UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 30 May 2008

Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Report of the Review of History held on 20 February 2008

Ms Helen Clegg, Clerk to the Review Panel

April 2008

Review Panel

Professor Andrew Nash	Clerk of Senate (Convener)
Professor Roger Mason	University of St Andrew's (External Subject Specialist)
Mr GeorgeTwizell	Students' Representative Council
Dr Olwyn Byron	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Gerry Carruthers	Department of Scottish Literature (Cognate Department)
Dr Sarah Mann	Learning and Teaching Centre
Ms Helen Clegg	Assistant Academic Policy and Information Manager, Senate Office (Clerk to the Panel)

1. Introduction

1.1 The Department of History was formed in 1997 through the merger of the Departments of Medieval, Modern and Scottish History. Each of these still retains an identity as 'areas' within the Department. The Department is one of the largest within the Faculty of Arts, in terms of student and staff numbers. The Department includes the Scottish Centre for War Studies, and staff also contribute to the Andrew Hook Centre for American Studies, the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and the Centre for Celtic Studies. It hosts the Higher Education Academic Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology.

1.2 The Department last underwent internal review in May 2001, and was subject to external subject review by the Quality Assurance Agency in April 2002. The outcome of this review was that the reviewers had **'confidence'** in the academic standards achieved by the programmes in History. The quality of teaching and learning, student progression and learning resources were all categorised as **'commendable'**. Reviewers had **'full confidence'** in the Department's ability to maintain and enhance quality and standards in its programmes.

The Department had achieved a rating of 5 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.

1.3 The Self Evaluation Report (SER) had been produced for the review by Dr Donald Spaeth, Head of Department, and Dr Stuart Airlie, Quality Assurance Officer/Convener of Teaching Committee). Comments had been invited from staff and students through circulation of the SER at staff meetings and focus groups. The Review Panel **commends** the SER produced by the Department for the review, which was

unanimously considered to be an excellent, positive and reflective document and one which might appropriately be offered as a 'good practice' example to departments undergoing DPTLA review in future. Staff and students confirmed that the document did realistically reflect the operation of the Department. The Head of Department and the staff group stated that preparation for the DPTLA review had raised their awareness of the activities of other staff within the Department, and had allowed valuable self-reflection.

1.4   Throughout the course of the day, the Review Panel met with Professor Elizabeth Moignard, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and the Head of Department, Dr Donald Spaeth, together with the Department Quality Assurance Officer and Convener of the Teaching Committee, Dr Stuart Airlie. The Panel also met with key teaching and support staff [15], probationary staff [3], Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) [9], postgraduate students [3] and undergraduate students [4].   The Panel expressed disappointment at the low student numbers, particularly as more students had agreed in advance to attend but failed to do so on the day.

2.   Background Information

2.1   The Department has, at present, 29 full-time academic staff, including the Head of Department, one shared with the Celtic Department and one part-time. Administrative support is provided by 4.5 FTE secretarial/administrative staff. 35 Graduate Teaching Assistants are employed by the Department.

2.2   Student numbers for Session 2006-07 were as follows:

Level	Headcount	FTE
Level 1	971	164.70
Level 2	557	94.90
Level 3	45	11.81
Level 3H	119	98.05
Level 4H	125	95.50
Undergraduate Total	1817	464.96
Postgraduate Taught	33	27.52
Staff:Student Ratio	1:19.34	

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

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

- MA (Hons) in History

- MLitt in History

- MLitt in War Studies

The Department contributes to the following *joint* degree programmes offered with other departments or other institutions:

- MA (Hons) in History (Joint)

- MLitt in Medieval Scottish Studies (taught jointly with Celtic Studies)

- MLitt in Scottish Studies (taught jointly with Scottish Literature)

The Department also contributes to the following degree programmes offered by other departments or other institutions:

- MSc (SocSci) in History (including the degree with History of Medicine)

- MLitt in Medieval and Renaissance Studies

- MSc in Social History (taught in conjunction with the University of Strathclyde)

Two further programmes – MLitt in American Studies and MLitt in History and Computing – were not being offered in the current session and were unlikely to be offered in 2008-09.

3. Overall Aims of the Department's Provision and How It Supports the University Strategic Plan

The Review Panel welcomed the Department's overall aims as laid out in the Self-Evaluation Report. These were considered to be highly appropriate and met the University's strategic aims with regard to learning and teaching.

