

## UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

### Academic Standards Committee – 25 and 26 February 2014

### Periodic Subject Review: Report of the Review of Sociology

Lesley Fielding, Clerk to the Review Panel

#### Review Panel:

Professor John Briggs, (Convener), Clerk of Senate and Vice Principal  
Professor David Inglis, University of Exeter, External Subject Specialist  
Professor Azrini Wahidin, Nottingham Trent University, External Subject Specialist  
Mr Caelum Davies, Student Representative  
Professor Alison Phipps, Education, Cognate Member  
Professor Karen Lury, Senate Assessor on Court  
Dr Vicky Gunn, Learning & Teaching Centre  
Mrs Lesley Fielding, Senate Office, Clerk to the Review Panel  
Mrs Janet Fleming, Senate Office, Observer

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Sociology is a multidisciplinary Subject Area, in the School of Social and Political Sciences. The School of Social and Political Sciences is one of five Schools within the College of Social Sciences.
- 1.2 Sociology staff are based mainly within the Adam Smith Building, although Ivy Lodge is the base for the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research. Whilst teaching is spread around the main campus, the majority of the teaching is carried out in the Adam Smith Building.
- 1.3 The previous internal review (under the DPTLA process) took place in November 2007, prior to restructuring, as the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Applied Social Sciences. The review commended the then Department for its overall quality of provision, conscientious approach to feedback and the strength of its research-led teaching. A number of recommendations were made including the review of the provision of the Honours 'General Paper' and the Dissertation options and fuller engagement with the Careers Service and the PDP processes.
- 1.4 Preparation of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) was undertaken by a number of teaching and administrative staff under the editorial leadership of Professor Fergus McNeill, Head of Subject, and Dr Andy Smith, Deputy Head of Subject. The Review Panel was pleased to note that wide consultation on the discussion had taken place through specially convened preliminary meetings with a wide spread of Sociology staff. The draft version of the SER was discussed at staff and student meetings.
- 1.5 The Review Panel considered that the SER was self-aware and contained a self-critical appraisal of the challenges facing teaching provision at this time.

- 1.6 The Review Panel met with the Head of School (Professor Chris Carmen), Head of Subject Area (Professor Fergus McNeill), Deputy Head of Subject (Dr Andy Smith) and the Dean of Learning and Teaching (Dr Moira Fischbacher-Smith). The Review Panel also met with twelve staff, one probationer, six Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), five postgraduate and twelve undergraduate students representing all levels of provision. The undergraduate students were split into two groups of similar composition and each group met with half the Review Panel.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Headcount</b>
Level 1A	565
Level 1B	466
Level 2A	175
Level 2B	164
Level 3	50
Honours	63
Undergraduate Total	1460
Postgraduate Taught (Sociology)	29
Postgraduate Taught (Criminology)	27
Postgraduate Research*	50 (FT) 10 (PT)

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

The Review Panel considered the following range of provision offered by the School/Subject Area.

#### Undergraduate

- MA (Soc Sci) Single Honours degree in Sociology
- MA (Soc Sci) Joint honours degree in Sociology (with various Social Sciences subjects)
- MA Joint Honours degree in Sociology (with various Arts subjects)
- MA (Soc Sci) (Three year Ordinary Degree)

#### Postgraduate

- MSc in Sociology
- MRes in Sociology
- MSc in Equality and Human Rights
- MRes in Equality and Human Rights
- MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice
- MSc in Transnational Crime, Justice and Security
- MRes in Criminology
- MSc in Global Health

