

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee – 4 October 2013

Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of Politics held on 4 and 5 March 2013

Ms Fiona Dick, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel:

Professor Steve Beaumont	Vice Principal (Research and Enterprise) (Convener)
Professor Robert Ladrech	Keele University (External Subject Specialist)
Ms Laura Stockwell	Students' Representative Council
Professor Robert McMaster	Adam Smith Business School (Cognate Member)
Dr Donald Spaeth	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Amanda Sykes	Learning and Teaching Centre
Ms Fiona Dick	Senate Office (Clerk)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Information

- 1.1.1 The Subject of Politics is the largest of five subjects within the School of Social and Political Sciences, formed in August 2010 at the time of re-structuring of the University within the College of Social Sciences. Politics has been taught at Glasgow since the 1760s beginning with a series of lectures by Adam Smith.
- 1.1.2 The Subject occupies the twelfth and thirteenth floors of the Adam Smith Building, with access to teaching rooms, workshops, IT suites and the Adam Smith Library. There are also Common Rooms on the ground floor for use by staff and students.
- 1.1.3 The previous review of Politics carried out by the University was the Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (DPTLA) review in March 2007. The Panel noted the Politics Department's robust approach to quality assurance and commitment to enhancing the learning experience of its students.
- 1.1.4 The Self Evaluation Report (SER) was prepared by Professor Christopher Thornhill (former Head of Subject) and Dr Paul Graham (former Director Teaching and Learning). Input was invited from all staff and students and the draft document was also considered at a Politics Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meeting on 26 November 2012.
- 1.1.5 The Review Panel **commends** the SER for its collaborative and reflective approach which delivered an honest, self-critical analysis of the Subject's activities, including numerous examples of innovation and good practice, and opportunities emerging from significant challenges the Subject had

encountered in the bedding down of new arrangements within the School of Social and Political Sciences.

- 1.1.6 During the two day visit (4 and 5 March 2013), the Review Panel met with: the Dean (Learning and Teaching), Dr Moira Fischbacher-Smith; the Head of School, Professor Michael French and the newly appointed Head of Subject, Professor Christopher Carman. The Panel also met with 17 members of staff (including 3 Sessional staff), 4 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), 4 postgraduate taught (PGT) students and 9 undergraduate students.
- 1.1.7 The Subject has 19 members of academic staff (18.5 FTE), 3 administrative support staff (2.8 FTE), 4 sessional teachers (1.0 FTE) and 14 GTAs (2.5 FTE).
- 1.1.8 Student numbers for Session 2012-13 are as follows:

Students	Headcount	FTE
Level 1	407 + 378 *	130.83
Level 2	215 + 215*	71.666
Level 3	88 + 102 + 3**	141.25
Level 4	84 + 95 + 2**	133
Level 5 (if applicable)	7	3.5
Undergraduate Total	1,596	480.246
Postgraduate Taught	53	53***
Postgraduate Research (for information only- research is not covered by PSR)	23	23

- * The figures refer to 1A and 1B, and 2A and 2B – many students appear in both the A and B courses.
- ** Single + Joint + Principal/Subsidiary
- *** PGT students may take some non-Politics courses so the FTE figure will be lower

- 1.1.9 The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the Subject area.

At undergraduate level, Politics offers:

- An MA Single Honours degree in Politics;
- Joint Honours degrees in Politics and another subject offered from a range of subjects within the College of Social Sciences* and the College of Arts, subject to timetabling restrictions. In recent years, these among others have included Geography, History, French, German, Sociology, Economic and Social History, Economics, Mathematics, Spanish, Philosophy, Law, and English Literature;
- Principal-subsidiary degrees with a number of language subjects (75% Politics; 25% Language).
- An MA non-Honours degree;
- A range of Politics Honours degree options are also made available to other degree programmes across the Colleges of Social Sciences and Arts.

*The Subject area contributes to the joint degree programme MSc International Management for China offered by the Adam Smith Business School.

At postgraduate level, Politics offers:

- MSc Human Rights and International Politics;
- MRes Human Rights and International Politics;
- MSc International Relations;
- MRes International Relations;
- MSc Political Communication;
- MRes Political Communication ;
- MSc European Politics;
- MSc European Politics and Law;
- MSc International Politics (China).

Members of Politics staff also contribute to teaching provision on the following taught postgraduate programmes offered by the University:

- MSc Global Security;
- MRes Global Security ;
- MSc Chinese Studies;
- MSc Europe and International Development;
- LLM International Law and Security.

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

- 2.1 The Review Panel was satisfied that the aims of the Subject's provision detailed in the SER were appropriate and aligned with the University's Strategic Plan and in particular supported the University's commitment to global reach, internationalisation and multi-disciplinarity. The Panel considered that the Subject's approach to the study of Politics: research-led; interdisciplinary; and delivered by a broad range of pedagogical and assessment methods, supported the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and compared favourably with other HE institutions.
- 2.2 The Review Panel noted that the School's Strategy Document was currently undergoing a review and that the School Executive, which included Heads of Subjects and Course Conveners, had attended an Away Day mid February 2013 to discuss strategic issues around learning and teaching. Section 3.8 considers strategic issues in more detail.

3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

3.1 *Aims*

- 3.1.1 The aims of the Subject's undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes were detailed in Programme Specifications and communicated to students by means of Course Handbooks/Guides through on-line access via Moodle.
- 3.1.2 The Review Panel considered provision was aligned to Quality Assurance Agency subject benchmarks (Politics and International Relations 2007) in terms of course design and component modules. Subject benchmarks detailed abilities and skills expected of graduates in Politics and International Relations, which included knowledge and understanding, generic and personal transferable skills.
- 3.1.3 The Panel noted the SER's comments regarding a lack of prescribed linear pathways and that curriculum development was therefore modulated by national and international developments in the understanding of the Subject, guidelines by the Political Studies Association and student and External Examiner feedback.
- 3.1.4 The Panel welcomed the broad range and comprehensive provision that also offered students some flexibility in terms of degree content. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate students who met with the panel stated that provision breadth and flexibility had been key attractions.
- 3.1.5 The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialist, confirmed that the programmes offered by the School/Subject Area remain current and valid in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application.

3.2 *Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)*

- 3.2.1 Intended Learning outcomes (ILOs) for programmes and courses were made available to students through Programme Specifications, Programme Handouts, Course Handbooks and via Moodle. The Review Panel noted that while many of the ILOs were comprehensive and well articulated, some had employed language that was difficult to assess: verbs such as 'understand'; 'appreciate'; and 'be able to think about'. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages directly with staff from Learning and Teaching Centre and through online support available (see Guidance Notes: http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_106193_en.pdf) to ensure a consistent approach in the communication of assessable Intended Learning Outcomes to students.
- 3.2.2 It was noted from undergraduate and postgraduate students who met with the Panel that ILOs and course descriptors did not always match course content and course reviews did not currently offer students the opportunity to contribute their own perspective in creating or critiquing ILO/course descriptors. Staff members confirmed that there were examples of 'miscommunication' and agreed with the Panel that students should have the opportunity to feed into the review process. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages

with students, through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, in a review of course descriptors that accurately reflect course content.

