not financially viable. The Panel observed, however, that the need to have a more efficient student feedback system would become more pressing as Short Courses moved to establish a fully coherent qualifications framework. The Panel **suggests** that Short

² Further information on improving response rates for student surveys is available on the University website at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_485065_en.pdf

Courses keep the effectiveness of its current student feedback mechanisms under review.

- 3.4.4 The Panel was advised that Short Courses ran a number of annual recruitment events, including a languages open evening, where potential students of languages courses could meet with tutors to discuss their language competence and what level of course would be most suited to them should they decide to enrol on a course. This event has proved very popular amongst applicants who consider this type of pre-course informal dialogue extremely useful.

4. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching

4.1 Learning and Teaching

Curriculum Design and Development

- 4.1.1 The Panel was informed that Short Courses' provision was under constant review to ensure that the curriculum was financially sustainable and addressing perceived student demand. Curriculum planning was guided by several key strategic priorities identified in the Self-Evaluation Report (page 14) as being: 'student demand (actual and potential) and commercial viability; alignment with the University's strategic priorities; the development of new credit-bearing courses, so that a greater proportion of the Short Courses portfolio can lead to the award of credit; and the development of flexible programmes of study, leading to Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education awards.'
- 4.1.2 As highlighted in section 2.4.2, Short Courses took a strategic decision in 2014-15 to move away from the delivery of leisure courses and towards more academic courses. Currently, in any given year, a portfolio of over 200 credit-bearing courses and a similar number of non-credit-bearing courses are offered. All courses are offered on a modular basis and the curriculum is intended to be robust so that the ongoing sustainability of individual classes is not dependent on the expertise of one particular tutor. Short Courses has a number of approved programmes leading to the award of either a Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education, and this provision was under review at the time of the PSR. This was with the aim of either discontinuing those programmes where related course provision was no longer offered, or supplementing those where additional demand had been identified. Short Courses' students enrol at course, and not programme level, and this was seen as offering more flexibility from a commercial perspective. The Panel heard that the recent appointment of a Senior Recruitment Marketing Officer and the use of innovative marketing strategies had allowed Short Courses to extend the appeal of its provision to new markets.

Access Programme

- 4.1.3 In comparison to the (approximately) 400 credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing short courses on offer, the portfolio of Access courses (which covers Arts, Social Sciences and Science, Engineering and Nursing) centres on 17 courses. The Panel heard that the main aim of Access programme provision was to prepare students for Level 1 University study, and the curriculum of all Access courses was developed with that in mind. Access tutors had some autonomy with regard to curriculum content but Short Courses considered it essential that Access courses equipped students with the core skills and knowledge identified as key to succeeding at Level 1. This could include the development of skills such as essay-writing for arts and social sciences subjects, or numerical competence for engineering courses.
- 4.1.4 One student who had completed the Access programme and was now in Level 1 at the University reported that he considered the course content and presentation of

materials that he had experienced while taking Access courses to be superior to that which he subsequently received in Level 1.

- 4.1.5 The Panel recalled that the last Periodic Subject Review (for Open Studies) had recommended that the course approval process be clarified. Since 2014-15, the formal approval of new courses and programmes, and major changes to courses and programmes, has been the responsibility of the Short Courses Board of Studies, which reports to the College of Social Sciences. Details of approvals in relation to new programmes and awards are transmitted from the Board to the Programme Approval Group (PAG) of Academic Standards Committee (ASC). In November 2017, the consideration of courses and programmes offered by the University's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS) was incorporated within the Board and it was renamed the University Services Board of Studies. In 2015-16, Short Courses also introduced a Scrutiny Group which considers both credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses. This group meets ahead of the Board of Studies' meetings and considers draft course/programme proposals. The staff the Panel met with considered that the newly configured University Services Board of Studies offered a good balance of representation and provided good oversight and quality assurance in terms of curriculum development. The Panel considers the introduction of the Scrutiny Group to preview course and programme proposals to be **good practice**.
- 4.1.6 In Science subjects, the Access curriculum had been developed following discussion with Level 1 Course Coordinators to ensure that courses included the key skills that students would require in Level 1. Ongoing contact with undergraduate Course Coordinators takes place every few years to ensure that the curriculum remains appropriate. The Panel considered that this level of contact should be increased and **recommends** that Short Courses put in place measures to ensure that all Access tutors meet with relevant Level 1 Course Coordinators on a more regular basis than that which is done at present, to ensure that tutors are up-to-date with curriculum developments at Level 1.

COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland) Counselling Skills

- 4.1.7 The Panel noted that the quality assurance mechanisms in place for the COSCA Counselling Skills course were the same as those used for all other short courses. In session 2016-17, Short Courses received two formal stage 2 complaints regarding the COSCA course, both of which were managed by the Senate Office and upheld, in part. Arising out of this, Short Courses identified a number of areas for improvement, including providing guidance to potential applicants on the level of English language required for the course, and the introduction of second marking for coursework. Most of the required actions had now been implemented with their impact remaining under review. An overall review of the COSCA Counselling Skills course is planned for 2018-19.

Sharing Good Practice

- 4.1.8 The Panel heard that maintaining and sharing good practice in Short Courses was a challenge. Good practice in one area could be lost as a result of a course not running because of insufficient student numbers, or a change in the course tutor. At the moment, the main channel of communication open to part-time tutors was via their Subject Specialist and no over-arching training programme existed whereby part-time tutors could share their skills and experience with each other or other members of staff. Some Subject Specialists delivered training for tutors within their subject group, such as teaching observation at a tutor's first class, but this was not organised in a structured and consistent manner. In order to ensure greater consistency in how tutors are supported in their development needs, the Panel **recommends** that Short Courses, in consultation with LEADS, puts in place a formal training structure for part-

time tutors which will allow them to engage with other part-time tutors/other staff and learn/share best practice as part of a wider community of learning.

Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

4.1.9 The Panel recognised that given the diverse background and experience of both part-time tutors and students, the level of IT literacy across Short Courses varied widely. This brought with it different expectations of how technology could be incorporated within learning and teaching. Many of the students the Panel met with observed that the use of technology as a tool for teaching in the classroom varied considerably across Short Courses and its availability often depended on the particular subject, the tutor, or the facilities available in particular rooms. Some staff the Panel met with considered that the nature of their subject did not lend itself to the use of new technology. Furthermore, students on credit-bearing courses have access to Moodle, but students on non-credit-bearing courses do not. In addition, most credit-bearing courses have a Moodle page, but not all. Also, a part-time tutor who teaches a course in one year might not necessarily still be in post the next year which could affect the ongoing availability of Moodle pages for a particular course. Some part-time tutors the Panel met with noted that opportunities for training in Moodle were limited and, when available, tended to be of a general nature, and they expressed a wish to receive more specific Moodle training. Furthermore, it was recognised that given the nature of the contracts that part-time tutors were employed on, they would require to be paid to participate in activities, such as training that were considered to be over and above their core teaching/assessment duties. The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses arranges for all credit-bearing courses to have a Moodle page, and that these courses all adhere to Moodle minimum standards. Furthermore, the Panel **recommends** that Short Courses brings to the attention of the VLE Board the possibility that students on non credit-bearing courses have access to Moodle or has some Moodle presence. The Panel also **recommends** that Short Courses encourage Subject Specialists to consider incorporating more learning innovation into their teaching, such as the use of blended and online learning, in partnership with, and where necessary, drawing on the training opportunities provided by, the University's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS).

Approach to Intended Learning Outcomes

4.1.10 The Panel was **pleased** to note that Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) incorporate skills specific to particular subjects and also that they are uploaded online so students can view them at an early stage ahead of commencing study.

4.2 Assessment and Feedback

4.2.1 The Panel noted the reference in the Self-Evaluation Report (page 18) which stated that, with regard to short courses, 'in general, the approach to assessment is determined at a subject level, as appropriate to the discipline'. Some of the students the Panel met with advised that they were content with feedback and in some cases considered it to be excellent. However, other students reported that the arrangements for receiving feedback varied considerably across subjects and from tutor to tutor. For students taking short courses, formative and summative assessment is optional and in some instances, students choose not to undertake assessment and to take a course on an 'audit only' basis. In Access courses, formative assessment is essential and this is undertaken before first summative assignments are issued. Work is graded anonymously and Subject Specialists undertake moderation or second marking of a sample of assignments for each course. The Panel heard that Short Courses had

already taken steps to standardise some aspects of feedback, such as the use of standardised assessment cover sheets, however, some students expressed a wish for further consistency in this area. The Panel **recommends** that Subject Specialists adopt a consistent approach to designing and delivering a varied range of assessment methods and feedback across Short Courses' provision³.

