

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Education Committee - Monday 16 June 2003

**Report of the Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching,
Learning and Assessment of the Department of Scottish Literature
held on 19 March 2003**

Ms Lesley Fielding, Clerk to the Review Panel

Review Panel

Professor Chris Morris	Vice Principal (Staffing) and Territorial Vice Principal (Arts-based) [Convener]
Dr David Robb	Senior Lecturer, Department of English, University of Dundee
Dr Bob Matthew Director	Teaching and Learning Service
Dr Judy Wilkinson	Senate Assessor on University Court
Ms Lesley Fielding	Senate Office (Panel Secretary)
Ms Elaine Shearer	Senate Office

A. Introduction

The Department of Scottish Literature was last reviewed internally in 1995. As part of the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature it was rated Excellent in the SHEFC Teaching Quality Review in 1997. The School was rated 5* in the 2001 RAE having improved from 3A in 1996.

The Department provided a Self Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documentation in accordance with the University's requirements for the Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

The Review Panel met with the Head of Department, Professor Alan Riach, and subsequently with all other full-time members of academic staff. The Panel also met with the Department's probationary member of staff and with three Graduate Teaching Assistants who represented hourly-paid staff and one honorary part-time member of staff. The Panel met with two MPhil students, one of whom was enrolled on the MPhil Distance Learning Programme, and twelve undergraduate students.

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

- a) MA (Hons) programme in Scottish Literature

This programme can be taken as Single Honours or as part of a Joint Honours programme. Contributing courses are:

Scottish Literature 1A
Scottish Literature 1B
Scottish Literature 2A
Scottish Literature 2B
Scottish Literature 3A Scottish Renaissance and its Legacy
Scottish Literature 3B: New Directions in Post WW2 Writing

Pre-Sessional Courses for International Students
12 Honours options.

- b) MPhil (Taught) in Scottish Literature
- c) MPhil (Taught in Scottish Studies)

B. Summary Report

The Review Panel found a strong, traditional Department with a staff highly enthusiastic and committed to teaching and research. The Department had obvious pride in its unique and distinctly Scottish status. The Department displayed good internal communication processes with regular staff meetings and an environment where the exchange of ideas and support for each other was obviously important, particularly for the newer members of staff.

The Head of Department had developed a workload model and the staff's commitment was evident from the wide range of courses offered and from the maintenance of the chronological method of teaching throughout all years, which was a considerable undertaking in terms of staff time and effort. Undergraduate students met by the Review Panel spoke enthusiastically about the Department and their learning experience. They indicated that staff were supportive and friendly and that the teaching quality was excellent. They were pleased to be studying in a small Department where they had close contact with the teaching staff and their obvious enthusiasm for their subject was a reflection of the staff's dedication and passion for their subject.

As part of the documentation for the Review, the Review Panel had received samples of course handouts and the Honours Degree Programme Handbook. The undergraduate students consulted indicated that they were happy with the information provided, finding the documentation most helpful.

The Review Panel concluded that the provision under review was of a very high standard. However, the Panel considered that there were a number of areas for development to further strengthen provision. These are discussed below along with associated recommendations.

Aims and Learning Outcomes

1 Computing/Word Processing

The Review Panel was concerned to note that students perceived the requirement for submission of written work to be word processed as 'implicit' as opposed to being part of the regulations. Staff reported that it was now very rare to receive a piece of handwritten work. However, the Panel **recommends** that it should normally be a requirement for all submitted course work to be word-processed and this should be reflected in student handbooks.

2 Curricula and Assessment

The Review Panel gleaned from discussion with the Head of Department that there had been collaboration with the Creative Writing Professors which had been well-received by the students. Students were able to submit pieces of Creative Writing, the marks for which were taken into account. The Head of Department was in favour of the more formal introduction of Creative Writing as part of assessment. The students had favoured a creative writing input but did not wish to see it become compulsory.

The Panel **recommends** that the Department should develop this element of assessment.

3 *Pre-Sessional Course*

The Review Panel had queried the appropriateness in terms of staffing and resources of continuing the Pre-Sessional Course. The Head of Department and academic staff defended this course most vigorously and stressed the importance and benefits that providing such a course offered. The Department considered that some of the work submitted by the overseas students was of an extremely high calibre and it was vital in providing overseas students with an overview of Scottish Literature. Despite the course being financially unviable, the Head of Department stated they were willing to make savings in other areas in order to maintain the status of the Pre-Sessional courses. During the Panel's discussion with the Dean, the Dean concurred and advised the Panel that the Faculty would be willing to provide financial support to maintain this course. The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department and Dean re-consider the financial basis of the course and agree the level of cross-subsidy requested to maintain this course.