4. An Evaluation of the Student Learning Experience

4.1 Aims

4.1.1 Programme Specifications for all of the programmes offered by the Department were available to the Review Panel. It was noted that the stated aims were aligned to the History Benchmark Statement (for undergraduate provision) and to the Department's learning and teaching strategy, as well as being clear, informative and readily available to students in the course documentation provided to them.

Research-Led Teaching

4.1.2 The Review Panel noted the Department's emphasis on research-led teaching and its related aim to produce research of international significance. The Panel was reassured to note that, although staff did incorporate their areas of research interest into their teaching in order to add value, they did not focus solely on these or construct the curriculum to suit their research interests. All staff had a broad understanding of a variety of courses, and all new courses were scrutinised in accordance with University procedures and in the context of the degrees to which they would contribute.

4.1.3 Staff commented that, in fact, full exploitation of research-based material could be affected by limitations in resourcing, or the level of student ability, for example, in appropriate language attainment. There were linguistic difficulties in some areas which prevented access to the most useful resources, although if students expressed strong interest, language teaching could be negotiated. More positively, team-taught courses at Honours level allowed subjects to be offered for study which could not otherwise be sustained. Students could also be exposed to new research and knowledge as it became available.

Coverage of Geographical Areas

4.1.4 It was noted that, in the Department's provision, certain geographical areas were not covered, and the Review Panel considered that this might perhaps appear restrictive and old-fashioned to potential applicants. The Head of Department and staff confirmed that this issue had been considered and discussed at length. Some staff felt strongly that it was more valuable to strengthen existing provision, rather than expand

into new areas. In view of the University's Internationalisation Agenda, staff noted that they were unlikely to become world-class in new areas, but could potentially do so in areas of existing expertise. It was also noted that some of the individual courses did include other geographical areas, although it was acknowledged that coverage was not extensive. Additional staff and library resources would be required for any future expansion into teaching areas not presently covered.

Teaching of Historiography

4.1.5 It was indicated in the SER that several External Examiners had suggested the inclusion of a course in Historiography in the undergraduate programme. The Head of Department advised that there was reluctance to offer such a course, and reported that a dedicated Historiography course had been offered in the past, but that this had not proved to be a positive experience. Not only would the introduction of such a course have significant resource implications, but staff also firmly believed that the development of an understanding of historical debate was best achieved in the context of particular courses. Therefore, the issue of historical debate was included in many of the existing courses, and in the 'Stories About the Past' Honours course in particular. Therefore, there were no plans to introduce a specific Historiography course in the foreseeable future.

4.2   Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

4.2.1 The Panel found that the ILOs were closely related to the programme aims. Students had a good understanding of these (although not always using the specific terminology) and found them to be appropriate to their level of study. The students stated that the ILOs were particularly useful revision tools.

4.2.2 The Review Panel suggested that, whilst the means of achieving ILOs were entirely appropriate, a greater variety of modes of assessment could enhance achievement. Undergraduate students took the view that there was perhaps too much weight placed on final examinations, particularly as coursework often involved an equivalent amount of work. Also, depending on the options chosen, students might experience very few different assessment modes. Staff recognised that these points were important, and were generally receptive to the idea of increased continuous assessment, although with some reservations surrounding a potential increase in plagiarism. The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider broadening the range of assessment methods used, in order to enhance achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes and thereby somewhat reduce the emphasis on formal examinations.

4.3   Assessment, Feedback and Achievement

Modes of Assessment

4.3.1 The Self Evaluation report indicated that the Department employed a variety of assessment methods, including examinations, essays, presentations, seminars and dissertations. For Honours programmes, ten criteria were laid down upon which work was assessed, reflecting the ILOs. The Panel considered this to be an excellent, thorough approach. However, the Panel considered that further variety could be incorporated into assessment, as noted in Paragraph 4.2.2 above. Staff stated that although variety already existed and was encouraged, it was recognised that too much variety could create confusion amongst students, who favoured consistency and clarity.

