

## University of Glasgow

### Academic Standards Committee – Friday 26 November 2021

#### Periodic Subject Review: Review of Philosophy held on 24 – 25 May 2021

Catherine Omand, Clerk to the Review Panel

##### Review Panel

Convener	Professor Neil Evans
External Subject Specialist, University of Stirling	Professor Peter Milne
Student Member	Mr Grigoris Kokkinidis
Cognate Member	Ms Karen Thompson
Elected Member from the University Court	Professor Carl Goodyear
Academic and Digital Development (ADD)	Dr Elliott Spaeth
Clerk	Mrs Catherine Omand, Academic Services (Senate Office)
Observer	Mr Stuart Purcell (Student Learning Development, LEADS)

##### Overview

The Review Panel was impressed with the staff of the Subject Area's commitment to high quality, research-led teaching, and dedication to supporting their students and providing them with a sense of community. This commitment has been long established within the Subject and it was evident, from the GTAs the Panel had met with, that this had transferred onto these staff. The commitment to providing a high-quality learning experience had evidently been continued throughout the pandemic, which has been an extremely difficult period for all. The students were aware and appreciated the effort staff had made to continue to provide a good education and university experience. The Panel recognised many outstanding good practices within the Subject Area [see Sections 6&7], but long-standing issues with a high Student:Staff ratio and consequent heavy staff workloads, were having a detrimental impact on staff, leading to frustration with staff unable to take forward their research as much as they would like, as well as develop further teaching opportunities. Whilst new staff had been appointed since the last PSR, this had had limited impact on workloads as this had correlated with increased student numbers. It was also noted that success by one new appointee in attaining a substantial research grant had had a further negative impact on teaching support, as replacement staffing was not always available.

To aid the sustainable development of the Subject Area, attached are several recommendations for it to consider. Some are being proposed to enable the Subject Area to address issues raised during the Review in the short term, while others are for longer term consideration, in relation to future growth and development.

### 1. Context and Strategy

#### Context

1.1 Philosophy is one of six Subject Areas based in the School of Humanities within the College of Arts.

1.2 The Subject Area is responsible for the following degree programmes:

- MA (Hons) Philosophy. Taken either as Single Honours, or Joint with 32 other subjects (two of these, the Joint Honours degrees with Law and Mathematics, are LLB and BSc respectively, rather than MA).

- MSc Philosophy (General)
- MSc Philosophy (Conversion)
- MSc Philosophy of Mind and Psychology

1.3 There are currently 18 permanent, full-time members of academic staff (all are 1 FTE). The breakdown by category is as follows:

- Professor 6
- Reader 2
- Senior Lecturer 4
- Lecturer 6

In addition, there is one Lord Kelvin/Adam Smith (LKAS) Fellow and three four-year Research Associates.

Staffing levels had increased since the last PSR, but some members had substantially reduced loads due to other School-wide commitments.

1.4 Teaching was substantially supported by a large group of GTAs, normally 20. This was mainly due to the exceptionally high Student:Staff Ratio (SSR).

1.5 A major review of teaching had taken place, with substantial changes made to Levels 1 and 2 and Senior Honours, in terms of courses offered and assessment methods. A new taught postgraduate degree, the MSc in Philosophy of Mind and Psychology has been introduced.

1.6 Student numbers have increased, with the Student:Staff Ratio (SSR) remaining high and the worst in the country (among Philosophy departments). The high SSR, associated staff workloads and over-reliance on a significant number of GTAs are the main areas flagged to the Review Panel as an area for concern.

1.7 At the Review, the Panel met with Dr David Bain (Head of Subject), Professor Michael Brady (Head of School), Dr Chris Lindsay (Head of Teaching and Joint Honours Convener), 9 Undergraduate (UG) students, 6 Postgraduate (PGT) students and 4 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). It further met with a range of academic and professional services staff, covering various teaching and administrative roles and 8 Early Career staff. In the final session, the Panel met with the Head of Subject, Head of School, Head of College and PGT Dean (the Dean of Learning & Teaching was unable to attend).

## Strategy

1.8 There had been significant changes since the last Review, with significant development of PGT provision, a major curriculum review had been undertaken and successful research grants awarded. At the meeting with the Head of Subject, the Panel was advised that the Subject Area's current strategy was to ensure teaching continued to be research-led, and further rollout of active and collaborative learning with co-creation of courses with students. However, the high Student:Staff Ratio (SSR) remained an issue, placing staff under considerable pressure and as such, it was difficult for the Subject Area to be strategic in terms of future growth and range of provision (Please refer to 2.1). In line with the new Learning and Teaching Strategy and working with the Head of School, Deans (Learning & Teaching, and PGT) and Head of College, the Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area considers developing a coherent strategic vision, in terms of future growth and range of provision, and a phased plan as to how and what is required to reach its vision. This should include protecting research time for staff and future use of GTAs in terms of number and how they work alongside teaching staff. Staff should be involved in the development of such a strategy to gain staff 'buy in' to the vision. This should enable the Subject Area to establish a project/business plan for longer term planning that would enable consideration of further changes, including potential for further growth in PGT provision and/or collaborative arrangements, ability to undertake research whilst maintaining good quality teaching, that can be used re School and College planning. This may involve capping of student numbers or reduction of courses. A strategic vision/plan should enable the Subject Area to identify constraints and aspirations, risks, and opportunities,

as well as identify the consequences of no change. This should be undertaken in association with the Head of College and Head of School to ensure the Subject's strategy is not only aligned with the School, College and University's aspirations, but also within the constraints of the level of support that the School/College can provide.

