

# University of Glasgow

## Academic Standards Committee: 20 November 2020

### Periodic Subject Review: Response to Recommendations arising from the MVLS Graduate School Cluster 1 (Animal and Plant Sciences, and Biomedical Sciences) held on 14 June 2019

#### Student Mental Health

##### Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the lines of responsibility for student mental health support should be clarified across the Graduate School to ensure that all staff are aware of who students should be referred to and that all staff in the referral system are appropriately trained. [Paragraph 3.3.1]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

#### *Response:*

This first point of contact for a student looking for mental health support has traditionally been met by our academic advisers of studies; however, we appreciate that not all programmes use academic advisors to the same extent. In smaller programmes this role is filled by the programme lead, however in other situations a more established approach is used with small groups being assigned an advisor from within the programme team. We understand the importance of this role and will endeavour to create more structured support for all students and the staff who act in these advisor roles. In addition, we have increasingly noticed students approaching our administrative staff for support with these issues. While we are pleased that our Graduate School staff are approachable, we realise this adds additional stress and workload to these staff. As such we will also look to provide training and mapping for the appropriate escalation of these issues, within the university structure, to our administrative staff.

#### Applicant Self-Service

##### Recommendation 2

The Review Panel urgently **recommends** that deficiencies in the Applicant Self-Service process are addressed by IT Services. [Paragraph 3.1.1]

**For the attention of: The Director of IT Services**  
**For information: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

#### *Response: IT Services*

We went live with Applicant Self Service phase 1 on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020. A dedicated project team was setup between MSDI and Admissions. There was also an Operational Group setup that included management and key Stakeholders around the application system. Philip

Stanley was included in this operational group and I've included below the email he sent just after go-live.

To summarise the key deliverables in Phase 1:

- Portal to be made available to all applicants (Direct and UCAS)
- Increase in conversion rates
- Mobile / Tablet friendly look and feel through implementation of Fluid User Interface (Fluid UI)
- Clear and simple To Do list for applicants
- Clear and simple overview of the status of an application for applicants
- Ease of access to all UofG applicant communications
- Ability for all applicants to upload documentation
- Clear and simple way for applicants to make payments

***Response: Dean of Graduate Studies***

It is our understanding that this has been addressed and improvements have been made to the self-service system.

**Physical Estate, Facilities and Timetabling**

**Recommendation 3**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Disability Equality Group should examine and, if appropriate, implement strategies to identify students with mobility issues prior to their arrival at the University to ensure that appropriate rooms can be obtained in advance of the start of teaching. [Paragraph 3.2.1]

**For the attention of: The Disability Equality Group  
For information: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

***Response: Disability Equality Group***

This was discussed by the Disability Equality Group following the PSR of the MVLS Graduate School.

As things stand, in line with our anticipatory duties, preparations for each new academic year's teaching timetable begin in February with Schools having until the end of April to update their course requirements based on their expected new and continuing undergraduate cohort. Unfortunately, there are situations where the University is not made aware of access requirements until Freshers' Week. This, together with allowing students to choose their classes very late, causes most of the issues experienced.

It was also noted many disabled Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students experience issues as they usually arrive on campus very close to the start of their course and don't engage with the Disability Service until then. The Disability Service staff are aware that some PGT courses have a regular cohort of disabled students and the relevant course coordinators/administrators will be targeted for early accessible room allocation in the future but this will not address the totality of the problem.

While there are challenges, the Timetabling team are very aware of the issues that unsuitable rooms and cross campus journeys have on both disabled students and staff. They do try to accommodate all change requests. However, it's not always as simple as swapping one room for another; size of classes, teaching styles and any resulting knock-on effects to timetables all hamper finding solutions.

Early notification of any accessibility requirements is key to supporting our disabled students. There is scope for current University projects, such as the 'smart campus' and student forecasting and enrolment project to impact positively on this situation. A proposal for a suite of new student data collection/reporting is in development and will be put to the Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee (EDSC) with entrant's disability one of the proposed data collection points. All of this will help the situation but the Disability Equality Group recognised that there is no complete solution to the problem. Work will continue to explore further options but, in the meantime, applicants, students and colleagues will be advised to provide relevant information at the earliest opportunity to allow appropriate arrangements to be put in place before the start of teaching.

**Response: Dean of Graduate Studies**

We are not aware if progress has been made on this recommendation.

**Recommendation 4**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School should analyse current requirements for computing facilities across its portfolio and, on the basis of this and trend data, develop a future requirements statement to inform future facility development. This should then be shared with the Vice-Principal Academic Planning and Technological Innovation to ensure the requirements are appropriately captured in future IT facility planning. [Paragraph 4.3.2]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**  
**For information: Vice-Principal Academic Planning and Technological Innovation**

**Response:**

Before lockdown a review was initiated into the physical requirements for computer facilities, this was discussed and prioritised in the college budget, but has since been put on hold. We do appreciate in the last 6 months significant work has been done to develop the Windows virtual desktop platform, and the added accessibility of site licences off campus which have been very well received by staff. However, we hope in the coming academic year to restimulate the investment in computing facilities.

