

# University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee – 24 May 2019

### Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Periodic Subject Review of Short Course held on 1 and 2 May 2018

Robbie Mulholland, Clerk to the Panel

#### Conclusion

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 scaffold 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.

#### 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**

## Response:

Subject Coordinators all provide training and development for their individual cohorts of tutors. However, to ensure a minimum level of consistency in tutors' understanding of the general requirements of teaching for Short Courses, for the academic year 2019/20 a short, Moodle-based induction process has been developed. This has been formulated as a Moodle lesson plug in, where tutors will be navigated to training on critical aspects of their role (such as assessment and feedback, good cause procedures, Moodle minimum standards, etc.). A short test is included at the end of the process to enable tracking of completion rates.

The induction process will be supported by the recently relaunched Moodle site for Short Courses tutors, which will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure all tutors have access to key information such as dates of teaching blocks, deadlines for new course submissions to Scrutiny Group/Board of Studies, dates for Boards of Examiners etc. This site will also operate as a platform for sharing best practice, with Subject Coordinators taking turns to post relevant material such as: the Assessment Feedback proforma; Moodle minimum standards; minutes from the Staff-Student Liaison Committee; pedagogical research; and information on upcoming LEADS CPD events. All tutors have been made aware of this new repository, and are being encouraged to share ideas for good practice.

All Short Courses tutors are eligible to attend LEADS training events. However, because tutors are not paid to attend such training, take-up is limited. To address this, Short Courses has discussed with LEADS the production of a range of topic-based CPD materials, to be delivered online, to support the development of key aspects of professional practice such as writing aims, objectives and intended learning outcomes, and engaging with Moodle. This work will be progressed during the 2019/20 academic year.

Because of the difficulties associated with bringing large numbers of part-time tutors together on a regular basis, much of the focus for development around training and the sharing of best practice has been online. However, from 2019/20 Short Courses will introduce a number of informal events to which all tutors will be invited. The days and times of these will vary to allow all tutors an opportunity to attend. There is no formal training element associated with these events; they are intended to be informal opportunities for tutors to meet each other and to raise matters of mutual interest or concern with Subject Coordinators.

### *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**

## Response:

The job descriptions for all academic staff have been reviewed and the formal line management role in relation to part-time tutors is now explicitly stated. The responsibilities

associated with managing staff have also been clarified, and job descriptions now stipulate that Subject Coordinators will oversee all aspects of human resources management in relation to part-time tutors including recruitment, performance management, the management of attendance and staff development.

All Subject Coordinators are now clear about their staff management responsibilities, and will maintain regular contact by email and via Moodle with all the tutors they line manage. A minimum expectation of at least one face-to-face meeting with each tutor per annum has also been established.

### **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**

### **Response:**

As an outcome of the Periodic Subject Review, Short Courses undertook a review and refresh of the operation of Academic Planning and Management Group (its de facto Learning and Teaching Committee). This included adopting standing agenda items (such as course development, Annual Course Monitoring, Access, and reports from Staff-Student Liaison Committee) for consideration at each meeting, the introduction of tutor representation (see Recommendation 4 below), and the election of a new Chair. This review, coupled with the fact that during 2018/19 Short Courses gained several new members of academic staff, has meant that Academic Planning and Management Group meetings are now a much more effective mechanism for team working amongst Subject Coordinators, benefitting from the input of experienced members of staff as well as fresh perspectives brought by new colleagues.

Academic Planning and Management Group now has a much more explicit focus on sharing good practice and supporting cross-disciplinary working. Examples of this include the recent development of a course information template, which has been discussed and agreed at Academic Planning and Management Group and which is now being used as the standard proforma for the recording of course information. There has also been the development of a new assessment feedback form, which draws on the practices of a number of members of the Group. Regular Academic Planning and Management Group meetings are being utilised for course planning, to ensure that there is a shared approach to the development of, for example, the Short Courses summer programme, as well as working groups focused on sharing expertise about Moodle features, modes of assessment, and online course development.

The Short Courses Scrutiny Group, which considers new course proposals before they go to the University Services Board of Studies for approval, is another mechanism by which Subject Coordinators can share ideas and good practice (especially in terms of assessment design). All Subject Coordinators are members of Scrutiny Group, which has expanded considerably with the recruitment of a number of new academic colleagues during 2018/19. Following the Periodic Subject Review, the remit and operation of Scrutiny Group has been reviewed, and in order to maintain operational effectiveness we have introduced pre-Scrutiny

Group meetings. These comprise smaller groupings of Subject Coordinators who act as critical friends to colleagues submitting new course proposals, providing initial consideration and feedback before proposals are considered more formally by Scrutiny Group. This means that colleagues proposing new courses have an additional opportunity to respond to feedback prior to taking their course(s) to the Board of Studies.