4 *Level 3 Course*

The Review Panel noted that the Department offered the only Literature Level 3 course within the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature, which the Panel perceived to be a further burden on the Department in terms of staff time and resources. However, the Head of Department and academic staff strongly defended this provision, viewing it as useful to those students embarking on teaching careers and felt that it assisted in raising the Department's international profile. The Department was justifiably proud of this course and viewed it as a 'manageable burden', but conceded that it was a 'fragile state' in terms of staffing and required constant review. The Panel concurs with this view and **recommends** that the Level 3 provision should be regularly reviewed to reflect changing staff commitments, but that, nevertheless the issue should be re-visited at the School level.

5 *Assessment*

5.1 The Review Panel noted with some concern the Department's approach towards the implementation of the new Code of Assessment. The intention of the new Code of Assessment was to introduce it as the main method of assessment in session 2002-2003, whilst retaining the old system to act as a 'shadow' and to compare the two systems at the end of the session. The Panel understood from the Head of Department that this was not the current procedure within the Department. The Department had retained the old methodology and was using the new Code of Assessment as a back up to the old system. The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department should take steps to implement the correct procedures at the earliest possible opportunity.

5.2 The Department referred to its plan to introduce new methods for the assessment of skills and to introduce the use of multi-media presentations. The Panel **recommends** that the Department contact the Teaching and Learning Service in order to seek advice about the various alternative methods of assessment.

6 *Assessment of Contribution to Tutorial and Presentations*

The Review Panel noted there was widespread concern, both expressed in the SER and at the meeting with staff and students, regarding the number of students who either failed to attend or had done no preparation for tutorials. The Department planned to introduce some form of assessment for attendance at seminars and the Panel concurred that such action was necessary. Undergraduate students told the Panel that they were reluctant to undertake peer-marking stating that personal feelings

could obstruct fairness. The Panel **recommends** that the Department continue with its plans for some form of assessment to encourage attendance at and preparedness for tutorials.

Teaching and Learning

7 *Accommodation*

7.1 In the SER, the Head of Department described the physical resources available, indicating that teaching took place in lecture theatres around the campus and that this and the absence of a Departmental seminar room was detrimental to the Department's teaching and eroded the feeling of 'belonging' to the Department for many of its students. This was confirmed during the meeting with the undergraduate students who stated that their preference was to have lectures within the Department. The Convener of the Panel was able to confirm to the Panel and the Head of Department that the Department would be acquiring additional accommodation in No 6 University Gardens and that there should be provision for a seminar room. [Since the meeting this has been revised to No. 7, with the agreement of the Department.]

7.2 *Lecture Theatres*

Staff had expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration due to a lack of suitable lecture theatres with inadequate technical resources and support. Staff did concede that often their technical needs were of a last minute nature, which created difficulties when trying to secure appropriate accommodation from Central Room Bookings. They perceived poorly equipped lecture theatres as hindering their attempts to introduce a number of innovative teaching methods such as multi-media and advised the Panel that, on occasion, they had purchased equipment of their own rather than try to deal with malfunctioning equipment. The Review Panel highlighted the availability of new properly maintained equipment around the campus such as in the new Wolfson West Medical Building and whilst they appreciated the more spontaneous nature of certain events, the Panel **recommends** that the Department should give more consideration to advanced planning in order to secure appropriate accommodation with adequate facilities from Central Room Bookings. However, it was considered that once the departmental new seminar room was available, that some of these difficulties should be resolved.

8 *Computing Resources*

8.1 The Panel was informed by the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) that all the GTAs had a dedicated computer with the exception of one GTA who preferred to work in a quieter environment elsewhere. Undergraduate students had expressed dissatisfaction with the provision of computer clusters within the University, citing long queues and difficulties in securing a computer. The Review Panel was informed that the Murano Street computer clusters were not functioning and the Convener of the Panel agreed that this was unacceptable and that the situation would be rectified. The Panel was of the opinion that, apart from the legitimate complaint regarding the Murano Street clusters, students did not appear to be fully aware of the entire range of available computer clusters within the University and might be overly concerned with convenience. The Panel **recommends** that the Department make students aware of the availability of the range of clusters throughout the University, including elsewhere in the Faculty.