**Recommendation 5**

The Review Panel recommends that future timetabling and Estates developments at the University should address concerns about staff being unable to consistently access rooms that are suitable for small group teaching or technology-enabled learning. [Paragraph 4.3.3]

**For the attention of: Director of Strategy, Performance and Transformation, Estates and Commercial Services**  
**For information: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

**Response: Director of Strategy, Performance and Transformation, Estates and Commercial Services**

The University continues to invest in its teaching spaces and to provision a variety of spaces to support evolving pedagogies.

At the present time, the majority of smaller teaching spaces are held under local management, limiting the ability of central teams and services to influence the design and use of these

spaces. This is a matter which can better be addressed following the decision of SMG to transfer all general teaching rooms into central management in a phased approach.

This move, with the associated investment in upgrading and reconfiguring teaching spaces, along with the opening of the James McCune Smith Learning Hub will improve access to rooms for small group teaching and will increase the number of spaces which support technology-enhanced learning.

The Central Timetabling Team has been in consultation with academics teaching PGT courses within the College to consider their requirements and how these might best be supported in the coming years. As a result of this a number of PGT courses will be taught in spaces better suited to their needs next year

**Response: Dean of Graduate Studies**

The University's investment in the new JMS learning and teaching hub offers welcome progress in this area.

**Recommendation 6**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School should review the provision of loose furniture at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital teaching facility with a view to addressing student concerns regarding facilities for group and personal study. [Paragraph 4.3.4]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

**Response:**

The Graduate School raised this issue with the teaching and learning facilities within the Queen Elizabeth estate. As this facility is equally used by NHS staff, we plan work together to make improvements. We do recognise that as student numbers have increased, it has become more difficult to manage class sizes and maintain an appropriate space within these facilities. We were in the process of investigating a possible relocation of some of our classes to the Gilmore Hill campus before the current pandemic. Now the Lighthouse lab has fully taken over the LTC at the QEUH we are accelerating these plans to relocate all teaching.

**Learning and Teaching Strategy**

**Recommendation 7**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School reviews its approach to the provision of MSc group projects with a view to evaluating the benefits and costs of expanding this provision to alleviate project loads associated with future postgraduate student growth. The Review Panel also **recommends** that this approach should be discussed at the College Management Group to ensure that it can be embedded within future resourcing plans. [Paragraph 4.2.3]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**  
**For Information: Vice Principal and Head of College, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences**

**Response:**

The provision of group projects was presented and discussed with CMG, Head of College and other members of the group were very supportive. Plans were made for additional group projects to run; additional lab space was identified, and additional equipment was purchased. Unfortunately, this was cancelled, and all projects were moved to a 'dry' format in 2019/20. We do however believe this will be essential going forward and are already making plans for more group projects to run, if possible, in 2021. Due to limitations with occupancy in research labs, this is likely to be our best opportunity to provide lab-based projects in 2020/21.

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School should identify programmes that are delivering the most effective learning experience for students in terms of good teaching practices, the provision of effective feedback, and the equality of learning opportunities, with a view to disseminating these practices to other parts of the Graduate School. [Paragraph 4.2.6]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

#### **Response:**

We are always looking to promote good practice within our programmes. This was one of the main drivers for establishing clusters of programmes with similar academic direction. Initially these clusters became overwhelmed with course approvals paperwork, but we have since redesigned this process to enable clusters to have the time and space to share experience and good practice. In clusters such as Biomedical Sciences, with many units contributing programmes, this has been particularly useful.

Wider dissemination occurs through the MVLS PGT away day, where we always include a session on innovative good practice, and through the MVLS Scholarship away day. As well as learning of new processes from staff first-hand and through the annual monitoring report, it is always informative to see where students feel practice has been most effective through SSLC meetings and EvaSys reports.

#### **Course Evaluation**

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School liaises with the Senate Office and consults the good practice guide on the Senate Office Website to develop a strategy for increasing student response rates for EvaSys course evaluation surveys. The Review Panel also **recommends** that the Graduate School develops a mechanism to ensure that Summary and Response Documents are completed for all courses and that these documents are made available to students on each course. [Paragraph 3.4.2]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies  
For information: Senate Office**

#### **Response:**

In response to this recommendation we have begun to review the communications sent to students and the language we use to promote engagement. We are also developing timetables for students on when they will receive links to complete the survey. We have improved return rates for the summary and response documents to almost 100%, however this has been through continual review and reminding from the administrative team. The

timeliness of these responses also needs improvement to make this a meaningful process for students. This is something we will look to continue improving.

### **Signposting of PhD and Funding Opportunities**

#### **Recommendation 10**

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School should improve the pre and post-arrival signposting of PhD and funding opportunities to students. [Paragraph 3.4.6]

**For the attention of: The Dean of Graduate Studies**

#### ***Response:***

PhD opportunities are continually updated on our Graduate school web page. In addition, a few years ago we began running dedicated PGT to PGR workshops where current PGR students, or institute and school academic representatives would be able to come and discuss opportunities and experiences within these areas. To expand this point a little further, we are aware that there are many other career destinations students wish to follow as well as PhD's, so we try to balance career sessions with industry speakers, scientific writers, clinicians, teachers and many other professions. This is carried out together with the UofG Careers Service and through our Graduate Skills Award.