## 2. Enhancing the Student Experience

### *Admission and Progression*

2.1 Whilst the Subject Area was pleased that student numbers were expanding at both UG and PGT level, this further impacts the high SSR which remains a serious concern. The high SSR was leading to an over reliance/utilisation of GTAs and involvement of GTAs at higher levels of teaching. The increased teaching activities of the GTAs in turn had an impact on staff with responsibility for managing and supporting GTAs. Capping of student numbers and/or changing progression requirements was regularly debated but growth (e.g., in PGT numbers) is encouraged in the current financial climate and considering that and the desire to make degrees in Philosophy available to GU students capable of completing them, the Subject Area has not thus far pushed for caps. Consideration had also been given to reducing the breadth of course provision but was dismissed as the breadth of higher-level courses was highly valued by their students. Staff indicated that the Subject was also unable to develop potential opportunities to expand its PGT profile due to exceptionally high workload. It also had a detrimental impact on staff ability to undertake research. Staff indicated that staff wellbeing should be factored into any future strategy.

### *Student Transitions*

2.2 At the meeting with the UG students, the Panel's attention was drawn to the welcome introductory lectures held in Level 1 courses introduced to assist students see coherency which was welcomed. From the documentation provided to the Panel, the Subject was actively supporting student transitions through essay writing guides provided for students transitioning into Level 2, Junior and Senior Honours, that highlighted the different levels of expectation. A Moodle site dedicated to supporting dissertation writing was also provided. The PGT induction process had also been revamped to support PGT students and the PGT students the Panel met with indicated that they had been well supported in their transition with the short introductory bootcamp considered helpful. The Panel considered this support for transitioning students between Levels 1, 2 and 3 as **good practice**. However, from discussion with the UG students, it was indicated to the Panel that there was a perception of a significant leap in level and quantity of work between Junior and Senior Honours and, although the Head of Subject advised this was flagged at the induction meeting, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area clearly articulates to students the different expectations between Junior and Senior Honours, scaffolding student learning to decrease the sharpness of the leap.

2.3 In relation to Session 2020-21, the use of Padlet during online lectures was highlighted as useful for enhancing interactions, giving students an opportunity to understand what other students were thinking. Lecture 'Watch parties' were also flagged as supporting students. Continuation of such practices should be considered as the University moves into a more blended approach.

### *Supporting Students*

2.4 Staff demonstrated a **commendable** approach to supporting students, ensuring they were approachable. This was confirmed by the UG and PGT students the Panel met with. The UG students highlighted several social events held, podcasts, use of Teams and other social platforms, and opportunities to talk after seminars. The PGT students highlighted examples of zoom socials held most Fridays which staff attended, quizzes, film nights and end of year party. Some students had found/developed social community themselves via WhatsApp Groups. The Panel was advised that not all students chose to attend all events but were aware of events taking place. One of the PGT students advised that they had not participated in social events as they had been overwhelmed by the events of the whole year. The students recognised and

appreciated the efforts made by the staff to support them during the pandemic.

### ***Sense of Community***

2.5 The Subject Area prided itself of creating an environment where staff were considered approachable and supportive, and where a strong sense of community was created. The Subject Area's disappointment with the 2019 NSS results in relation to the low score to the question on feeling part of a community was flagged in the SER drafted last year and they had introduced several initiatives to address this. During Session 2020-21, the Subject Area created Student Social Coordinators for each cohort to assist with organizing online social events, such as film nights, social drinks, lecture viewing parties etc. to tackle student isolation. The Panel **commends** this initiative and encourages further consideration of peer support opportunities as well as Student:Staff partnerships as the University continues with a blended teaching approach.

### ***Provision of Course information***

2.6 At the meetings with the UG and PGT students, both sets of students indicated that the Subject Area effectively used Moodle, providing good course information and guidance. However, information tended to be UG focused (see 3.5).

### ***Peer Assisted Learning***

2.7 The Panel noted that Peer Assisted Learning had been introduced for Formal Logic components of pre-Honours classes as students had found this particularly difficult. The Panel considered this **good practice** and suggested extending this further for other courses. The Panel also noted the introduction of Lecture watching parties this year. This practice was welcomed by students. The Panel noted that normally the Subject Area held Reading parties, encouraging students to get together with staff and fellow students outside of the classroom. This practice was commended at the last PSR. This practice was very much liked by the students who got to know the staff and vice versa. The Subject Area hopes to reintroduce this practice once Covid 19 restrictions are removed. The Panel would welcome and support this reintroduction. In relation to PGT students, the inability for students to routinely meet this Session had been difficult but social media along with opportunities to meet online via research seminars had been useful.

### ***Learning Support***

2.8 The Panel **commends** the introduction of Online Office Hours whereby all students could attend to hear questions being raised by other students. Moving forward, the Panel **recommends** continuing with this approach and consider supplementing this by creating a FAQ section on course Moodle sites to provide information and advice on typical questions raised by students. Students could be encouraged to post questions in an open forum which can be answered and viewed by all students.

