

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**  
**Academic Standards Committee – 24 May 2019**

**Periodic Subject Review: Review of Politics held on 6 March 2019**

**Mr Chris Buckland, Clerk to the Review Panel**

**Review Panel:**

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| Professor Jill Morrison | Clerk of Senate and Vice Principal, Panel Convener    |
| Professor Fiona Mackay  | University of Edinburgh, External Subject Specialist  |
| Professor Nick Hill     | Senate Assessor on Court                              |
| Ms Teresa Banos         | Student member  |
| Professor Michael Brady | School of Humanities, Cognate member                  |
| Dr Matthew Williamson   | Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service |
| Mr Chris Buckland       | Registry, Clerk to the Panel                          |
| Mrs Catherine Omand     | Senate Office (Observer)                              |

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1.1 The Subject of Politics is the largest of five Subjects within the School of Social and Politics Sciences, which is one of 5 schools within the College of Social Sciences.
- 1.1.2 The previous review of Politics undertaken by the University was in March 2013. The Panel was impressed with the actions taken in response to the recommendations made at the last Review, in particular, the introduction of a pre-honours induction for undergraduate students, the reduction of the Student Staff Ratio from 29.17 in 2013 to 15.0 in 2018, which is currently in line with the College's target, and the steps taken to improve feedback and assessment. The Panel was pleased to note the significant improvement in the National Student Survey (NSS) scores in relation to feedback following the recent changes implemented by the subject.
- 1.1.3 Preparation of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) was led by Dr Kelly Kollman, Head of Subject until January 2019. A number of staff were consulted, including Honours Convenors, and the Convenors of the Subject's postgraduate taught programmes. The Head of the School of Social and Politics Sciences, Professor Michelle Burman, was provided an opportunity to review the draft SER. A student consultation exercise was undertaken with Student Representatives in October 2018.
- 1.1.4 The Review Panel met with Dr K Kollman, Professor C Carman (Head of Subject since January 2019), Mrs M Murray (Course Administrator), Dr S Deeley (Dean for Learning and Teaching) and Professor A Anderson (Head of College and Vice Principal). A subsequent meeting between the Panel Convenor, Clerk, and the Head of School and Head of Subject took place on March 22. The Panel also met with 8 members of Academic Staff, 5 members of Administrative Staff from the School and Subject, 5 Early Career staff, 4 GTAs/Tutors, 10 UG students, and 4 PGT students.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 Staff

The SER indicated that the Subject has 24 full-time academic staff (FTE), as well as 4 additional members of staff on fractional contracts. The Panel noted that the Subject has a relatively small Professoriate (4), with 9 Senior Lecturers and 15 Lecturers also employed. In addition, the Subject have 2 Lord Kelvin Adam Smith postdoctoral fellows on renewable R&T contracts, 4 part-time Tutors with 3-year fixed term contracts, and 9 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs).

Following the University's restructuring in 2010, administrative support was reconfigured and the Subject now has one full-time administrator, and three further administrators who work on a part-time basis - further administrative support is provided to the Subject by the School.

### 2.2 Students

Student numbers for session 2018/19 are as follows:

| <b>Undergraduate</b>       | <b>Headcount</b> | <b>Postgraduate</b>   | <b>Headcount</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|
| Politics 1A                | 473              | Chinese Studies   | 7                |
| Politics 1B                | 439              | Human Rights & International Politics   | 42               |
| Politics 2A                | 349              | International Relations   | 46               |
| Politics 2B                | 345              | Political Communication   | 38               |
| Politics Level 3           | 3                | Global Security   | 40               |
| Junior Honours (Single)    | 89               | Erasmus Mundus International Masters in Security, Intelligence & Strategic Studies (IMSISS) | 67               |
| Junior Honours (Joint)     | 136              | <b>Postgraduate Total</b>   | <b>240</b>       |
| Senior Honours (Single)    | 73               |   |                  |
| Senior Honours (Joint)     | 92               |   |                  |
| <b>Undergraduate Total</b> | <b>1999</b>      |   |                  |

### 2.3 Range of Provision under Review

Undergraduate

- Master of Arts (Social Sciences) – Politics (single honours)
- Master of Arts (Social Sciences) – Politics with Quantitative Methods

- Master of Arts (Social Sciences) – Politics (joint honours, with 40 subject choices)
- Master of Arts (Social Sciences) – Politics (3-year general degree)

Postgraduate (run directly through the subject):

- Chinese Studies (MSc)
- Human Rights & International Politics (MSc and MRes)
- International Relations (MSc and MRes)
- Politics Communication (MSc and MRes)

Postgraduate (run through the School of Social and Political Sciences and with substantial input from the subject):

- Erasmus Mundus International Masters in Security, Intelligence & Strategic Studies (IntM)
- MSc International Relations (Joint Graduate School with Nankai University)
- Global Security (MSc and MRes)

### **3. Review Outcomes**

3.1.1 It was evident to the Panel from both the SER and the meetings with staff and students that the Subject's academic team showed a clear commitment to teaching, learning and the student experience. The Panel were also impressed by the responsiveness of the Subject in its openness to highlighting its concerns and weaknesses, as well as its strengths, as part of their reflective and open approach taken to the PSR process.