- 3.2.3 The Review Panel noted from the SER that Recommendation 5 from the previous PSR (DPTLA 2007) to incorporate a closer focus on Personal Development Planning (PDP) to increase student awareness of 'course learning outcomes', had still not been implemented. The Head of Subject reported that student feedback from the 2012 National Survey of Students (NSS) in relation to personal development had been below the School average (see Section 3.4.7 et. seq.).

3.3 *Assessment, Feedback and Achievement*

Code of Assessment

- 3.3.1 The SER described how all assessed work for pre-Honours was moderated by the appropriate Course Convenor and that all assessed work for Honours and PGT was non-blind second-marked. The Review Panel was keen to explore with key staff members what criteria the Subject used to decide how much work was second marked, as the proportion of A grades seemed to vary significantly between courses, from 7% to 39% in courses with 20+ students; suggesting attention needed to be paid to second marking. Staff members confirmed that that the percentage of second marked samples was standardised, markers examined the distribution of grades and there was always the opportunity for dialogue between the first and second markers. The Panel was unable to clarify issues highlighted by External Examiners' comments in relation to use of the full 22-point scale (as expressed in ILOs) and the potential negative impact on mean scores used for degree classification, double-rounding, i.e. between different elements of assessment and then of overall module grade, and the rule that medical evidence can only be taken into account for students within the zone of discretion. The Review Panel **encourages** the Subject to further discuss and clarify assessment rationale to ensure that relevant criteria and their application are fully understood and communicated to external examiners. (see Code of Assessment:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/academic/assessmentpolicies/guide/> and guidance on moderation and second marking guidance available at: http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_216411_en.pdf).

Assessment Methods

- 3.3.2 The Review Panel **commends** the diversity of assessment methods on offer to meet the varying needs of student abilities/expectations and professional criteria in the development of transferable skills. The Panel welcomed the widespread use of formatively assessed work in Honours courses and the emphasis away from examination-room assessment to reports, essay plans or article reviews, which was considered appropriate for the subject area. The Review Panel were particularly interested in the use of reflective logs in the Politics Honours module 'Communication and Conflict in World Politics', convened by Dr Naomi Head. This module utilises role-play to evaluate peer communication processes within the context of UN Security Council. Further reflection is facilitated by recording role-plays via Moodle and the provision of written guidance. The Review Panel **commends** the use of reflective journals in the Politics Honours module developed to encourage students to consider the nature and quality of their communication and to reflect on the relationship

between theory and practice, potential issues and their own learning process and skills.

- 3.3.3 The Review Panel sought clarification of the claim noted from the SER that the variety of assessment methods has been helpful in the recovery of lost study periods. The Subject responded that the remark had been made within the context of student progression, retention and support; offering assessment methods beyond the traditional examination reliant format increased the flexibility for students to recover periods of study lost due to illness or other significant events. In particular, a broader range of assessment methods was less restrictive and increased the degrees of freedom in assisting students encountering lost study periods in their Junior Honours (third) year.
- 3.3.4 The Subject was asked to clarify what formative assessment opportunities were available for students and in particular if there was practice for summative assessments. The Panel noted that the Subject did not specifically distinguish between formative and indicative components, as formative essays both developed students' preparation for exams and for assessed essay writing in addition to gauging student progression. Each module featured some form of formative assessment, although its submission was optional in some courses; Politics Levels 1 and 2 used formative essays and Honours modules allowed for more variation in the formative exercise, with some retaining an oral component as the formative exercise, whilst others used an essay. In the case of formative essays, students received written feedback on the essay. It was not standard practice to assign a hypothetical 'mark' to a formative component, though some tutors might indicate the broad potential classification that a formative component might receive had it been formally assessed.

Feedback on Assessment

- 3.3.5 The Subject's policy on the return of feedback that 'most undergraduate coursework should be returned within three weeks of submission (excluding vacations)' was communicated to students in Course Handbooks and discussed at SSLC meetings. The panel noted SER comments regarding consistency and the unwillingness of the Subject to compromise standards despite large pre-Honours student numbers. National Student Survey (NSS) scores for assessment and feedback for the Politic subject group were lower than the University Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and in some cases had fallen since 2009. However it was noted that scores for prompt feedback, whilst still below University's KPIs had increased since 2010; perhaps in response to the three-week turnaround policy. Timeliness was however an issue for some Honours and postgraduate students, who reported feedback variance ranging from 3 to 8 weeks. The quality of feedback was also a concern for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, who wanted more constructive feedback. Panel members were particularly interested to hear from one probationary member of staff, who had undertaken a qualitative study as part of PGCAP, which involved interviewing Politics Honours students about their views on feedback on assessment. Findings suggesting that students wanted detailed, balanced and timely feedback on their assessments and the survey results had been disseminated to teaching staff. Staff who met with the Panel acknowledged that there were still some challenges around timeliness and quality of feedback but that there were many examples of good practice within the Subject to improve feedback commentary. The Panel **recommends** that the Subject should take steps to reconcile student needs for improved feedback on assessment with the variable practise across the subject area, drawing on appropriate examples of good practice from within the Subject.

- 3.3.6 The Review Panel were interested to know if the Subject provided feedback sheets for summative assessments of oral presentations. The Panel noted the Subject response that a standard sheet was not in use across the subject area. The Honours Handbook did however include guidelines in relation to the assessment of oral participation when specified as part of a class assessment regime. The Review Panel noted positive comments from External Examiners and good practice highlighted in the SER in relation to the use of examination feedback forms, **commends** the formative feedback scheme devised by Dr Katherine Allison and **encourages** the Subject to roll out this approach to formative feedback to students by all staff.

Integrity in Writing

- 3.3.7 The SER confirmed that the Subject was compliant with Senate Office regulations for dealing with plagiarism but there was currently no School-wide policy regarding the use of plagiarism-detection software such as Turnitin. Staff members confirmed plans to introduce Turnitin had been considered at the Politics Teaching Committee on 14 January 2013, where the discussion had moved away from the language of plagiarism to 'integrity in writing and research'. It was noted that the Subject had agreed to introduce Turnitin next session (2013-14) and acknowledged the need for the training of staff members to be able to support their students in understanding how the system works and in interpreting their own Originality Reports. Undergraduate students who met with the Panel confirmed that Turnitin was available through the Qualitative Methods course offered by School but did not seem to know that they could submit assessed work themselves to check compliance. They acknowledged that it was a useful tool particularly for citation practice and dissertation submission but highlighted problems encountered around assessment deadlines due to high usage which could cause the website to crash and potentially delay submission. Difficulty in viewing written assessments externally was noted both by External Examiners and the Board of Studies for the MA (SocSci) in relation to programme approval. The GTAs also reported problems in relation to delays in passing on written work from collection boxes, due to administrative overburdening which further exacerbated feedback on assessment turnaround deadlines. The Panel noted staff workload, training implications and initial set-up costs but considered that in the longer term the use of Turnitin for on-line submission could address the needs of students in the development of writing integrity awareness and facilitate internal and external access to written work by staff in relation to assessment, External Examiners and programme approval. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject extends plans in relation to online essay submission and with a view to reducing the administrative burden, to include all written work through Turnitin, Moodle or similar, in consultation with the College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre. The Subject should also consider the scheduling of submission deadlines to manage the load on IT systems and minimise the risk of system breakdown.

