

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 29 May 2009

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Report of the Review of English Literature held on 16 and 17 March 2009

Mrs Jackie McCluskey, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Professor Andrew Nash | Pro Vice Principal (Convener) |
| Professor Geoff Ward | Royal Holloway, University of London (External Subject Specialist) |
| Mr Stuart Rodger | Students' Representative Council |
| Professor Adrienne Scullion | Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies |
| Dr Martin Macauley | Senate Assessor on Court |
| Dr Mary McCulloch | Learning and Teaching Centre |
| Mrs Jackie McCluskey | Senate Office (Clerk to the Panel) |

1. Introduction

1.1 *Background Information*

1.1.1 The Department of English Literature is based in the Faculty of Arts. Dating back to 1862, it is one of the oldest in the UK. Together with the departments of English Language and Scottish Literature, it forms the Faculty's School of English and Scottish Language and Literature (SESLL).

1.1.2 On the initiative of the departments involved, SESLL was formed in 1996 as a coordinating facility for matters of mutual concern affecting all three departments, including: combined submissions to Research Assessment Exercises; monitoring of shared research and teaching provision, such as Medieval Literature, Scottish Language and Literary and Linguistic Computing; and to facilitate sharing of best practice. The Review Panel (hereafter "the Panel") commended SESLL and the Department for the excellent result in the 2008 RAE.¹

A Head of School is appointed in rotation from one of the three departments. Currently the Head of School is Professor Jeremy Smith from the Department of English Language. He will be succeeded in 2009 by a nominee from the Department of English Literature. A SESLL Executive Committee and SESLL Planning Group have been established, and the latter meets regularly to discuss matters of common interest. In addition there are SESLL committees concerned with general aspects of teaching and learning; quality assurance; information technology and, as SESLL is regarded as a single unit of assessment by both the RAE and the Arts and Humanities Research

¹ The unit was rated eight equal out of 82, according to the 'Times Higher Education' grade-point average system, and third after Oxford and Cambridge, according to 'Research Fortnight's' "research power" index.

Council (AHRC), research and postgraduate studies. In all other aspects, the departments retain their autonomy. The Panel discussions with the Head of Department and Key Academic Staff (hereafter "Staff") supported the view that the concept and operation of the SESLL is beneficial.

- 1.1.3 The Department is based in adjacent buildings, dating from 1882-4, at 4-6 University Gardens. Staff offices vary greatly in size with only a few large enough for small group teaching. The bulk of the undergraduate teaching takes place in centrally provided lecture theatres and rooms but there are three shared departmental seminar rooms; the Edwin Morgan Resource Centre - a room with an extensive poetry library and 6 networked computers, primarily for the use of Creative Writing students and staff - and a dedicated postgraduate room. An IT Suite is shared by other SESLL departments. There is also an open plan departmental administrative office.
- 1.1.4 The previous internal review of the Department's programmes of teaching, learning and assessment took place on 3 March 2003. On initial reading of the Self Reflection Report (SER) the Panel realised that it did not reflect fully the progress made in the intervening years and, on request, the Head of Department provided in advance of the visit useful updates on the departmental responses to the recommendations of the 2003 review, which the Panel used as part of the current review. The Panel **recommends** that the preparatory guidance provided to Heads of Department should emphasise the need for reflection on the outcome and recommendations from the previous review in order to demonstrate the level of enhancement achieved.
- 1.1.5 The SER had been produced by the Head of Department. Key members of departmental staff, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) student representatives had all been given the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The Panel recognised that Head of Department had adopted an inclusive approach to the preparation of the SER, but noted that the document would have benefited from being more reflective and self-critical. The Panel also felt that the SER was unnecessarily muted about departmental strengths and noted the range of positive work, achievements and energy of the Department, all of which were clearly evident throughout the review visit. The Panel **commends** the Department for its progress and achievements since the 2003 review.
- 1.1.6 The Department currently has 30 academic members of staff, including 7 Professors (one of whom is Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 0.33); 2 Readers; 7 Senior Lecturers; 1 University Teacher; 10 Lecturers (four of whom are probationary); 2 Creative Writing Tutors and 1 Creative Writing Lecturer/Administrator (FTE of 0.6). In addition, the Department employs 24 GTAs and is supported by 3 members of administration staff (FTE of 2.7).
- 1.1.7 The Panel met with the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts; the Head of SESLL; the Head of Department; 16 Staff, including two members of Support Staff and the Academic IT Adviser for SESLL; 3 Probationary Staff; 7 GTAs; 19 undergraduate students from Levels 1, 2 and Honours; and 7 taught postgraduate students.
- 1.1.8 The Department has experienced a period of significant change since the 2003 review, during which time there have been four Heads of

Department, the current Head having taken up office in 2007. Moreover, 16 new members of academic staff have been appointed, 11 since 2007. Some of these appointments were replacement posts but there was also expansion in the teaching team with 2 new posts. The range of PGT programmes has increased commensurate with the expansion of staff numbers and expertise. The Panel **commends** the Department for successfully weathering the staff changes and developing into a thriving, dynamic Department and noted the current Head of Department's positive contribution in this regard. Staff turnover is discussed further in paragraph 3.8.5.

1.1.9 Student numbers for 2008-09 are as follows:

| Students | Headcount |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Level 1* | 480 |
| Level 2* | 320 |
| Level 3 | 177 |
| Honours | 164 |
| Undergraduate Total | 1141 |
| Postgraduate Taught | 82 |
| Postgraduate Research** | 52 |

* (each counts as 0.333 FTE)

** (for information only - research is not covered by the review)

1.1.10 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the Department.