3.1.2 The Panel congratulate the Subject on a well-structured and broad curriculum, particularly in Junior and Senior Honours years where a wide range of course choices allow students to build upon core skills developed during Levels 1 and 2. The Panel also recognised the thought and care with which the Subject have approached the development of the Master of Arts (Social Sciences) in International Relations programme, which will be introduced from 2019/20, and acknowledged the challenges presented with the decision taken to introduce this programme.

3.1.3 The Panel were impressed by the students with whom they met, who demonstrated enthusiasm for the Subject and the opportunities provided to work in partnership to improve provision. Students described the Subject and its staff as approachable and helpful and reported good experiences when support from staff was required. Both UG and PGT students welcomed the flexibility and willingness of staff to adapt content and support provision to reflect interests expressed by students.

The following paragraphs detail the key points discussed during the review visit along with commendations recognising good practices and areas where the Review Panel identified scope for improvement. Commendations and recommendations are made to support the subject in its reflection and to enhance provision in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. Appendix 1 provides a summary list of the commendations and recommendations.

### **4. Strategic Direction**

4.1.1 The Panel noted that both the relatively recently introduced Politics with Quantitative Methods Honours programme, and the new programmes which will be introduced with

effect from 2019/20 (Master of Arts (Social Sciences) in International Relations, and the two-year Erasmus Mundus International Masters degree programme in Southern European Studies (EUROSUD)) demonstrate responsiveness to trends in the discipline and markets.

- 4.1.2 The SER indicated that there would be an increase in student numbers from 2019/20 onwards as a result of these new programmes, but it was unclear to the Panel how this was going to be supported in terms of staffing, both academic and administrative, and physical capacity. At the meeting with the Head of the Subject it was acknowledged that, although there had been recent staff appointments, additional UG numbers from 2019/20 might necessitate the need for double-teaching and possibly the live streaming of lectures at Level 1, that academic staff were currently at capacity in terms of workload and that staffing levels have not been commensurate with the recent increase in PGT numbers, and that recent Student Staff Ratios reflected this. In the Meeting with the Head of Subject and Head of School it was also noted that with the introduction of the new International Relations Honours programme, consideration would need to be given to the existing Politics programme to ensure that it remains distinct, and to maintain its integrity.
- 4.1.3 In the meeting with the Head of College, the Panel was advised that 2 new Professorial appointments had been approved by College Management. Whilst the Panel was pleased to note this additional resource, it **recommends** that the Subject, School and College develop a clear strategy for the introduction of the new IR degree programme and how this will complement the current Politics degree programme, ensuring both are equally supported. The Subject and School should closely monitor the impact the new degree programme may have on current provision and staff morale. This strategy should be developed and agreed in consultation between the Subject and School and ratified by the College Management Committee ensuring all teaching commitments are considered within College forward planning.
- 4.1.4 The School's Curriculum Oversight Committee was highlighted in both the SER and the Panel meetings as an area where Politics staff would welcome greater Subject representation, or for the Committee's recommendations to be presented to the School's Learning and Teaching Committee to allow for greater involvement of Subject staff. There was an acknowledgement that there is a degree of complexity in ensuring that staff feel suitably involved in the decision making process within the School, which comprises of 5 distinct subject areas, but at the meetings with the Head of Subject and staff it was unclear as to how the whole School community was consulted in relation to learning and teaching strategy and what opportunity was given to have input into decision making. The Review Panel **recommends** that the School reviews communication, engagement and inclusion of all staff to ensure all staff are given an opportunity to contribute to strategy and teaching developments in an open and transparent environment.

## 5. Enhancing the Student Experience

### *Admissions*

- 5.1.1 The subject utilises the centralised admissions process managed by External Relations, but they have a proactive involvement in recruitment, marketing and (at PGT level) conversion.
- 5.1.2 Admission to UG programmes remains healthy and high. There is currently flexibility post-admission for UG students where they may enter the Politics Honours programme

without naming Politics on their UCAS application. This flexibility will not be extended to the International Relations Honours programme which is being introduced in 2019/20.

- 5.1.3 Admissions to PGT programmes have grown dramatically over the last 3 years, with FTE increasing by 68% during this period. The SER and PSR meetings with staff highlighted difficulties with students being admitted to PGT programmes up until the end of week 2 of teaching, with the Subject and School identifying issues with timetabling and staff allocation as a result of this flexible timescale. Difficulties for students themselves were also highlighted, as although those arriving after orientation are given a 1-to-1 individual induction, the onus is on the student to ensure that they catch-up, concerns were raised on their ability to make sufficient academic progress if they have missed both orientation and the first 2 weeks of teaching. The Panel encourages the Subject to review the procedures around late orientation of students to ensure that they are given adequate support, and to work in conjunction with the School and College to identify any trends in student attainment for those admitted after teaching has started to establish whether certain programmes would benefit from having their admission cut-off date brought forward.
- 5.1.4 In 2019/20, the College will welcome the first cohort of students via the HNC Articulation Programme with Clyde College. Politics is one of the Subject areas onto which students will receive direct entry into Year 2, and the Politics pre-Honours and Honours coordinators have conducted a mapping exercise comparing the University's curriculum with that of Clyde College to help ensure that the articulation students are sufficiently equipped to begin their studies. This aligns with the College and University strategy for widening participation, and the Panel **commends** the Subject's efforts in this area.