2.9 Honours students were offered one-to-one meetings and assigned personal tutors for general advice and support, thereby having two named contacts for pastoral and curricula support. The Panel **commends** this practice, although it is aware of the impact this has on workload.

2.10 There are several University support services available where students could receive additional support and therefore reduce workload for staff and GTAs. The Panel **recommends** greater use of these services and clearly signposts additional support provided by the College Effective Learning Adviser and to the new Student Support Officers, about to be recruited to the College of Arts.

### ***Supporting students with disabilities***

2.11 Whilst it was apparent to the Panel that the Subject provided for students with disabilities, this was on a reactive basis. It was apparent that those students who declared were supported, ensuring accessible rooms were timetabled and regular discussions took place concerning requirements. Dr Chris Lindsay (Head of Teaching and Joint Honours Convener) advised that

issues could arise when disabled students had not declared their disability and it was difficult to be pro-active on student requirements without targeting. Provision of recordings to students prior to class was considered inclusive and therefore **good practice**. At the meeting with UG students attention was drawn to the need for transcripts to be provided for students with disabilities. The Panel was advised that Zoom captions were provided and that some lecturers had edited these which had been appreciated as the students recognised the additional work this had placed on staff. The Panel **recommends** that the School develops a more proactive policy on how it supports students with disabilities. Guidance on this could be sought from Disability Services and Academic Digital Development (ADD), LEADS.

### ***Equality and Diversity***

2.12 The Panel noted that there was an equitable gender balance in the UG population and two courses on gender and race had recently been introduced. The Head of Subject had previously been Chair of the School's Gender Equality Committee (GEC), and another Subject colleague on the GEC led on establishing the Women in Philosophy mentoring scheme, which had been well received. The Mentoring scheme was created to support undergraduate, postgraduate and staff who self-identify as women and introduced to address under-representation of women at all levels in the profession. The Head of Subject also led the introduction of the School gender equality Good Practice Scheme, which included helpful guidance regarding diversifying syllabi and myriad other matters concerning gender equality. There was a total of 34 students participating (7 PGR, 4 PGT and 23 UG) with mentoring undertaken by both women and men. No data on disability and ethnicity had been made available to the Panel and, at the meeting with the Head of Subject, support for other marginalized groups was discussed such as those from a widening participation background, disabled, trans or nonbinary students and how to ensure individuals were not excluded from support. [Dr Spaeth advised that he could advise the Subject on supporting other marginalized groups.]

### ***Student Voice***

#### ***Responding to student feedback***

2.13 'Whole class' meetings were held at the end of Level 1 and 2 courses and the end of each semester for Honours students. This was considered **good practice**. However, as discussed under 2.14, to ensure opportunities are provided for student feedback to have more of a direct impact, the Panel suggests considering holding these earlier to enable students to benefit from the direct impact of their feedback.

2.14 The PGT students who had met with the Panel advised that they had a strong student voice which was appreciated. Staff had been proactive, encouraging student representatives to bring forward ideas on what could be done better. They felt that issues raised were taken seriously and acted upon whenever possible. At the meeting with staff, it was confirmed that regular SSLC meetings and working in partnership with student representatives had worked well. Student representatives were asked to raise issues and options to improve which enabled staff to be responsive. This level of engagement and responsiveness was considered **good practice**.

2.15 Whilst the PGT students indicated that they felt listened to and staff had been responsive, this was not always the case for the UG students. Comparison between the PGT and UG processes indicated that PGT SSLCs were held earlier in the year to enable responses to feedback. The UG students the Panel met with indicated that, although there were opportunities to relay feedback to staff, it was not always acted upon or a reason for no action given. This issue had been identified in the SER and at the meeting with key staff. SSLC minutes and responses to Course Evaluation were not always posted on Moodle, the Subject Area is addressing this and has recently established new practices whereby a summary of comments and responses would be drafted by the Class Reps and placed on Moodle sites. It was acknowledged that feedback could be lost at the end of the year as students move onto the following year and that an action document 'You Said, We Did' could be circulated to staff

and students. It was noted that Class reps last year had run a survey to identify what was working/not working regarding online teaching and how to build a community with a summary of the results having been disseminated to all staff. The Panel **recommends** that the good practice established for the PGT community, regarding student feedback, is adopted for the UG students with meetings held to discuss what can be improved, if/how student ideas can be taken forward, whilst also ensuring that responsiveness to feedback is clearly communicated back to all students.

### ***Class Representation***

2.16 In relation to class representation, at the meeting with the UG students, it was indicated to the Panel that student representatives were appointed on a semester-by-semester basis. Whilst the Panel understood the reasoning for this at the Sub Honours years, having class representatives appointed on a full year basis has the advantage of allowing the class reps to establish themselves and students becoming familiar with their representatives. It was also indicated that class representatives had been chosen by the staff. As university regulations stipulate, class representatives should be elected and therefore the Panel **recommends** implementing an election process for class representatives and extending their term of office to a full year.

### ***National Student Survey (NSS)***

2.17 NSS scores were discussed at the staff meeting. The low score on Assessment and Feedback in 2019 had been disappointing but the score had increased significantly in 2020 (55.6% to 79.5%) due to action taken. Staff indicated that student feedback was taken seriously, and this improvement evidenced this.