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

The Review Panel considered the Subject Area to be extremely successful and was satisfied that the aims were appropriate and aligned well with the University Strategic Plan, particularly in relation to research, teaching and interdisciplinary teaching. However, the Review Panel considered that, whilst the Subject Area had risen to the numerous challenges presented last session, the key issue was now that of long term sustainability. Sociology at the University of Glasgow is one of the leading subject providers in the United Kingdom. However, it is essential that a number of critical decisions be made in order to sustain this position. Further recommendations to achieve this will be made at a later stage of the document. The Review Panel identified a need for the Subject Area to develop a long-term vision through which they could distinguish themselves from other universities and communicate more effectively their unique inter-disciplinary nature (combining Anthropology, Criminology and Sociology), their distinctive voice and their civic-minded ethos which are pivotal features of the Subject Area. The Review Panel considered that, in order for the Subject Area to develop such a long-term vision, it was essential that it worked closely with the School and College. The Review Panel **recommends** that discussions take place with the School and College about resources to support the achievement of the Subject Area's long-term vision for learning and teaching.

## 3. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

### 3.1 *Aims including final sub-section below:*

The aims of the School's undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes were clear and broad.

The Review Panel, guided by the views of the External Subject Specialists, **confirms** that, at this time, the programmes offered by the 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)*

The Review Panel confirmed that students were provided with programme details and course Intended Learning Outcomes through the relevant handbooks. The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for providing clearly articulated ILOs. The ILOs reflected an excellent understanding of the benchmark statements and provided clear examples of both subject-specific and other skills that are expected from the students enrolled on this programme.

### 3.3 *Assessment, Feedback and Achievement*

3.3.1 The Review Panel considered that assessment was carefully managed. In particular, the Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the General Paper which it considered to be an impressive and innovative form of assessment aimed at encouraging and developing students' ability to think synoptically. The undergraduate students expressed their appreciation of the thought and intent behind the paper.

3.3.2 Whilst from the SER there was little evidence of diversity in the Subject Area's forms of assessment, the Review Panel ascertained that other forms of

assessment, such as film reviews, oral presentations and the General Paper, were used. The Head of Subject outlined plans to develop this further at Honours level through the Engaged Sociology programme. However the Panel noted staff had reservations regarding formal non-written assessment methods due to perceived practical difficulties. The Review panel considered this should not prevent the introduction of alternative forms of assessment. There are a number of opportunities available to undertake curriculum mapping and assessment blueprinting, particularly those associated with the University's engagement with the current Enhancement Theme as well as the implementation of the Q-Step project. These opportunities would provide an overview of assessment needs over the four year programme. The Review Panel welcomed the innovations as outlined for Engaged Sociology. However, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area review their range of assessments across the programmes utilising the opportunities provided by the Q-Step project in collaboration with the relevant member of the Learning and Teaching Centre, and incorporating alternative methods of assessment such as report writing and reflective diaries.

3.3.3 The Review Panel was satisfied that the Subject Area's feedback was clear with a robust moderating and second marking system implemented, as appropriate. The Review Panel noted that, as identified in the SER, the NSS results for feedback from students had fallen and require review. The Review Panel acknowledged the challenges that the Subject Area faced with feedback, particularly in view of the size of the Level 1 cohort and the ensuing demands on staff time, and **commends** the Subject Area for continuing to provide the level of feedback which, despite the drop in the NSS score, remained good overall. In exploring this issue further with undergraduate students, references to "vague feedback", lack of depth and, at Level 1, the slow return of feedback were made. Students observed that there was a marked improvement by Level 3 in terms of both quality and speed of return of feedback. The Panel explored this issue and was concerned that some GTAs could take up to 90 minutes to mark an essay at Level 1. The Panel appreciated that marking would take longer for newer staff and acknowledged that the GTAs wished to provide detailed and informative feedback. Nevertheless, it considered that 90 minutes were excessive and not an efficient use of time. The GTAs received essay marking training from the course convener; however, the Review Panel considered further training in relation to marking and providing feedback was required. In order to address the feedback issue, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area arranges for training, through the GTA Development Coordinator within the Academic Development Unit of the Learning and Teaching Centre, on essay marking and feedback for all GTAs.