#### **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**

#### **Response:**

This has been implemented and tutor representatives are now entitled to sit on the Academic Planning and Management Group. It has been agreed to include two to three tutor representatives at each Academic Planning and Management Group meeting. Ideally, tutors will undertake the representative role for one academic year; however, due to the short-term nature of our courses it might not be possible to ensure the same tutors attend all meetings during an academic year.

The Chair and Clerk of Academic Planning and Management Group will ensure communication to all tutors in advance of each meeting to maximise representation, and agendas and minutes will be posted on the Short Courses tutors' Moodle page to enhance communication. Tutor representatives will be encouraged to submit the topics they'd like to discuss as agenda items in advance.

#### *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**

#### **Response:**

The Director, Short Courses met with the Convener of the VLE Board in October 2018 to discuss this recommendation, and the Convener of the VLE Board indicated that he was supportive of students on non-credit-bearing courses having Access to Moodle. However, at a follow-up meeting with IT colleagues in December 2018, it became evident that there are considerable obstacles to opening up the University's Moodle site to non-credit-bearing courses. These include the fact that courses would need to be manually set up in Moodle, allocating students to courses would also be a manual process, and students would need to be individually checked to ascertain whether they are already studying on a credit-bearing course. Short Courses does not have the resources to manage the manual processing

associated with enabling students on non-credit-bearing courses to be able to access the University's Moodle site, however see also Recommendation 7 below.

#### **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**

#### **Response:**

The majority of credit-bearing courses now have a Moodle page, however further work is required to encourage better engagement with Moodle by a number of tutors. To this end, during 2019/20 an audit will be undertaken across all credit-bearing courses to establish the extent of Moodle use, and through the forum of Academic Planning and Management Group Subject Co-ordinators will then develop a strategy to increase Moodle usage by their tutors (including through possible CPD opportunities, see Recommendation 1 above).

The University's Moodle minimum standards have been shared and discussed at Academic Planning and Management Group, and Subject Co-ordinators have communicated to tutors the requirement that Moodle pages now adhere to Moodle minimum standards. During 2019/20 Subject Coordinators will report regularly to Academic Planning and Management Group on the extent to which the courses they oversee adhere to Moodle minimum standards, and identify ways in which to encourage their adoption.

#### **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**

#### **Response:**

For 2019/20 Short Courses will have an increased number of credit-bearing courses available on a blended or wholly online basis, including a growing portfolio of Archaeology and Egyptology courses. Online development has been supported by the purchase of additional and upgraded Camtasia licences, and there has been recent investment in specialist recording equipment that will capture content in creative and innovative ways. Following work that has been undertaken during 2018/19 with the MVLS Digital Education Unit, a number of non-credit-bearing online Philosophy courses have been developed for delivery via the MVLS external Moodle site in 2019/20.

A preliminary discussion has taken place with LEADS to identify the best way to support further online development for Short Courses, and to this end a LEADS workshop for all Subject Coordinators, as well as identified part-time tutors, will take place in May/June 2019, with a focus on how to create an effective learning experience in a digital environment. It is anticipated that this will be the first of a regular series of workshops drawing on the expertise provided by LEADS.

### *Assessment and Feedback*

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Panel **recommends** that Subject Specialists, following liaison with LEADS, 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**

**For information: Director, LEADS**

#### **Response:**

As noted above (Recommendation 3), the remit and operation of Scrutiny Group has been reviewed in light of the Periodic Subject Review, and now takes a proactive approach to the consideration of consistency of assessment methods and feedback. Scrutiny Group is responsible for ensuring that a diversity of approaches to assessment – including traditional modes such as oral presentations, class tests, and essays, as well as digital forms such as Moodle quizzes, blogs, peer reviews, and Mahara e-portfolios – are utilised and shared for consideration across all Subject Coordinators.

Further to a recommendation from the two Access External Examiners that Short Courses should improve its formative feedback for students, and following discussion with LEADS colleagues about best practice in student feedback mechanisms, an assessment feedback template has been developed which is now being used across all Short Courses credit-bearing provision to address the issue of maintaining consistency in student feedback. This standardised form covers student performance against established course-specific criteria, as well as comments on areas where a student has performed well and less well, and provides detailed guidance on how to improve for future assignments. An amended version of the feedback form has been developed for Access Maths and Science courses to better reflect the specific characteristics of assessment in these disciplines.

### *Student Feedback Mechanisms*

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Panel **recommends** that Short Courses keep the effectiveness of its current student feedback mechanisms under review. [Paragraph 3.4.3]<sup>1</sup>

**For the attention of: Director, Short Courses**

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 9 was an additional recommendation requested by Academic Standards Committee which has been agreed by the PSR Panel Convener.