4.3.2 It was noted that, at undergraduate level, assessment appeared fairly light, with many courses requiring the submission of only one essay, and one examination. Staff acknowledged that, whilst it would be useful to introduce an additional essay, both in terms of increasing assessment and also to enhance students' essay writing skills,

resources did not permit this at present. Undergraduate students tended to agree that assessment was rather light, with some expressing surprise that their workload appeared to be lighter in Year 1 than in their final school year. It was suggested that this made the transition from Year 2 to Honours even more difficult as there was not sufficient preparation for the significantly increased workload at Honours. Staff were concerned about adding further assessment simply for the purpose of having more assessed work, but agreed that this could be useful if carefully matched to what was intended to be taught and learnt in Years 1 and 2. It was suggested that additional formative assessment might be more appropriate and that the Department might consider possibilities in this regard [see Paragraph 4.3.4 below].

Feedback on Assessment

4.3.3 The SER indicated that, at undergraduate level, staff aimed to return marked essays to students, with feedback, within two weeks. Both the staff group and the undergraduate students confirmed that this timescale was generally adhered to – in all cases in Levels 1 and 2, and in general at Honours levels. In Levels 1 and 2, the fortnightly seminar was the catalyst for ensuring the system operated well. However, it was noted that the timing of the Easter Break disrupted this, with the result that students often did not receive feedback sufficiently well in advance of the examination period. The use of one-to-one essay tutorials was also praised, although it was noted that these were not compulsory and did absorb a good deal of staff time.

4.3.4 Undergraduate students noted that, in other departments, formative essays were submitted, but that this was not the case in History. Some of the students had been surprised to find they were only required to submit one essay per semester per subject, and found it difficult to engage with the subject because of this. Some believed it would be useful if formative essays were introduced. The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider the use of formative essays earlier in the semester, in order to allow feedback to be used more effectively and to help students engage more with the subject. Alternatively, the Department might employ a different format to the usual essays, in order to accommodate this additional formative assessment within existing resources.

4.3.5 At postgraduate level, most students advised that they received very swift, constructive feedback – within one week of submission, in some cases. However, the experience of one student taking a module offered by the University of Strathclyde had been less positive, where feedback on work submitted before Christmas had only been received the previous week. A three-week turnaround had been specified for the return of the work but, even taking into account the vacation period, this had clearly been exceeded. Staff agreed this was unacceptable and noted that a Code of Best Practice had been devised and circulated earlier in the year. The Panel **recommends** that, with regard to the return of work and the provision of feedback, the Department and any outside agencies ensure that the standards set out in the Code of Best Practice are adhered to, for all students at all levels.

4.4 Curriculum Design, Development and Content

4.4.1 It was noted that the undergraduate programme had remained largely unchanged since the last review of the Department in 2001, with only minor changes having been made.

4.4.2 Undergraduate students stated that there was little choice of subjects in Years 1 and 2 but, whilst this meant taking subjects that might be outwith the students' area of interest, it did also open up new possibilities and inspire new interests.

4.4.3 Postgraduate students, whilst generally happy with their programmes, stated that some of the courses offered in their programme appeared to be there simply for the

accumulations of credits, and that they would prefer more courses specific to the programme.

Transferable Skills/Employability

4.4.4 Whilst transferable skills were embedded into the curriculum, and there appeared to be a strong emphasis in the Department's teaching culture on making students employable, students did not always understand that they were developing such skills. The undergraduate students and the GTA group confirmed this view, by stating that students understood what they were being asked to do, but not the reasons for it. The Panel **recommends** that the Department makes more explicit the fact that the development of transferable skills is catered for in a variety of ways throughout the curriculum, in order that students are aware of the relevance of these.

4.4.5 Staff, whilst keen to embed transferable skills into the curriculum, noted that Personal Development Planning (PDP) was currently being discussed at Faculty level. To avoid duplication of effort the Department was therefore waiting for guidance from the Faculty before introducing PDP activities to programmes, especially at Levels 1 and 2 (beyond a pilot already completed). It was noted, however, that Learning Diaries may become embedded in the curriculum if found to work effectively. PDP issues were also likely to be included in Honours Induction, by which time students had committed to study within the Department.

4.5   Student Recruitment

4.5.1 Undergraduate entry to the Department was through the Faculty entry system. It was noted that undergraduate numbers were healthy, having grown over the last five years in most courses. Honours entry had remained stable, despite a slight increase in entry requirements. Postgraduate entry had increased significantly with the introduction of new MLitt programmes since the last review.