### ***Graduate Attributes and Employability***

2.18 The SER indicated that the Subject Area had a good awareness of Graduate Attributes and Employability, with the provisions on an employability webpage and Career Services providing talks. Students indicated that activities that helped them identify how the skills they learned at university linked to criteria on job specifications would be very helpful. The Panel, therefore, questioned whether a more direct connection between employment and transferrable skills, such as critical thinking and working with complex information, could be embedded within the programmes, and made more transparent. Regarding PGT students, Research Methods was useful for students wishing to proceed to PhD, but further information on careers outside of academia would be beneficial. In conjunction with the recommendation raised under Strategy, the Panel **recommends** that the Subject explores further ways of incorporating employability and transferable skills into the curriculum, introducing more career events, and using alumni networks as well as opportunities for including work-related learning and work-based activities into the curriculum. This may also open more and different opportunities to collaborate with employers.

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

### ***Curriculum design and content***

3.1 The Subject Area had made recent major revisions to sub honours and to Senior Honours, with new courses introduced and method of delivery and assessment. Prior to the pandemic, innovative teaching had been introduced, involving collaborative classes in place of seminars which were GTA led group discussions. Feedback from students had been positive. However, due to the pandemic, the Subject Area has not had the opportunity to reflect and evidence the benefits made by these changes but hope to do so to inform possible changes to Junior Honours. At the meeting with the Head of Subject, the Panel was informed that following on from the curriculum review already undertaken, the connection between Junior and Senior Honours would be reflected upon, taking into consideration changes to staff. However, this would be a rebalance rather than major overhaul. In relation to previous changes, students and staff had been consulted and stability of assessment methods was considered desirable.

- 3.2 The Subject Area was committed to providing research-led teaching with recent appointments including research-active staff. At the meeting with staff, it was noted that following the award of a substantial ESRC research grant, no additional appointment had been made to cover grant funded research leave only further GTA funding. This had placed additional pressure on staff with the individual who had been awarded the grant feeling guilty for the impact on fellow colleagues. At the meeting with staff, it was indicated that this had acted as a disincentive to apply for research grants. Staff also indicated concern that pressure points in teaching were covered by appointing additional GTAs and the potential impact this could have on the student experience. Staff indicated that workload was having a very negative impact on mental health. Staff further expressed concern that the substantial increase in PGT provision would have a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching as staff simply could not be as available as before. These concerns may be alleviated by the development of a strategic vision and operational plan by the Subject Area, as recommended above (1.8).
- 3.3 The UG students advised that they welcomed the number of options available in Honours Years, enabling students to focus on areas of interest to them. Due to the Subject Area's commitment to providing a high-quality student experience and creating a sense of community, the Subject Area provided small group seminars for PGT students and Junior and Senior Honours (class size of 6 for Junior Honours and 12 for Senior Honours) where feedback on formative essays could be given. At the meeting with the UG students, it was evident how popular these were and that they had a significant impact in creating a sense of community with seminar leads encouraging discussion outside of class. One of the Second-Year students entering Year Three next Session was looking forward to the smaller classes as there had been limited opportunity to get to know classmates in Years 1 and 2. However, due to high SSRs, the Subject Area was discussing whether they were able to maintain this as numbers increased. Further consideration of streamlining the curriculum could be considered In line with recommendations made under Strategy [1.8], as part of future growth and development,

#### ***Distinction between UG and PGT levels***

- 3.4 The Subject Area provided the Panel with information on the different provision for MSc Conversion students undertaking Honours courses, and while ILOs differed, this was limited to variation in assessment, marked to a higher standard. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject Area reviews the constructive alignment between teaching, ILOs, and assessment, to ensure that each cohort of students is supported in the development and demonstration of the knowledge, understanding and skills required to address the ILOs, and that lectures/tutors are actively focused on facilitating students' development of those ILOs within their teaching. For MSc Conversion students, this may require introduction of top-up teaching sessions, above that received by Honours students plus introduction of a more systematic approach to the research sessions that PGT students attend.
- 3.5 At the meeting with the PGT students, it was brought to the Panel's attention that the PGT Conversion students received all correspondence related to the course, but often this was UG related. PGT Conversion students had to sift through information provided to identify what information was relevant to them. It was also unclear to the PGT Conversion students how marking differed between the two levels. The Review Panel **recommends** that to provide greater distinction between the UG and PGT Conversion student communities, the Subject should streamline communications to separate student cohorts, clearly highlighting the separate assessment schemes and ILOs.

