

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – 15 April 2014

Periodic Subject Review: Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of School of Modern Languages and Cultures held on 18 and 19 February 2013

Mr Gavin Lee, Clerk to the Review Panel

Conclusions

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

Recommendations

A number of recommendations had been made, many of which concern areas that the School itself highlighted for further development prior to the review as part of the work to integrate the Language Centre into the School or in the SER.

The recommendations have been cross referenced to the paragraphs in to text of the report to which they refer. They are listed in the order of appearance in the report.

Recommendation 1

The Team **recommends** that the School review the sustainability of provision and develop a strategic approach to development of new (or maintenance of existing) language provision to meet market demands and support the strategic development of the School. [Paragraph 3.5]

For Action: Head of School

Response

The School believes that its current provision is sustainable. For the moment, there will be no new proposal to re-introduce a Slavonic Studies programme, although Czech and Polish maintain a strong presence at levels 1 and 2 in collaboration with CEES and Comparative

Literature, and Russian continues as a separate Joint Honours programme. A Joint Honours programme in Portuguese has been approved, and the structure of the existing Hispanic Studies programme will be reviewed during 2014-15 in the light of this development.

The School's major strategic priority is the introduction of provision in Mandarin. A Lecturer in Chinese (Mandarin) will be appointed to start in September 2014 and will contribute to the MSc in Translation Studies as well as credit-bearing courses in Chinese language at UG and PG level. Working with the Confucius Institute and Chinese Studies in Social Sciences, the School will seek to plan for further development of Chinese language provision in the short to medium term.

New credit-bearing International Mobility language courses run by the MFL unit of the Language Centre were introduced in 2013-14 and have proved successful. From a small core of languages on offer this year, the range will be expanded in line with student demand.

Recommendation 2

The Team **recommends** that the School moves forward with tighter integration of the Language Centre within the School on an academic and administrative basis to realise fully the potential benefits of the merger. [Paragraph 3.2]

For Action: Head of School

Response

Tighter integration of the Language Centre into SMLC is an ongoing project, but several major steps have been taken since the Review that have already had significant benefits for our activities.

Since June 2013, there has been a change to staff engagement practices for Language Centre and all Language Centre temporary tutors are now employed on short term contracts rather than engaged as atypicals. This means that they are automatically included in the SMLC all staff mailing list [mlc-staff@glasgow.ac.uk], improving cross-School communication. The Language Centre has been included as a standing item at the School Meeting, SMLC Executive Committee and Learning & Teaching Committee and both of these committees have Language Centre representation. In addition, the Language Centre is represented at the SMLC Post Graduate Committee and Web Committee, and one of the EFL staff has joined a small working party on assessment criteria.

Although there have been fewer opportunities to extend research opportunities to Language Centre staff as tutors are employed on a Teaching Only basis, the SMLC Strategic Research Fund has been opened for bids from Teaching Only and MPA staff and all staff are encouraged to participate in the SMLC seminar series, reading groups and 'work in progress' events.

A review of the Language Centre's MFL unit is currently underway, and although it is too early at this stage to say what will emerge, desired outcomes include greater integration of all forms

of foreign language teaching across the School and more opportunities to share good practice across a wide range of teaching situations. The review is being conducted by SMLC with appropriate input from the College of Arts, and is following the Management of Organisational Change Policy/Procedure. Planning for any Language Centre-based MFL activities will be carried out in consultation with other colleagues in the School.

During 2013, training activity took place to ensure greater resilience within the School administration, for example the PA to Head of School and a temporary grade 3 administrator learnt core IELTS activity and the MLC Language Secretaries learnt the processes relating to student applications for summer pre-sessional courses. This closer way of working also facilitated the staff to informally peer-review each other's activity and has led to a shared project to ensure all Language Centre courses are available to students via My Campus and can be supported using the new UoG processes and systems such as CMIS. Functions historically seen as belonging to the Language Centre now sit within School management structure (IELTS, Library, Admin and Student Support are overseen by the HoSA).

In January 2014, building works were carried out in the Hetherington Building to allow the Head of School, Head of School Administration, MLC Secretaries and Language Centre Office to come together in an open plan area. Work is ongoing to fully realise the potential of this change during 2014, but there has been an immediate and spontaneous increase in cross-working between the two teams and visitors have all noted the relaxed, positive atmosphere and improved working conditions.