4.5.2 It was apparent that, for some of the postgraduate programmes, student numbers were very small, with some programmes having 2 or 3 students registered. A large number of programmes were available, but these were not attracting good numbers of students. Whilst the students considered this beneficial in terms of having more dedicated teaching, the Panel was concerned about the concentration of resources needed to sustain these programmes. The Head of Department recognised that this was an important issue, but was reluctant to distil the current provision into a smaller number of homogenised programmes teaching students from contrasting backgrounds. He believed that students preferred greater specialism and was concerned that potential PhD students might be lost were the programmes to become more generic. The Panel **recommends** that the Department discuss the sustainability of providing a large number of programmes with very small student numbers, and consider whether offering a smaller number of programmes with specialisations, which utilised common core teaching, might be a more appropriate course of action, or whether there is an alternative solution.

4.6   Student Progression, Retention and Support

Progression

4.6.1 It was indicated in the Self Evaluation Report that progression to honours was not a cause for concern, although course recruitment was monitored in order to make projections about the number of places required in Honours courses.

Retention

4.6.2   The Department recognised that facilitating the move from school to undergraduate study was a key factor in aiding retention, and additional support had been built into Level 1 courses and through specific workshops. The Department also hosted a day symposium "From School to University" in February 2006, which concentrated on history teaching and essay writing in schools, in an attempt to address the problems caused by developments in the school system, which had left pupils poorly prepared for undergraduate study of history.

4.6.3   The Department had measures in place to identify students at risk of withdrawing from their programme, and these were largely operated through the Advisers of Study system and the monitoring of attendance - particularly at seminars, which were compulsory.

Support

4.6.4   The Department offered various means of support, including one-to-one essay tutorials at all levels of undergraduate study (with pre-and post-submission sessions at Level 1). Graduate Teaching Assistants also offered voluntary learning support workshops which, whilst time consuming for the GTAs, did aid support and progression and were appreciated by students.

4.6.5   It was noted that Peer Assisted Learning had been centrally funded in 2005-06 and 2006-07, but had been suspended in 2007-08 due to lack of funds. However, the Department was committed to supporting the scheme and was currently reviewing possibilities for reviving it.

4.6.6   It was noted that the Department was introducing a week-long Honours Induction programme in order to facilitate the transition from Year 2 to Honours. This would include subject-specific activities, sourcing, referencing, films, library tours and visits. This had been devised in recognition of the anxiety expressed by students about the expectations of Honours study and was **commended** by the Panel as an example of good practice.

4.7   The Quality of Learning Opportunities

Frequency of Seminars

4.7.1   Lectures, seminars and tutorials were the main methods of teaching and learning, as well as independent learning. It was noted that undergraduate seminars constituted only one hour each fortnight in first year. The Head of Department recognised that weekly seminars were preferable, but that the current GTA teaching budget did not allow for this. The GTAs group agreed that a weekly seminar would be valuable and allow time for additional activities, including perhaps an additional piece of assessed work. At present, they believed it was not possible to cover all the necessary aspects of the curriculum within a one hour fortnightly session, and as a result some areas which students might find appealing had to be omitted. Additionally, the GTAs believed that, because of the long period between seminars, students appeared not to be able to make links from one seminar to the next. Those GTAs who had studied in the Department at undergraduate level confirmed that a weekly seminar would have been welcomed for these reasons. The undergraduate student groups confirmed that they would appreciate additional seminar time, as the seminars were considered to be more effective than lectures in developing students' learning, because questions could be asked more freely and discussion could take place. Staff stated that they were aware of the desire for additional seminar time, and acknowledged that this would assist with retention. They agreed that, with appropriate resourcing, they would be pleased to introduce additional seminars. The Panel **recommends** that the Department give serious consideration to the introduction of additional seminars at undergraduate level, even if a regular weekly seminar was not possible, in order to enhance the student learning experience and allow

for the possibility of additional assessed work. High priority should be given to this in terms of resourcing and the issue should be referred to the Dean of Faculty with a view to increasing the GTA teaching budget whilst at least retaining, and ideally increasing, the number of GTAs.

4.8   Resources for Learning and Teaching

Staffing – Graduate Teaching Assistants

4.8.1   The GTAs reported that they enjoyed their work within the Department and found it fulfilling.   They also confirmed that they were well-supported as researchers. However, it was noted that the rate of pay had not been altered since 2002, despite a requirement that it be reviewed annually.   The Panel **recommends** that the issue of GTA rates of pay be referred to the Dean of Faculty for investigation with Human Resources, with a view to arriving at a more appropriate rate which reflects the amount and quality of work being done by GTAs.