#### *Progression and Retention*

- 5.1.5 The SER and documentation highlighted that Politics has good progression of students from first year into second year and that this continues from year 2 to 3. Progression rates of 90% are comparable with the School of Social and Politics Sciences and the College of Social Sciences.
- 5.1.6 Retention of students is monitored at a College rather than a subject level. Various staff who met with the Panel noted the value of the relationships between the College Social Sciences Advising Office and their counterparts in cognate subjects (e.g. College of Arts Advising Office) in ensuring that students receive advice in a holistic manner.
- 5.1.7 Subject staff contribute to College progress boards at the end of each academic year and manage the local Good Cause process. It was noted in both the SER and Panel meetings with staff that a number of Good Cause applications are received each year, but feedback also suggested that the process is unclear to students and is time-consuming for staff. The Panel encourages the subject to review this process and work with the School where appropriate to ensure that it is efficient and fit for purpose.
- 5.1.8 Around 25% of students have been awarded a first-class honours classification over the past three academic years, with about 60% being awarded a 2:1 classification. This profile is in keeping with the College of Social Sciences as a whole, as well as wider sector trends, and classifications are routinely confirmed by external examiners.

#### *Advising*

- 5.1.9 The SER reported that concerns around the levels of advice offered to students on course choice and curriculum have been highlighted by both student-staff meetings and NSS responses. The Panel heard about the approach taken at UG level, where Politics

students are assigned an Advisor of Studies by the College Advisory Service, with feedback from both staff and students stating that this was an improvement to the previous system of individual advisors. The Panel note the positive steps taken but suggest that the Subject reflect upon how other subject areas approach advice to students in the School, College and University as a whole, and work with the Student-Staff Liaison Committee to identify what steps can be taken to meet student demand in this area.

- 5.1.10 The Panel heard from PGT students on their experience of the support offered to them by the Subject, both by PGT programme convenors, and the Advisor of Studies to whom they are assigned. The students with whom the Panel met reported that programme convenors combine elements of advising and support, as do members of administrative staff, but that they were largely unaware of having an Advisor of Studies, with those who were aware only being notified of this mid-way through the semester. The Panel suggests that the Subject clarify the types of support available to PGT students and to bring this to their attention during Induction, and later for those students who enrol for the session after Induction events are run.

#### *International Students*

- 5.1.11 The SER and meetings with staff highlighted that, although there are no specific arrangements in place at the Subject, provisions were put in place to support International students with Politics staff taking pro-active steps to signpost students to support that is available via the College of Social Sciences, Student's Representative Council (SRC) and the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service (LEADS).

- 5.1.12 The SER reported that the Subject welcome a large number of incoming study-abroad students each year (237 in 2017/18), as well as the long-running exchange that the Subject has developed with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, where incoming Duke students combine academic study with study trips and a programme of cultural enhancement activities which are organised by Politics staff. The Panel agree with the Subject that the arrangement with Duke University is an example of **good practice** in the field of internationalisation.

- 5.1.13 The Panel heard from staff and students on the Subject's efforts to support transition of students who articulate from Glasgow International College (GIC) into Year 2 of the UG Politics programme, with Politics staff working with GIC to ensure that there is consistency of curriculum, as well as moderating GIC coursework to ensure that students have a good understanding of the level of work expected when they progress to the University. The Panel noted the high level of care and attention given to the transition of this cohort of students and were encouraged by the positive links which have been fostered, and the Panel **commends** the subject's efforts in this area.

#### *Equality and Diversity*

- 5.2 The Panel was impressed with the ambition of the Subject with respect to de-colonising the curriculum, which was highlighted in the SER and panel meetings with staff and something that the subject is working toward in dialogue with students. The Head of Subject acknowledged that much work still needs to be done to achieve this, but there is a strong commitment from staff to engage with existing University networks in this area. The UG students who met with the Panel also responded positively to this,

expressing the view that the curriculum in Politics is less Euro-centric than other subjects in which they are taking courses.

- 5.3 The UG students who met with the Panel reported that the subject utilises the “trigger warning” process, whereby students are notified of content within the curriculum which could cause potential upset or concern. This was acknowledged as positive by the students, but it was felt that more could be done to provide further advanced warning to allow them to assess whether they are comfortable in attending. The Panel **recommends** that the subject consider this process to ensure that adequate context is provided, which may include providing details in course handbooks, and reconsideration given to the use of sensitive material in data sets.