## **Response:**

A number of actions have been identified in order to consider the effectiveness of student feedback mechanisms, including through Evasys. In order to benchmark Short Courses performance using Evasys against University norms, a review will take place in autumn 2019 of student response rates. The appropriateness of the timing and content of the Evasys questionnaire will also be reviewed, including through consultation with Short Courses' Staff-Student Liaison Committee, and will be revised accordingly. It is also intended to review and evaluate the effectiveness of tutors' responsiveness to student feedback and the ways in which tutors' responses and actions are communicated back to students, in order to identify ways of 'closing the loop' more effectively. Academic Planning and Management Group will take oversight of this review and will report at the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

The effective operation of the Short Courses Staff-Student Liaison Committee is also under review. The Committee has been consulted on the frequency and timing of meetings, and the introduction of reporting from Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings as a standing item on the Academic Planning and Management Group agenda (see Recommendation 3 above) will help to improve in closing the feedback loop between students, Subject Coordinators and tutors.

### *Resource Base*

#### **Recommendation 10**

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**

## **Response:**

An assessment of the tutors' base took place in December 2018, which identified a number of issues. These relate to the constraints of the current physical space as well as the outdated resources and facilities within it. Following the assessment, recommendations were made to update flooring and walls, improve lighting, and increase the usable space by removing an existing partition wall which is adjacent to an empty room. This would provide additional space to install more desks and PCs, as well as a new photocopier. The renovated space would also have short-term storage for tutors' materials and a door lock so personal items could be left securely whilst teaching. In January 2019 a request for drawings and quotes was passed to Estates and Buildings, and we are currently awaiting a response from them.

### *Access Students*

#### **Recommendation 11**

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**

**Response:**

Short Courses has reviewed its support mechanisms for Access students and has implemented a number of changes to the induction process for the 2019/20 cohort. Enhancements include: opportunities for new Access students to meet with former Access students who have made the successful transition to HE; a presentation by the SRC to advise on the range of clubs and societies which Access students can join, including the Mature Students Association; a number of IT sessions which are designed to familiarise students with Moodle, MyCampus and the Librarian search facilities; and LEADS sessions which support Access students in academic writing and study skills development, as well as maths and stats advice where appropriate.

At the end of the Access programme students completing their studies will now be automatically included in the Student Orientation Event for Widening Participation Students. This takes place the week before Freshers' Week and is designed for students who will be living at home and have taken part in any of the University of Glasgow's pre-entry programmes. Students have the opportunity to meet fellow students coming from a similar background to them; talk to academic staff; get information about Freshers' Week; and find out about the support available to them as a new student at the University of Glasgow.

**Recommendation 12**

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**

**Response:**

For 2019/20 the dates of Library presentations will be provided at the Access student induction event (which is scheduled to take place in early September 2019) and details will also be posted on Moodle and included in the general course information emailed to all Access students prior to the start of the academic year. A reminder about Library presentations will then be emailed to all Access students via the Moodle news forum as soon as teaching commences, so that tutors can also encourage students to engage with the presentations.

For 2019/20 a Library PowerPoint presentation will be posted on Moodle and all Access students will be emailed the link so that the information is easily accessible online, in particular for those unable to attend the Library presentations in person.



## *Access Programme*

### **Recommendation 13**

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**

### **Response:**

Since the Periodic Subject Review took place there has been a change to the arrangements for the management of Access courses. Academic oversight of each Access course is now the responsibility of the relevant Subject Coordinator, and line management responsibility for Access tutors is also now with the Subject Coordinators. For this reason it is intended that engagement will mainly be between Subject Coordinators and Level 1 Course Coordinators, and the process of scheduling meetings between relevant staff has now begun. Level 1 Course Coordinators will also be invited to attend the Access tutors' induction session (in September 2019) to provide an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other.

## *Equality and Diversity*

### **Recommendation 14**

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**

### **Response:**

The Art Studio used by Short Courses is one room in a suite of 3 art studios in the St Andrew's building (the other two being locally managed).

The area of the building where this suite is located is on a half-level accessed via a short flight of steps.

There is one lift which provides level access to the room, though it is not sufficiently sized to accommodate a large, motorised wheelchair.

Short Courses requires a fully equipped art room (with running water) for their courses which run Wednesdays (10-4) and Saturdays (10-1) for 9 weeks per semester

The allocated room (559, capacity 22) is not used for any other teaching as it is not suitable for general teaching currently.

The split-level nature of the building makes providing level access to the room challenging and options explored to date (e.g. providing ramped access) have proven not to be viable.

The potential to install a platform stair-lift (similar to those used elsewhere on campus) is being investigated.

The central teams continue to explore options for using alternative spaces either within or proximate to the main campus, noting that there are costs associated, particularly with the latter.

It should also be noted that any move of this one studio would result in the loss of beneficial adjacencies with the other art studios and the requirement for running water in the room could limit the suitability of other spaces.

Estates and Commercial Services continues to work with colleagues across the University to ensure allocation of suitable and accessible accommodation within the constraints of the Estate.

#### **Action to be Taken Forward Outside of the Review**

<p>The Panel <b>agreed</b> 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]</p>
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