- MA Hons in English Literature (Single and Joint)
- MLitt in Creative Writing
- MLitt in Modernities
- MLitt in Enlightenment, Romanticism and Nation
- MLitt in Victorian Studies

The Department also contributes to the MLitt in American Studies (based in the Department of History), the MLitt in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (based in the Department of English Language), and the MLitt in Renaissance Studies taught jointly with the University of Strathclyde through the Scottish Institute for Renaissance Studies (SINRS).

2. Overall aims of the Department's provision and how it supports the University Strategic Plan

2.1 The SER sets out the overall aims of the Department's provision. The Panel was assured that the aims were appropriate and linked to the University's Strategic Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Panel noted, in particular, the Department's aims in relation to teaching and research, whereby

its focus was on research-active staff and research-led curricula, as well as its contribution to the widening access agenda through the postgraduate Creative Writing programme and associated outreach; Reading Groups and other extracurricular activities. Extracurricular provision is outlined in Appendix 2.

3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

3.1 Aims

3.1.1 The Panel noted from the SER that the aims, relevant for all SESLL departments, were closely mapped to the QAA benchmark statements for English and were clearly articulated in the programme specifications available. The Panel was assured by the Students that they were familiar with these aims as they were readily available in the student handbooks.

3.1.2 As specified in the SER, the Department's taught postgraduate provision was informed by the UK Research Councils' statements on postgraduate provision and the AHRC guidelines for the Research Preparation Masters Scheme².

3.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.2.1 The Panel sought to clarify the availability of programme specifications for the Department's undergraduate provision. The Head of Department and Staff confirmed that programme specifications were currently available on the website for all topic courses but that programme specifications for the general honours provision were currently under revision, in line with the overall review of honours provision discussed in paragraph 3.4.3. The Panel was interested to hear of SESLL's intention to publish all programme specifications on the website, enabling students to access them before starting their programme. The Panel was reassured by the Students, GTAs and Staff that they were all aware of the ILOs for their relevant programmes.

3.3 Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

Code of Assessment

3.3.1 The SER stated that information on the Code of Assessment was readily available to all. The Panel discussed this with the Staff and Students and was pleased to note that this was indeed the case. Both the UG and PG Students reported that they understood the marking system which had been explained to them, and they were aware of how to access the information if needed.

3.3.2 The Panel was impressed by the instruction and support provided to staff and GTAs on the Code of Assessment both at departmental and Faculty level. A departmental training session for GTAs on marking techniques and the Code of Assessment organised by the Level 1 Convener had been well received. Similarly, the GTAs and Staff had welcomed the seminar on the Code of Assessment provided by the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Arts. The Panel supported the suggestion by a probationary member of staff that it would be useful to have the opportunity to view comparative marking as a means of reassurance that their marking was in line with that of others.

² <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/RPMS.aspx>

Assessment Procedures

Feedback on Assessment

- 3.3.3 The Department had identified in the SER that the provision of feedback to students, both oral and written, was an area for improvement. This view was supported by some of the UG and PG students interviewed. Other Students reported satisfaction with the level of feedback, noting a significant increase in feedback at Level 3 and an opportunity to meet with tutors to discuss their assessed performance. One UG student explained that it was possible to request a copy of their examination script. In line with the Faculty of Arts policy, there would be no comments on it, however, they were able to discuss it with a member of staff. Although this facility was outlined in the student handbooks it did not appear to be widely known.
- 3.3.4 The Panel noted some inconsistencies in the arrangements for the provision of student feedback, such as the use of cover sheets by some staff and not others, and UG students reported a perception of inconsistency in the application of anonymous marking at Level 1.
- 3.3.5 Postgraduate students were critical of the level of staff feedback in semester 1 and would have welcomed earlier guidance on their progress. The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews its policy on the provision of feedback to students to ensure that a clear and consistent process exists across all programmes. The process should address, amongst other things, a strengthening of feedback for postgraduate students at the earliest opportunity. The Department should ensure that the agreed policy is communicated to all relevant parties and its effectiveness monitored at all levels.

Range of Assessment

- 3.3.6 The Review Panel **commends** the Department for the range of assessment available in the honours provision, such as practical exercises in editing and bibliography; essays; oral presentation (including peer-assessed presentation) and final examinations, but noted that there appeared to be a mismatch between the Department's statement and current practice relating to an emphasis on oral presentations over written assessment in the MLitt programmes. The Head of Department advised that he was aware of the anomaly, whereby, although presentations are built into all courses, they were currently not being assessed in some postgraduate courses. The Panel was reassured to know that this matter was due to be dealt with by the Head of the Teaching Committee.
- 3.3.7 The Panel requested the UG students' views on the weighting of the assessments, as it appeared that there was a lack of awareness of the weightings other than a perception that the focus on examinations increased to a percentage split of 70:30 in the fourth year. The majority of Students indicated a preference for extending continuous assessment on the basis that examinations were more a test of their memory than of their understanding.

The current Level 4 students, who had not been assessed at the end of their third year, welcomed the Department's current preparations for a split diet of honours examinations.

- 3.3.8 A suggestion that students might be permitted to bring books into examinations was not supported by the other Students or the Panel. However, the Panel felt that the idea that notes containing quotations might be permitted was worthy of consideration.

Change in Academic Year Structure

- 3.3.9 The Panel noted that the main impact on the staff and students of the change in academic year structure was in relation to the timetabling of the Christmas examinations.

Concerns were raised by some of the UG Students about the lateness of feedback prior to the first semester examinations as well as the timetabling of some of the joint honours classes

Staff reported difficulties with scheduling, particularly the turnaround time required for marking. Although, Registry had helped to facilitate this, other changes had included the External Examiners now being required to attend the University to read the relevant papers whereas previously there was time for the papers to be sent to them.