### *Student Engagement*

- 5.4 The students who met with the Panel had mixed experiences of the Student Staff Liaison Committee process. PGT students highlighted that there was a good awareness of who their class representatives were, and that a good relationship with programme convenors ensured that there was constant dialogue between staff and students and that feedback was being responded to. UG students however noted that there was a general lack of awareness of where to find details of student representatives, that there were limited options for each year group to provide feedback, and that the structure of the Liaison Committee meeting itself limited the amount of feedback which could be provided. The Panel **recommends** that the subject take steps to address the perceived lack of awareness amongst UG students of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee, including the methods of communication used to make students aware of the process, and how contact details of class representatives are advertised.

### *Graduate Attributes*

- 5.5 The SER and meetings with staff and students highlighted a wide range of provision for students to develop their graduate attributes and employability, both as part of the curriculum and outside of the classroom. The subject’s employment of a PhD intern to assist with extra-curricular activities was noted by the Panel as a good example of student engagement, as was the utilisation of social media to disseminate information on events.
- 5.6 The Panel also noted a pilot project, highlighted in the SER, which involves the Subject teaching a similar UG course at the same time at the Universities of Glasgow and Leiden in the Netherlands. As part of this, a Politics lecturer from Glasgow travels to Leiden in December to teach, with three students also in attendance where they are actively involved in teaching working groups. The Panel highlighted this pilot as a **good example** of the Subject’s attempts to provide students with both transferable skills, and embedding social and cultural links, and the Panel encourage the subject to review the pilot and assess whether it can be widened in future years.
- 5.7 The Panel heard from staff and students on the Olive Tree Initiative (OTI), an experiential learning programme which allows 10 UG students each year to participate in a 3-week field trip to the Middle East between the Junior and Senior Honours years, which builds upon existing knowledge acquired via the *Narratives of Conflict in the Middle East* module upon which participating students are enrolled. Different sources of funding available to participants ensures that the Project is accessible to a broad demographic. Upon completion of the field trip, students are supported by the College Employability Officer to reflect on the impact of the experience by developing an online e-portfolio and

LinkedIn profile. The Panel **commends** the subject on the continued offering of the Olive Tree Project and its related activities<sup>1</sup>. The UG students who met with the Panel expressed disappointment that there were not more subject-specific opportunities to allow them to reflect upon how key skills and graduate attributes acquired through academic study can be applied to an employment setting, and that OTI opportunities such as the online e-portfolio and LinkedIn profile were not available more widely. The Panel encourages the subject to continue to develop the area of embedded graduate attributes and identify what elements of existing best practice or provision can be applied to a larger cohort of students.

- 5.8 PGT students who met with the Panel reported that they had made use of the central-University Careers Service and College Employability provision but suggested that they would benefit from having an element of careers advice tailored to each programme, and that information on progression into academia or PhD studies would be welcome. The Panel heard positive feedback on the relationship between students and course convenors, with convenors organising an employability workshop following a request from students – the Panel felt that this response to student feedback further highlighted the commitment from the academic team to the student experience.
- 5.9 The Panel heard from UG students on the pilot being undertaken in 2018/19 to give three students the opportunity to undertake a collaborative Dissertation with MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. The scheme, which is being supported by the John Smith Centre, also requires students to submit a separate policy background paper to the MSPs office. The UG students noted this as a beneficial opportunity and hoped that it would be expanded in future years, but also raised concerns about potential ethical issues if students are not able to select their own dissertation subject and are instead required to align their theme to the MSP's interest. The Panel encourages the Subject to reassure students and ensure that they are familiar with academic ethical approval processes.
- 5.10 The SER reported that field trips to Brussels and Geneva were also included for PGT programmes in International Relations and Human Rights respectively. The Panel heard from PGT students on their experiences of these, with concerns being raised that, whilst funding opportunities are available, costs of the trips can prove to be prohibitive and act as a barrier to involvement. It was also the student's understanding that costs for similar activities in other subjects based in the School of Social and Political Sciences, such as the Geneva field trip in the MSc Global Health, is fully funded. The Panel suggest that the Subject work with the School to ensure that funding options for field trips allow such opportunities to be open and inclusive.

## **6. Enhancement in Learning and Teaching**

### **6.1 Learning and Teaching**

#### *Curriculum Design*

- 6.1.1 The SER reported that the two existing Honours programmes are based on a common pre-Honours curriculum, which provides students with a grounding in the major sub-

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the Review the Panel commended the Olive Tree Initiative but following the Review, the Subject advised that this had been suspended to allow for reassessment and programme evaluation. The Panel hopes that an opportunity presents itself in order for the Subject to continue with this initiative.



disciplines of the field and a necessary foundation for Honours. Changes to the existing pre-Honours structure will take effect from 2019/20 to reflect the introduction of the new International Relations programme. Politics is offered as a Joint-Honours combination with 40 other subjects, and given the size, complexity and scope of the Politics joint degrees the Subject is not able to consult all possible degree plans when adopting changes to the Politics curriculum.