Course Reading

- 3.3.8 Students who met with the Panel described access to required course reading and on-line resources as excellent, although there had been some difficulty accessing course books for some of the Honours modules. It was noted that the digitising service offered by the Library's [Online Course Materials Service](#) required between ten days and two months notice depending on whether or not

materials were covered by the University's licence, although for some materials it could provide a same-day service. This service also features usage monitoring and embedded links through Moodle pages. The Panel **encourages** the Subject to submit digitisation requests of core texts to the Library with due notice, to ensure all students have access to required course reading materials at the course start.

3.4 *Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

Range of Courses

3.4.1 The Review Panel **commends** the wide range and challenging suite of courses that addresses core areas within the subject discipline and offers flexibility in terms of specialisation and focus. The Panel noted the Subject's requirements for additional teaching expertise in the areas of UK Government and Politics, US Foreign Policy, the Politics of the Middle East, International Political Economy, International Organisations and Comparative Politics.

3.4.2 It was noted that across the School of Social and Political Sciences, students selected from the entire range of the Honours modules on offer in either of their Honours years. Significant demand for Honours modules meant that many modules reached capacity within the first day or even several hours of registration. Flexibility therefore not only increased the choices available but also increased the opportunity for students to study their preferred options.

3.4.3 The Subject strengthened research methods training in 2012 with the introduction of the School of Social and Political Sciences Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences modules. Courses were taught at school level and at least one (with option to do both) was mandatory for Year 3 Honours students. The Head of School pointed out that due to economies of scale, with large student numbers and limited resources, the focus was inter-subject, embedding the common interests of Public Policy and Politics. The Head of Subject reflected that this pluralistic approach presented real challenges, both in terms of teaching methods and contextual knowledge. Student feedback highlighted the need for greater relevance to subject interests, which he suggested could be met by strengthening the Subject's input to the methods training provision. This view was reiterated by GTAs who met with the Panel and acknowledged the compromise required in addressing the wide and diverse learning needs of students in sufficient depth to ensure their engagement. The Panel also noted a suggestion that the training methods courses could be combined to offer both quantitative and qualitative methods training. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject to liaise with course lecturers to ensure the inclusion of sufficient subject-specific examples, particularly for the mandatory Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Social Sciences courses, to meet the needs of Politics students in cross-discipline teaching provision.

3.4.4 Undergraduate programmes were modularised in 2009, moving from 30 to 20 credit courses, resulting in a significant increase in the breadth of modules offered. The Head of Subject explained that with large numbers of Honours students (383), many class sizes exceeded 50 and were taught every day, significantly impacting on staff and administrative workloads. Students who met with the Panel liked the wide range of options and flexibility offered but felt that compulsory courses such as Pre-Honours International Relations could have a broader scope. The Panel noted from the Head of Subject that the History of Political Thought (Politics 2A) was currently subject to rethinking, in

terms of how they matched up to strategy and how they complemented and integrated with the Honours provision.

- 3.4.5 It was noted from the SER that the compulsory General Paper would be discontinued post 2012-13, despite positive comments from an External Examiner, as it was not viewed favourably by students and because staff voiced concerns regarding sufficient teaching hours. In its place there was the newly established requirement for Honours students to take one of the two school Research Methods classes in their third year.

Course Review

- 3.4.6 The SER stated that while there had been incremental change to the range of courses 'there had been less discussion of the curriculum as a whole'. The Review Panel, cognisant of recent changes in management, **encourages** the Subject to make full use of monthly staff meetings, Teaching Meetings, the Annual Teaching Review and Away Days to engage with staff and students in considering how the shape and direction of the curriculum should be developed.

Transferable Skills

- 3.4.7 While transferable skills were described in the SER as intrinsic to the subject discipline and were promoted through a wide range of assessment methods and pedagogic activities, including group projects, debates, discussion groups and role-playing, these skills were 'more often implicit than explicit' and 'communicated in the process of teaching'. Panel members were therefore not surprised to find that students who met with the Panel seemed doubtful about what transferable skills they were learning. The Dean (Learning and Teaching) cited an example of College good practice by Dr Susan Deeley and Dr Dickon Cosey, which used the e-PDP portfolio tool Mahara. This tool provided opportunities for students to create their own portfolio and to view each others' profiles to exchange ideas about transferable skills. It was suggested that induction would also be an opportunity to seed this activity in the promotion of transferable skills awareness. The Head of Subject agreed there was a case for a more demonstrable and systematic approach. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject make transferable skills more explicit to students, via Programme Aims/Intended Learning Outcomes through links with initiatives and good practice available in the School of Social and Political Sciences, College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre.

Employability

- 3.4.8 The Panel noted comments from the SER in relation to improving liaison with the Careers Service and how the high staff/student ratio had negatively impacted on the provision of personal development planning for students. There was also no evidence from the documentation supplied, of regular or institutionalised engagement with potential employers. Staff members confirmed that there were alumni contacts available to the Subject but that they had not been used recently as a result of heavy staff workloads due to increasing student numbers. The Head of Subject cited examples which included placements in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments but acknowledged that the experience offered was ad hoc and not part of a systematic approach to address the employability agenda.

- 3.4.9 The undergraduates who met with the Panel were aware of the Careers Service but were not convinced that the support offered was specific to their

needs beyond the provision of generic guidance on curriculum vitae and covering letter preparation. Students had also heard of the Club 21 Business Partnership Programme but again took the view that it was neither relevant to Politics, nor up to date. There was much praise for a College-based poster event which had not been advertised by the Subject. It was noted that students also rated positively the programme of visiting speakers coordinated through the Politics Society and it was suggested that the Subject could usefully liaise more closely and support the Politics Society to develop links and increase potential employability opportunities. It was noted students could not join the Politics Society till Level 3. The Dean (Learning and Teaching) encouraged the Subject to consider ways in which it could support the Politics Society.

- 3.4.10 Postgraduates confirmed that they received emails from the Careers Service but as with undergraduate students considered that the guidance was too generic. Students had enjoyed a course offered through the Employability Office in the College of Social Sciences on self-reflection and articulating transferable skills. The Panel also heard about several events coordinated through the M.Sc. Political Communication programme that had included mapping out different potential professions, visiting speakers etc and had been very popular. Students welcomed a suggestion from the Panel for the Subject to bring in Alumni to build contacts with employers.
- 3.4.11 Panel members also acknowledged the particular challenges facing Politics in preparing their students for employment opportunities in a subject area without obvious professional outcomes. The Head of Subject reflected that the real issue was more about helping students to make 'connections' between transferable skills and employability, by tapping into existing provision and making skills more explicit, through course design integrated across Honours modules. The Dean (Learning and Teaching) concurred that there were many examples of good practice available centrally and the Subject could collaborate with School contacts/TELT to raise awareness with both staff and students. The Panel noted suggestions for potential initiatives that included: appointing a graduate who had unique perspective and could build on social capital adding value to the student experience; and a creative and less resource intensive communication and morale-boosting exercise to make students aware of work and career opportunities. The Panel concurred that the Subject needed to develop a consistent approach in providing students with access to career advice and support.
- 3.4.12 There was no clear evidence, from the documentation provided to the Panel, of the Subject's understanding and engagement with the Graduate Attributes agenda despite a responsibility to the Scottish Funding Council.
- 3.4.13 Given resource constraints, the Panel was keen to explore with staff how the Subject intended to help students in the development and reflection on employability and more generally with graduate attributes, without significantly impacting on workload. Staff members reported that they recently had consulted with Dr Vicky Gunn, Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre, to identify and make explicit a system for students to articulate their skills and strengths, within a self-assessment framework for their personal development, relative to the world of work. Panel members were also encouraged that graduate attributes had been considered at the recent Away Day event and noted future plans that might include bespoke student-led workshops and included GTAs with staff to feed into activities

around interview technique, curriculum vitae preparation and journal submission.