A difficulty relating to the arrival of Erasmus students was also highlighted. Due to differences in the academic years between the partner institutions, a number of Erasmus students were late in arriving for the start of the first semester, which presented difficulties for staff having to ensure that these students managed to catch up on missed work. The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department reports departmental experience of the new academic year structure to the Convener of the Academic Structures Implementation Group and liaises with the International and Postgraduate Service about the late arrival of Erasmus students to minimise any potential for their being disadvantaged.

The Panel was assured that overall, both Staff and Students were content with the new academic year structure and most welcomed having had examinations before the Christmas/New Year break.

Examination Boards

- 3.3.10 The Head of Department expressed concern to the Panel that there were inconsistencies in practice and procedure at Joint Honours examination boards. Whereas the Department controlled the Single Honours board, it was difficult to influence practice in other departments, the main concern being the preservation of anonymity. In addition, as the English Literature External Examiners were not always able to attend Joint Honours boards, there was concern that the departmental position on borderline students might be weakened. The Head of Department's view, shared by the Panel, was that the Faculty guidelines for ensuring honours students are treated uniformly irrespective of whether they had undertaken single or combined programmes, should be adhered to closely. The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty's examination board procedures be reviewed to ensure consistent practice across all departments.

- 3.3.11 The Staff sought the Panel's advice on the authority of External Examiners in cases of disagreement over grades. In the Panel's view the University should uphold and preserve the authority of the External Examiner, despite changing attitudes to the role of external examiners in other institutions

Tutorials

- 3.3.12 The Panel raised the possibility of inconsistencies of practice in UG tutorials. The Students indicated that tutorial classes did lack structure and that they would appreciate more guidance on what to prepare for discussion. In addition, they reported different approaches to the operation of Autonomous Learning Groups (ALGs) – tutorless groups of 3-4 students who met between tutorials to consider two or three questions posed by tutors. The Panel recognised the value of ALGs and that they are appreciated by the students but was concerned at the apparent differences in operation, depending on the tutor concerned.
- 3.3.13 The Panel learned how tutorials differed at the different levels. The UG Students explained that the structure was different and that there was a major step change from Level 2 to Level 3 tutorials in respect of both the increased demand on, and usefulness to, the student. The Students were very positive about the support provided by GTAs; however, they felt that the Level 1 tutorials would have been more beneficial if a greater degree of commitment was demonstrated by a significant number of students.

Plagiarism

- 3.3.14 The SER had highlighted that the Department had no immediate plans to use TURNITIN software for the detection of plagiarism. Given the University's encouragement for the use of TURNITIN, this was explored further with the Head of Department and Staff. The Panel was encouraged to hear that its use was under consideration by SESLL and that there were no objections to the use of software *per se*, but heard from Staff that informal discussions with colleagues in other departments had not encouraged them towards using TURNITIN. The Staff consensus was that further work and debate was necessary to assess its effectiveness in English Literature and any potential copyright issues. Notwithstanding these discussions, Staff indicated that they felt confident about detecting plagiarism if for example, there was a sudden change of writing style.
- 3.3.15 The Panel was reassured by the level of awareness of plagiarism across the Department. The UG students, in particular, confirmed that they were very well informed by departmental staff on what constituted plagiarism and they were comfortable about the possible use of TURNITIN although they had not been fully aware of an issue with copyright. The Panel was pleased to hear from the GTAs that they were well informed by staff and were confident about the correct process to follow if they suspected plagiarism.

3.4 Curriculum Design, Development and Content

Undergraduate

Balance of Courses

- 3.4.1 The Panel was keen to hear the views of the Head of Department, Staff and Students on the balance of the courses within the UG programme, specifically the provision of theory and poetry. The UG students, particularly those in Level 4, felt strongly that there should be an earlier introduction to literary theory, preferably in Level 1 rather than the present arrangement whereby it is introduced towards the end of Level 2. Similarly, there was a concern that there was too little poetry within

the curriculum and a number of Level 2 students reported that for them, poetry had yet to be introduced. The Panel noted the students' preference for an anthology of poets as opposed to individual poems. The Panel **recommends** that, as part of its review of the honours provision, the Department considers the introduction of literary theory based lectures in Level 1 and the inclusion of the study of an anthology of individual poets.

The Panel also explored the level of writing skills support provided by the Department. Some UG Students had found a voluntary workshop delivered by two GTAs particularly helpful. Nevertheless, the general view was that more Department specific writing skills support would be welcomed. The Panel would encourage the Department to review the present provision of Department-specific support in writing skills and expand this as deemed appropriate.

- 3.4.2 The Panel was pleased that the UG Students regarded the breadth of the curriculum as a strength of the Glasgow UG programme, and particularly the emphasis on pre-1800 literature. Staff echoed this view, which was supported by the Panel. The External Panel Member viewed this emphasis as a trademark of the Glasgow provision and counselled against diluting it in any way or being pressurised by the current trend elsewhere in favour of 20th century literature. Encouraged by this, the Staff sought the Panel's view of what would constitute an optimal balance of pre-1800 courses. The Panel suggested that, within the framework of the QAA benchmark statements, and the desire to retain the Glasgow trademark, the Department should consider introducing a minimum requirement of pre-1800 courses, for example, a minimum of two in single honours and one in joint honours. At the same time the Department should consider relaxing the upper boundary of what might be usefully included as "pre-1800".