6.1.2 The staff who met with the Panel expressed the view that they were able to show initiative with regards to the curriculum, as they were not restricted to only teaching on existing courses, rather they could identify requirements for new provision at Honours level and had the opportunity to develop and introduce these courses. The Panel also heard that, although courses are withdrawn as part of this process, the subject currently offers c.35 Honours choices at an Undergraduate level, with staff reporting that they are at capacity in terms of what they can teach. The Panel **commends** the quality and variety of programmes offered, the pro-active approach taken by staff to ensuring that the curriculum content remains contemporary and up-to-date, as well as the positive culture fostered within the subject which allows this approach to prosper. The Panel however also suggest the Subject keep all courses under review, balancing ability for staff to show innovation and introduce new courses with the time constraints currently placed on them as a result of teaching the existing UG Honours portfolio.

#### *Approach to Intended Learning Outcomes*

6.1.3 The SER reported that Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for all programmes and courses are outlined in the programme or course specifications, in the programme and course guides, and in the Politics Programme Handbook for Honours courses. These documents are made available to students via Moodle, and they are outlined during induction sessions and introductory lectures. The Panel noted that both programme specifications and ILOs were clear and that there is a good articulation with assessment methods and **commends** the subject for this.

6.1.4 The UG students who met with the Panel confirmed that they were aware of the purpose of ILOs and understand those relating to their courses, but they highlighted that a better connection could be made between ILOs and the guidelines for assessment. They also felt the core messages contained in the guidelines for assessment were somewhat lost within the detail of the course handbook(s), with the students suggesting that they be made available in a separate document which was accessible via Moodle alongside other key documents e.g. the assignment cover sheet, extension request form etc. The Panel suggest that the Subject ensures that guidelines for assessment and ILOs are effectively communicated to students, and that students are reminded to consult ILOs prior to assessments.

6.1.5 The Panel heard from both UG and PGT students about the subject's use of Moodle more widely in relation to ILOs, specifically the availability of course handbooks. Both sets of students highlighted that, when changes were made to course handbooks following their initial publication, both the old and new versions of handbooks were available on Moodle, leading to a lack of clarity about which version is the live document and what changes had been made. The Panel suggests that the Subject review their Moodle content and version control processes to ensure that students are clear on which documents should be referenced.

#### *Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching*

6.1.6 The UG and PGT students who met with the Panel noted that, whilst agreeing with the SER statement that all programmes and courses use Moodle, they felt there was

inconsistency in how the platform was utilised by different lecturers. There was a general feeling that the overall utilisation of Moodle by Politics was at least as good, if not better, than other subjects in which they are taking courses, but that this did not apply to the return of summative assessments which are initially submitted via Moodle. Most feedback is received in hard-copy, which is contrary to the student's experience in most other subjects. The UG students also noted that not all students appeared to be automatically enrolled in the Honours Moodle page, which the Panel suggests that the subject look to address to ensure that students have timely access to relevant materials.

- 6.1.7 Both UG and PGT students highlighted (as noted in 6.1.5) issues with old versions of documents not being removed from Moodle, as well as some technical issues they'd encountered where Moodle was unavailable for assignment submission, with the students' perception being that it was unable to cope with the demand of students from multiple courses submitting coursework online at the same time. The Panel also heard from staff who also expressed similar concerns about the ability of the Moodle software to cope with "peak" demand.

In the previous Periodic Subject Review conducted in 2013, it was recommended that the Subject extends plans in relation to online essay submission with a view to reducing the administrative burden, by including submission of all written work through Turnitin, Moodle or similar. In the current review, it was clear from the SER and meetings with staff that a large number of the academic team are not utilizing online assessment, with only c.25% of staff using Moodle to mark in-course summative work online, but that the Subject is committed to full online submission of in-course work to reduce paper wastage and to meet the growing student preference for this. The Panel heard from staff that the continued use of paper-marking was partly the result of personal preference, but more significantly the result of technical and functionality issues with Moodle which does not consistently allow the Subject's marking template to be uploaded. The Panel **recommends** that the subject work with LEADS to identify any University best practice on the use of online assessment which can be shared, and that the technical issues with Moodle software is raised with College and University IT Services to identify what steps can be taken to address these.

- 6.1.8 The SER noted that most courses utilise an e-reading course list via the University Library's Talis system. The Panel heard positive feedback from both UG & PGT students and staff on the Talis system, with students noting that the thematic reading lists were a positive resource. The Panel note the consistent use of Talis by the Subject as an example of **good practice**.

- 6.1.9 The Panel noted the experimentation within the Subject of the Aropa online peer review system for some Honours and PG modules. The Panel acknowledge the development in this area and encourage the Subject to assess whether use of the system could be adopted more widely.