- 3.4.14 The Panel agreed that the Subject should promote a better understanding of the various pathways and wide range of employment options available to students; and to take a consistent approach to providing students with access to career advice and support. The Review panel **recommends** the subject to engage with internal and external stakeholders to develop a strategy and plan for embedding applied learning (employability) and reflection (PDP) within the Graduate Attribute framework. Where appropriate the approach adopted should involve the Careers Service, Club 21, the Politics Society, potential employers and alumni, together with good practice initiatives in the College of Social Sciences.

Study Abroad

- 3.4.15 The Review Panel was impressed by the level of participation and support for Study Abroad with encouraging numbers for both outgoing as well as incoming students, through Subject initiatives that included: the Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy Study Abroad Programme; the Geneva Field Trip offered to Human Rights and International Politics students and field trips to Brussels and Luxembourg. The Panel **commends** the Subject on the success of its Study Abroad programme.

3.5 Student Recruitment

- 3.5.1 One of the main factors that had attracted new members of staff who met with the Panel was the Subject's reputation for attracting large numbers of high-calibre applicants, particularly at the undergraduate level. It was noted that the unit's recruitment profile was heavily biased to undergraduate provision and that as undergraduate level entry was mainly determined by the College of Social Sciences, the Subject, and School, had limited influence on both entry requirements and entry routes. Nonetheless, the SER indicated that students were relatively highly qualified on entry and the Head of Subject confirmed that Politics was fortunate to be able to attract a strong student cohort, who were attracted to the Politics subject area. The Panel Review **commends** the Subject on the recruitment of highly qualified students at undergraduate level.
- 3.5.2 Students who met with the Panel had spoken highly of their teaching and learning experience within the Subject/School and student life at the University. The SER had described the high quality of student intake and Panel members were keen to explore with them the motivating factors that had influenced their decision to choose to study Politics at the University of Glasgow. For both student groups the cost of fees was regarded as the most important factor. Other motivators included the University's reputation in terms of ranking and internationalisation, the location within Glasgow as a multicultural and friendly city and as already mentioned, the flexibility and breadth of curriculum offered by the Subject/School. It was noted that for the postgraduate group, the University of Edinburgh had closely competed in their final choice but they had been persuaded in the end by lower fees, breadth of choices and the reputation of the Subject at Glasgow.

- 3.5.3 The SER indicated that the Subject has increased the number of PGT programmes it offered or contributed to, in conjunction with cognate Subjects. Supporting documentation indicated that the overwhelming majority of these students possessed international first degrees. This profile seemed to reflect the experience of the College as a whole. Panel members considered whether this was indicative of a potential growth area, but one that might also be vulnerable to any further changes in student visa requirements. Moreover, the SER had indicated that recruitment activities at PGT level might be impaired by demarcation uncertainties between the School and College. The Head of Subject acknowledged the need for growth of this cohort, which would benefit from clarification of lines of responsibilities through Subject, School and College.
- 3.5.4 It was noted that the Subject/School had followed the Adam Smith Business School approach to recruitment and while there had been an increase in applications, there was room for improvement in the rate of conversion. PGT courses were currently being reviewed through Teaching Committees and at the recent Away Day. The Panel noted the success of the Human Rights and International Politics M.Sc., plans for the introduction of additional PGT courses and potential scope to weed out some of the smaller programmes. There was discussion around how to make the current provision more attractive and competitive, for example by integrating languages. There was also a suggestion regarding the potential roles of Skype or Webchat to improve the rate of conversion.
- 3.5.5 Staff members outlined a perceived strategic dilemma in terms of whether the Subject should be building on strengths and distinctiveness in exploring potential new provision. They described how previously it had been considered more productive to think in terms of what the Subject was good at. In the new approach the shift was towards meeting student demand. There was also some concerns regarding Recruitment and International Office (RIO)'s perceived top-down approach and the relevance of market analysis and trend data it provided to the interests and capabilities of the Subject. Market intelligence seemed often to be based on whether or not a particular course was offered successfully by other institutions; this seemed to limit scope for proposing genuinely pioneering, market-leading programmes. Panel members expressed the view that these two positions needed to be reconciled. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject liaises with RIO to engage constructively with appropriate colleagues in the College and School in the consideration of the viability of current and new PGT programmes, which respond to student needs and build on the strengths of the subject.

Widening Participation

- 3.5.8 The Review Panel **commends** the Subject's engagement with the widening participation (WP) agenda and in particular the number of Diploma students recruited through a variety of initiatives. The Head of School confirmed that these activities operated at the College level through Teaching and Learning Committees, Access via the Centre for Open Studies and the Glasgow International College. He explained that students were attracted to the broad structure and Politics had an excellent track record in retaining them.

Internationalisation

3.5.9 The Panel noted that in the current academic year, there were 241 non-UK students from 26 different countries taking Politics courses, although just 4 countries accounted for half of these (Sweden, Finland, Germany and Bulgaria). Of these non-UK students, 176 were on Politics degree plans, so the additional 65 would be taking Level 1 (and possibly Level 2) classes but not continuing on to Politics Honours. External Examiners and GTAs had raised the issue that high numbers of international students could be impacting on other students, particularly in relation to language skills. The Panel noted that the School was engaging with the Adam Smith Business School and RIO to address the issue of additional support for international students

3.6 Student Progression, Retention and Support

Staff support

3.6.1 Student groups who met with the Panel were very enthusiastic about the support they received from academic and administrative staff members. Undergraduate students described the staff as helpful and approachable, responding to ad hoc enquiries by email and face-to-face meetings. Postgraduates liked the 'warm atmosphere' and 'group spirit' and appreciated opportunities to develop rapport with dynamic and open-minded staff members who provided support and encouragement.

3.6.2 Undergraduate students suggested that communication of formal matters could be more systematic and had described being deterred from visiting the administrators, due to a lack of privacy and awareness that staff were too busy. The SER had referred to recent infrastructural and governance changes, and a relatively high Staff Student Ratio (SSR) as contributing to, or engendering a lack of community among students. This included the relocation and rationalisation of the Subject's administrative offices from Level 12 to an open-plan School office on the ground floor. Panel members concurred with the sentiment of the SER that a sense of community would likely contribute to a valuable learning experience and were therefore keen to explore the issue with the other groups. Staff members reported efficiency gains in terms of submission of assessed work and camaraderie, particularly in respect of challenges experienced with MyCampus. However despite students' positive attitude and response, staff members reiterated SER concerns around a 'depersonalised' service to their students and how community/point of contact had decreased in their transition to School (considered further in Section 5.3). For probationers, the physical distance of the administrative office had been problematic particularly at their job start. Staff expressed concern about future provision of support to increasing numbers of Honours students given current prioritisation of needs and contact minimisation. The Panel noted potential solutions that included the appointment of a Student Liaison Officer.