Review of Honours

- 3.4.3 The Panel was advised of the Department's plans to review the entire undergraduate provision, led by the Convener of the departmental Teaching Committee. Since the decision to move to a split diet, the initial focus of the review would be on the honours levels, followed by a review of the sub honours provision. The review was likely to result in a redistribution of the current provision in order to more clearly achieve progression between the levels and to concentrate the topic courses in Level 4. The Panel was reassured by the Convener of the Teaching Committee that the review would address the comments about bringing forward the theory based lectures, as discussed in paragraph 3.4.1, through the introduction of a new course at sub honours level. In the meantime, there was an immediate plan to roll out theory in Level 3 and introduce a relevant topic course in Level 4. Aware of the departmental resistance to a split honours diet following the 2003 review, the Panel welcomed the Department's change of mind and intention to achieve this by 2009-10.

Dissertation

- 3.4.4 The 2003 Review Panel had strongly recommended that the Department introduce an honours dissertation in line with the recommended practice in the Faculty of Arts. The Panel was reassured to know that a departmental Honours Dissertation Reform Working

Group was established to oversee the introduction of the honours dissertation and that the move to a dissertation instead of a portfolio of essays had been fully implemented. The Panel also welcomed the level of consultation with students that had taken place in respect of the honours dissertation and the establishment of a clear timetable for the dissertation module, as outlined in Appendix 1.

- 3.4.5 Although a timetable for the honours dissertation had been developed, the Panel was concerned from student feedback that although the students understood the process and what was expected of them, there were problems about the level and timing of support for the dissertation during Level 3. One student advised the Panel that her Supervisor had yet to be appointed and for this reason her dissertation topic remained unapproved. At their meeting with the Panel, the PG Students also reported receiving misleading guidance about their dissertation, which had necessitated additional clarification from staff. However, they were content that this was now being addressed following their representations to Staff. The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensures that all students are fully informed about requirements for dissertations, particularly the relevant timescales and arrangements for support, and that students are kept informed should these be subject to delay.

Postgraduate Taught

- 3.4.6 The Panel discussed with the PG Students the differences between UG and PG study. A number of them were Glasgow graduates whereas others, more especially the Creative Writing students, came from diverse academic backgrounds. Those who had previously studied in Glasgow felt that there was an element of overlap with, and consolidation of, their UG study, and one acknowledged that this was useful preparation before embarking on his PhD. They had been challenged by the change in the required level of writing skills from UG to PG and the Panel supported their suggestion that the Department should consider covering this aspect more fully in the first semester of the PGT programmes.

Research Skills Training

- 3.4.7 The PG students reported on a helpful research skills seminar from the Principal Assistant Librarian, with whom they had developed a close working relationship. The UG students also expressed appreciation of a seminar provided by the Principal Assistant Librarian, although they indicated that they would have welcomed lectures on research skills training from Level 2 onwards. Although the PG students did not raise it as a particular concern, it became clear to the Panel that the part-time students often found it difficult to attend training sessions provided because of other commitments. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews arrangements for PG seminars to ensure that part-time students are not excluded, even if this requires repeating the seminars.

Interaction with SESLL

- 3.4.8 The Panel learned from the Head of SESLL, Head of Department and the Staff that the opportunities for cross fertilisation between the departments and the impact on teaching had grown. The Panel was

delighted to hear from the Head of SESLL of a revived interest and energy for joint initiatives coming from the Staff of the English Literature Department.

- 3.4.9 The Panel was also encouraged to hear from the Head of SESLL of the proposal to develop the ground floor of the Modern Languages building for the promotion and facilitation of interdisciplinary activity. The plan was to create a hub for the Faculty of Arts providing social space; a location for seminars; accommodation for visiting academics; and space for externally funded projects.
- 3.4.10 The Head of Department highlighted ongoing Faculty discussions about the possible introduction of coordinated pathways for students undertaking Combined Honours programmes. The Convener welcomed this initiative and explained that the benefit of offering more defined degree pathways might appeal to some applicants and students who would prefer more structure and less choice, with potential benefit to recruitment and retention, and that this matter had already been raised in other meetings. The Panel suggested that the Deputy Dean should discuss this further with the Dean on behalf of the Department.

3.5 Student Recruitment

- 3.5.1 The Panel explored the Department's engagement in student recruitment. The Staff described their increased involvement in schools liaison initiatives. The Head of Department and Staff confirmed that the Department's focus was on PG and international recruitment in line with the University's strategy. The increased number of mature students was due, in the main, to the appeal of the PG Creative Writing programme. The Creative Writing staff reported on a number of outreach activities which included CPD provision and public availability of the Creative Writing lectures.
- 3.5.2 When questioned about their choice of University, the Students indicated that in addition to the attractiveness of the programme, the reputation of the Department and the City of Glasgow, the level of support given to them prior to entry had been an important influencing factor. One EU UG student and one international PG student were particularly complimentary about the level of prior contact they had enjoyed with the academic and support staff which had directly confirmed their decision to come to Glasgow in preference to Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities. The Panel **commends** the Staff involved in pre-entry contact with applicants and encourages all staff to participate in this approach.

3.6 Student Progression, Retention and Support

Progression

- 3.6.1 The Panel explored the procedures used by the Department to encourage student engagement and to address absenteeism and was advised of an early warning system within the Faculty of Arts involving the issue of formal letters. The Staff explained that they monitor engagement closely, particularly early on in the programme and GTAs are also encouraged to invite students to discuss their problems when they have cause for concern.