4.8.2   It was noted that many of the GTAs had been undergraduate and postgraduate students within the Department, and had been encouraged to pursue further study, either within the Department or at other institutions. They had been provided with the necessary information to do so. However, many had been inspired to stay within the Department due to the enthusiasm and diverse research interests of staff. Those who had come from other institutions had been drawn to the Department as a result of specific research interests and expertise which were not readily available elsewhere.

4.8.3   The GTAs confirmed that they felt well-supported within the Department in terms of their teaching duties, and that the mentoring system in place had, on the whole, been excellent. They noted that the quality of feedback they received from their mentors varied. Some mentioned that they had been invited to sit in on a seminar taken by their mentor, although this was not standard practice. The Panel **recommends** that the Department invite all Graduate Teaching Assistants, as a matter of course, to observe at least one seminar led by their assigned mentor, as part of their personal and skills development.

4.8.4   The GTAs indicated that they undertook some marking of assignments including, in some cases, examination marking. However, they reported that little training was provided with regard to marking, and it became apparent that they had received insufficient advice in relation to the use of the Code of Assessment. The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty must ensure all GTAs carrying out marking be appropriately trained, prior to approval as additional internal examiners by Senate. A detailed understanding of the operation of the Code of Assessment was of key importance and this should be emphasised by Heads of Department.

4.8.5   All of the GTAs had undertaken training for their duties through the Learning and Teaching Centre, but opinion was divided on the value of this. Some reported that the training was too generic and needed to be tailored to specific departmental requirements. Additionally, there had been too much content for the very limited time period allocated to the training.

Staffing – Probationary Staff

4.8.6   Probationary staff appeared generally happy within the Department and stated their appreciation for the mentoring systems in place. However, they commented that the New Lecturer Teaching Programme had not been as useful as it might have been, as it was not Faculty-specific. The resultant, rather generic nature of the programme affected its relevance. There was also a very heavy workload for the programme.

Physical Resources

4.8.7   It was noted that one of the recommendations of the 2001 Department Review had related to the need for refurbishment of DISH Laboratory A. The Review Panel viewed the laboratory and it was apparent no refurbishment had taken place and, in fact, its condition had deteriorated. The Panel **recommends** that Estates and Buildings be alerted to the poor condition of DISH Laboratory A, with a view to carrying out the necessary refurbishment as had already been recommended in the 2001 review of the Department.

4.8.8   It had been indicated in the SER that disabled access to the Department's teaching rooms and offices was difficult due to the nature of the buildings. The Head of Department advised that 9 and 10 University Gardens had been examined recently and that plans were being drawn up with a view to creating disabled access to the ground floor. It was noted that Level 1 of the Careers Service was accessible via the back lane, and that this was a further possibility that might be considered. The Panel **recommends** that the issue of disabled access to the Department must be pursued as far as practicable, with access at least to certain parts of the Department being made possible.

4.8.9   As stated in the Self Evaluation Report, the number of students in Level 1A and 1B lectures required that some had to hear the lectures remotely, due to the lack of appropriate accommodation. Staff stated that, should a large lecture space become available, they would be keen to make use of this. They acknowledged that lecturing to such a large audience (350 – 400) was difficult, but nonetheless regarded this as preferable to lecturing remotely to part of the class. However, they would still continue to offer remote lectures to students at Crichton Campus.

4.8.10 Students reported that difficulties arose with regard to the availability of core texts in the Library. Four-hour loan periods had been introduced for the most requested texts, but this was not a practical solution as students could not make effective use of books in such a short time period. The Head of Department and staff, including GTAs, confirmed that this was an issue that could be eased simply by the acquisition of additional copies of texts. The Panel **recommends** that the Department carry out an inventory of the required texts and determine the cost of acquiring sufficient copies. The matter could then be raised formally with the Library Committee with a view to holding additional copies and thus reducing the reliance on short loan periods for core texts.

4.8.11 The Head of Department reported that there was some resistance, at undergraduate level, to the use of periodicals. Discussion with students revealed that there was uncertainty about the effective use of periodicals, and that instruction would be welcomed. The Panel **recommends** that students, particularly at Honours level, be provided with training on the use of periodicals in order to further enhance their learning experience.