3.6.3 Undergraduate students who met with the Panel stated that although written advice on essay writing was available, there could be more emphasis on essay writing skills and increased opportunities to practice essay writing before submitting assessed work, especially for international/EU students. Dissertation support policy for undergraduates (an entitlement to 4 meetings plus written feedback on proposal/draft) was not considered to be consistent in practice and there is a need for increased support for Study Abroad students, especially pre-dissertation. Postgraduate students suggested that staff support could be

formalised and more effectively provided in the final semester. The Panel noted External Examiner comments which had highlighted a difficulty in obtaining a copy of dissertation guidelines for the MSc in International Politics. Students also suggested that the Subject could provide more course/programme information in advance. The Panel noted that the Politics Society was seeking closer links with the Subject. The Review Panel **encourages** the Subject to take a more formal, proactive and systematic approach that strengthens and rationalises the advice and support offered to students.

Induction for Pre-Honours

3.6.4 Joint honours students had reported on their positive experience of the induction fair offered by School of History at the end of Level 2, to support students in the selection of Honours options. Students welcomed the proposal for a Politics Honours induction to help them navigate the complex system of Honours courses and map these to degree/final year requirements. It was noted that a pre-honours induction event was an ideal opportunity for the Subject to promote and develop the employability/personal development planning/graduate attributes agendas (see section 3.4.14). The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject introduces pre-Honours induction for junior honours students, timed appropriately, to guide and support undergraduate students in the transition to Honours.

Fast Route Entry

3.6.5 It was noted that direct or fast route entry was available into Level 2 Politics for students holding appropriate grades. A-Level students with 'A' grades were not routinely admitted to Level 2; this was at the discretion of the Head of Subject. All decisions about advanced entry into Politics Level 2 were taken either by the Honours Convener or the Head of Subject. There have been a few cases in which a student had been allowed direct entry into Honours, but this was unusual and only open to transferring students who had studied Politics at another university.

3.7 The Quality of Learning Opportunities

Tutorials

3.7.1 Whilst large student numbers might explain why seminar groups for Honours and PGT were permitted to have 25 students, this exceeded the School average (according to MyCampus) and the Subject reported difficulty finding suitable teaching space (see Section 3.8.17). Moreover the undergraduate group preferred the smaller class sizes they experienced in Honours, as they were more interactive and provided the opportunity to develop relationships with teaching staff. Most tutorials for Levels 1 and 2 were taught by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who received excellent feedback from students. However GTAs also considered tutorial groups too large for effective purposeful teaching. It was noted that staff had limited involvement in pre-honours tutorials, which reduced awareness of the particular challenges involved. The Panel was also concerned that current tutorial provision was not addressing the need for additional support required by the large number of international undergraduate students. The Panel **recommends** the Subject undertakes a review of tutorials to both reduce tutorial class sizes for honours students and ensure provision is meeting the needs of international undergraduate students.

Lectures

3.7.2 The Review Panel **commends** the recording of Level 1 and 2 lectures that are provided online via Moodle to facilitate the learning opportunities for a diverse student cohort with differing backgrounds, cultures and physical needs. The Subject took the decision to record pre-Honours lectures in response to overwhelming numbers of students in Politics. The Subject clarified that the resource could only be accessed through streaming to avoid the potential of editing or posting video files to other websites. The undergraduate group raised a minor technical issue regarding the use of microphones and sound quality of lectures. The Panel **encourages** the Subject to continue to video record lectures and make them accessible through Moodle for all students.

3.8 *Resources for Learning and Teaching*

3.8.1 The Panel discussed with staff members their concerns about under-investment, an apparently very high staff student ratio caused by large student numbers and reduced staff, accommodation that was not fit for purpose, high staff workloads with large teaching, assessment and supervision (see Section 3.8.5) loads; and reduced administrative support. It was noted that these concerns were further compounded by difficulties in obtaining Subject metrics, which could help build a business case to the College of Social Sciences for increased resources. Panel members were particularly keen to explore views on how to incentivise staff, who firmly held the view that no matter how much growth there was in student numbers, there would be no match in resources.

3.8.2 The Panel noted from School staff that re-organisation of PGT courses post restructuring was still in a state of flux and utilised the 'hub and spoke' model to streamline provision and maximise resource utilisation. In their view the biggest challenge facing the School/College was resource distribution. The Panel noted that the School had spent the first year of its existence balancing workload implications. The Head of School confirmed that Politics was the biggest teaching income generating resource in School and that the marketing focus/resource shift was to grow the PGT cohort. While responsibility for Learning and Teaching at Subject level avoided duplication, the School needed to be more directive, particularly regarding resources, and reaffirm the maintenance of the five undergraduate programmes that it financed.

3.8.3 While Panel members noted and encouraged plans to develop the subfield of Comparative Politics there was some concern that the Subject might end up with too much choice, and that the underlying marketing rationale might lose focus. The Head of Subject confirmed that the current focus was to continue International Relations (IR) and Human Rights and firm up strengths in Comparative Politics in staff research interests and teaching focus. It was noted that where the Subject had not been successful was challenging the University of Edinburgh's dominance in recruiting PGT students for their European Politics and International Relations programmes, although, IR and Human Rights programmes were growing albeit slowly and IR remained a popular field with UG students. The Head of School confirmed that it was time for a review, addressing how to re-package the Subject brand and broaden the scope more globally.

- 3.8.4 The Dean (Learning and Teaching) reported that the Adam Smith Business School had considered redesigning entry criteria to control numbers, and also met with RIO on a regular basis to improve management of student numbers without reducing student choices. There was a suggestion that Politics could explore similar models to bring together key contacts to consider concerns constructively, facilitating more fruitful discussions, informing different perspectives and promoting goodwill. Panel members acknowledged that the existing structure limited input and consultation, and that an understanding of resource implications and external demands were not well communicated or understood at the Subject level. The Head of School reflected that the focus of PSR at Subject level limited analysis of policies and procedures that operated at School/College level.

Staff Student Ratio

- 3.8.6 The Panel was encouraged to hear of School plans to appoint four more academic members of staff by August 2013, which addressed the loss of seven or eight staff (including two VSER departures) over the last four years. The College had also agreed to increase the number of GTAs to support pre-Honours. The Head of School pointed out that the Honours programme was large and complex and that it had been difficult to build a case for Politics investment despite its high income generation. The SER had stated that the Staff Student Ratio (SSR) was 29.17. The Head of School conceded this figure was unacceptably high and would only increase with incoming Education students and the pressure of the Nankai programme. While it was noted that there had been some improvements in the last fifteen months, which included bringing in extra teaching to bridge SSR gaps, workload issues persisted. There was however potential for Politics to make a business case around SSR reduction which the School could take to the College, although he suggested that there would be more clarity after the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014. The Panel took the view that the College needed to pay attention to a serious issue of under-resourcing. The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences urgently takes appropriate steps to reduce the staff student ratio, liberating staff to be more creative and to spend more effort in the provision and enhancement of the student learning experience.