#### *Study Abroad*

- 6.1.10 The SER noted that one third of students participate in an international experience during their programme of study, with opportunities for students including the ability to undertake a semester or full year abroad at one of multiple partner institutions, shorter field trips (e.g. to Geneva and Brussels) which are embedded into certain MSc courses, and the Olive Tree Initiative. The range of opportunities continues to grow, with the subject securing funding for the Erasmus+ ICM/Open Skies initiative with McGill University from 2019/20 onwards. The Panel recognise the number of students noted in the SER are above the University's Strategic Plan aim for 20% of all students to have an international experience by 2020.

## 6.2 Assessment and Feedback

- 6.2.1 The Panel noted from both the SER, and meetings with staff and students, that Politics utilises a wide variety of assessment methods at UG and PGT level, and that the Subject was commended by an External Examiner in 2017 for its efforts to allow students “to develop different skills and to understand Politics and its salience to ‘real life’ in a variety of ways”. In the meeting with UG students, the use of policy briefings was highlighted as a form of summative assessment which was thought to be useful for a variety of potential future career paths. The range of summative assessment types also includes essays, exams, oral presentations, research proposals, research projects, and reflective journals, and is something on which the Panel **commends** the Subject.
- 6.2.2 The UG students who met with the Panel raised concerns about the anonymity of late submission, with the apprehension being that extension requests for assignments must be approved, and that the identity of the student can be identified by virtue of the extension request process. The Panel encourages the Subject to ensure that documentation related to extension requests/late submission reassures students that marking is consistent and subject to moderation.
- 6.2.3 The SER noted the measures taken by the Subject in recent years to improve its feedback and assessment procedures, with past NSS and PTES scores indicating that students rated feedback lower than other aspects of Politics’ teaching. Recent changes include the introduction of an assessment calendar for the Honours Programme, which aims to ensure that coursework is returned within the University’s recommended three-week timeframe. The UG students with whom the Panel met were aware of the calendar and felt that it was working well, and the Panel noted that the Subject aim to introduce this for PGT programmes in future. The SER also noted the subject’s reworking of feedback template forms in response to student feedback and the introduction of dedicated essay feedback office hours as positive developments, which are demonstrated in improved NSS scores. The staff with whom the Panel met recognised that these developments are not an end in themselves, with PGT students highlighting particularly wide variations in turnaround times for feedback across different courses, but the Panel **commends** the Subject for the steps they have taken to improve feedback and encourage them to continue this direction of travel and embed these changes within all programmes.
- 6.2.4 At both the meetings with staff and students, it was confirmed that staff responded informally to student feedback via email. However, there were no student summary response documents to course evaluation questionnaires, a requirement of the University’s Course Evaluation policy. The Panel **recommends** that the Subject provides summary response documents to course evaluation questionnaires and that these are placed on course Moodle pages as well as provided to SSLCs.
- 6.2.5 The PGT students who met the Panel noted that results for some aspects of their summative assessment had been converted to a percentage, rather than being fed back to them as a grade, with the result being that the students were attempting to map the percentage result onto the grading system. It was unclear to the Panel whether this practice was limited to multiple choice assessments or used more widely within PGT programmes, so the Panel encourage the Subject to ensure that student results are fed back consistently and in accordance with the University Code of Assessment.

### 6.3 Resources for Learning and Teaching (staffing and physical)

#### *Learning and Teaching Space*

- 6.3.1 The meetings with staff and students reinforced comments raised in the SER in relation to the difficulties experienced by the Subject in securing appropriate teaching space, with particular concerns expressed in relation to the fact that not all floors within the Adam Smith Building are accessible to students or staff with mobility challenges.
- 6.3.2 The UG students who met with the Panel perceived that, due to the limited lift provision within the Adam Smith Building, students with mobility challenges who need to access the upper floors need to arrive at the building 10-15 minutes before their classes are due to commence. Both staff and students highlighted that the ability to arrive either on-time, or suitably in advance, of the lecture or seminar commencing was made more challenging by the timetabling of sequential sessions in venues such as the St Andrews Building. The Panel recognise that the current Campus Development will alleviate pressure on teaching space, but **recommend** that the School of Social and Political Sciences work with the College and Estates and Buildings to address accessibility issues in the Adam Smith Building, and to work with the Space Management and Timetabling Team to factor in the distance between buildings when scheduling consecutive lectures.

#### *Staffing*

- 6.3.3 The SER and meetings with staff noted that, in order to encourage and support curricular innovation, Subject staff receive additional Workload points when they teach a new course. The Panel were not clear however whether staff received similar recognition for substantially overhauling existing courses, with the concern (noted in 6.1.2) that the time constraints of teaching the existing course portfolio are potentially being intensified by the development of new provision. It was also not clear to the Panel the extent to which the Workload Model in place was working well for staff, although the Panel did note comments from staff and the Head of Subject that the increase in student numbers over the past three years has led to an increase in staff workload. It was reported that the measures needed to accommodate increasing numbers, such as staff teaching lectures and seminars back to back for 4 hours, were a challenge to both staff morale and the student experience.
- 6.3.4 The SER, Staff Survey and meetings with staff highlighted issues with the administrative support for teaching within the Subject and the School, which was having a significant impact on all staff. It was not clear to the Panel which tasks fell within the remit of the Subject, and those which fell to the School, with feedback from the two areas differing as to who does what, and also that administrative procedures within Politics differ from other Subjects within the School, making it harder to implement consistently. The Panel heard that the School of Social and Political Sciences have attempted to address these administrative issues, and the Review Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject work, in consultation with the Head of School and Head of School Professional Services, to continue to review the administrative provision and develop and implement a plan to resolve current administrative difficulties in a manner that is resilient to the planned future growth.

