University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee: Friday 21 May 2021

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations Arising from the Review of Sociology held on 17 February 2020

The following recommendations have been made to support Sociology 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**.

Recommendation 1.1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject has representation on the relevant School and College Committees and is consulted on all key strategic planning and appointment processes concerning the Subject. [Paragraph 2.4.3]

For the attention of: The Head of School
Head of College
For information: Head of Subject

Responses:

Head of School:

The Subject now has key representatives on relevant School and College Committees and is consulted on all key planning and appointment processes concerning the Subject via Head of Subject/Head of School liaison.

Head of College:

The School has been under new leadership since November 2019, and considerable advances have been made with regard to Subject participation in School level strategizing and planning. As the Head of School notes in her response, the Subject now has key representatives on relevant School and College committees, and is consulted on all key planning and appointment processes concerning the Subject.

Recommendation 1.2

The Review Panel, while welcoming the recent developments, **recommends** that the College and School continue to ensure that the Subject is consulted and involved at all stages of the course approval process. [Paragraph 5.1.3]

For the attention of: The Head of School
Head of College
For information: Head of Subject

Responses:

Head of School:

The Subject is consulted and involved in all stages of the course approval process through a redesigned Portfolio Review and approvals process.

Head of College:

As the Head of School indicates, the Subject is consulted and involved in all stages of course approvals through a redesigned Portfolio Review and approvals process. Since the Periodic Subject Review in February 2020, the College has appointed a new Dean of Learning & Teaching (this post was void when the PSR was undertaken) and the School has appointed a new Director of Learning & Teaching. Both appointments, together with a restructured College level Student Experience & Enhancement team, have sought to facilitate Subject consultation and involvement in the course approval process.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the College and School, as a matter of priority, in consultation with the Subject, review the current postgraduate provision and recruitment, taking into consideration the sustainability and impact on staff and the Student Experience. [Paragraph 3.1.2]

For the attention of: The Head of School
The Head of College
The Head of Subject

Responses:

Head of Subject and Head of School:

Since the PSR, PGT convenors have discussed provision and capacity for growth, whilst cognisant of recommended class sizes and subsequent impacts on student experience and sense of community. We have assessed student numbers (current and projected growth) and identified several key issues: maintaining number of courses; increasing number of courses; valuing the range of large and smaller programmes. To address these challenges, we have increased the number of PGT courses on offer for 2021/22 through the development of new courses and the reinstitution of courses to dovetail student interests as well as staff expertise. Whilst this has expanded provision, this also brings into sharp relief the issue of competing needs in the Subject area in relation to growth in numbers and Honours and PG provision. New posts created in the subject area should greatly strengthen our current and future provision. We are also working closely with the School PGT Committee to ensure alignment with School vision for PGT provision. Significantly however, achieving the sustainability of PGT programmes requires that the subject has the ability to determine and advise on the numbers of students recruited to popular programmes. The School and Subject have been liaising more closely with External Relations to manage this more effectively.

Head of College:

As the Head of Subject and Head of School indicate, there have been significant and positive developments in this area. In addition to their responses, I make two further observations. First, it is appreciated that the School and Subjects are coordinating more effectively with regard to selecting and supporting sustainable PGT programme growth – new appointments have been and are being made in the subject which will help bolster Subject-level capacity. Second, across the College there seems to be a disconnect between ER, College, Schools and Subjects with regard to student intake targets. Greater transparency and clarity about the process of setting and achieving intake targets would be beneficial to all and would also help garner academic support and involvement in this process which would in turn assist ER staff. The recent discussions at SMG about data, and the participation of the Deputy Secretary and new Head of PIA in this arena, are very welcome in this regard.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School review the contracts and workloads of early career staff and tutors to ensure parity and to identify possible career pathways. In addition, the School should review the current system for paying tutors and GTAs to ensure that occurrences of non-payment do not occur. This should include the review of best practice in other colleges. [Paragraph 4.4.8]

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

Response:

The School has reviewed the use of fixed term contracts for early career staff and taken steps to minimise these. We have also reviewed the academic career track and sought to develop career opportunities for Tutors coming to the end of their contracts through including entry level G7 research and teaching roles. Workload planning has been improved through the use of a transparent model for allocating workload which is used across the School in one-to-one discussions with all academic staff involved in teaching with their head of subject. The College has recently reviewed and standardised payment rates for GTAs and we will continue to work with College Finance to improve the payment process.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject look at the numbers of PGT students any individual should supervise and explore whether it is possible to devise a method of more equitable distribution of projects for supervision. [Paragraph 4.1.5]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