Staff Workload

- 3.8.7 The SER had alluded to the staff perception that teaching loads were heavier relative to other subjects in the School. The Panel noted that in addition to teaching and assessment, supervision allocations for staff averaged eight undergraduate students and four PGTs, and advising commitments. Staff members pointed out that while current appointments would go some way to meet teaching needs they would not ease the load on external pressures such as study abroad support in terms of dissertation, advising etc. The Convener of the Panel observed that the workload model described in the SER was not compliant with the University framework (see Section 3.8.6) and therefore could not be used to support the claimed impact of high SSR on staff workload.
- 3.8.8 The SER emphasised issues such as high teaching workloads in comparison to other subjects in the same School, suggesting that this has had an impact on the teaching-research balance, and that lines of accountability between subject group and School and College were weak. The External Subject Specialist panel member reflected that reorganisation could generate unpredictable outcomes, and it was clear that although the Politics subject area at the University of Glasgow was meeting high standards of provision, attention to

some of the wider structural issues might consolidate the goals that led to reorganisation in the first place.

Probationary Members of Staff

3.8.9 Three members of the Review Panel met with three probationary members of staff. It was noted that two new staff members - the other was exempt due to previous teaching experience - were attending the two year part-time Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP), which must be completed to fulfil University probationary requirements. The probationers reported that formal arrangements for teaching, research and administrative support were in place and they benefitted from regular informal support from other staff members including opportunities to get feedback on their teaching. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject's support and mentoring arrangements to integrate probationary members to the body of staff. Workloads were considered reasonable and took account of probationary training requirements, although heavy administrative loads were impacting on their research resulting in a trade-off in terms of the ability to offer continuous assessment/quality and timeliness of feedback on assessment. It was noted that opportunities for curriculum development/review and input to Subject/School decisions were available through SSLC.

Administrative Staff

3.8.10 There was clear evidence from the documentation and in meetings with staff and students that the administrators were highly valued. The Panel **commends** the skilled and dedicated subject-level administrative staff, and in particular Mrs Margaret Murray, in the support of students and academic staff. The Head of School conceded that the current administrative allocation of 2.8 FTE was not enough. The Panel noted that administrative support had been rationalised in the transition to the new School of Social and Political Sciences post restructuring of the University. The Head of School considered this issue to be the School's biggest weakness. While the logic behind job streamlining was specialisation, which had involved the creation of separate UG, PGT and finance teams, it was not popular with staff members as there was less focus at the Subject level. The Panel was encouraged to note that there was a current bid to increase administrative support by three more posts as part of the 2013-14 budget discussions.

Sessional Teachers

3.8.11 The Panel noted from meetings with staff and the SER that sessional teachers played a vital role in the support of teaching and learning provision following reduced staffing post-VSER and increasing student numbers. The group of four sessional teachers included Dr Patrick Bell, who was awarded a Student Teaching Award last session. The Review Panel **commends** the professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm of sessional teachers.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

3.8.12 Four members of the Panel met with four Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who described their substantive and varied teaching experience. The Review Panel **commends** the professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of Graduate Teaching Assistants, who were committed to their students and teaching role.

- 3.8.13 The Panel discussed with GTAs the level of support provided by the Subject. While the GTAs had observed some improvement, they identified several areas for development that included: guidance/support for their pastoral role; better communication and engagement (email/face-to-face) with staff; and increased opportunities for peer observation. The SER stated that Course Conveners offered to observe GTAs and give feedback on performance but it was noted that this monitoring support was not consistent. GTAs acknowledged the mentoring role of Course Conveners and in particular the support offered in course 2B. The Review Panel **commends** the development and mentoring of Graduate Teaching Assistants supporting the Politics 2B course, which includes weekly coffee mornings to discuss their teaching requirements/best practice by Dr Cian O'Driscoll. The Panel noted plans to roll out regular coffee mornings for GTAs to all pre-Honours courses and **encourages** the Subject to extend good practice in support mechanisms and systems of feedback in the development of the role of Graduate Teaching Assistants.
- 3.8.14 Panel members were concerned that GTAs did not feel that they were sufficiently engaged with Course Conveners or the Subject and even more worryingly, considered that their contribution was not valued by the Subject. There was also no clear evidence of systematic opportunities for them to contribute and provide feedback in the development of current teaching or curriculum monitoring, planning review processes. The Panel **encourages** the Subject to acknowledge the valuable contribution by GTAs, who have responsibility for all pre-Honours tutorials and a significant amount of assessment for Levels 1 and 2, and whose considerable knowledge of pre-Honours students was not currently being tapped into. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject formalises its engagement with Graduate Teaching Assistants through Annual Monitoring, Course Review and representation at Staff Student Liaison Committee and supports the development of their role by facilitating a dialogue around teaching requirements/best practice and providing opportunities for feedback on their performance.
- 3.8.15 Despite a recent improvement in the hourly rate of pay, it was noted that there were still issues in relation to preparation times and it was common for GTAs to work outside hours negotiated for payment. The Head of School confirmed that the School's largest GTA budget was for Politics. He reported that a case had been successfully presented to the College of Social Sciences, who had agreed to increase the GTA budget allocation for 2013-14, subject to some limits which related to zero hours contracts, over-time for progression etc.
- 3.8.16 GTAs were enthusiastic about the statutory LTC training provision which they had found very useful. However they were not aware of any Subject/School provision. The Background; Terms and Conditions for GTAs 2012-13 detailed School provision for 'course planning or subject meetings' whereby GTAs could claim for up to 4 hours in Semester 1 and 3 hours in Semester 2 for these purposes. It was noted that although there was no specific reference to training there was an implicit understanding that this time allocation could be used for training. The Review Panel **recommends** the School of Social and Political Sciences liaises with the Subject, in the provision of discipline-specific training for Graduate Teaching Assistants which complements the generic training provided by Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), in compliance with Senate Regulations.

(see guidance available through LTC

website: http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/taughtcourses/graduate_teaching_assistant_tutors_and_demonstrators_statutory_training/)

Accommodation

3.8.17 Accommodation available to the Subject was currently unable to meet the needs of high student numbers and resulting large class sizes. The largest lecture theatre capacity was too small to meet pre-Honours needs and rooms offered for tutorials were too small for class sizes that could exceed maximum capacity of 17 to 20. It was also noted that the Subject Seminar organisers experienced considerable difficulty in finding suitable teaching space that accommodated the volume of Politics teaching/research staff and students. The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences and the University address serious accommodation issues by offering alternative or additional teaching space that meets the needs of the Subject.

IT

3.8.18 The Panel welcomed the Subject's extensive use of Moodle and other electronic resources to support learning and teaching. The postgraduate group reflected that while Moodle was effective in the distribution of information it was not interactive and the Panel felt that the Subject should consider the use of interactive elements within Moodle, software that enabled peer review or even platforms popular with students such as Twitter. The Panel **encourages** the Subject to liaise with staff from Learning and Technology unit, Learning and Teaching Centre to consider the use of TELT software/tools that facilitate peer critique/review, in the development of teaching and learning without additional workload burden.

Library

3.8.19 The Review Panel noted that library facilities included the Russian and Eastern European collection that is world-renowned and **commends** access for students and staff to major research library, facilitated by Dr Kay Munro, who also attends Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings.