## 6.4 Engaging and supporting staff

- 6.4.1 The SER noted that all Early Career Staff are assigned a mentor and participate in the Early Career Development Programme (ECDP), and the Panel met with Early Career Staff to discuss their experience with this programme. There was a general agreement that it had not lived up to their expectations in many respects, as although there are opportunities for support and mentoring, communication lines between the different levels of support are unclear and not well structured. The Panel also heard that some individuals had been required to participate in ECDP despite having experience as an academic in other institutions, with feedback from the staff that the programme is not tailored to those who are genuinely “Early Career”. The feedback that the Panel received from staff who had participated in the PGCert in Academic Practice (PGCAP) was generally positive, however.
- 6.4.2 The meeting with Early Career staff also highlighted that the process for progression is slow, which has an impact upon staff moral and retention, and that staff would welcome greater guidance on clarity on aspects of the promotion criteria. The Panel **recommends** that the Subject work in partnership with the College Human Resources Team to ensure that staff are clear on the criteria for Academic Promotion, and that they are suitably supported through the promotion application process.
- 6.4.3 It was noted in the meeting with the Head of School that work had been undertaken at a School level to rationalise the use of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), address existing issues with GTA variable contracts and uneven training, and to refresh the lapsed GTA committee within the School. These were acknowledged by the Panel as positive steps and **good practice**. The SER noted that the Subject employ 9 GTAs and 4 Tutors on multi-year, part-time contracts, and that all staff were provided with a bespoke training session run by the School and LEADS. The GTAs with whom the Panel met acknowledged the training that was provided but highlighted that additional practical training would be welcome before they take up their roles, and also highlighted that they currently receive no formal feedback, either from students or from colleagues. The Panel **recommends** that efforts be made to provide GTAs with a level of peer assessment and feedback on their teaching performance, with the GTA committee being consulted on potential requirements.

## 7. Academic Standards

- 7.1.1 The Panel considered that the Subject had a variety of robust and effective procedures in place which ensure that the School was engaged in a continual process of self-reflection and self-evaluation with regards to academic practice.
- 7.1.2 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 developing knowledge and practice within the subject area.
- 7.1.3 The Panel established from the Self-Evaluation Report and the supporting documents that the Subject was operating effective quality enhancement processes in line with University policy and practice. The Panel did note a concern from the supporting documents that in 2018, only 1 of the Subject’s 3 External Examiners for Level 2 and Honours were able to attend an Exam Board. This was raised with the Head of Subject who confirmed that whilst this was unusual, the circumstances relating to their non-attendance were unique, and that the Subject received pre-reports from the Examiners

to confirm that they were satisfied with marking arrangements to ensure that scrutiny was not reduced.

7.1.4 The Panel noted from the SER and from meetings with academic staff and the Head of Subject that there were concerns relating to the process of making changes to courses and programmes, and how the time-consuming nature of this process had the potential to discourage innovation to existing provision. The Panel **recommends** that the Subject work with the School and College to provide clarity on what constitutes a minor or major change to an existing course or programme to ensure that the approval process is timely, and that Subject staff receive adequate feedback on changes which have been assessed by the College Board and School Oversight committees.

## **8. Collaborative provision**

8.1.1 The SER noted the contribution made by the Subject to the MSc International Relations programme that is run as part of the Joint Graduate School with Nankai University in Tianjin, China. The programme has been running since 2015 and has seen a steady increase in student numbers since its inception. The Subject convenes and teaches 2 core courses on the programme, as well as contributing supervision, with dissertations in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year being jointly supervised and marked by both institutions. The Panel acknowledged that the collaborative MSc is a well-planned and well-managed venture and were encouraged by the intensive induction offered to each new cohort, as well as the language support which is made available, both in the form of in-session English language lessons and the three-week summer school.

8.1.2 The Panel also note that in 2019/20 Politics will introduce a new International Masters degree programme in Southern European Studies (EUROSUD), with funding awarded as part of the EU Erasmus Mundas Joint Masters (EMJMD) programme, and that the Subject, School and College will monitor the impact of Brexit on the running of this programme.

## **Appendix 1 Summary of Commendations and Recommendations**

The Review Panel commends the Subject of Politics on the following:

### **Commendation 1**

The reflective and open approach taken by the subject to the self-evaluation report. [Paragraph 3.1.1]

### **Commendation 2**

The evident commitment of the academic team to teaching, learning and the student experience. [Paragraph 3.1.1]

### **Commendation 3**

The high level of care and attention given to the transition of students from Glasgow International College and the positive links which have been fostered with GIC [Paragraph 5.1.13].