#### ***Innovative Teaching***

- 3.6 One of the perceived **positive** outcomes of moving exclusively to online learning during Session 2020-21, was the benefits of lecture recording and making these available to students before class. Breaking lectures into sections was also beneficial regarding inclusivity, allowing students to engage with material that they might otherwise not have. Senior Honours students had weekly seminars with a 10-minute video introduction which scaffolded the discussion and enabled weekly engagement with peers. At the meeting with UG students, they suggested that

it would be beneficial to have the seminars including the pre-recording videos in advance of synchronous teaching events so the synchronous time would be used more effectively and interactively. Padlet and the chat function on Zoom had also worked well and such facilities would continue to be used to supplement face-to-face teaching, optimising the benefits. The Panel was impressed with the use of virtual reality software and, at the meeting with staff, it was indicated that in the future, further teaching apps could be developed. However, whilst it was recognised how well staff had adapted to online teaching, it was also acknowledged that it had involved a substantial amount of work and upskilling and should not replace face-to-face teaching. The Panel suggested that the benefits and what was liked in relation to online learning would be a good area for discussion at SSLC and/or whole class meetings, to inform development of the subject area's strategic vision/plan (1.8)

### ***Range of Assessment***

3.7 Following student consultation, assessment changes had been made during the curriculum review. These changes had often meant that the weighting of the exam component was reduced, and some courses now did not contain an exam component. The full effects of these changes have not yet been assessed given their timing and the pandemic. Students from the student focus group appeared satisfied with the range of assessment and its relationship with teaching. The choice of essay questions, deepened learning and the regular quizzes were considered useful. The UG students the Panel met with indicated that most course assessment was either essay or essay/exam based. The change in weighting was well received, helping minimize exam anxiety. The students noted that there was a clustering of some submission deadlines and expressed a preference for more staggered deadlines [see 3.10].

### ***Assessment and Feedback***

3.8 At the meeting with staff, the Panel was advised that the Code of Assessment Grading Schedule was used to inform marking. Due to student numbers, marking was often distributed across staff, thereby staff not involved with the teaching were sometimes involved with the associated marking. This had been flagged as a concern in the Staff survey. At the meeting with the GTAs, they reported that when working through feedback with students, in seminars, they noted inconsistency of marking and in the amount of feedback provided when multiple markers were used. Both UG and PGT students and GTAs found feedback and correlation with grades difficult to interpret. Whilst External Examiners had not raised concerns regarding this practice, to ensure consistency and make the amount/quality of feedback more transparent for students, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area develops and introduces a clear marking criteria/marketing rubric that links the Grading Schedule with ILOs for each individual assessment (including examination questions). A clear rubric modified to Philosophy would also streamline processes for both staff and GTAs.

3.9 At the meeting with staff, it was highlighted that considerable guidance on essay writing was provided and that, as some elements of feedback were often topic-specific, usefulness was limited to other topics. Whilst the Panel recognised this constraint, students welcomed feedback on what had been done well and how to improve, both regarding subject-specific aspects of the assessment and transferable skills. The students advised that they often could not see the link between the feedback and the grade awarded. The PGT students advised that quality of the feedback could vary with some being useful feedforward feedback, but some could be vague and unhelpful. Students valued the provision of feedback on drafts as was offered for some assessments. This was detailed and considered to be very helpful. The PGT students confirmed that staff had been approachable and had made it transparent that students could contact them as and when required for clarification of any aspect of feedback. Like the recommendation above [3.8], to ensure quality and quantity of feedback, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area introduces a feedback template to ensure consistency of feedback to students. There are several types of templates that could be adapted to accommodate Philosophy's own requirements and Academic & Digital Development in LEADS could provide support and advice with this development. A feedback template would be a supplement to margin annotations, providing higher level comments.



### ***Timeliness of Feedback***

- 3.10 At the meeting with the UG students, the Panel was advised that a single deadline was used for some Joint Honours assessments, which meant that submissions were bunched at the end of Semester 2. The PGT students advised they too had same day submission, with 5 submissions on one day which they found challenging. Whilst the PGT students recognised that the working to deadlines was a good way to develop time management skills, they did find it stressful. Furthermore, the use of deadlines following the Christmas and Spring holidays prevented students having a break. At the meeting with staff, professional services staff noted that the one deadline submission date eased workload, allowing more time to assist students. Different deadlines would require more organization. It was also highlighted that the single deadline had been introduced as a response to previous student feedback that this was preferred. Staff anticipated that the new Assessment and Feedback dashboard currently being piloted would assist with both improving staff workload while improving the student experience. Whilst the Panel recognised the reason why a single deadline had been introduced, this did not always allow for feedforward for future work and therefore the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews the timing of Joint Honours and PGT assessment deadlines, as staggering these could enable students to manage assessment load better as well as provide an opportunity for feedforward.
- 3.11 The Panel recognised that, due to the exceptional circumstances this year and concern over student mental health, criteria for extension requests had been relaxed. As such, substantial numbers of extension requests had been received which logistically made it very difficult to return timely assessment feedback. The Head of Subject drew attention to the recent NSS results which indicated a large improvement in relation to timeliness (45.2% to 82.1%) and that reflected the effort the Subject had made to address this.

### ***Formative Feedback***

- 3.12 Where high-stakes assessment was used, the Review Panel **recommends** the provision of some formative feedback, such as feedback on the essay plan, be given. Although good practice was noted that each Year was briefed on what was expected in a philosophy assessment, some additional information was required as students who the Panel had met were unsure as to what the differences were between a Philosophy essay and other subject areas. The Subject Area could consider providing assessment exemplars.

### ***Student Mobility***

- 3.13 The Panel noted the limited student international mobility within the Subject Area. At the meeting with the Head of Subject, it was noted that previous plans to develop two new international partnerships with Renminbi and Nankai did not materialise. The Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area increase visibility of opportunities available and develop an approach to improve student mobility. The GoAbroad Team and Global Opportunities could assist with any developments.