- 3.6.2 The Staff reported similar monitoring of attendance at UG tutorials involving a register system and warning letters, with attendance contributing 10% to the summative assessment grade and also a condition for the award of course credit. A student missing 5 or more out of 10 tutorials would be refused credit. The GTAs confirmed their obligation to report a student to the Course Convener if they missed two consecutive tutorials. Documentation provided by the Department indicated a high level of attendance and the Panel was impressed by the Department's efforts to create a "culture of attendance". Staff involved with the MLitt programmes explained that they did not presently monitor attendance at the same level and sought the Panel's guidance. The Convener expressed the Panel's opinion that the same level of rigour should be applied to all programmes and explained that student attendance and late submission of coursework was being reviewed by a Working Group, with the intention of establishing institutional guidelines which would permit a degree of flexibility to departments. The Panel encouraged the Department to review its position on attendance and late submission once the report of the Working Group has been published, with a view to establishing a transparent and consistent policy across all its programmes.

Support

Induction

- 3.6.3 The Panel raised the issue of induction with the staff and students. The staff reported that UG Students are provided with a great deal of information in their first few weeks via MOODLE, in addition, the Level 1 Convener provides induction sessions which the students agreed were very useful. The PG Students received more tailored induction sessions from the Department and Faculty. They were generally positive about induction although the Creative Writing Students had expected to receive their reading lists and a detailed timetable before the start of the programme. They suggested that some tightening of the administrative aspects of the Creative Writing programme would be beneficial. The Panel **recommends** that the Department provides reading lists and timetables to PGT students in advance of the start of their programme.

Disability

- 3.6.4 The Panel learned of the established process for arranging support for students with disabilities. The Level 1 Course Convener, the designated Departmental Disability Coordinator, together with the Departmental Secretary play a key liaison role with the Disability Service and the relevant Course Conveners. The Students expressed no concern about the level of disability support from the Department.

Communication with students

- 3.6.5 The Panel was delighted to hear from the students that, in general the Staff, including the Department's administration team, were very helpful, although some UG Students had experienced long delays before receiving email responses from some tutors. The Student Representatives present advised that this would be raised at a forthcoming meeting of the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC).
- 3.6.6 In terms of support, the UG Students reported a lack of clarity as to whom they should contact and when. They had all been assigned a

University Adviser of Studies and a departmental Personal Tutor. They were unclear about the role of the latter, and for academic issues they indicated a preference to contact teaching staff directly when necessary. Some students had had occasion to consult the Faculty Chief Adviser and she had been very supportive. The Students confirmed their support of the Department's "drop-in" system adding, that, unlike their experience of some other departments, staff in English Literature were always available as advertised.

Because of their maturity and smaller numbers, the PG Students enjoyed a closer relationship with their tutors and cited accessibility of staff as one of the strengths of the programme. They agreed that the PG Course Conveners heeded any concerns raised and responded immediately.

Employability and PDP

3.6.7 Given the level of involvement by a member of English Literature staff in the Faculty's PDP agenda, the Panel was interested to know how PDP was being addressed at the departmental level. Although the Head of the Department suggested that PDP was still developing at the Faculty level, the Staff and Students reassured the Panel that efforts were being made within the Department by the member of staff concerned, in the form of departmental seminars, which the students reported they had found useful.

3.6.8 When asked about the level of engagement with the Careers Service, both the UG and PG Students reported that while they had not established personal links with the Service, they were aware of the services provided. The employability sessions organised by the Postgraduate Convener were highlighted by the PG Students as an example of good practice; a view endorsed by the Panel.

The UG Students acknowledged that they were advised from the outset that the course was not vocational. However, they felt that they would have benefited from more advice on the postgraduate study options available.

3.7 The Quality of Learning Opportunities

3.7.1 The UG and PG Students who met the Panel declared their strong satisfaction with the quality of teaching delivered by the Department and this supported the Panel's conclusion.

3.7.2 The Students confirmed that they were aware of the level of research excellence within the Department and appreciated that they were being taught by experts in the field.

3.8 Resources for Learning and Teaching

Learning Resources

Accommodation

3.8.1 Since the 2003 Review the Department had relocated to University Gardens. The Panel had perceived from the SER concern about the size of the teaching rooms and variation in size of staff offices. However, following a tour of the premises and discussions with the Head of Department, Staff, GTAs and students, the Panel was reassured that the new accommodation was an improvement.

- 3.8.2 Concerns were expressed in the SER and during the Review by the Head of Department and Staff regarding the recently imposed restrictions on janitorial availability prohibiting access to teaching rooms out with normal working hours and the resulting constraint on evening delivery of courses. This issue particularly affected the Creative Writing programme as the staff frequently required lecture rooms in the evening suitable for recording purposes and public access. The Panel suggested the possibility of the Department paying for the required janitorial cover but discovered that it was less about cost but more about janitorial staff working arrangements. The Panel **recommends** that the University reviews its position on the provision of janitorial staff to ensure that desirable out of hours teaching opportunities are not jeopardised.
- 3.8.3 The GTAs expressed satisfaction with their study space and the dedicated postgraduate room. However, they did express concern that although not all GTAs used PowerPoint, AV equipment was only available in some of the seminar rooms, and this restricted the allocation of rooms. The Panel **recommends** that the Department takes steps to standardise the provision of AV equipment in its seminar rooms, for example, by making a strategic application to the Faculty Technical Committee.

Library and IT

- 3.8.4 The UG Students reported a shortage of secondary critical texts in the University Library and although there were relatively more primary texts available, these were often hard to find. The Students suggested that this could be alleviated by placing extracts and relevant texts on MOODLE, as with Irish Literature. They also requested that DVDs, currently available for hire, be made accessible on-line. The Panel **recommends** that the Department discusses with the University Library the adequacy of provision of secondary texts and that the Department considers placing extracts of relevant texts on MOODLE as well as providing on-line access to those DVDs currently available for hire. The Panel was pleased to note that there was overall general satisfaction with the IT provision.