In response to the recommendation, with PGT growth there are direct implications for increased PG numbers for dissertation supervision. Several actions have been taken to create a sustainable, equitable distribution, as outlined in the following. In 2019/20 each member of staff was allocated 3 PGT dissertations. In 2020/21, despite the increase in numbers of PGT students, the allocation was maintained, due to staff who do not have PGT supervision in their workload (roles in College /School leadership, research-only contracts etc.) agreeing to supervise students. At the same time, members of staff who are supervising specialised dissertations or practical projects on certain programmes (such as Media, Migrations, Global Health) were allocated a reduced number of dissertation students to supervise. Furthermore, in 2020/21, because a high percentage of PGT Media students have selected the practical project option, the members of staff supervising them will not supervise traditional dissertations at all. In cases where someone is allocated 4 instead of 3 dissertation students, efforts are made to reduce their workload in other areas, such as undergraduate dissertations supervision. To manage project supervision on the Media programme we have recruiting a number of media practitioners to supervise projects, alongside other colleagues and sought to manage their workload by reducing supervision duties for UG and other PGT programmes. We are recruiting further staff in the Media area to further spread this supervision load and we will actively manage the numbers of students who take on project rather than traditional dissertation work.

Regarding early supervision, PGT students are offered a series of Dissertation Training sessions, containing both content-based recordings, and face-to-face interactive workshops in the 1st semester. They are distributed to a supervisor in February, while they still take

their second semester courses, to ensure that, should they start working on the dissertation early, they have the appropriate support.

Recommendation 5.1

In order for students to have sufficient learning support, as outlined in the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy and Lecture Recording Policy, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject ensure that lecture recording is undertaken, wherever possible, by all staff or alternatives provided, including uploading slides to Moodle. [Paragraph 3.3.9]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Recommendation 5.2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject undertake a review of the practice of uploading lecture slides to ensure that students are not disadvantaged and ensure staff are informed on the requirements of the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy. [Paragraph 3.4.3]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response to 5.1 and 5.2:

Given the move to online learning and teaching (2020/2021) and in line with university guidance on good practice and supported by information and advice from LEADS and the School Blended Learning Online Group, all courses have been delivered using a combination of pre-recorded and live lectures, with alternatives provided where recording has not been taken place (e.g., a detailed set of lecture notes to accompany slides). Staff have been made fully aware of good practice to ensure compliance with accessibility legislation, and have moved towards ensuring PowerPoint slides, when used, are available before scheduled class times.

Measures taken during this current academic session have been integrated into a wider range of steps taken to comply with the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy, including: uploading reading lists via the University Library's @readinglists facility in advance of the start of the course; uploading a complete Course Guide and further teaching materials (like tips on essay writing and data analysis) in electronic format on Moodle before the start of the course; including information on relevant documents, assessment information, deadlines, and indicative marking criteria on the Course Guide; making explicit on the Course Guide, Course Moodles and Level / Programme Moodles that deadline extensions and special assessment considerations are available in case of health or disability issues of different sorts, and according to University regulations (i.e. adapting oral assessment requirements for students whose health can be affected by speaking in public); and ensuring that the Course Moodle page is accessible, in compliance with relevant legislation.

Recommendation 6.1

The Panel **recommends** that the College undertake a review of the current advising system, particularly in relation to the support required for postgraduate students. [Paragraph 3.3.8]

For the attention of: The Head of College
For information: The Head of School
The Head of Subject

Response:

The College Head of Student Experience is currently working on a project proposal for a review of student support across the College (this action was delayed because of the

pandemic). This project will progress through the College's Learning & Teaching Framework, potentially using the Chief Advisers Group in a quasi-academic lead capacity. The Head of Subject has nominated a representative from Sociology to participate in this project. For AY 21/22 we plan to have (i) drafted a summary document for all subjects contributing towards the MA SocSci outlining broad advising arrangements and (ii) provide a briefing session for staff to supplement the Advisers' training module provided by the Senate Office.

Recommendation 6.2

[1]The Review Panel recommends that the School examine the statistics with a view to identifying whether a pattern emerged for those students who received Credit Refused and to research potential strategies to reduce the instances of Credit Refused. [Paragraph 3.1.3]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

We have strategies in place to support students (awarded CR for non-attendance/non-submission) throughout their course. Currently, Level Administrators contact students several times throughout their year of study to better understand non-attendance/non-submission and establish if further supports are needed. We also advise the MA Social Sciences Advising Team, as they may be able to offer additional supports.