### ***Supporting staff***

- 3.14 The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the introduction of the Moodle Staff Handbook. This provided useful information, divided into four sections: General, Research, Teaching and Appendix. It included News Announcement, a Who's Who, Frequently Asked Questions, A-Z glossary, dates, deadlines and timetables, minutes, and agendas. This had been developed for new staff but was likely to be an asset for all staff. The handbook had been widely advertised to new staff with a glossary section added with a guide to UoG/UK terminology. The handbook was accessible with a clear, hyperlinked table to contents.
- 3.15 From the SER and staff survey, there was a perception that teaching was not ranked as highly as research, with innovation in teaching given more significance over quality teaching. In terms of PDR and promotion, staff did not see a connection between good teaching and career development. At the meeting with staff, staff considered research and teaching went hand in hand which students, particularly at Senior Honours level, appreciated. Locally, teaching was

recognised in PDR but not in promotions with career development perceived to be focused on research. The Senate Assessor Panel member highlighted that quality teaching was recognised in the promotions criteria which covered diverse profiles and therefore the Panel **recommends** that the School provides promotion workshops for staff, highlighting the relevance of teaching excellence as well as innovation to staff. This could include the teaching adaptations introduced during the Covid 19 pandemic.

### ***Support for Early Career Staff***

3.16 At the meeting with Early Career staff, there was still some uncertainty regarding processes. The Head of Subject highlighted that there were several new staff, ranging from senior to early career/post doc to temporary and that the Subject planned to create a new role of Staff Coordinator as a point of contact for temporary staff. The Panel also considered aspects of the mentoring of new staff as **good practice** with good feedback provided on the Women in Philosophy mentorship programme. Whilst the School mentorship scheme was available to all staff, the Panel **recommends** promoting the benefits of participation in the School scheme to all staff. Moreover, the Panel recommends that all staff (regardless of contractual status) are given an opportunity to undertake P&DR to assist in their career development.

3.17 The early career staff the Panel met with voiced strong criticism of the PGCAP/ECDP with the relevance and opportunity for development questioned, particularly for staff on short term contracts. No previous recognition of teaching experience was considered. Staff considered that it had been of no benefit, except from feedback on teaching. It was also unclear to staff undertaking this programme whether workload had been reduced to take it into account. The Panel highlighted that workload should be reduced, staggered over three years. [Following the Review, the Head of Subject confirmed that workload is reduced to 0.5 in Year 1 and 0.75 in Year 2 to allow PGCAP but agreed this should be better communicated.] The Subject Area should also note that there are routes for prior teaching that is recognised through Recognising Excellence in Teaching (RET) as an alternative route to the PGCAP. Those staff on fixed term contracts felt job insecurity led to low morale. The Panel will bring concerns raised on the PGCAP/ECDP to the attention of Academic and Digital Development (ADD) who provide this service.

### ***Support for GTAs***

3.18 At the meeting with the GTAs, the Panel was advised that they had felt well supported and all had received training. GTAs were encouraged to ask for help when needed. It was noted that GTAs had established Facebook Groups that provided informal support networks. While one GTA had been given an opportunity to observe teaching and receive feedback on their teaching, other GTAs had not been given this opportunity.

3.19 The GTAs advised that they were aware of the difference between pre-Honours and Honours expectations but not necessarily made aware of the ILOs and whether the students were grasping these. GTAs stated that they had never had ILOs brought to their attention by course teams. Meetings were held to discuss exam questions and marking criteria prior to exams. In relation to marking and assessment, whilst the course lead communicated marking criteria, inconsistencies could be found between lecturers on the same course. Often students would seek advice from them on feedback or marks awarded and there would be inconsistency in relation to quality and quantity of feedback. Sometimes there was no indication as to how students could improve performance and there could be a perceived mismatch between grade and feedback. This placed GTAs in a difficult position. The GTAs advised that Marking Criteria Schedule A was used but that there were no specific criteria formulated for Philosophy. The GTAs confirmed that they felt more competent teaching in areas related to their research. [Please refer to recommendations under 3.8 and 3.9].

3.20 The GTAs drew attention to the time allocated to marking examinations: 25 minutes per exam and that was not considered sufficient. It was noted that the allocation had been set by the College. The Panel highlighted the recently approved GTA Code of Practice which the College

and School would need to take account of.<sup>1</sup>

3.21 Whilst the Panel was aware that the Subject planned a major overhaul of GTA recruitment and training processes, the Panel **recommends** that the Subject (and School) ensures this aligns with the support and training recommended by the recently established GTA Code of Practice. This should include observation of teaching and feedback on teaching. The introduction of marking and feedback templates (as recommended at 3.8 and 3.9) and involvement of GTAs in Team Meetings should also enhance support provided. GTAs should also be aware of support mechanisms in place to support students and redirect student queries, thereby reducing their time dealing with student queries. Better organisation and training of GTAs would also reduce staff workload related to supporting GTAs.

#### 4. Academic Standards

4.1 The Panel **confirmed** there were no concerns regarding the academic standards of programmes delivered by the Subject Area and recommended the validation of all programmes for a further six years.

4.2 The Panel **confirmed** the School had a transparent academic governance and quality assurance structure which aligns to the University regulatory framework.