### **Commendation 4**

Support for Widening Participation, both in terms of the WP Summer School, and the preparatory work undertaken to ensure that students entering Politics Level 2 via the Clyde College Articulation Programme are sufficiently equipped to enter the University. [Paragraph 5.1.4]

### **Commendation 5**

The quality and variety of the programmes offered – years 1 and 2 offer a solid grounding, which allows students to articulate to an impressive range of honours choices. [Paragraph 6.1.2]

### **Commendation 6**

Good articulation between Intended Learning Outcomes and assessment methods. [Paragraph 6.1.3]

### **Commendation 7**

Improvements in student feedback, which have seen a positive change to NSS scores. [Paragraph 6.2.3]

### **Commendation 8**

The use of a broad range of assessment methods, such as placement-based assessment, reflective journals, policy briefing and individual research projects. [Paragraph 6.2.1]

### **Commendation 9**

Impressive range of extra-curricular activities, including the Olive Tree Initiative. [Paragraph 5.7]

## **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.

### *Context and Strategy*

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject and School develop a clear strategy for the introduction of the new IR degree programme and how this will complement the current Politics degree programme, ensuring both are equally supported. The Subject and School should closely monitor the impact the new degree programme may have on current provision and staff morale. This strategy should be developed and agreed in consultation between the Subject and School and ratified by the College Management Committee ensuring all teaching commitments are considered within College forward planning. [Paragraph 4.1.3]

**For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School, Head of College**

### *Strategic planning for future growth*

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Panel **recommends** that the School reviews communication, engagement and inclusion of all staff to ensure all Subject staff are given an opportunity to contribute to strategy and teaching developments in an open and transparent environment. [Paragraph 4.1.4]

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

*Supporting staff*

### **Recommendation 3**

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Subject should, in consultation with the Head of School and Head of School Professional Services, continue to review the administrative provision and develop and implement a plan to resolve current administrative difficulties in a manner that is resilient to the planned future growth. [Paragraph 6.3.4]

**For the attention of: Head of Subject, Head of School and Head of School Professional Services**  
**For information: Head of College**

*Accommodation*

### **Recommendation 4**

The Panel recommends that the subject work with the School, College and Estates and Buildings to address accessibility issues in the Adam Smith Building, and to work with the Space Management and Timetabling Team to factor in distance between buildings when scheduling consecutive lectures. [Paragraph 6.3.2]

**For the attention of: Head of School, Head of Subject, Director of Estates and Buildings, Space Management and Timetabling Team**  
**For information: Head of College**

*Enhancement in learning and teaching*

### **Recommendation 5**

The Panel **recommends** that the Subjects work with the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Service to share University best practice on the use of online assessment & marking, and that the technical issues with Moodle software be raised with University IT Services to identify what steps can be taken to address these. [Paragraph 6.1.7]

**For the attention of: Head of Subject**  
**For information: Head of School, Director of LEADS, Director of IT Services**

*Academic Standards*

### **Recommendation 6**

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject work with the School and College to provide clarity on what constitutes a minor or major change to an existing course or programme to ensure that the approval process is timely, and that Subject staff receive adequate feedback on changes which have been assessed by the College Board and School Oversight committees. [Paragraph 7.1.3]

**For the attention of: Head of Subject and Dean for Learning and Teaching**  
**For information: Head of School**



*Supporting staff*

### **Recommendation 7**

The Panel recommends that the Subject work in partnership with the College and Human Resources to build upon existing provision and ensure that staff are clear on the criteria for Academic Promotion, and that they are suitably supported through the promotion application process. [Paragraph 6.4.2]

**For the attention of: Head of College Human Resources, Head of College  
For information: Head of School**

### **Recommendation 8**

The Panel **recommends** that efforts be made to provide GTAs with a level of peer assessment and feedback on their teaching performance, with the GTA committee being consulted on potential requirements. [Paragraph 6.4.3]

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

### **Recommendation 9**

*Assessment and feedback*

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject provides summary response documents to course evaluation questionnaires and that these are placed on course Moodle pages as well as provided to SSLCs. [Paragraph 6.2.5]

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

*Enhancing the student experience*

### **Recommendation 10**

The Panel **recommends** that the subject take steps to address the perceived lack of awareness amongst UG students of the Student-Staff Liaison Committee, including the methods of communication used to make students aware of the process, and how contact details of class representatives are advertised. [Paragraph 5.4]

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

*Equality and Diversity*

### **Recommendation 11**

The Panel **recommends** that the subject consider their “trigger warning” process, by which students are notified of potentially sensitive material which will be discussed in a lecture, to ensure that students are given suitable advanced warning to allow them to assess whether they are comfortable in attending. This may include providing details in course handbooks, and reconsideration given to the use of sensitive material in data sets. [Paragraph 5.3]

**For the attention of: Head of Subject  
For information: Equality and Diversity Unit**