Looking at the statistics for the period 2015 to 2019 (no record is available for 2019/20 due to CA awarded), we can identify the following patterns: L1 CR rates are both low and steady except for the 2017/18 year; we note a decrease in rates at L2; both L1 and L2 have very small percentage increase in CR rates in Semester 2 (averaging over the 4 academic years at 1.3% at L1 and 1.7% at L2). It is our view that CR rate reflect students who do not progress because of academic plan (e.g. MEDUc students) and students repeating courses (second or third attempt) but still do not attend/submit coursework despite the regular contact and follow-up from Course Administrators as outlined above. We are reassured our retention rates remain generally very good and will keep this under review.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject, with the support of the School and College, explore approaches to build a sense of community among the student cohort including further development of the Sociology Café and the Sociology Student Society. [Paragraph 3.3.3]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject
For information: The Head of School
The Head of College

Response:

The subject continues to build on its existing work to develop a wider sense of community. In 2020/21, the Sociology Café continues to thrive with invitations extended to honours and PG students and staff to come along. Colleagues who run the café have set up its own webpages hosting a range of resources and materials related to each of the sessions https://www.uogsociologycafe.net. The Cafe runs joint events with the Sociology Society, and the Glasgow Anthropology Network runs monthly seminars, alongside the Sociology

---

[1] The second item under Recommendation 6 was an additional recommendation requested by Academic Standards Committee which has been agreed by the PSR Panel Convener.

Seminar programme. Staff regularly post notices of School, College and university-wide events (eg The Global Health Film Club, the GRAMNet Seminar and Film Series, Social Theory Seminars, book clubs) as well as those occurring outwith the university on Course / Programme Moodles. It should be noted and emphasised there that this work continues in the current context and is testament to the subject area's commitment to establishing meaningful spaces of encounter and discussion with students.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject review the current processes, relating to responding to student feedback, to ensure there is clarity around these issues and to ensure that all responses are unambiguous. The Subject should engage the class reps to provide feedback to students, possibly via social media. [Paragraph 3.4.2]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

We have carefully evaluated the processes for student feedback across Levels and Programmes. As standard, feedback is sought at several points across both semesters (via the staff / student committee during semester and then the end of semester online assessment using Evasys). At UG level we adopt a standardised approach: L1 and L2 Convenors provide a detailed convenor response to both sets of feedback addressing issues raised and outlining adjustments to practice as appropriate and this is posted on Moodle. Our Honours Convenor circulates course specific student feedback to Course Convenors plus a template document to teaching staff that is to be completed and returned to students outlining main areas of feedback that elicit a response, and some reflection on how the course may be further improved in coming academic sessions. This completed document is posted on Course Moodles.

At Postgraduate Level, different feedback processes are in place tailored to specific cohort needs and requirements (via class feedback meetings, via Moodle course fora, via Student Reps at the bi-annual Staff/Student Liaison Committees). All appropriate amendments made in response to feedback are communicated to students via Moodle and the various feedback platforms provide a further check and balance for clarity on action when required.

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject invigorate efforts to revive the Sociology Learning and Teaching Group and to ensure regular meetings to enhance the identification and sharing of good practice across the Subject. The Subject may wish to consult with LEADS for guidance on this issue. [Paragraph 4.1.3]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

In response to this recommendation, we emphasise and value the opportunity to discuss a wide range of L&T issues and have identified through different fora a number of areas that will be the focus of the reinstituted L&T group. In the current academic year (2020/21) much of the focus of Subject L&T work has been on the rapid response delivery on online teaching, adjustments to assessment, supporting colleagues with developing and delivering a wider set of pedagogical tools and supporting students to ensure inclusive, accessible, safe and intellectually stimulating learning environments. We anticipate this work to be a continued area of work for the L&T group, but not the sole focus and we are collectively

identifying a range of topics that will inform the L&T Group work moving forward. This work will be led by the newly created role of L&T convenor in the subject area.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject take steps to ensure that potential students wishing to undertake SAY are not discouraged or disadvantaged in the choice or support for their dissertation. [Paragraph 4.1.6]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

We already have several detailed processes in place to support students that are specifically designed to support their dissertation preparations whilst at their host institution during their SAY.

We have a course code already set up on mycampus (SPS9008) so that students, by dint of enrolling in the class, would then automatically get enrolled onto the Moodle. Our Honours Administrator searches mycampus for students going abroad, and checks via email if they have enrolled on the JH dissertation training. As a precaution, all students (single and joint honours) are enrolled on our training sessions on the dissertation Moodle and can access the material there.