4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards

External Examiners

4.1 External Examiner reports highlighted many examples of good practice which included: impressive curriculum content/range; range and level of attention given to the marking of essays and exams; and Course Conveners who had a 'fair amount' of autonomy with respect to course organization/ownership, which was regarded as 'good for motivation and morale'. Issues identified included variance in choice of essay/exam questions, in particular for comparative classes whereby one or two of the countries seemed to get more questions than others included on course; a high degree of consistency between essay marks and examination marks suggesting use of feedback to improve outcome; adherence to Code of Assessment (considered in Section 3.3.1) and the high number of students with relatively poor English language skills which negatively impacted on performance (see Section 3.6.3).

Annual Monitoring

4.2 Good practice identified in Annual Monitoring reports included: videoing of lectures and breakout sessions; fortnightly informal meetings set up between tutors and staff to share ideas on best practice and feedback on lectures; extra sessions on skills for GTA marking; administrative support and Subject Librarian. Challenges highlighted included: inadequate teaching rooms and seminar space; reduction in administrative support; on-going concerns regarding efficacy of MyCampus in terms of resources and staff time, particularly in relation to student recruitment (conversion rates); and GIC

students' poor language skills which impacted negatively on tutorial and exam performance. It was noted that this matter was raised at the End of Year Board meeting and informal discussions continued.

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

Student Feedback

5.1 The Subject's National Student Survey (NSS) (2012) results were described as disappointing, with 16 out of first 21 questions falling below University's KPI of 80%. Overall satisfaction (Question 22) was 80%, which was below the School average. The Panel noted SER comments regarding a possible relationship between high staff-student ratios and NSS performance and diminished sense of community in transition to the school structure (see Section 5.3). There was also discussion around a closer focus on Personal Development Planning to increase student awareness of course learning outcomes (see Section 3.2.3); improving student understanding and articulation by making transferable skills more explicit for undergraduates (see Section 3.4.7). Postgraduates who met with the Panel reported that they had not attended Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), feedback from staff in terms of expectations as course representative was not forthcoming and that staff could be more encouraging and supportive of the process in general. Staff members pointed out that PGT students had the opportunity to feed into programme approval. It was noted that students had also been consulted on the M.Sc. Global Security module and M.Sc. Chinese Studies, where the Subject had introduced new modules in response to student feedback.

Committees

5.2 The Subject/School had a number of committees that considered teaching and learning provision: School Learning and Teaching Committee; Subject Undergraduate Committee; postgraduate and undergraduate Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and committees specific to pre-Honours undergraduate levels. These committees appeared to have properly scheduled meetings and most were well attended by both staff and students. The undergraduate student group confirmed that they were able to feedback on specific issues through SSLC but that the flow of information could be improved. The Review Panel *encourages* the continued refinement of the committee system embedded in the governance of the Subject and making good use of its agendas and minutes to improve communication between stakeholders. There was also a suggestion that standing agenda items could be introduced in relation to good practice, to facilitate dissemination across the School.

Transition to School

5.3 The SER identified numerous benefits in the transition to the School of Social and Political Sciences post re-structuring of the University which included: a School Workload model; increased range of Honours options and availability of dissertation supervisors; expanded potential for interdisciplinary teaching; creation of mandatory Quantitative and/or Qualitative Methods in Social Sciences. Concerns included: succession management following significant number of retirements, departures and VSERs which had in turn led to an over-reliance on use of sessional teachers and reduced control over appointments; clarification of lines of responsibility, centralisation of administrative staff that had 'de-personalised service' despite acknowledged efficiency gains in terms

of submission of assessed work; and the perceived absence of a Politics community.

- 5.4 The Subject's experience in their transition to School was further developed in the meeting with staff members. Staff reiterated concerns in relation to the issue of appointments, which now operated at School level, effectively diluting, in their opinion, the Subject's input to selection as the appointment panel was now composed with fewer Politics staff. The Panel **encourages** the Subject to engage with staff to discuss new posts and utilise opportunities through drawing up job descriptions and discussion in relation to priorities, to maximise their input to appointment process. The Panel noted SER commentary around appropriateness and integrity of conducting staff Personal and Development Reviews following re-structuring and termination of the Head of Department post. As a result there was no single person to monitor and address issues related to collective teaching provision. This highlighted the requirement for clarity and strengthening of lines of accountability between Subject, School and College.

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

6.1 Strengths/Good Practice

- Research-led teaching from conscientious and skilled staff;
- Professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm of Sessional teachers;
- Probationary staff enthusiastic and very well supported by academic and administrative staff members;
- The recruitment of high-calibre undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds and cultures;
- The wide-ranging, flexible and stimulating curriculum;
- Dedicated and enthusiastic GTAs;
- Support and mentoring provided to GTAs by Dr Cian O'Driscoll (Politics 2B);
- Diversity of assessment methods on offer, including of reflective journals;
- The formative feedback scheme developed by Dr Katherine Allison;
- The skilled and dedicated subject-level administrative staff, and in particular Mrs Margaret Murray, who support staff and students;
- Access to research library, facilitated by Dr Kay Munro, who also attends Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings;
- Availability of on-line recordings of lectures for pre-honours teaching;

- Study Abroad programme;
- Collaborative and reflective approach of Self Evaluation Report.

6.2 **Areas for Improvement**

- Staff Student Ratio;
- Teaching space that meets the needs of increasing numbers of students;
- Liaison with School/College/RIO in the development of new programmes;
- Consistent approach in the communication of assessable Intended Learning Outcomes;
- Accuracy of course descriptors;
- More explicit communication of transferable skills;
- Pre-Honours induction;
- Tutorial support for international undergraduate students;
- Essay submission and use of Turnitin;
- Feedback on assessment;
- Strategy and action plan for employability and graduate attributes;
- Subject-specific course examples for across-discipline teaching provision;
- Training of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs);
- Engagement with GTAs to support and develop their role.

6.3 **Conclusion**

The Panel was impressed by the positive feedback for teaching and administrative staff, from both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students about being taught at the University of Glasgow and their experience in Glasgow. However the Subject was subject to resource constraints which presented significant challenges in terms of a phase of reduced academic and administrative staff supporting significant and increasing numbers of pre-Honours students; and a sense of disenfranchisement following restructuring within the School and College. This had resulted in multiple negative impacts including: high SSR; accommodation issues; low staff morale; over-reliance on GTAs and sessional teachers, and over-burdened administrative staff, which potentially undermine the student learning experience. Panel members were

very concerned that the current approach was unsustainable and required careful utilisation of resources and continued investment from the School of Social and Political Sciences and the College of Social Sciences. The Panel *recommends* the Subject, School and College work closely and urgently to: address resourcing concerns; gain a better understanding of College and School strategies; and support the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the subject which draws on its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure.

6.4 Commendations

Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** the conscientious and reflective approach of skilled and research-led teaching staff operating at maximum capacity [paragraph 3.8.1].

Commendation 2

The Review Panel **commends** the professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm of Sessional teachers [paragraph 3.8.11].

Commendation 3

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject's support and mentoring arrangements to integrate probationary members to body of staff [paragraph 3.8.9].

Commendation 4

The Panel **commends** the Subject on the recruitment of highly qualified students at undergraduate level [paragraph 3.5.1].

Commendation 5

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject's engagement with the widening participation (WP) agenda and in particular the number of Diploma students recruited through a variety of initiatives [paragraph 3.5.8].