Staffing Resources

Staff Turnover

- 3.8.4 The Panel recognised that the Department had experienced significant changes in staffing, with 4 Heads of Department and 16 new members of staff since 2003. The Head of Department explained that he had considered the role carefully before accepting it and was happy that he had. He reported that he felt that the Department comprised a highly committed group of colleagues who supported him well. Following discussion with the Staff and Students, the Panel observed a high level of respect for the Head of Department for his diligent oversight of the seamless integration of the new members of Staff. The Review Panel **commends** the Head of Department and the Staff for the successful integration of the new Staff and the successful recruitment strategy of focusing on candidates who were clearly committed to the Department.

Staff Workload

- 3.8.6 The Panel was reassured to see the existence of a clear, consistent workload model. However, it was noted that the responsibility for the support of disabled students was not explicit. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department make specific reference to the role of the Departmental Disability Coordinator in the workload model.

GTAs

- 3.8.7 The Panel was very encouraged by the unanimously positive view of the Department expressed by the GTAs. One GTA who had been in the Department as an undergraduate and postgraduate since 2002 described the change in departmental ethos during this period as “seismic”. There was now a much more positive environment and staff and students related together more as friends and colleagues.
- 3.8.8 The 24 GTAs, were each allocated approximately 50 Level 1 or Level 2 students and were permitted to teach for a maximum number of 5 hours per week with one hour of paid preparation time.
- 3.8.9 Amongst their supportive comments about the Department, the GTAs highlighted the guidance given to them on their GTA role. They described departmental requirement for a formal interview, and, although they found this daunting, they all agreed it was good practice, a view shared by the Panel. The GTAs confirmed that they had received a basic contract which outlined the hourly payment and the payment for marking. One element of dissatisfaction concerned the latter which the GTAs felt did not reflect the effort expended, although they acknowledged the reality of the tight funding situation. The GTAs were enthusiastic about their regular meetings with staff, when part of the time was spent in discussion with Course Conveners after the latter had sampled their marking. It was agreed that this was a beneficial activity in enhancing both the GTAs’ personal development as well as the quality and consistency of marking. Another feature in this regard was that GTAs were required to inform the Course Convener if they assigned a grade below D. Further support was provided by Course Conveners sitting in on a few of their tutorials and providing them with written feedback. The Panel **commends** the Department for the support provided to GTAs as an example of good practice, in particular the formal pre-appointment interview.
- 3.8.10 The Panel was keen to gauge the level of feedback from students on the performance of the GTAs. The GTAs explained that while there was no formal mechanism at present, recently the Head of Department had discussed with the matter with them. Meanwhile, at least one GTA had issued a feedback questionnaire. The Panel **recommends** that the Department introduces formal feedback from UG students on the performance of the GTAs.
- 3.8.11 The GTAs found their GTA role fulfilling as it helped them with their own writing and research and had given them exposure to Erasmus students who broadened their knowledge. At the end of the meeting the GTAs expressed their appreciation at being part of such a rich academic environment and highly rated Department.

Probationary Staff

- 3.8.12 The Panel received feedback from the Probationary Staff on the New Lecturer and Teacher Programme (NLTP). They had all found it a very helpful and positive process which afforded them an opportunity for reflection. One member would have welcomed more practical advice; more discussion about new methods and more subject specific relevance when observing peer lectures.
- 3.8.13 When asked about the Department's approach to mentoring, the Probationary Staff appeared to be unclear about arrangements, although they acknowledged the helpfulness and support of more senior departmental colleagues. The newest member of staff present was unaware of having been allocated a mentor. The Panel **recommends** that the Department clearly formalises the mentoring arrangements already in place and takes steps to ensure that all parties are aware of their relevant roles and responsibilities.
- 3.8.14 With regard to workload, one Probationary Staff member perceived that the first year was relatively light but that there had been a fairly substantial increase in the second year. The Course Convener of the Level 1B course was also a probationary member of staff and she reported some conflict between her teaching and the administrative workload associated with Course Convenership and suggested that the Department should consider relieving Course Conveners of teaching duties.
- 3.8.15 The Probationary Staff assured the Panel that they felt confident about the support given to them by the Head of Department and of his aspiration for his colleagues to receive due recognition and promotion. They acknowledged, however, that feedback from their colleagues indicated that promotion could take some time due to the lack of opportunities. Despite the predominance of male staff in the Department, there was no evidence of resistance to the promotion of women. Indeed, the Panel was pleased to note that a high proportion of recent recruits had been women. The Probationary Staff perceived that there had been a significant culture change in the Department in this regard.
- 3.8.16 All three members of the Probationary Staff who met the Panel affirmed their welcome by the Department and indicated their involvement with all aspects of its activities, although thus far only one of the Probationary Staff present had experienced any link with SESLL.

Course Handbooks and Materials

- 3.8.17 The Panel observed that there was room for improvement in the course documentation and discussed this with the Head of Department, Staff and Students. The Panel was reassured that there was a clear procedure whereby Course Conveners were responsible for writing the handbooks, with the content plus any amendments being considered by the SSLC. The Panel raised the question of monitoring the content to ensure reference to ILOs which currently did not appear to be the case. The staff advised that this was the responsibility of the Convener of the SSLC. Although the students were content with the documentation, the Panel felt that it should be revised and made more user friendly and relevant for students. The Head of Department confirmed that he was aware of this issue and that rewriting of the documentation had already

commenced. The Panel **recommends** that the Department continues the revision of all documentation intended for students and ensures adequate reference to ILOs and compatibility of the style and content with the target readership. The Department should also consult the students as an integral part of the revision process.