4.3 Resources for Learning and Teaching (staffing and physical)

Learning and Teaching Space

4.3.1 The teaching accommodation used by Short Courses is allocated by the University's Central Timetabling (CTT) and rooms can be allocated right across the campus. Short Courses submit room booking requests as part of the annual timetabling process but is sometimes required to submit one-off requests at other times of year. As noted earlier in the report (paragraph 3.2.2), the use of the Accessplanit course booking system meant that applicants could apply online late in the application cycle and the Panel asked that this arrangement be kept under review. On occasion, room booking arrangements have had to be changed at the last minute to accommodate accessibility requirements or capacity issues. Some of the students the Panel met with reported that if they were required to use different rooms this could adversely impact on teaching staff's ability to have consistent access to IT resources. The Panel heard that Short Courses used accommodation in the Kelvin Hall extensively and students on relevant courses used resources in the Hunterian Collection, and the University Archives and Special Collections. Students on the Art and Art History courses reported very positively on the unique learning opportunities that these facilities offered them.

Resource Base

4.3.2 The part-time tutors the Panel met with reported that the Resource Base which tutors had access to previously had been replaced with a smaller facility which they considered to be inadequate for their needs. They pointed out that the previous Base had provided a working/storage space and a place where learning materials and personal belongings could be held. It had also acted as a space where tutors could meet informally. They considered that the replacement facility was too small and inadequately resourced for their needs. The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses work with the part-time tutors to ensure the Resource Base is furnished in a way that meets their needs. If the current space proves to be too small then Short Courses should work with Estates and Buildings to identify alternative accommodation.

Engaging and Supporting Staff

4.3.3 The Panel heard that Subject Specialists were each responsible for supervising approximately 15-20 tutors in their subject group and queried how part-time tutors were supported in liaising with other tutors on matters of common interest. The Panel was aware that Short Courses operated, to a large extent, outwith the main academic structure of the University which meant that it was particularly important to ensure that staff had opportunities to engage with the wider University community. Several of the part-time tutors the Panel met with expressed the view that they felt slightly distanced from other tutors not in their subject group and from other staff within the University. This stemmed, in part, from the number of tutors in Short Courses (between 150-200 at any one time) but also from the reporting structures whereby the principal channel of communication was that which existed between tutors and Subject Specialists. Several tutors reported that they would value the opportunity to have greater engagement with tutors and staff from other subject groups and also the opportunity to engage with

³ Information on the University's Assessment and Feedback Toolkit is available at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/lead/aftoolkit/policyandpractice/policy/>

Subject Specialists on a more formal basis. The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses put in place measures to facilitate a more formal engagement process between Subject Specialists and part-time tutors. The Panel also **recommends** that Short Courses introduce a tutor representation system with representatives entitled to sit on the Academic Planning and Management Group (APMG) of Short Courses. The Panel also considered that there was scope for closer working between Subject Specialists on matters of common interest such as assessment and feedback. The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses puts in place mechanisms to encourage greater team-working amongst Subject Specialists with a view to them adopting a more consistent and common approach to learning and teaching matters of mutual concern.

Subject Specialists and Career Development

- 4.3.4 The Subject Specialists the Panel met with drew attention to the matter of career development for academic staff within Short Courses and, in particular, the lack of opportunity to undertake scholarly activity. They drew the Panel's attention to the fact that academic staff in Short Courses are subject to the same promotion criteria as other academic staff in the University. However, being based in a unit with a clear commercial imperative, they considered that they had much less, if any, opportunity to undertake scholarly work which would be considered as satisfying promotion criteria. It was noted, however, that one member of staff had been granted study leave to write a book. The Panel observed that scholarly work was highly important to academic staff in terms of career development, but also to the profile of Short Courses as a whole, as this was the type of activity that set its provision apart from competitor institutions in, say, the FE sector. The Panel observed that the requirement for protected time for scholarly activity is laid out in individual members of staff contracts of employment. The Panel **agreed** that the Director of Short Courses would liaise with the Convener and the Director of Human Resources (outside of the Review) to explore matters further regarding protected time and scholarly activity.