Students may contact the Dissertation Convenor at any time and our Honours Administrator provides support to students regarding access to Moodle. The Dissertation Convenor again contacts SAY students when the dissertation proposal drop-in sessions are being organised to ensure that they have an opportunity to discuss their ideas with a member of staff. Moreover, the provision of online recorded lectures in 2020/21 has made dissertation training more accessible to students abroad and we will retain these online resources in future years for this reason. Drop-in sessions are also online, and it is very likely a similar format will continue in the coming academic year. There has been no indication in previous years that SAY students suffer on the dissertation when it comes to their mark; indeed, the average mark for SAY students' dissertation proposals (often submitted while they are abroad) has either been in line, or above, the average mark for the whole cohort.

Finally, for students interested in SAY, the Study Abroad Convenor will (1) ensure that pre-honours students receive the necessary reassurances that they will be able to access the dissertation Moodle whilst away, and (2) explore with the students the possibility of methods training at the host institution.

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel considered that it was desirable for the work-based learning opportunities to be made more explicit to undergraduate students and therefore **recommends** that the Subject take a more proactive approach to developing work links with the dissertation for undergraduate students. [Paragraph 4.1.7]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

At subject level there is already a set of practices and mechanisms in place to promote collaborative dissertations option to UG and PG students. We work closely with colleagues in COSS Employability who present to third year students in the first semester about the options around collaborative dissertations for UG students. A hyperlink to the new Making

your dissertation work for you course and Moodle which contains advice and guidance on making dissertations workplace relevant is embedded on the Dissertation Moodle. This session is usually well attended, and students are encouraged to contact Dickon Copsey and Emma Smith directly (COSS Employability) to discuss their ideas. During these information session students learn about the built-in supports that will be vital to students and supervisors less familiar with this option. In discussion with our COSS Employability colleagues, UG uptake is much lower than PGT reflecting a school-wide pattern, which might be explained by the longer lead into the dissertation at UG Level (proposal in JH, dissertation in SH). Moving forward we will continue working with our Employability colleagues and direct students to the Making your dissertation work for you course and Moodle.

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject, in conjunction with the current online pilot and in liaison with LEADS, review the current submission process and consider viable alternatives, including the option of submission of assignments in Word document format which would enable feedback to be provided via tracked changes. [Paragraph 4.1.9]

For the attention of: The Head of Subject

Response:

The move to online L&T in response to Covid-19 accelerated the review of current submission practices for course work. Consequently in 2020/21, all pre-honours submissions (Level 1 and Level 2) have moved to online marking and assessment (using Turnitin online marking suite). Honours and PGT assessments use an adapted online marking process using uploaded Word documents. Both processes have proven viable in 2020/21 and provide the option for in-text feedback, at the discretion of the marker.

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject 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. [Paragraph 3.4.4]

For the attention of: The Head of School

Response:

The move to online L&T in response to Covid-19 accelerated the use of online course evaluations and this is now embedded practice in the School.

Matters for attention – outside of Subject or School

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel considered that it was important that mental health resources were widely publicised and **recommends** that the Mental Health Working Group should consider how to disseminate information on training and support available to staff such as Mental Health First Aid training and 'Mind Your Mate'. [Paragraph 3.3.6]

For the attention of the Convener of the Mental Health Working Group
For information: The Head of Subject

Response:

We will publicise opportunities for staff and students to take part in a further round of Mental Health First Aid training and, via the SRC, for students to participate in Mind Your Mate training, later this year. This will be done via staff and student newsletters, the University and SRC websites, and social media. In addition, we will regularly remind students of the available means of mental health support, including Together All (available 24 hours a day) and CAPS.

Over the course of the next few months we will be putting in place an intermediary level of support at College level which should assist academic and professional staff in the School in supporting student wellbeing. Further information on this will be disseminated in due course. This will complete the five-level support structure envisaged in the Student Wellbeing Strategy which was recently approved by the Senior Management Group. In relation to this, we will also review the training provided to non-specialist staff.

Recommendation 15.1

The Review Panel **recommends** that the observations regarding the good cause form and online process be forwarded to the Senate Office for consideration. [Paragraph 3.3.5]

For the attention of: The Assistant Director of the Senate Office
For information: The Head of Subject

Recommendation 15.2

At the staff meeting, the Panel was advised that another University operated a centralised system for good cause claims, which ensured consistency of practice across the institution while alleviating the administrative pressure on academic staff. The Review Panel **recommends** that this issue be drawn to the attention of the Senate Office. [Paragraph 3.3.7]

For the attention of: The Assistant Director of the Senate Office
For information: The Head of Subject

Response:

In order to give full context for the response, it is helpful to see the relevant paragraph from the report:

3.3.5 The Panel noted that, while students could apply for good cause on MyCampus, they were unable to apply online for an extension for assignments. The Head of Subject believed that students were deterred by the requirement to submit personal information online. He commented that the previous system required students to complete a physical copy of the form, which encouraged the provision of fuller evidence in support of their application. In view of this observation, the Review Panel **recommends** that the observations regarding the good cause form and online process be forwarded to the Senate Office for consideration.

