

Periodic Subject Review (PSR)

Review of School of Modern Languages and Cultures held on 18 and 19 February 2013

Report Summary

The following is a brief summary of the full report of the review carried out in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures. *Periodic Subject Review* is an internal subject review focused on the quality of provision as experienced by students. The review looks at the range of programmes, course content, the teaching methods employed, assessment, facilities and much more.

The full report of the review is available publicly at:

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_295211_en.pdf

Further information about the PSR process can be found at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/approvalmonitoringandreview/periodicsubjectreview>

Italicised words are explained in a glossary below.

Conclusions

The Review Panel observed a dynamic and forward thinking School which has grasped opportunities and sought to reflect on its practices in order to ensure continual enhancement. The School has successfully developed a unitary structure, with the removal of Sections, which has contributed to the growing sense of collegiality identified during the Review. The inclusive approach to harmonisation and co-location has contributed to this and has facilitated synergies and sharing of best practice across the School. The Panel were impressed by the commitment from the student body to the School and to the Review process. The engagements with students confirmed the mutual respect between the students and staff and highlighted the meaningful and regular engagement with students in learning and teaching, student support and quality processes. The previous six years has seen a great deal of change and transition for the School, which has greatly enhanced its provision and effectiveness, and the Review Panel commends the School for its excellent practices and encourages it to continue providing an excellent student learning experience.

Key Strengths (Commendations) ¹

Student Support

- for the exemplary practice of returning assessed language work with written feedback within a week. [Paragraph 4.3.10]
- the level of involvement of students in developing the *Self Evaluation Report (SER)* and the contributions made by students who met the Panel. The number of students who were willing to meet the Review Panel and their positivity indicated a School which values and supports its students. [Paragraph 1.8]

Student Learning Experience

- the 'strongly affective dimension' of language teaching, especially in terms of increasing awareness and transforming attitudes towards culture, difference and diversity, which was highlighted in the SER and echoed by Key Staff. [Paragraph 4.1.2]
- for, independently and as part of the University-wide restructuring and reshaping exercises, developing a unitary School which staff and students value and can see the benefits of in terms of support, interdisciplinarity, enhancement of quality and good practice and collegiality. [Paragraph 3.12]

Curriculum Design and Content

- for intending to preserve the breadth of provision which benefitted the School greatly and encouraged the School to consider developing non-European language and culture provision. [Paragraph 3.4]
- the School managed the process of harmonisation of the curriculum through a sub-committee of the *School Learning and Teaching Committee* with staff drawn from across the School. The approach to reviewing the curriculum is to be **commended**: the express desire to ensure fairness and transparency across the School without setting exact stipulations and restrictions on academics or students allowed the process to be smooth, valued and most importantly effective. [Paragraph 4.4.4]
- the commitment to staff and student engagement in the curriculum review process which ensured a shared ownership and understanding of the approach to teaching in the School and which was reflected in meetings with staff and students. [Paragraph 4.4.5]

Learning and Teaching Resources

- the exemplary support provided to *probationer* staff through official mentoring processes and through regular informal support such as discussion of pedagogical, assessment or student support issues. [Paragraph 4.8.11]

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

- the School has demonstrated a willingness to respond to recommendations from each review. The School is to be **commended** for its positive response to meeting and, in many cases, surpassing the recommendations from the *Departmental Programme of Teaching and Learning and Assessment (DPTLA)* in 2006. [Paragraph 1.5]

¹ Numbers refer to the paragraphs in the full report that contain the relevant discussion.

- the analytical and reflective SER which demonstrated an inclusive and transparent approach to development and accurately portrayed an innovative School demonstrating self-awareness and an ability to reflect on, and enhance, practices and provision. [Paragraph 1.7]
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Areas to be improved or enhanced

Student Support

- provide clarity and more information around feedback processes deployed in the School to ensure that students are aware:
 - when feedback will be provided
 - what constitutes feedback
 - what the University guidelines permit a three week timeframe for feedback on assessed work
 - if feedback cannot be given within the three week timeframe, why this is the case and when the students can expect the feedback
 - that the return of work on a weekly or fortnightly basis is exemplary practice [Paragraph 4.3.11]
- review the information provided to students detailing the key administrative contacts, their respective responsibilities and the appropriate methods to enquire (e.g. in person, telephone and email contact details). [Paragraph 4.7.7]

Student Learning Experience

- work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes. [Paragraph 4.8.4]
- review the sustainability of provision and develop a strategic approach to development of new (or maintenance of existing) language provision to meet market demands and support the strategic development of the School. [Paragraph 3.5]
- continues to develop and improve the consistency of use of *Moodle* across the School, utilising the skills and expertise of internal good practice (e.g. French) to support and enhance Moodle provision. The use of a sub-committee of School Learning and Teaching Committee, with representatives from across the School and students was an effective mechanism for implementing curriculum developments, and may also be suitable for delivering enhanced Moodle provision. [Paragraph 4.8.16]

Learning and Teaching Resources

- *Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)* and *University Native Language Teachers (UNLT)* pay and recognition is reviewed by the School and College to ensure the processes operated by the School are in line with University policy such that GTA and UNLT staff receive fair recompense for the quantity, and quality, of work they deliver. [Paragraph 4.8.8]

- moves forward with tighter integration of *the Language Centre* within the School on an academic and administrative basis to realise fully the potential benefits of the merger. [Paragraph 3.2]
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Glossary of terms/acronyms used

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA)

Following the restructuring of the University in Session 2009-10 and the translation of departments and faculties to Schools and Colleges, the University's institution-led Internal Subject Review process, DPTLA, was re-named Periodic Subject Review (PSR) (see below). The review process remains largely the same but takes a subject-based approach, combining closely related subjects where it is feasible and in line with the new School and College structure.

Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTAs

Graduate Teaching Assistants, Tutors and Laboratory Demonstrators are students, usually research students, who assist with teaching in the form of tutorials, labs and other activities that are part of undergraduate programmes in the subject/school. They are paid an hourly rate by the University.

Language Centre

The Language Centre supports the learning and teaching of languages within and outwith the University and comprises: the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Unit; the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Section; a test centre for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Learning and Teaching Committee

Each School has a Learning & Teaching Committee to discuss, advise and make recommendations to College on all matters relating to teaching, including educational policy, strategy and resource issues in relation to the development and enhancement of Learning and Teaching activities.

Moodle

Moodle is the University's supported Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Periodic Subject Review or PSR

The University has a six yearly cycle of review of the Subjects/Schools within it. The PSR is one of the main ways by which the University assures itself of the quality of the provision delivered by Subjects/Schools.

Probationary Staff

Lecturers/Teachers, on appointment are required to serve a period of probation to ensure that a new lecturer/teacher has an opportunity of familiarising him or herself with the academic environment; it also provides the University with an opportunity of ensuring that the lecturer/teacher is capable of undertaking the work for which he or she has been employed.

Self Evaluation Report (SER)

A Self Evaluation Report is a document prepared by the Subject(s)/School in advance of a PSR Review. Its purpose is to provide the Review Panel with an insight into the Subject(s)/School's view of itself, its strengths and areas it would wish to develop. It is normally prepared by the Head of School in conjunction with other staff but students should also be offered the opportunity to comment on whether or not it reflects the Subject(s)/School they know.

University Native Language Teacher/University Teacher

University Teachers are equivalent to Lecturers but make a relatively greater contribution to teaching and service/administration than Lecturers who are required to conduct and publish research in addition to teaching.