Recommendation 3

The Team recommended that the School work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes. [Paragraph 4.8.4]

For Action: Head of School

For information: Dean (Learning and Teaching)

Response

This is the most challenging of the Review's recommendations because of continued constraints on resources that make it difficult simply to opt to provide weekly oral classes. In the light of this, a working group has been created to review the available options, including different forms of equivalent provision. This task needs to be placed in the context of more general discussions about the way speaking activities are balanced and integrated with teaching of the other core skills (writing, listening and reading). The working group will report its findings to the School in Semester 1 2014 for discussion and agreement, followed by implementation of the chosen solution in 2015-16 (see Appendix 1 for terms of reference). Appendix 1 makes reference in the

Terms of Reference to 'gather[ing] and review[ing] student feedback relating to classroom practices in language teaching – especially in relation to oral classes – and their views on the alignment between teaching and assessment'. This will be done through reviewing existing course feedback but also through direct engagement with students (e.g. focus groups and tailor-made questionnaires). Student engagement in the process will also be vital after the working party has produced its recommendations, while these are being discussed by the School. It would be at this stage that – if necessary – conversations about 'equivalent provision' would be held directly with student representatives.

The School considered having student membership of the working group but this was not felt to be appropriate. The process will involve detailed discussions of language-teaching methodology to which a student member is unlikely to be able to contribute. This does not preclude the possibility of inviting one or more students to attend particular meetings if it is felt that this would be helpful.

Recommendation 4

The Team **recommends** that GTA and UNLT pay and recognition is reviewed by the School and College to ensure the processes operated by the School are in line with University policy such that GTA and UNLT staff receive fair recompense for the quantity, and quality, of work they deliver. [Paragraph 4.8.8]

For Action: Head of School

For Information: Dean (Learning and Teaching)

Response

As mentioned in Recommendation 1, all Language Centre temporary tutors are now employed on short term contracts rather than engaged as atypicals. The HoSA is working with College of Arts HR to assess the feasibility of adopting this practice in the rest of SMLC, but in the interim has established Affiliate status for all Atypical / GTA teachers in order that they can be granted the same building access and IT permissions as employed staff.

Recommendation 5

The Team **recommends** that the School should provide clarity and more information around feedback processes deployed in the School to ensure that students are aware:

- When feedback will be provided
- What constitutes feedback
- That the University guidelines permit a three week timeframe for feedback on assessed work

- If feedback cannot be given within the three week timeframe, why this is the case and when the students can expect the feedback
- That the return of work on a weekly or fortnightly basis is exemplary practice [Paragraph 4.3.11]

For Action: School Learning and Teaching Convener

Response

The School has created the post of Assessment Officer to support the Learning and Teaching Convener, and one of the specific remits of this role is to find more effective ways of explaining the purpose, timing and nature of feedback to students, as well as disseminating good practice in the quality of the feedback itself. In a related development, the school has further enhanced the existing range of feedback provided by establishing new standard detailed feedback forms for honours oral exams, the first of which was used following oral presentations in December 2013.

Further information has been given to students about the timing and kind of feedback they can expect. For example, an email explaining this was sent to Honours students during the period after Christmas when large numbers of exams and dissertation were being returned. This kind of communication will of course need to be updated and resent at the same time each year to each new cohort of students.

Recommendation 6

The Team **recommends** that the School reviews the information provided to students detailing the key administrative contacts, their respective responsibilities and the appropriate methods to enquire (e.g. in person, telephone and email contact details). [Paragraph 4.7.7]

For Action: Head of School

For information: Head of School Administration

Response

The unified administration area mentioned in Recommendation 3 now provides a single reception for students and visitors. A laminated list of administrative staff areas of responsibility is displayed by the reception desk and students receive regular email contact from the relevant administrator during the academic year so are generally clear who to contact and how. Any enquiries where it is unclear who to contact are generally received to the SMLC, EFL or MFL enquiries emails, Head of School Administration or occasionally Head of School.

As part of the development of the SMLC webpages, the School has followed the approach used by College of Arts and as well as an A to Z by staff surname has developed a directory by role / responsibility. One issue that contributed to student comments at the time of the PSR was that the HoSA was an agency temp and therefore it was the previous post holder's name and

contact details displayed on the website: we will endeavour to make sure this problem does not occur again.