- The statement about online application for extensions is not completely correct – short extensions of up to five working days are not part of the Good Cause process but requests for extensions of more than five working days are required to be submitted via a Good Cause claim in MyCampus. Students indicate the amount of additional time that they are requesting and when the claim has been considered staff complete the record by indicating whether an extension has been granted and, if so, what the revised deadline is. Shorter extensions which are lighter touch and do not require the submission of evidence are considered by course convener (or the person identified in course documentation as responsible for coursework assessment). The concern surrounding submission of personal information online

is an issue that is well known from the point of view of both student sensitivity and data protection. The procedure already allows for students to provide sensitive information to staff direct rather than submitting it to MyCampus. In addition, as ASC is aware, the Good Cause procedure is under review, and one of the issues under consideration is how to make the system more accessible for students who are dealing with particularly sensitive circumstances – from the point of view of the amount of information that is required and whether supporting documentary evidence must be provided.

3.3.7 In the SER, the Subject outlined the initiatives they had introduced in endeavouring to support students including a 'Who to Speak to' document available through Moodle and aimed at directing students to appropriate forms of support. Additionally, the Subject operated a good cause committee comprised of three staff members. The team operated by splitting the caseload; however, the team were familiar with all cases which assisted continuity, which was of particular importance in relation to complex cases. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject for its proactive stance on this issue. At the staff meeting, the Panel noted that another University operated a centralised system for good cause claims, which ensured consistency of practice while alleviating the administrative pressure on academic staff and ensured consistency of practice across the institution. The Review Panel **recommends** that this practice be drawn to the attention of the Senate Office.

- The Senate Office recognises the use of a Good Cause committee of this nature to be good practice, as decisions should not be made by one member of staff alone, and acknowledges that the work involved in considering claims is considerable. This issue was explored during the recent University-wide consultation on the Good Cause procedure. The Senate Office is in contact with colleagues at a number of HE institutions across Scotland and is aware that various different approaches are in use, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. It is noted that while handling of all Good Cause claims centrally would alleviate administrative pressure on academic staff, there is no capacity available centrally to absorb this pressure.

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel **recommends** that this issue regarding unsuitable teaching accommodation be highlighted to the Director of Estates and Commercial Services. [Paragraph 4.3.2]

For the attention of: The Director of Estates and Commercial Services
For information: The Head of Subject

Response:

SER extract - Learning and Teaching Space

4.3.2 The Review Panel acknowledged the challenges presented by the lack of appropriate teaching spaces, particularly in relation to the growth in student numbers over recent years. This was the case, particularly, with regard to those student and staff with particular issues of accessibility. Based predominantly in the Adam Smith Building, common complaints ranged from the allocation of multiple rooms for courses, the allocation of unsuitable rooms and loss of teaching time travelling between lectures. All students with whom the Panel met echoed these concerns. The Panel acknowledged there was no immediate solution to these issues, however, the Review Panel recommends that this issue regarding unsuitable teaching accommodation should be highlighted to the Director of Estates & Commercial Services.

Teaching space across the campus is at a premium and in order to optimise allocations whilst allowing Schools to determine the day and time at which classes are taught all space is allocated on the basis of 'best fit' - matching the capacity, features and equipment of the room with the size of class and requested facilities as far as possible. This may result in rooms being allocated which are a distance from a School's 'home' location.

The aim when producing the first timetable each year is to ensure as much consistency as possible in room allocations. However, changes or additions requested subsequently (e.g. as a result of increases in the size of the cohort) often result in less consistency and a greater spread of locations necessarily being used.

With regards to the Adam Smith building specifically, the size, configuration and accessibility of teaching rooms in the building often leads to classes in large-cohort subjects such as Sociology being roomed elsewhere on the campus rather than adjacent to staff workspace.

There is an annual programme of investment in centrally-managed teaching spaces to ensure their suitability as learning spaces. As part of this investment, teaching rooms are being converted, on an incremental basis, to support active and collaborative learning. However, at the present time there is a mismatch between the demand for active learning space (such as may be required by this subject area) and the availability of such. This can often result in rooms being allocated which are less than ideal for the mode of delivery. Whilst this situation will improve over time, it cannot be fully resolved until a significantly greater proportion of the teaching estate is reconfigured.