3.3.4 Postgraduate students commented favourably on their experience of the feedback process although, due to the structure of the programme, no formal feedback was received during the first semester. This created a sense of uncertainty among the postgraduate students with regard to their performance. The Review Panel suggests that the Subject Area consider ways in which to address this issue in order that the postgraduate students receive some formal feedback before the end of Semester 1.

### 3.4 *Curriculum Design, Development and Content*

3.4.1 The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the broad and impressive range of courses offered and the level of research-led teaching conducted by staff which allowed for diversity and flexibility within the Honours programme. The Panel noted the inter-disciplinary nature of the Subject Area and the

distinctive global focus present at all levels of the curriculum. Students were exceptionally positive about the courses available.

- 3.4.2 From discussions with the undergraduate students, and as identified in the SER, the Review Panel considered that, whilst the Level 1 provision was the subject's main advertisement for Sociology, this was less evident at Level 2. The Panel was pleased to note that lecturers held workshops, at the end of Level 2 lecture blocks, to discuss research issues and challenges. The Panel also acknowledged the staff view that pre-Honours courses developed a wider skills base including the development of empirical skills. The Review Panel concluded that Level 2 courses required greater coherence and connection to the overall programme, and **recommends** that the Subject Area undertakes a review of the Level 2 provision to address these concerns.
- 3.4.3 The taught postgraduate students on the MRes course who met with the Review Panel expressed their appreciation of the subject and were most complementary about the Subject Area and its staff. The reputation of the Subject Area had been instrumental in several of the students undertaking their postgraduate studies at Glasgow. The Review Panel explored the issue of generic courses at taught postgraduate level with the students and learned that, with regard to the College level courses Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods, these courses were considered as inadequate with a lack of staff engagement or support. The students advised that there was considerable overlap with the same courses offered by the Subject Area at undergraduate Levels 3 and 4. The Research Methods training at undergraduate level was considered to have been very good, whilst the College provision was perceived as being "superficial" and "frustrating". Additionally, there was concern that the Subject Area has to compensate for the perceived shortfalls in the generic College courses. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area and School engage at College level to review these generic Research Methods courses as a matter of urgency.

### 3.5 *Student Recruitment*

- 3.5.1 As stated in Section 2, the Subject Area has been identified as an approachable, supportive unit with a commitment to a socially engaged ethos and to their students. The term "inspiring" had been used by students when describing their appreciation of the Subject Area staff. There was considerable evidence of the staff's commitment to maintaining that support whilst under extreme pressure as a result of the unexpected and substantial increase in student numbers in session 2013-14. The result of meeting this challenge placed considerable pressure on staff. The Review Panel applauds the staff's achievement in meeting this challenge.

However, the Review Panel had serious concerns about the impact such a burden placed on both staff and students. The impact clearly has significant implications in terms of sustainability, particularly in view of the expected further increase in Education student numbers. Moreover, in relation to the student body, large classes can create a distance between lecturers and students and it could be possible for a student to speak only rarely to a member of the lecturing staff during his/her programme. The Subject Area has the potential for world class excellence. Nevertheless, in order to create this vision, the Subject Area requires the time and support to foster and formulate this vision. The Subject Area and School appeared to have limited control of certain areas of their provision including recruitment and finance. As outlined in Section 2, this lack of control seemed to be a challenge to the sustainability of the Subject Area's provision and the ability to create a long term strategy for

the future. The Subject Area was reluctant to introduce capped numbers for Level 1 and cited concerns for the impact on teaching opportunities for the postgraduate research students, among others. The Review Panel acknowledged there would be consequences from such action. In spite of this, it considered this undertaking was essential for the continued success of the Subject Area. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews student recruitment with a view to introducing capping for forthcoming sessions in order to sustain the current levels of provision.

3.5.2 The Panel had serious concerns about the levels of staffing and the impact on staff retention in relation to the consequences of increased student numbers and the failure to invest in the recruitment of new staff. This will be addressed in Section 3.8.1.