5. Academic Standards

- 5.1.1 The Review Panel considered that Short Courses had a variety of robust and effective procedures in place which ensured that the unit engaged in a continual process of self-reflection and self-evaluation with regard to academic and pedagogical practice. The Review Panel was satisfied that Short Courses was making every effort to maintain academic standards and this was borne out by external examiners' comments which were generally very favourable. The Panel noted the various steps taken by Short Courses to maintain quality across its provision since the occasion of the last Review which included: the strengthening of its course and programme approval process to adhere to the University's policies and procedures; the incorporation of greater expertise within an extended Board of Studies' membership; the introduction of a Short Courses Scrutiny Group to preview draft course and programme proposals ahead of Board of Studies' meetings; and the introduction of more robust and subject-specific ILOs. At the same time, the Panel acknowledged that Short Courses saw room for improvement in several areas such as the need to draw on a wider evidence base with regards to Annual Monitoring. Currently, there was an apparent over-reliance on student feedback derived from EvaSys, a source not always robust and sometimes (due to the nature of part-time study) limited as a meaningful provider of data (see also paragraph 3.4.3). Short Courses was looking to incorporate other evidence such as student performance data and External Examiners' comments. The Panel also observed that many of the metrics relating to academic standards which might normally be applied to stand-alone Subject Areas did not always translate easily to a unit such as Short Courses. In most courses, Short Courses did not apply entry requirements; students' intention to participate in standard formative and assessment

practices was variable; and students usually attended their course for one year or less, all of which mitigated against deriving robust performance trends. The Panel noted that the extent to which Subject Benchmark Statements could be applied to Short Courses provision was also limited, given that most courses were at University Level 1 with little offered beyond University Level 2.

6. Collaborative Provision

6.1 COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland) Counselling Skills

6.1.1 The Panel noted that Short Courses had a collaborative arrangement with COSCA ('Scotland's Professional Body for Counselling and Psychotherapy'), for the delivery of the COSCA Counselling Skills Certificate course. The course is of long-standing and the current validation period expires in July 2021. Short Courses has no plans to develop other collaborative arrangements in the near future (see also paragraph 4.1.7).

7. Summary of perceived strengths and areas for improvement

7.1 Key strengths

The Review Panel identified the following areas as key strengths:

- The support given by all staff to students on the Access programme
- The high level of engagement shown by students to their studies
- The commitment of part-time tutors to effective student learning
- The commitment of Short Courses to civic engagement and widening participation as key aspects of the University's Strategic Plan
- A strong learning community and collegiate environment

7.2 Areas for improvement

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

- The development of a formal training structure for part-time tutors
- The promotion of greater team-working amongst Subject Specialists
- More formal engagement between Subject Specialists and part-time tutors
- A consistent approach to the design and delivery of a varied range of assessment and feedback methods
- The increased adoption of technology enhanced learning and teaching
- The introduction of additional support mechanisms to help Access students' integration into the wider University community.

Specific recommendations addressing these areas for work are listed below, as are a number of further recommendations on particular matters.

8. Conclusion

8.1.1 The Review Panel concluded that Short Courses demonstrated a clear commitment to excellence in learning and teaching. The Panel congratulated the Director and staff of

Short Courses on bringing the unit from a position of financial uncertainty in 2014 to near break-even in the space of four years, while also fulfilling the expectations of an extremely diverse student body. During this time, Short Courses had established itself as a highly valued resource within the University and now played a key role in promoting the University's ethos of open learning and widening participation. Since the last Periodic Subject Review, Short Courses had made significant developments in areas such as: the course and programme approval process; a modernised online booking and payment system; extended support for Access students; and a more streamlined staff-student liaison committee. The Review Panel was very impressed by the quality and dedication of all staff they met during the Review and their commitment to providing an enriching learning experience for students. The Panel made particular mention of the excellent support that was in place for the Access programme and how staff scaffolded the various stages of the learner journey. The Panel also highlighted some areas where it saw opportunities for improvement and these are summarised above in section 7.2.

8.2 Good Practice

The following good practices were identified in order of appearance in the Report.