5.   Maintaining the Standards of Awards

External Examiners

5.1   The Panel noted that the comments of External Examiners were taken extremely seriously and were cited in the Self Evaluation Report as the most important means by which the learning experience of students was enhanced. A number of changes had been made as a result of External Examiners' suggestions. Comments made by External Examiners had generally been favourable, and they appeared impressed with the quality of the assessment process and of the student cohorts.

Plagiarism

5.2 The Head of Department expressed support for the use of the Turnitin software to detect plagiarism, software which is currently being piloted in other Faculties of the university. At present, instances of plagiarism were detected through, for example, shifts in writing style or the use of unusually high-level prose. It was recognised that there was perhaps a lack of understanding amongst students as to what actually constituted plagiarism, and the legitimate use of sources. The Panel **recommends** that the Department give consideration to a move towards electronic submission of coursework and consequently to the use of the available software, Turnitin, when this is rolled out across the university. The Panel further **recommends** that the Department reinforces the clear guidance provided to students at all levels as to what constitutes plagiarism and the acceptable use of sources.

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

Feedback from Students and Responses by Department

6.1 Undergraduate students were given the opportunity to offer feedback on courses through course evaluation questionnaires. The Review Panel noted that, in many cases, formal feedback was given to students by means of a summary report and response from the lecturer. The Panel **commends** this system as an example of good practice.

6.2 However, postgraduate students advised that this system was not in operation for their programmes, and that they had not as yet been asked to give any feedback. They suggested that this might be due to the very small numbers of students on postgraduate programmes, and the fact that they spoke to staff on a one-to-one basis regularly. The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure that formal feedback procedures are in place for students on all postgraduate programmes, even where student numbers are very small, in order to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to offer feedback on their experiences. The Panel further **recommends** that GTA representatives be included in the membership of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

6.3 Undergraduate and postgraduate students stated that staff were receptive to suggestions and could always be approached if difficulties arose. They noted, however, that individual students were more inclined to take the initiative to raise issues directly, rather than doing so through student representatives, and that this was most likely due to the open, approachable style of the Department.

Moodle

6.4 It was noted that students were using Moodle and found it very useful in delivering material and providing reading links. Lecture notes were usually posted on Moodle, often in advance of lectures. However, it did not yet appear to be in use as a teaching tool, and students noted problems had been experienced in accessing it. Staff advised that it was easier to incorporate the use of Moodle into new courses at the design stage, rather than into existing courses. The Panel **recommends** that the Department encourage fuller use of Moodle as a teaching tool and as a learning community for students, which would allow additional support for learning.

Quality of Staff

6.5 Undergraduate and postgraduate students agreed that one of the major strengths of the Department was its staff, who were committed, enthusiastic and approachable, and who inspired students to be passionate about their subject.

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

Key Strengths

- The commitment and enthusiasm of staff (both teaching and support) which led to a supportive, inspiring environment for students

- Steps taken to support students at strategic points in their academic life, including the use of one-to-one essay tutorials, and the introduction of the Honours Induction programme

- Rigorous assessment procedures and the provision of constructive feedback

- Detailed and systematic reporting to students on end of course feedback

- The benefits afforded to students through the use of staff research interests to complement core teaching

Areas to be improved or enhanced

- Support for Graduate Teaching Assistants

- Provision of seminars at first year undergraduate level

- Assessment and feedback

- Teaching and learning resources

- Postgraduate range of provision

- Formal feedback from postgraduate students and inclusion in the Staff-Student Liaison Committee

- Transferable skills

- Advice on plagiarism and the introduction of plagiarism detection software still at pilot stage

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The Review Panel commends the Department on its awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, which was evident both in the Self Evaluation Report and in discussions during the Review. Despite the number of recommendations, the Panel has no concerns regarding the quality of the Department, its provision or its operation. The Panel was impressed with the clear commitment of Departmental staff (both teaching and support), and found the students with whom it had met to be a credit to the Department.

Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the Department of History. It is important to note that many of these recommendations refer to issues identified by the Department for action, either in the Self Evaluation Report or through discussion at the Review.

The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs to which they refer in the text of the report. They are grouped by the areas for improvement/enhancement noted above, and are ranked in order of priority.