3.5.3 The Review Panel noted from the SER the small number of students enrolled on the various taught postgraduate programmes, particularly the MSc Sociology. The Panel considered the Subject Area provided substantial service teaching for other areas that did not necessarily bring benefits to the Subject Area itself, such as evidenced from the MRes students' comments pertaining to the Generic College courses. The Review Panel was aware of the difficulties of reviewing postgraduate provision and the impact on the special research areas of staff. However, the Review Panel considered that the Subject Area should not continue to invest time and resources into programmes that were unsustainable. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area undertakes a review of the taught postgraduate programmes' provision to ensure student numbers are sufficient to sustain the programmes.

### *3.6 Student Progression, Retention and Support*

3.6.1 The Review Panel noted from the meeting with the undergraduate students that a number of students had changed their intended route of study to continue with Sociology. Their decision to continue with the subject was attributed to the quality of teaching and level of support offered by the Subject Area. The Review Panel was interested in the potential bulge that could arise from the current Level 1 class and explored this further with staff and established there had been no internal discussions or structured planning for this eventuality. Staff believed that the situation would probably be easier to manage next year; however, the issue could be further complicated if substantial numbers of students continued onto Honours level. The Review Panel considered that this could present considerable difficulties for the Subject Area in terms of staff resources. It was evident that the staff are under considerable pressure to maintain the current high standard of provision offered and to accommodate an increase in Level 2 numbers in addition to Level 1 would not be sustainable. The Review Panel considers that it is essential that consideration is given to capping Level 1 numbers, as outlined in section 3.5.1, to alleviate the mounting pressure that the continuation of large numbers will create.

3.6.2 The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the level of support provided by staff to students. This was evident from the meetings with all levels of students who spoke highly of the quality of support and advice that staff provided. However, it was evident that the level of support provided by staff to students, via Moodle and email, was unsustainable. Staff acknowledged that contact went beyond regular contact hours and was becoming increasingly difficult to manage. The Review Panel considered there were a number of strategies that could be introduced to manage the level of electronic traffic such as a frequently asked questions section. Therefore, in

order to alleviate this growing pressure on an already stretched staff team, the Review Panel **recommends** the Subject Area reviews and develops a policy and guidelines with regard to staff availability via Moodle and email.

### *3.7 The Quality of Learning Opportunities*

3.7.1 The students who met with the Review Panel expressed satisfaction with the quality of their learning opportunities and their experiences as students of Sociology. The enthusiasm for their subject was evident. The Panel noted that in the 2013, 2012 and 2011 National Student Surveys, the positive responses to the statement 'Overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course' were 87% 96% and 94% respectively. The drop in overall satisfaction in 2013 was attributed to the impact of the increase in student numbers at Level 1.

3.7.2 At the meeting with the postgraduate students, the Panel was pleased to note the students' positive attitude to the programme and to learn that they would recommend the programme to other students. The students were content with the level of contact with staff.

### *3.8 Resources for Learning and Teaching*

3.8.1 The Review Panel perceived that the staff team, whilst maintaining teaching and support across all levels, was under increasing pressure due to the demands of research and teaching. The strengths of research-led teaching had implications in terms of staff buyouts, the resources required to provide teaching cover and the ensuing burden on remaining staff. Additionally, a substantial number of staff involved in the daily provision of teaching held temporary contracts. The Review Panel considered that this was not beneficial for staff progression or retention. Staffing issues were identified as a key challenge for the Subject Area. There were signs that staff recruitment was dictated by the research drive with some research staff appointments not directly meeting key teaching requirements of the Subject Area.

The Review Panel noted that a bid by the Subject Area to appoint a University Teacher (UT) had been unsuccessful and considered there would be benefits of such an appointment. In view of the substantial challenges that have been presented to the Subject Area, a strategy to address this situation was essential in order to assist the Subject Area in maintaining its position as a leading provider in Sociology. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area along with the School and College reviews the Subject Area's staffing structure to identify, if possible and appropriate, where staff appointments and contracts could be increased and/or made permanent to address the SSRs currently being experienced in the Subject Area.