#### 5. Summary

The Review Panel recognised that the Subject Area was well established, observing a highly dedicated and hard-working Subject that strived to provide the best learning environment for its students. The Subject Area demonstrated a genuine commitment to providing research-enhanced teaching, and a sense of community and belonging to provide a full and meaningful student experience. However, the Subject Area was under immense pressure due to a high Student:Staff ratio, whilst offering a diverse range of teaching and research. In the short term, standardising and improving processes should reduce workload pressures associated with teaching support and, for the longer term, the Subject Area should develop a phased strategic plan with the Head of School and Head of College, to plan for future provisions and size. The Subject should develop a business plan, setting a vision that demonstrates its potential and highlights the beneficial growth for the School and College.

#### 6. Commendations

6.1 The Panel **commends** the dedicated staff approach to supporting their students, ensuring they were approachable and commitment to providing their students with a sense of community.

6.2 The Panel **commends** the introduction of Student Social Representatives to work with staff to provide a sense of belonging and community. The Panel encourages the Subject Area to consider further peer support opportunities and Student:Staff partnerships as the University continues with a blended teaching approach.

6.3 The Panel **commends** the introduction of Online Office Hours whereby all students could attend to hear questions being raised by other students.

6.4 The Panel **commends** one-to-one **meetings** offered to Honours students and assigned personal tutors for general advice and support, thereby having two named contacts for pastoral and curricula support. Whilst this is a commendation, the Panel was aware of the impact this has on workload.

6.5 The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the introduction of the Moodle Staff Handbook.

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<sup>1</sup> Colleagues should be fairly paid for the work that they do, reflecting both the contribution and the time spent on associated activities. For hourly-paid colleagues engaged in tutoring and graduate teaching related activities, this includes being paid appropriate time for preparation, administration and marking, in addition to their teaching or class contact time

## 7. Good Practice

- 7.1 The Panel considers the support for transitioning students between Levels 1, 2 and 3 as good practice.
- 7.2 The use of Peer Assisted Learning introduced for Formal Logic components of pre-Honours classes which students found particularly difficult. The Panel considers this **good practice** and suggests extending this to other courses.
- 7.3 The Panel considers the provision of recordings to students prior to class as inclusive and good practice.
- 7.4 The Panel considers 'Whole class' meetings as **good practice**. However, as undertaken with the PGT students, the Panel suggests considering holding these earlier to enable students to benefit from the direct impact of their feedback.
- 7.5 The Panel considers the strong PGT student voice, level of engagement, responsiveness and working in partnership as **good practice**.
- 7.6 The Panel considers the innovative practices introduced as an outcome of moving exclusively to online learning during Session 20-21 as **good practice**.
- 7.7 The Women in Philosophy Mentorship programme was recognised as **good practice**.

## 8. Recommendations for Enhancement

The table of recommendations for enhancement is attached. The table also identifies those responsible for taking forward.

**PERIODIC SUBJECT REVIEW OF PHILOSOPHY**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PHASE 1: To be addressed within 6 months**

	<b>THEMATIC ACTIVITY: Enhancement in Learning and Teaching</b>	<b>Enhancement Benefits</b>	<b>For the attention of</b>	<b>For information</b>
	<b><i>Distinction between UG and PGT levels</i></b>			
	<p>Review the constructive alignment between teaching, ILOs, and assessment, to ensure that each cohort of students is supported in the development and demonstration of the knowledge understanding and skills required to address the ILOs.</p> <p>For the MSc Conversion students, this may require introduction of top up teaching sessions, above those received by Honours students, plus introduction of a more systematic approach to research sessions that PGT students attend. [Para 3.4] The Subject Area should ensure that the ILOs are the appropriate SCQF level for each course.</p> <p>To provide greater distinction between UG and PGT student communities, streamline communications to separate student cohorts, clearly highlighting the separate assessment schemes and ILOs [Para 3.5]</p>	<p>Clarity and transparency between different levels and enable students to recognise ILOs in their assessment. Better student satisfaction rates</p>	<p>Head of Subject</p>	<p>Dr Kimberly Wilder-Davis (Academic &amp; Digital Development)) linking ILOs with assessment and Dr Amanda Pate (Academic Digital Development) for course design</p>
	<p>Create separate Moodle sites for courses that are shared Masters' and Honours' courses and introduce separate communications between the two levels of students. In particular, conversion</p>	<p>Supporting Students: providing sense of community for PGT students</p>	<p>Head of Subject</p>	