Support for Graduate Teaching Assistants

Recommendation 1:

The Panel **recommends** that the issue of GTA rates of pay be referred to the Dean of Faculty for investigation with Human Resources, with a view to arriving at a more appropriate rate which reflects the amount and quality of work being done by GTAs. *[Paragraph 4.8.1]*

For the attention of: **The Dean of Faculty/Human Resources**

Recommendation 2:

The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty must ensure all GTAs carrying out marking be appropriately trained, prior to approval as additional internal examiners by Senate. A detailed understanding of the operation of the Code of Assessment was of key importance and this should be emphasised by Heads of Department. *[Paragraph 4.8.4]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department/Dean of Faculty**

Recommendation 3:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department invite all Graduate Teaching Assistants, as a matter of course, to observe at least one seminar led by their assigned mentor, as part of their personal and skills development. *[Paragraph 4.8.3]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Provision of Seminars at Undergraduate Level

Recommendation 4:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department give serious consideration to the introduction of additional seminars at undergraduate level, even if a regular weekly seminar was not possible, in order to enhance the student learning experience and allow for the possibility of additional assessed work. High priority should be given to this in terms of resourcing and the issue should be referred to the Dean of Faculty with a view to increasing the GTA teaching budget whilst at least retaining, and ideally increasing, the number of GTAs. *[Paragraph 4.7.1]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department/The Dean of Faculty**

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 5:

The Panel **recommends** that, with regard to the return of work and the provision of feedback, the Department and any outside agencies ensure that the standards set out in the Code of Best Practice are adhered to, for all students at all levels. *[Paragraph 4.3.5]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Recommendation 6:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider the use of formative essays earlier in the semester, in order to allow feedback to be used more effectively and to

help students engage more with the subject.   Alternatively, the Department might
employ a different format to the usual essays, in order to accommodate this additional
formative assessment within existing resources. *[Paragraph 4.3.4]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Recommendation 7:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider broadening the range of
assessment methods used, in order to enhance achievement of Intended Learning
Outcomes and thereby somewhat reduce the emphasis on formal examinations.

[Paragraph 4.2.2]

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Teaching and Learning Resources

Recommendation 8:

The Panel **recommends** that Estates and Buildings be alerted to the poor condition of
DISH Laboratory A, with a view to carrying out the necessary refurbishment as had
already been recommended in the 2001 review of the Department. *[Paragraph 4.8.7]*

For the attention of: **The Director of Estates and Buildings**

Recommendation 9:

The Panel **recommends** that the issue of disabled access to the Department must be
pursued as far as practicable, with access at least to certain parts of the Department
being made possible. *[Paragraph 4.8.8]*

For the attention of: **The Director of Estates and Buildings**

Recommendation 10:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department carry out an inventory of the required
texts and determine the cost of acquiring sufficient copies. The matter could then be
raised formally with the Library Committee with a view to holding additional copies
and thus reducing the reliance on short loan periods for core texts. *[Paragraph 4.8.10]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Recommendation 11:

The Panel **recommends** that students, particularly at Honours level, be provided with
training on the use of periodicals in order to further enhance their learning experience.
[Paragraph 4.8.11]

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Recommendation 12:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department encourage fuller use of Moodle as a
teaching tool and as a learning community for students, which would allow additional
support for learning. [Paragraph 6.4]

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Postgraduate Range of Provision

Recommendation 13:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department discuss the sustainability of providing a
large number of programmes with very small student numbers, and consider whether
offering a smaller number of programmes with specialisations, which utilised common

core teaching, might be a more appropriate course of action, or whether there is an alternative solution. *[Paragraph 4.5.2]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Feedback from Postgraduate Students

Recommendation 14:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensures that formal feedback procedures are in place for students on all postgraduate programmes, even where student numbers are very small, in order to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to offer feedback on their experiences.   The Panel further **recommends** that GTA representatives be included in the membership of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. *[Paragraph 6.2]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Transferable Skills

Recommendation 15:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department makes more explicit the fact that the development of transferable skills is catered for in a variety of ways throughout the curriculum, in order that students are aware of the relevance of these. *[Paragraph 4.4.4]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Plagiarism

Recommendation 16:

The Panel **recommends** that the Department give consideration to a move towards electronic submission of coursework and consequently to the use of the available software, Turnitin, although this is still at a pilot stage within the university. The Panel further **recommends** that the Department reinforces clear guidance provided to students at all levels as to what constitutes plagiarism and the acceptable use of sources. *[Paragraph 5.2]*

For the attention of: **The Head of Department**

Prepared by: Helen Clegg

Last modified on: Wednesday 9 April 2008