MOODLE

3.8.18 The Panel discovered that there was variance in the staff experience and use of MOODLE within the Department. It was currently used sporadically in the UG provision of handouts and lecture notes, but was increasingly becoming a core aspect of the MLitt programmes. Given the distance learning pathway within the Creative Writing programme, the Staff reported that they could not survive without it. Overall, staff viewed it as a useful tool for the provision of information and discussion fora.

4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards

4.1 *Benchmark Statement and other relevant external reference points.*

4.1.1 The Panel noted from the SER that the Department placed great emphasis on the Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) in reviewing its provision, but expressed concern that a number of AMRs had not been provided with the documentation. The Head of Department suggested that the volume of staff changes had led to the absence of some AMRs not being picked up. The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department ensures full compliance with Annual Course Monitoring requirements for all courses.

5. Assuring and Enhancing the Quality of the Students' Learning Experience

5.1 *Student Engagement with feedback processes*

5.1.1 The UG and PG Students assured the Panel that they had sufficient opportunity to feedback to staff any concerns or suggestions for review of the curriculum. The UG Students were unclear whether their concerns had been addressed in specific cases but in general, they felt that staff were responsive to the issues they raised.

5.1.2 UG Students in their honours years reported that they enjoyed a strong sense of community with staff and were able to approach staff on an individual basis whenever necessary and thus felt less need of more formal feedback mechanisms.

5.1.3 The PG Students also confirmed that they had previously raised issues directly with relevant staff and these had been dealt with quickly and appropriately.

5.1.4 The Staff advised the Panel that the questionnaire form issued to all students at the end of the session was currently under review and would likely be extended to cover feedback on IT provision and GTA performance. The Panel welcomed this development and counselled that an important aspect of feedback was the response by the Department to points raised by students and subsequent action taken, thus ensuring loop closure. The Panel referred the Department to the recently distributed handbook on student feedback. For further

guidance: '*Obtaining and Responding to Feedback from Students: A University Code of Practice*'³

5.2 Annual Monitoring Process

5.2.1 As discussed in paragraph 4.1.1, the Panel had noted the absence of some AMRs in the documentation provided which it was agreed may have arisen as a result of the high level of staff turnover.

5.3 Extracurricular Provision

5.3.1 During the Review visit the Panel discovered more from the Head of Department, Staff and Students about the provision of extracurricular activities which the Panel felt demonstrated the Department's research strengths and enhanced the student experience by contributing to the strong sense of collegiality experienced throughout the review. The Panel **commends** the Department for the range of activities offered, details of which are outlined in Appendix 2.

6. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching

6.1 Key Strengths

- The departmental ethos of collegiality, energy and enthusiasm under the effective leadership of the Head of Department.
- The level of contact and support provided to applicants prior to entry.
- The high levels of student attendance and retention.
- The breadth of courses in the honours provision, and the emphasis on pre-1800 literature giving the Department a distinctive "trademark".
- The extra curricular provision.
- The formal GTA interviews and level of support provided for GTAs.

6.2 Areas to be improved or enhanced

- Adopt consistent practices for feedback to students on their assessed work and ensure staff and GTA compliance.
- Review student documentation to ensure full inclusion of ILOs and to convey enthusiasm for the programme.
- Provide clearer guidelines for students about available staff support and contact arrangements.
- Clarify guidelines on organisation and supervision arrangements for the honours dissertation.
- Ensure that induction processes are appropriate for each level,
- Optimise support for part-time PG students.
- Clarify mentoring arrangements for new staff and inform all concerned.
- Introduce a mechanism for feedback from students on GTA teaching performance.
- Increase departmental engagement with the PDP agenda and local support for the Faculty PDP champion.

³ http://senate.gla.ac.uk/qa/CoP_Obtaining_student_feedback_Oct08.pdf

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The Review Panel was impressed with the leadership of English Literature by the Head of Department, the collegiality of the Department's staff, the quality of support to GTAs and above all, to the Students. The Students who met with the Panel were enthusiastic about their learning and spoke highly of the Department. The GTAs echoed this and displayed a great passion for their subject and the Department. There was strong evidence of energy and enthusiasm at all levels.

The Department demonstrated that it had made significant progress since the previous departmental Review in March 2003, with an impressive array of strengths and self-awareness of areas in which it wished to improve. The most substantive of these are reflected in the recommendations that follow.

7.2 Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report are summarised below. It is important to note that the majority of these recommendations refer to tasks or issues identified by the Department for action either prior to the Review or in the SER. Some of these actions are already in hand.

The recommendations have been cross referenced in the paragraphs of the report to which they refer and are not ranked in any particular order.

Recommendation 1:

The Panel **recommends** that the preparatory guidance provided to Heads of Department should emphasise the need for reflection on the outcome and recommendations from the previous review in order to demonstrate the level of enhancement achieved. [*Paragraph 1.1.4*]

For the attention of: Senate Office

Recommendation 2:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews its policy on the provision of feedback to students to ensure that a clear and consistent process exists across all programmes. The process should address, amongst other things, a strengthening of feedback for postgraduate students after week 3 of the first semester. The Department should ensure that the agreed policy is communicated to all relevant parties and its effectiveness monitored at all levels. [*Paragraph 3.3.5*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 3:

The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department reports departmental experiences of the new academic year structure to the Convener of the Academic Structures Implementation Group and liaises with the International and Postgraduate Service about the late arrival of Erasmus students to minimise any potential for their being disadvantaged. [*Paragraph 3.3.9*]

For the attention of: Head of Department, Director of IPS

Recommendation 4:

The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty's examination board procedures be reviewed to ensure consistent practice across all departments. [*Paragraph 3.3.10*]

For the attention of: Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching; Head of Department

Recommendation 5:

The Panel **recommends** that, as part of its review of the honours provision, the Department considers the introduction of literary theory based lectures in Level 1 and the inclusion of the study of an anthology of individual poets. [*Paragraph 3.4.1*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensures that all students are fully informed about requirements for dissertations, particularly the relevant timescales and arrangements for support, and that students are kept informed should these be subject to delay. [*Paragraph 3.4.5*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 7:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews arrangements for PG seminars to ensure that part-time students are not excluded, even if this requires repeating the seminars.. [*Paragraph 3.4.7*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 8:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department provides reading lists and timetables to PGT students in advance of the start of their programme. [*Paragraph 3.6.3*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 9:

The Panel **recommends** that the University reviews its position on the provision of janitorial staff to ensure that desirable out of hours teaching opportunities are not jeopardised. [*Paragraph 3.8.2*]

For the attention of: Secretary of Court, Director of HR

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department takes steps to standardise the provision of AV equipment in its seminar rooms, for example, by making a strategic application to the Faculty Technical Committee. [*Paragraph 3.8.3*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 11

The Panel **recommends** that the Department discusses with the University Library the adequacy of provision of secondary texts and that the Department considers placing extracts of relevant texts on MOODLE as well as providing on-line access to those DVDs currently available for hire. [*Paragraph 3.8.4*]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 12:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department make specific reference to the role of the Departmental Disability Coordinator in the workload model. [Paragraph 3.8.6]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 13:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department introduces formal feedback from UG students on the performance of the GTAs. [Paragraph 3.8.10]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 14:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department clearly formalises the mentoring arrangements already in place and takes steps to ensure that all parties are aware of their relevant roles and responsibilities. [Paragraph 3.8.13]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 15:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department continues the revision of all documentation intended for students and ensures adequate reference to ILOs and compatibility of the style and content with the target readership. The Department should also consult the students as an integral part of the revision process. [Paragraph 3.8.17]

For the attention of: Head of Department

Recommendation 16:

The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department ensures full compliance with Annual Course Monitoring requirements for all courses. [Paragraph 4.1.1]

For the attention of: Head of Department, Departmental and Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers

**The Department of English Literature
Honours Dissertation**

The Dissertation module is taught mainly in the Spring semester of Junior Honours (Level 3) within the following timeline:

Semester 2 Junior Honours (Level 3)

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Week 1: | Lecture 1: Introduction, Overview and Topic Selection (2 staff members) |
| Week 2: | Lecture 2: Using GUL Research Resources (Richard Bapty and another staff member) |
| Week 3: | Lecture 3: (Part 1) Bibliography development and referencing, (Part 2) Structuring a Thesis argument |
| Weeks 4 and 5: | Student reflection on topic proposal, to be handed in by end of week 5 |
| Week 6: | Dissertation Module Convener assigns student research topics to relevant staff |
| Weeks 7-10: | 2 x hour long workshop sessions addressing issues raised in lecture sessions and one half-hour individual supervision session; ALGs and MOODLE site set up |
| March 30-September 11: | Students work on 500-1000 word thesis abstract and annotated bibliography (min. 10 items), to be handed in on final day of academic session (standard Honours penalty system in operation) |

Semester 1 Senior Honours (Level 4)

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Week 2: | Hand back of abstract/bibliography and feedback (by individual supervisor) |
| Weeks 3-10: | Additional two supervision sessions (half hour) as needed, in Semester 1 and/or Semester 2; Contact through MOODLE site and ALGs; |

Semester 2 Senior Honours (Level 4)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Weeks 2-9: | Contact through MOODLE site and ALGs |
| Week 10: | Dissertation due |

In total, students are provided with 3 lectures; three half hour sessions with supervisors; an assessment/feedback session; and 2 x hour long workshop sessions. Additional support is available the MOODLE site and the Autonomous Learning Groups.

**The Department of English Literature
Extracurricular Provision**

1) Visiting Speakers

During term time there are two weekly series of visiting speakers, one organised by the Department as a whole and one by the Creative Writing team. All students are invited to attend, particularly postgraduate students, who are encouraged to regard these sessions as an integral part of their study. The Department is anxious to promote student participation in other ways, such as inviting students to suggest speakers of special interest to them and to welcome and introduce them. Students are actively encouraged to ask questions and make themselves an integral part of the event.

In addition, there is a regular work-in-progress series wherein staff and postgraduate students offer parallel 20-minute papers followed by discussion. The Student Literary Society, run by a committee of undergraduate students, also invites staff to give talks to its members on a regular basis on topics outside the regular curriculum and developments in the subject. The Faculty of Arts Graduate School Distinguished Speaker series attracts world famous names who make themselves available for consultation with students and participate in student-led seminars.

2) Reading Groups

In 2006 a Proust reading group was established at the instigation of a group of students who had followed the Head of Department's Proust in Theory module as part of the Masters in Modernities programme. Other postgraduate students with the Department, undergraduates, staff from other departments and interested parties from outside the University soon expressed an interest in joining. As a result, the group has grown considerably and, in October 2008 it hosted an AHRC-sponsored day conference 'Reading the Reading Group' which attracted international speakers including Jean-Michel Rabaté and UG and PG attendance from across the Faculty.

Since then, other reading groups have been established, such as, in January 2007, a *Finnegans Wake* reading group, 'Wakey Wakey'. This group has attracted positive attention in the national press and is regularly attended by both undergraduate and postgraduate students. An 18th Century reading group meets every week in term time, another group studying Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is about to reach the end of its first cycle, while a new student-led Literary Theory group had its first meeting in January 2009. These groups offer, besides camaraderie and intellectual stimulus, a refuge from overspecialisation and an opportunity for students and staff to share ideas in an area which is not governed by assessment.