3.8.2 The GTAs expressed their satisfaction with their role within Sociology. They confirmed that they were represented on the Learning and Teaching Committee and received detailed agendas for team meetings. The GTAs reported that staff were supportive and communication was open with frequent contact.

3.8.3 Within the SER, the Review Panel noted the Subject Area's concerns regarding the current status of the GTAs. Through various meetings with staff, students and GTAs, it became apparent that the role of the GTAs in delivering high quality teaching was important, particularly in view of the recent challenges of student numbers. Student feedback had indicated a high level of satisfaction with the tutoring of GTAs, with one description being that their tutorial was the "highlight" of their week. Within the SER and from meetings with the GTAs, the Review Panel learned that there was considerable concern regarding the rate

of pay for GTAs and the Subject Area had requested that this be increased and for payment to be for two essays per hour instead of three, with additional payment for tutorial preparation time which is currently one hour. The Review Panel discussed this issue with the GTAs and they expressed similar concerns. The Review Panel concurred with their concerns and **recommends** that consideration be given to the review of the preparation time and payment of GTAs.

- 3.8.4 The issue of the time spent on marking essays and providing feedback has been addressed under Section 3.3.3. However, this also raised the issues of the importance of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for GTAs, particularly as there are a number of GTAs who have been employed by the Subject Area for five years. The Review Panel considered that this was too long for an individual to remain static without any opportunity for development. The Head of Subject had advised that the Subject Area considered it would be impractical to introduce GTA exam marking this year due to the extensive preparation and support this would require from the Convenor. The Review Panel considered that, with sufficient time and training, this should not be too difficult to establish and would help address the CPD needs of the GTAs. It would also be beneficial for the GTAs to have a more formal structure for their progression and training. The Panel also considered that it would be beneficial to all parties if a senior GTA was appointed in order to provide mentoring for the others, although this should not replace staff mentoring, supervision or support. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews the CPD opportunities for GTAs with regard to extending their role, including an exploration of the possibility of providing support to undertake examination marking and to appoint a senior GTA to mentor the more junior GTAs.
- 3.8.5 The GTAs raised the issue of the clarity of payment and level of pay for Level 1 work. They advised that the breakdown of payment was unclear and GTAs were confused as exactly for what they were being paid on payslips. Through further discussion with staff, it emerged that the GTAs were not familiar with their terms and conditions which led to delayed payments. It appeared that the difficulty lay in administrative processes not being entirely understood. The Review Panel **recommends** that the School and Subject Area revisit the administrative procedures with GTAs in order to clarify the processes.
- 3.8.6 The GTAs had expressed some concern regarding their work with disabled students. They advised that they did not receive information on relevant students' disabilities until a late stage and that there was no formal guidance on how to handle these situations. The Convenor advised that this information came from Disability Services and that often information was not gathered until later in the semester.
- 3.8.7 The issue of the lack of suitable accommodation arose in the SER, both for the purposes of teaching and also existing staff accommodation. The Review Panel had a tour of the Adam Smith Building where most staff were based and considered that the accommodation was barely adequate for current demands. The biggest obstacle for the Subject Area in accommodation was the shortage of adequately sized teaching accommodation. The School had sought to secure off-campus accommodation with no success. The Review Panel, whilst acknowledging that off-campus teaching was not ideal, considered this was a viable alternative and, indeed, other Schools within the College had utilised this option. Therefore, the Review Panel **recommends** that the School pursues the possibility of using off-campus teaching accommodation for the Subject Area.