- The adoption of an online course-management platform
- The innovative use of social media as a marketing tool
- The increased adoption of centralised, rather than local, University IT systems
- The involvement of a student as a co-convener of the SSLC
- The introduction of the Scrutiny Group to preview course and programme proposals
- The incorporation of skills specific to particular subjects within ILOs

8.3 Commendations

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

- The Panel **commends** Short Courses for its success in taking the unit from a position of financial uncertainty to near break-even and establishing itself as a key educational asset for both the University and the wider community. [Paragraph 2.4.2]
- The Panel **commends** Short Courses for successfully balancing commercial imperatives along with the learning needs of its students. [Paragraph 2.4.2]
- The Panel **commends** Short Courses on its support for students on non-traditional educational pathways and its engagement with the wider community. [Paragraph 3.2.1]
- The Panel **commends** Access programme staff on the way they scaffold the student learning experience and facilitate student transition at each stage of the learner journey. [Paragraph 3.3.2]

8.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to support Short Courses 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**.

Sharing Good Practice

Recommendation 1

In order to ensure greater consistency in how tutors are supported in their development needs, the Panel **recommends** that Short Courses, in consultation with Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS) puts in place a formal training structure for part-time tutors which will allow them to engage with other part-time tutors/other staff and learn/share best practice as part of a wider community of learning. [4.1.8]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

For information: Director, LEADS

Engaging and Supporting Staff

Recommendation 2

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses put in place measures to facilitate a more formal engagement process between Subject Specialists and part-time tutors. [Paragraph 4.3.3]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Recommendation 3

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses puts in place mechanisms to encourage greater team-working amongst Subject Specialists with a view to them adopting a more consistent and common approach to learning and teaching matters of mutual concern. [Paragraph 4.3.3]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Recommendation 4

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses introduce a tutor representation system with representatives entitled to sit on the Academic Planning and Management Group (APMG). [Paragraph 4.3.3]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 5

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses brings to the attention of the VLE Board the possibility that students on non credit-bearing courses have access to Moodle or have some Moodle presence. [Paragraph 4.1.9]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

For information: Convener of VLE Board; Director, LEADS

Recommendation 6

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses arranges for all credit-bearing courses to have a Moodle page, and that these courses all adhere to Moodle minimum standards. [Paragraph 4.1.9]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

For information: Director, LEADS

Recommendation 7

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses encourage Subject Specialists to consider incorporating more learning innovation into their teaching, such as the use of blended and online learning, in partnership with, and where necessary, drawing on the training opportunities provided by, the University's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS). [Paragraph 4.1.9]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

For information: Director, LEADS

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 8

The Panel **recommends** that Subject Specialists adopt a consistent approach to designing and delivering a varied range of assessment methods and feedback across Short Courses' provision. [Paragraph 4.2.1]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Resource Base

Recommendation 9

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses work with the part-time tutors to ensure the Resource Base is furnished in a way that meets their needs. If the current space proves to be too small then Short Courses should work with Estates and Buildings to identify alternative accommodation. [Paragraph 4.3.2]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Access Students

Recommendation 10

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses put in place additional support mechanisms to help Access students to integrate and feel more at ease with general University activities and the wider student body outside of Short Courses. [Paragraph 3.3.4]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Recommendation 11

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses strengthens the information it provides about library access in the student induction process, and also incorporates online induction resources for Access students at point of need. [Paragraph 3.3.4]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Access Programme

Recommendation 12

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses put in place measures to ensure that all Access tutors meet with relevant Level 1 Course Coordinators on a more regular basis than that which is done at present to ensure that tutors are up-to-date with curriculum developments at Level 1. [Paragraph 4.1.6]

For the attention of: Director, Short Courses

Equality and Diversity

Recommendation 13

The Panel **recommends** that Estates and Buildings continues to examine ways to ensure that all Short Courses' learning spaces are accessible to disabled students, in accordance

with the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and the Equality Act 2010. [Paragraph 3.2.3]

For the attention of: Director, Estates and Buildings

For information: Director of Short Courses; Director of Equality and Diversity Unit; Central Timetabling Team

9. Action to be Taken Forward Outside of the Review

The Panel **agreed** that the Director of Short Courses would liaise with the Panel Convener and the Director of Human Resources to explore matters further regarding protected time and scholarly activity. This would take place outside of the Review. [Paragraph 4.3.4]