8.2 Throughout the various discussions regarding IT provision, there had been frequent reference to copyright restrictions in relation to placing information on the web and accessing information whilst off-campus. The Review Panel advised the Head of Department and academic staff that such copyright restrictions could be overcome and **recommends** that the Head of Department should contact the Teaching and Learning Service which could provide advice in resolving this difficulty.

9 *Student Feedback*

The Review Panel noted from the documentation that the format of the student questionnaire had been changed in recent years and that the graded tick boxes were no longer used and students now provided a written commentary on their course. The Panel felt this would make it most difficult to produce comparative statistics on the level of student satisfaction. The Panel **recommends** that the format of the student feedback questionnaire be reviewed.

10 *Staff Workloads*

The Head of Department had expressed reluctance at the prospect of 'hiring in help' to offset staff absences, preferring to manage the situation within the Department. However, the Review Panel felt that this approach put undue pressure on staff in terms of teaching and research and, given the Department's limited funding, **recommends** action should be taken to secure other resources in order to alleviate such situations. From discussions with the Head of Department and staff members, the Panel perceived that the Department, while willing to collaborate to a point with other departments, were committed to preserving its autonomy. Whilst the Panel was sympathetic to this concern, it would **recommend** that the Department addresses further the development of their external relationships with cognate departments with a view to reducing the teaching demands on staff through such cooperation.

11 *Staff Study Leave*

The Review Panel noted from the SER and from discussions with the Head of Department and staff that the Department operated a rotation of study leave system. However, the Panel observed from the SER that a member of academic staff had offered to continue to teach whilst on study leave. When asked by the Panel if the Department felt they would have coped without this assistance, the staff and Head of Department could not state with certainty what the implications for the Department would have been. Both the Panel and the Department were in agreement that longer, uninterrupted periods of study leave would be advantageous and desirable, however constraints were present as all full-time staff were Course Conveners and, hence, it would be impractical for staff to be on study leave for a full session. The Panel **recommends** that the Department determine the regulations and procedures relating to the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) Research Leave Scheme, and familiarise staff with these procedures. This could then assist staff to extend their study leave period to two terms of study leave in contrast to the current single term implemented at present.

12 *Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)*

At the time of the review, the Department had six full-time academic staff and one part-time 'honorary lecturer'. The practice within the University is that normally GTAs teach only at Levels 1 and 2. However, GTAs within the Department undertook tutorials with both undergraduate and Honours students. The Review Panel **recommends** that, as outlined in the SER, the Department should re-examine the GTAs' role in relation to the appropriateness of tutoring Honours level students.

13 *Facilities and Conditions*

The Graduate Teaching Assistants advised the Review Panel that they perceived an acute space shortage. GTAs used the senior postgraduate room within the Department but had no suitable accommodation for discussing matters with their students privately. The Panel **recommends** that the Department should identify, where possible, suitable accommodation for GTAs to meet with their students privately.

14 *Teaching Methods*

The Review Panel expressed concern that staff were under considerable pressure through the wide range of Honours topics available in relation to the relatively small numbers of students. Staff acknowledged that this was a strain and that it could be possible to reduce the number of Honours topics and the number of contact hours. The Panel **recommends** that staff should undertake a review of the Honours provision at the earliest opportunity with a view to rationalising the number of Honours topics and reducing the pressures on staff.

Student Progression and Support

15 *Transferable Skills*

The Review Panel noted that, while the undergraduate students expressed their satisfaction with the dissemination of information and guidance, in the case of transferable skills these tended to be more implicit than explicit. The Panel **recommends** that the Department should liaise with other University services such as the Teaching and Learning Service and the relevant LTSN sub-centres to ensure that aims and objectives relating to transferable skills are communicated to students in a clear and productive manner.

Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards

16 *MPhil*

16.1 An area that concerned the Review Panel was the current status of the MPhils. The existing MPhil students who met with the panel expressed their satisfaction with the course, but the real concern was the lack of students. The Head of Department confirmed that there are no students on the Distance Learning MPhil for the current year. The Panel felt that it was imperative for the Department to focus on their MPhil provision. Increasing the student numbers on the MPhil would be a valuable source of income for the Department. The Panel **recommends** that the Department undertakes to advertise it more widely via a number of outlets such as liaising with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, recruiting MSc Computer Science students to undertake the design of a new website for the MPhil and the use of the Department of Adult Continuing Education in advertising the availability of the MPhil. In the event that the numbers for the MPhil improved there would be a need to separate Scottish Literature from Scottish Studies.