3.8.8 The students confirmed their satisfaction with library and IT facilities.

#### **4. Maintaining the Standards of Awards**

- 4.1 The Review Panel noted that the School carefully observed the requirements of the accreditation and subject benchmarking.
- 4.2 The Review Panel noted the External Examiners' reports to be entirely positive, with assessment grounded in rigorous processes applying to the preparation and checking of assessment materials, and to the marking and the confirmation of results.

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

- 5.1 The Review Panel discerned from the SER and through discussions with students that the video lectures were not popular with students. The undergraduate students at Level 1 had not enjoyed the experience and those at Level L3 expressed relief that this had not been their experience at Level 1. The international students expressed an expectation that students should have live lectures. The Review Panel concurs with the students' and Subject Area's view on this and would support the Subject Area's decision to undertake double teaching in place of video lectures, despite the pressure on staff resources. However, it is important that the issue of off-campus accommodation is explored in relation to double teaching as recommended in item 3.8.7
- 5.2 Through discussions with staff and students, the Review Panel established that the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) was robust and operated satisfactorily. Undergraduate students considered that not all student representatives were known, particularly at Level 1. The Subject Area had addressed the issue of adequate Level 1 representation by the appointment of two additional representatives. Through further discussions, the Review Panel determined that this did not pose a substantial problem as the staff were most receptive to students' concerns and the students were satisfied that their concerns were dealt with adequately. The postgraduate students reported that the School responded to feedback very well and that this was in contrast to the College Graduate School where the students felt they received very little support and the information available was inadequate. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Graduate School develops ways of improving the interaction between College representatives and taught postgraduate students to develop clearer and more coherent lines of communication.
- 5.3 The Review Panel received a mixed response from students with regard to Advisers of Studies. Some students had a positive experience, whilst others had little or no contact with their Advisers. The international students considered that meeting with a mature and experienced person within the University was important, particularly at the beginning of the semester. Whilst the students were clearly supported by the Subject Area, the Review Panel suggests that the Chief Adviser ensures that all staff are reminded of the importance of communication with students in their role of adviser, and of the requirement for Advisers of Study to meet with their advisees at least once per academic session.
- 5.4 The undergraduate students reported that although there had been improvement in the most recent session, students continued to experience

difficulties with issues such as payment of accommodation fees and registration.

- 5.5 The Review Panel noted from data provided by the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) that the number of outgoing Sociology students participating in an international experience was low in comparison to the significantly higher number of incoming ERASMUS and international students to the programme. There was a mixed awareness among undergraduate students of international opportunities and the dominant view was that more information was available at University level than at Subject level. Many students had a number of financial commitments and responsibilities which impeded any opportunity to travel abroad. Staff identified limited availability of places and the Grade Point Average admission criteria for Junior Year abroad (JYA) as presenting a challenge to Sociology students who had to compete with science students who could achieve higher GPAs. A key obstacle for ERASMUS was the limited language skills of home students. The Subject Area planned to develop links with more North American universities over time. Additionally, a new School administrator would be appointed shortly to deal with student exchanges. The Review Panel welcomed this development and concurred that it was a difficult issue to address due to a number of key factors, particularly in relation to student finances. However, the Review Panel considered that the JYA and ERASMUS experiences were invaluable to the student experience and should be encouraged as much as possible. The Subject Area should continue to explore other internationalisation options, utilising external contacts and exploring opportunities for dissertation research overseas. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area should consult Recruitment and International Office (RIO) and the International Dean (Student Mobility) in revising its approach to student mobility.
- 5.6 The SER had limited information on Graduate Attributes and the Review Panel was keen to explore this further. The undergraduate students' response was mixed with regard to Graduate Attributes' awareness, and the majority thought the information was there, but that most students paid little attention to it. However, the students expressed an understanding of the rationale behind Graduate Attributes and considered that Sociology equipped them with critical skills and a wider perspective. The postgraduate students who met with the Panel were unaware of the Graduate Attributes agenda. Staff considered that, whilst Graduate Attributes were not flagged to students, they were embedded throughout the courses and were outlined in the Honours dissertation handbook. The Panel learned of the Subject Area's plans to develop a "week zero" induction programme which would focus on the development of skills. The Review Panel concluded that, while the Subject Area was addressing Graduate Attributes adequately, they were largely hidden and **recommends** that Graduate Attributes should be made more explicit to the student body to ensure their awareness of this important area of activity.
- 5.7 The undergraduate students had expressed some confusion over the availability of paid work placement and internships and thought that Club 21 did not advertise remunerated positions. Students also indicated that while a considerable amount of information was provided on placements and internships, the information was not always relevant or clear. The Review Panel suggests that the Subject Area review the way in which the information is disseminated to students to ensure that the target audience is appropriate.
- 5.8 The Review Panel learned from the taught postgraduate students that they identified strongly with the Subject Area. However, apart from those students interacting on Facebook with their peers to exchange news and ideas, there