Commendation 6

The Review Panel **commends** the wide range and challenging suite of courses that addresses core areas within the subject discipline and offers flexibility in terms of specialisation and focus [paragraph 3.4.1].

Commendation 7

The Review Panel **commends** the professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of Graduate Teaching Assistants who were committed to their students and teaching role [paragraph 3.8.12].

Commendation 8

The Review Panel **commends** the development and mentoring of Graduate Teaching Assistants supporting the Politics 2B course, which includes weekly coffee mornings to discuss their teaching requirements/best practice by Dr Cian O'Driscoll [paragraph 3.8.13].

Commendation 9

The Review Panel **commends** the diversity of assessment methods on offer, meeting the varying needs of student abilities/expectations and professional criteria in the development of transferable skills [paragraph 3.3.2].

Commendation 10

The Review Panel **commends** the use of reflective journals in the Politics Honours module developed to encourage students to consider the nature and quality of their communication and to reflect on the relationship between theory and practice, potential issues and their own learning process and [paragraph 3.3.2].

Commendation 11

The Review Panel **commends** formative feedback scheme developed by Dr Katherine Allison [paragraph 3.3.6].

Commendation 12

The Panel **commends** the skilled and dedicated subject-level administrative staff, and in particular Mrs Margaret Murray, who support academic staff and students [paragraph 3.8.10].

Commendation 13

The Review Panel noted that library facilities included the Russian and Eastern European collection that is world-renowned and **commends** access for students and staff to major research library, facilitated by Dr Kay Munro, who also attends Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings [paragraph 3.8.19].

Commendation 14

The Review Panel **commends** the recording of Level 1 and 2 lectures that are provided online via Moodle to facilitate the learning opportunities for a diverse student cohort with differing backgrounds, cultures and physical needs [paragraph 3.7.2].

Commendation 15

The Panel **commends** the Subject on the success of its Study Abroad programme [paragraph 3.4.15].

Commendation 16

The Review Panel **commends** the SER for its collaborative and reflective approach, which delivered an honest, self-critical analysis of the Subject's activities, including numerous examples of innovation and good practice, and opportunities emerging from significant challenges the Subject had encountered in the bedding down of new arrangements within the School of Social and Political Sciences [paragraph 1.1.5].

6.5 **Recommendations**

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the Subject. It is important to

note that the majority of these recommendations refer to tasks or issues identified by the Subject for action either prior to the Review or in the SER. The Panel recognised that the full resolution of Recommendations 8, 9, 11 and 12 would be somewhat dependent on Recommendations 1 and 2, as these related to the resourcing and capacity. However, in the meantime, the Subject should seek to progress the enhancements to its provision referred to in these recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The Panel **recommends** the Subject, School and College work closely and urgently to: address resourcing concerns; gain a better understanding of College and School strategies; and support the Head of Subject to develop, with colleagues, a plan for development of the subject which draws on its strengths and the opportunities afforded it in the new organisational structure [*paragraph Conclusion*].

For the attention of: **Head of College/School/Subject**

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences urgently takes appropriate steps to reduce the staff student ratio, liberating staff to be more creative and to spend more effort in the provision and enhancement of the student learning [*paragraph 3.8.6*].

For the attention of: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of Subject/School**

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel **recommends** that the College of Social Sciences and the University address serious accommodation issues by offering alternative or additional teaching space that meets the needs of the Subject [*paragraph 3.8.17*].

For the attention of: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of Subject/School**

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject liaises with RIO to engage constructively with appropriate colleagues in the College and School in the consideration of the viability of current and new PGT programmes, which respond to student needs and build on the strengths of the subject [*paragraph 3.5.5*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject and Director of RIO**

For information: **Head of College**

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel **recommends** that that the Subject engages directly with staff from Learning and Teaching Centre and through online support available (see Guidance Notes: http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_106193_en.pdf) to ensure a consistent approach in the communication of assessable Intended Learning Outcomes to students [*paragraph 3.2.1*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**
For information: **ADU, Learning and Teaching Centre**

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject engages with students, through the Staff Student Liaison Committee, in a review of course descriptors that accurately reflect course content [*paragraph 3.2.1*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject make transferable skills more explicit to students, via Programme Aims/Intended Learning Outcomes through links with initiatives and good practice available in the School of Social and Political Sciences, College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre [*paragraph 3.4.7*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 8¹

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject introduces pre-Honours induction for junior honours students, timed appropriately, to guide and support undergraduate students in the transition to Honours [*paragraph 3.6.4*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 9²

The Panel **recommends** the Subject undertakes a review of tutorials to both reduce tutorial class sizes for honours students and ensure that provision is meeting the needs of international undergraduate students [*paragraph 3.7.1*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject extends plans in relation to online essay submission and with a view to reducing the administrative burden, to include all written work through Turnitin, Moodle or similar, in consultation with the College of Social Sciences and the Learning and Teaching Centre. The Subject should also consider the scheduling of submission deadlines to manage the load on IT systems and minimise the risk of system breakdown [*paragraph 3.3.7*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

¹ The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recommendations 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 8, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see *paragraph 6.3.2*].

² The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recommendations 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 9, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see *paragraph 6.3.2*].

For information: **Head of College**

For information: **Head of ADU, Learning and Teaching Centre**

Recommendation 11³

The Panel **recommends** that the Subject should take steps to reconcile student needs for improved feedback on assessment with the variable practise across the subject area, drawing on appropriate examples of good practice from within the Subject [*paragraph 3.3.5*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 12⁴

The Review panel **recommends** the subject to engage with internal and external stakeholders to develop a strategy and plan for embedding applied learning (employability) and reflection (PDP) within the Graduate Attribute framework. Where appropriate the approach adopted should involve the Careers Service, Club 21, the Politics Society, potential employers and alumni, together with good practice initiatives in the College of Social [*paragraph 3.4.14*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

For information: **Director, Careers Service**

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject to liaise with course lecturers to ensure the inclusion of sufficient subject-specific examples, particularly for the mandatory Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Social Sciences courses, to meet the needs of Politics students in cross-discipline teaching provision [*paragraph 3.4.3*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject/School**

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject formalises its engagement with Graduate Teaching Assistants through Annual Monitoring, Course Review and representation at Staff Student Liaison Committee and supports the development of their role by facilitating a dialogue around teaching requirements/best practice and providing opportunities for feedback on their performance [*paragraph 3.8.14*].

For the attention of: **Head of Subject**

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel **recommends** the School of Social and Political Sciences liaises with the Subject, in the provision of discipline-specific training for Graduate Teaching Assistants which complements the generic training provided by Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC), in compliance with Senate Regulations. (see guidance available through LTC website: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching/taughtcourses/graduat>

The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recs 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 11, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see *paragraph 6.3.2*].

⁴ The Panel took the view that the issues raised in Recs 1 and 2 needed to be addressed before the Subject was able to respond to Recommendations 12, as this related to the resourcing and capacity that the Subject needed to implement further ongoing enhancements to its provision [see *paragraph 6.3.2*]

[eteachingassistantstutorsanddemonstratorsstatutorytraining/](#)) [paragraph 3.8.16].

For the attention of: **Head of School**

For information: **Head of Subject**