Recommendation 7

The Team **recommends** that the School continues to develop and improve the consistency of use of Moodle across the School, utilising the skills and expertise of internal good practice (e.g. French) to support and enhance Moodle provision. The use of a sub-committee of School Learning and Teaching Committee, with representatives from across the School and students was an effective mechanism for implementing curriculum developments, and may also be suitable for delivering enhanced Moodle provision. [Paragraph 4.8.16]

For Action: School Learning and Teaching Convener

Response

The MLC Language Secretaries are now Moodle Managers for their respective language areas, with a remit to assist academic staff in identifying and uploading suitable content and moderating a standard approach across the School. The School used the transition to Moodle 2 as an opportunity to review the structure of Moodle subcategories and courses across all programmes. In May/June 2013 there was a process of staff training in Moodle 2 and consultation across languages about how best to structure the provision, co-ordinated by the School TELT officer. The Acting Head of School and School TELT Manager communicated with staff regularly by email and at School Meetings during this process to encourage them to transfer their course materials to Moodle 2 as soon as possible.

Where previously there had been a very wide variation in the way our Moodle provision was structured across different languages, we now have in Moodle 2 a common structure based on shared programme structures. The full migration to Moodle 2 has not yet been completed for all individual courses, but we expect the few remaining Moodle 1 courses to complete the transfer over summer 2014.

Work on Moodle-based support for language teaching is ongoing and bids have been made to the Chancellor's Fund and Learning and Teaching to support the development of resources in Spanish (we await the outcome of these bids).

SMLC Working Group on Language Teaching and Oral Classes

Background

SMLC Periodic Subject Review Report (16/04/2013): Recommendation 3

The Team recommended that the School work towards delivery of weekly oral classes, or to providing equivalent provision, to achieve the desired aims of confident and independent graduates. If the School opts to develop 'equivalent provision' the School should engage with the student body to ensure that students consider that it is of equal value to weekly oral classes.

The constitution of an SMLC working group on (modern) language teaching and oral classes is primarily motivated by the above recommendation arising from the Periodic Subject Review carried out in 2013. Limitations on resources mean that it is not a simple matter to offer oral classes weekly across all programmes and the School needs to explore all available options. The main remit of the working group is therefore to do this.

However, the issue of oral provision cannot be dealt with separately from broader questions about the structure and methods of teaching on our language programmes, such as:

- Which are the most appropriate teaching methodologies to meet our students' needs and fulfil the aims of a particular course?
- How can we best balance and integrate the 'four skills' of speaking, writing, reading and listening?
- Is it possible to identify specific examples of good practice in classroom language teaching, and disseminate these across the School?
- Do the assessment tasks we set properly support and reflect the intended learning outcomes of our courses, especially when it comes to assessing oral work?

The working group therefore also needs to have a remit to examine SMLC language teaching practices as a whole, especially within levels 1 and 2 which is where student expectations are formed and which have the largest cohorts.

Membership

Given the need for a comparative perspective, the working group needs to be broadly representative of language teaching across the School. However, any working group should be relatively small so that it is as agile and productive as possible. It is therefore proposed that one member of the group be drawn from each of the languages that is currently offered as the major component of a degree programme (French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian), with an invitation to programme directors of the other languages to propose a particular member if they have substantial expertise in language teaching methodology. The group will be chaired by the Head of School, and the Convenor of Learning and Teaching and the Language Centre's

Director of MFL will be ex-officio members. Others with relevant expertise (e.g. in EFL teaching or teacher training) may be co-opted or invited to attend as necessary. The PA to Head of School will clerk meetings if necessary.

Terms of Reference

The working group is charged with the following tasks:

- To gather all necessary information about current practices in language teaching, especially in oral classes, across all of the School's credit-bearing courses.
- To gather and review student feedback relating to classroom practices in language teaching – especially in relation to oral classes – and their views on the alignment between teaching and assessment.
- To identify specific models of good practice in the School and to discuss ways in which these might be shared.
- To review relevant literature on language teaching methodologies and the most effective forms of speaking activity for different levels.
- To consider the pros and cons of both weekly oral classes and equivalent provision, and to discuss the forms that this equivalent provision might take.
- To produce a list of recommendations that specifically address PSR Recommendation 3, but that might have broader implications for our language teaching, especially at levels 1 and 2.

It is not part of the role of the working group to debate issues of resourcing for the models it may propose. Costings and resourcing models will be provided by the Head of School/Head of School Admin at the stage where the options are presented to the School.

Timetable

It is anticipated that the group will begin meeting after the Easter break and divide its work into two phases:

Phase 1: information gathering and general discussion of ideas/issues – May to June 2014

Phase 2: development of recommendations – September to November 2014

Recommendations would then be discussed by the School and a plan made for implementation in the academic year 2015-16.

Outputs

End of phase 1: a short summary paper identifying the issues that have been addressed up to that point, for wide circulation.

End of phase 2: a list of recommendations to be discussed by the School as a whole.