was little evidence of a thriving taught postgraduate community. The Review Panel noted this was an area with considerable scope for development and **recommends** that the Subject Area explore options in order to develop a cohesive postgraduate community.

6. Summary of Perceived Strengths and Areas for Improvement in Learning and Teaching (**referencing both good practice and recommendations for improvement**)

**Strengths**

- One of the leading providers of Sociology education in Scotland and the UK
- Research-led teaching
- Flexibility and choice of courses
- Dedicated staff
- Interdisciplinary teaching
- The Subject Area has displayed a strong sense of self reflection throughout the PSR process
- Engaged student body
- Accessible, supportive staff
- General Paper is an innovative form of assessment

Areas for Improvement

- High teaching loads
- Revision of postgraduate student recruitment
- Revision of assessment methods
- Enhancing students' understandings of Graduate Attributes
- Continuing Professional Development for GTAs
- Addressing the timely return of feedback
- Raising awareness of internationalisation opportunities for students

**Conclusion**

The Review Panel highly commends the Subject Area for the overall quality of its provision and the dedication of the staff team in providing a rewarding and supportive student environment. The research-led teaching is a major strength and the Subject Area is to be commended on the wide and varied range of courses made available for the students, although the Review Panel has concerns regarding the sustainability of the current provision. The areas that require attention are listed in the Recommendations below. These have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are ranked in the order of priority.

**Commendations**

#### Commendation 1

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for providing clearly articulated ILOs. *[paragraph 3.2].*

#### Commendation 2:

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the General Paper which it considered was an impressive and innovative form of assessment aimed at encouraging and developing students' ability to think synoptically. *[paragraph 3.3.1].*

#### Commendation 3:

The Review Panel acknowledged the challenges that the Subject Area faced with regard to feedback, particularly in view of the size of the Level 1 cohort and the ensuing demands on staff time, and **commends** the Subject Area for continuing to provide the level of feedback which, despite the drop in the NSS score, remained good overall. *[paragraph 3.3.3].*

#### Commendation 4:

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the broad and impressive range of courses offered and the level of research-led teaching conducted by staff which allowed for diversity and flexibility within the Honours programme. *[paragraph 3.3.4].*

#### Commendation 5:

The Review Panel **commends** the Subject Area for the level of support provided by staff to students. *[paragraph 3.6.2].*

### Recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

The Review Panel **recommends** that discussions take place about resources with the School and College to support the achievement of the Subject Area's long term vision for learning and teaching. *[paragraph 2].*

**For the attention of: Vice Principal and Head of College,  
Head of School and  
Head of Subject**

#### Recommendation 2:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area gives serious consideration to capping Level 1 student numbers for forthcoming sessions in order to sustain the quality of current levels of provision. *[paragraph 3.5.1].*

**For the attention of: Head of School,  
Dean of Learning and Teaching and  
Head of Subject**

#### Recommendation 3:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews its range of assessments across the programmes, utilising the opportunities provided by the Q-Step project in collaboration with the relevant member of the Learning and Teaching Centre, and incorporating alternative methods of assessment such as report writing and reflective diaries. *[paragraph 3.3.2].*