	students who perceived themselves different. [Para 3.5]			
<b>Assessment and Feedback</b>				
	Develop and introduce a clear marking criteria/marketing rubric that links the Grading Schedule with ILOs. [Para 3.8]	Enhance information, ensure consistency and clarity of marking with potential of reducing student queries	Head of Subject	Dr Kimberly Wilder-Davis (Academic & Digital Development (and Dr Scott Ramsay (Good Practice Adviser)
	Introduce a feedback template (this could supplement in margin annotations, providing higher level comments) to ensure consistency of feedback to students. The Subject Area should contact Academic and Digital Development for support and advice. There are several exemplars that the Subject Area could adapt to suit their own requirements. [Para 3.9]	Ensure transparency and clarity of feedback with potential of reducing student queries	Head of Subject	Dr Kimberly Wilder-Davis (Academic & Digital Development) and Dr Scott Ramsay (Good Practice Adviser)
	Review the timing of Joint Honours' and PGT assessment deadlines, as staggering these could enable students to manage assessment load better as well as provide an opportunity for feed forward. [Para 3.10]	Enable students to use feedback effectively. Better student satisfaction rates	Head of Subject	
	The provision of some formative feedback for high-stake assessments and provide exemplars to students. [Para 3.12]	Enhancing student satisfaction with the provision of timely feedback	Head of Subject	
	<b>THEMATIC ACTIVITY: Enhancing the Student Experience</b>	<b>Enhancement Benefits</b>	<b>For the attention of</b>	<b>For information</b>
<b>Enhancement in Learning and Teaching</b>				
	As there was a perception of a leap in level and quantity, scaffold the transition between Junior and Senior Honours including a clear	Better support for transition between Junior and Senior Honours	Head of Subject, Junior and Senior Honours' Conveners	

	communication of expectations to students [Para 2.2]			
<b>Staff Support</b>				
	Promote the benefits of participation in the School mentorship programme to all staff [Para 3.16]	Supporting staff development	Head of Subject and Head of School	
	Introduce Promotions workshops for staff, highlighting the relevance of teaching excellence as well as innovation. Include the impact of Covid and teaching adaptations introduced. [Para 3.15]	Supporting staff development	Head of School	Head of Subject
	Early Career staff had voiced strong criticism of the PGCAP/EDCP and the relevance and opportunity for development was questioned, particularly for staff on short term contracts The Panel will bring this to the attention of Academic & Digital Development. [Para 3.17].	Supporting staff development	Mx Nicole Kipar, Head of ADD	Head of Subject, Head of School
<b>Enhancing the Student Experience: Supporting Students</b>				
	Create a FAQ section in course Moodle sites to provide information and advice on typical questions raised by students. There is good practice elsewhere, where students are also encouraged to post questions in an open forum which can be answered and viewed by all students [2.7].	Effective ways of supporting students and raising awareness of support. Should reduce individual queries to staff and therefore reduce workload	Head of Subject	Head of School
	Clearly signpost additional support provided by the College Effective Learning Adviser and new Student Support Officers, about to be recruited for the College of Arts. [Para 2.9]	Provision of additional support. Should reduce staff and GTA workload	Head of Subject	Head of School, Mr Stuart Purcell (Effective Learning Adviser, College of Arts)
	Implement an election process for class representatives and extending their term to a full year. [Para 2.15]	More effective student voice	Head of Subject	

	Adopt the good practice in place for the PGT community, regarding student feedback, for UG students; where meetings are established to discuss what can be improved, with student ideas taken forward, whilst ensuring that responsiveness to feedback is clearly communicated to students. [Para 2.14]	More effective student voice and providing clear communication on responsiveness should improve student satisfaction	Head of Subject	
	The School should develop a more proactive policy on how it supports students with disabilities. Guidance on this could be sought from Disability Services and Academic & Digital Development [Para 2.10]	Enhancing the student experience for those with disabilities and providing a more inclusive environment	Head of School	Head of Subject, Mr Danny Gallacher, (Disability & Inclusion Lead, Dr Elliott Spaeth (Academic & Digital Development)

## PHASE 2: In line with the recently established GTA Code of Practice

	Recommendation	Expected Impact	For the attention of	For information
	<p>Better training and support for GTAs in alignment with the new GTA Code of Practice. This should include observing teaching and providing feedback. The introduction of marking and feedback templates (as recommended) and involving GTAs in team teaching meetings should greatly enhance support provided. GTAs should be aware of all support mechanisms in place to redirect student queries and reduce their time dealing with student queries.</p> <p>Better organisation and training of GTAs would also reduce staff workload involved with supporting GTAs. [Para 3.21]</p>	Better trained GTAs, supporting GTA development as well as providing consistent support to students. It should also reduce staff time required to support GTAs	Head of Subject, Head of School, Dean (L&T)	Head of College



**PHASE 3: In line with new Learning and Teaching Strategy and working with the Head of School and Dean (Learning & Teaching)**

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Expected Impact</b>	<b>For the attention of</b>	<b>For information</b>
	Develop a coherent strategic vision, in terms of future growth and range of provision, working with the Head of School and Head of College to produce a phased plan as to how to reach its vision. This should include future use of GTAs and protecting research time for staff. Staff should be involved in the development of the strategy. [Para 1.8]	Provide a more structured approach to development with School and College	Head of Subject, Head of School, Dean (L&T) and Dean (PGT)	Head of College
	In conjunction with the above, explore further ways of incorporating employability and transferable skills into the programmes, introducing career events for non-academic as well as academic careers. Consider using alumni to give presentations to students. Also consider opportunities for including work-based learning activities into the curriculum. [Para 2.17]	Transparency of skill sets being developed and embedding employability and graduate attributes into the curriculum	Head of Subject, Head of School	Dean (Learning & Teaching) and Dean (PGT)
	Increase visibility of opportunities available and develop an approach to improve student mobility. GoAbroad Team and Global Opportunities could assist the Subject Area with this development. [Para 3.13]	Enhancing the student experience: Study/work abroad part of graduate attributes skills set	Head of Subject	Mrs Sarah Armour (Head of Global Opportunities/GoAbroad)