16.2 The Department had highlighted in its SER and in promotional material for the MPhil in Distance Learning that the availability of materials requires consideration and one possibility which the Department may consider would be to compile a package of materials, which could be sent to Distance Learning students for a small fee. The Panel recommends that the Department review this element of their MPhil provision.

17 *Chronology vs Topic*

Through the Review Panel's discussions with the Head of Department there had been acknowledgement that the chronological approach to teaching of Scottish Literature was 'deeply embedded'. The Head of Department had advised, and this had been confirmed through the Panel's discussions with students, that the students had expressed their satisfaction with the current approach and felt that it offered greater depth and different perspectives on the subject. However, the Head of Department had advised the Panel that the Department planned to review the curricula at the Away Day and to discuss possible alternatives to a chronological approach in the Honours years such as by topic. The Panel supports this development and **recommends** that, in the interests of reducing staff teaching loads, serious consideration be given to adopting a different approach.

18 *New Teaching Methods*

The Review Panel welcomed the Department's desire to incorporate a number of new teaching methods such as multi-media presentations. The Panel considered that, given the appropriate accommodation and equipment, this would be a useful tool in introducing alternative methods of teaching. The Panel **recommends** the Department applies to the Learning and Teaching Development funds for assistance in developing techniques in the use of multi-media technology.

19 *Student Information*

19.1 The Review Panel noted that the assessment information for the Level 1 courses was outdated and contained information from the previous Code of Assessment on marking scales. The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensures that all such documents share uniformity relating to content and styles and ensures that information is updated as necessary.

19.2 The information provided for the pre-sessional courses was limited and did not contain the necessary aims and objectives required for a credit-bearing course. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department develops this information to meet the criteria required for such courses, and provides a fuller outline of aims and expectations for students.

19.3 As Honours courses were run on a two-year cycle, the Panel **recommends** that the Department should ensure that the handbooks for both years are placed on the web.

Staff Support

19 *Mentoring*

19.1 The Head of Department advised the Review Panel that for newly appointed Heads of Department their task in assuming all the new duties expected can be daunting. Hence the Head of Department expressed the view that it would be helpful if the Dean were to establish a 'mentoring' system, whereby a former Head of Department would be available for consultation, providing a valuable source of guidance and information for the new incumbent during the first year, particularly in areas such as finance and administration. The Panel concurred with this view and **recommends** that such a procedure should be established at the earliest opportunity and also favoured the suggestion that in order to facilitate interaction and dissemination of information, the Dean should initiate regular meetings of professorial staff.

19.2 The Review Panel was concerned that no formal mentor had been appointed for the probationary member of staff and whilst the Panel understood this was being addressed, it **recommends** that the Head of Department should rectify this situation at the earliest opportunity.

19.3 The Head of Department had expressed concern regarding the delay in the Department receiving money from the Finance Office, paid for the pre-session courses, highlighting the difficulties this could create in relation to the Department's fragile financial status. The Review Panel considered this to be a valid concern and **recommends** that the Dean of Arts should undertake to liaise with the Finance Office to ensure promptness in forwarding payment to the Department.

20 *New Lecturer Programme*

A concern expressed by the probationary member of staff was the intensity of the new lecturer programme that was perceived as having high expectations of first year probationers, which placed high demands on first year probationers through the constant need to provide documentation. The Panel recognised the perceived problem but also wished to support the integrity of the programme. It **recommends** that the demands of the programme be reflected in the workload model for members of staff.

BConclusions and Recommendations:

The Review Panel commended the Department for the overall quality of its provision and for its commitment to and support of its students. However, there is considerable pressure placed on staff through the breadth of Honours courses offered and the Panel expressed concern that the Department may struggle if faced with adverse conditions. The Review Panel would urge the Department to reassess its Honours provision at the earliest opportunity. It also wished to see an increase, through a re-launch, of the MPhil taught course.

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made to encourage the Department of Scottish Literature to continue in its excellent work but to address issues that the Panel perceives to be crucial in safeguarding the Department's status quo and to also allow for the Department to develop its teaching and research potential.