**For the attention of: Head of Subject,  
Director Learning & Teaching Centre and  
Director of Q-Step**

Recommendation 4:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area along with the School and College reviews the Subject Area's staffing structure to identify, if possible and appropriate, where staff appointments and contracts could be increased and/or made permanent to address the SSRs currently being experienced in the Subject Area. *[paragraph 3.8.1].*

**For the attention of: Vice Principal and Head of College,  
Head of School and  
Head of Subject**

Recommendation 5:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School pursues the possibility of using off-campus teaching accommodation for the Subject Area. *[paragraph 3.8.7].*

**For the attention of: Head of School and  
Head of Subject  
For information: Director of Estates and Buildings**

Recommendation 6:

The Review Panel recommends that the Subject Area arranges for training through the GTA Development Coordinator within the Academic Development Unit of the Learning and Teaching centre on essay marking and feedback for all GTAs. *[paragraph 3.3.3].*

**For the attention of: Head of Subject,  
Head of the Academic Development Unit and  
Dean of Learning and Teaching  
For information: Dean of Graduate Studies**

Recommendation 7:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area and School engage at College level to review the content of the generic Research Methods courses as a matter of urgency. *[paragraph 3.4.3].*

**For the attention of: Head of School,  
Head of Subject and  
Dean of Graduate Studies**

Recommendation 8:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews the CPD opportunities for GTAs with regard to extending their role, including an exploration of the possibility of providing support to undertake examination

marking, and to appoint a senior GTA to mentor the more junior GTAs. *[paragraph 3.8.4].*

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

**Head of Graduate Studies**

**For information: Dean of Learning and Teaching**

Recommendation 9:

The Review Panel concluded that Level 2 courses required greater coherence and connection to the overall programme and **recommends** that the Subject Area undertakes a review of the Level 2 provision to address these concerns. *[paragraph 3.4.2].*

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

Recommendation 10:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area undertakes a review of the taught postgraduate programmes' provision to ensure sustainable student numbers. *[paragraph 3.5.3].*

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

Recommendation 11:

The Review Panel concurred with the concerns expressed regarding the level of remuneration to GTAs and **recommends** that consideration be given to the review of the preparation time and payment of GTAs. *[paragraph 3.8.3].*

**For the attention of: Director of Human Resources**

**For information: Clerk of Senate**

Recommendation 12:

The Review Panel considered that whilst the Subject Area was addressing Graduate Attributes adequately, they were hidden and, therefore, the Review Panel **recommends** that Graduate Attributes should be made more explicit to the student body to ensure their awareness of this important area of activity. *[paragraph 5.6].*

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

Recommendation 13:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the School and Subject Area revisit the administrative procedures in relation to payment with GTAs in order to clarify the processes. *[paragraph 3.8.5].*

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

**Head of Subject**

Recommendation 14:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area reviews and develops a policy with regard to staff availability for students via Moodle and email to manage student expectations. *[paragraph 3.6.2].*

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

Recommendation 15:

The Review Panel **recommends** that the Subject Area should consult Recruitment and International Office (RIO) and the International Dean (Student Mobility) in revising its approach to student mobility *[paragraph 5.5]*.

**For the attention of: Head of Subject  
Director of Recruitment and International Office  
International Dean (Student Mobility)**

Recommendation 16:

The Review Panel recommends that the Graduate School develops ways of improving the interaction between College representatives and taught postgraduate students to develop clearer and more coherent lines of communication. *[paragraph 5.2]*.

**For the attention of: Head of Graduate Studies  
For information: Head of School**

Recommendation 17:

The Review Panel noted that the taught postgraduate community was rather fragmented and considered that this was an area with considerable scope for development. The Review Panel **recommends** the Subject Area explores options in order to develop a cohesive postgraduate community. *[paragraph 5.8]*.

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