These will have to be

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that it should be a requirement for all submitted course work to be word-processed. (Paragraph 1)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department develops the input of the Creative Writing Professors into the syllabus. (Paragraph 2)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department formalises the role of Creative Writing in assessment. (Paragraph 2)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the financial basis of the Pre-Sessional course be reviewed and agreement made on the level of cross-subsidy requested to maintain the course.

**Action: Dean
Head of Department**

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Level 3 provision be regularly reviewed to reflect the changing needs of the Department. (Paragraph 4)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews the implementation of the new Code of Assessment and takes appropriate action to ensure parity with other departments within the University. (Paragraph 5)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department seeks advice and guidance from LTSN and Teaching and Learning Service with regard to the ongoing introduction of new methods of assessment. (Paragraph 5.1)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department formalises its plans to introduce assessment for attendance and contribution to seminars by students. (Paragraph 6)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that due consideration be given to forward planning for lecture requirements in order to secure the appropriate accommodation from Central Room Bookings. (Paragraph 7.1)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department stresses to the students the location of the available computer clusters throughout the campus. (Paragraph 8)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department should liaise with Teaching and Learning Service to discuss the difficulties of copyright restrictions vis-a-vis computer access. (Paragraph 8)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department discusses with the Dean any staffing issues and their financial impact in order to address difficulties created by staff absences. (Paragraph 10)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department further explores the possibility of developing relationships with other departments in order to alleviate teaching demands on staff. (Paragraph 10.2)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel strongly **recommends** that the Department contact the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) regarding the AHRB Research Leave Scheme, which could assist staff to extend their study leave period. (Paragraph 11)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department should continue with its re-examination of the appropriateness of GTAs tutoring Honours level students. (Paragraph 12)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that when the proposed refurbishment of the Department's premises is underway, consideration be given to the provision of suitable accommodation for GTAs. (Paragraph 12)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel strongly **recommends** that serious consideration be given to reviewing the current Honours provision. The Department should consider reducing the number of options available and developing subjects which correlate directly to staff interests and research areas thereby creating more time for research and flexibility among staff. (Paragraph 14)

Action: Head of Department

Student Progression and Support

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department liaises with the LTSN and the Teaching and Learning Service to ensure clarity when communicating the Department's intended aims and objectives to students. (Paragraph 15)

Action: Department

Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards

Recommendation The Panel were most concerned regarding the current status of the MPhil in Scottish Studies and strongly **recommends** that the Department, working with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, takes urgent action to substantially increase recruitment to the MPhil in Scottish Studies /Scottish Literature. Possible methods are the recruitment of MSc Computer Science students to undertake the design of a new website for the MPhil and the use of the Department of Adult Continuing Education in advertising the availability of the MPhil. (Paragraph 16). The Department should also consider supplying Distance Learning students with a package of materials for a small fee. (Paragraph 16.2)**Action: Head of Department**

Recommendation The Panel strongly **recommends** that the Department gives serious consideration to the revision of the Department's chronological approach in Honours, thereby enabling the Department to introduce different approaches to the subject and to alleviate teaching pressures on staff. (Paragraph 17)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department investigate the Teaching and Learning Service development fund, which could assist in the development of PowerPoint technology. (Paragraph 18.1)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Department take action to ensure that all course documentation is updated to reflect the new Code of Assessment and to reflect consistent content and style. (Paragraph 18.2)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the course material for the Pre-Sessional courses be updated to reflect its position as a credit bearing course and therefore attention should be given to addressing the essential aims and objectives. (Paragraph 18.2)

Action: Department

Recommendation The Panel noted that Honours courses are run on a two yearly cycle and **recommends** that the Department takes action to ensure that all handbooks for both years of a current Honours cycle are available on the web. (Paragraph 18.2)

Action: Department

Staff Support

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Dean should identify a former Head of Department to act as a 'mentor' to a new Head of Department for the first year of the appointment and should initiate regular meetings of the School's professorial staff. (Paragraph 19.1)

Action: Dean

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department identifies a formal mentor for the probationary member of staff at the earliest opportunity. (Paragraph 19.1)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation The Panel **recommends** that the Dean should discuss with the Finance office and the Head of Department the procedure for the forwarding of payments from overseas students to the Department to endeavour to avoid unnecessary delays. (Paragraph 19.2)

**Action: Dean
Head of Department**

Recommendation The Panel recommends that the Head of Department should ensure that the demands of the New Lecturer Programme be reflected in the Workload Model for members of staff. (Paragraph 20)

Action: Head of Department

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Last modified on Tuesday, 30 November 2004