

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Academic Standards Committee - Friday 25 May 2007

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Responses to the Recommendations arising from the Review of the
School of Law held on 8 March 2007**

Mr Jim Craig, Clerk to the Review Panel

May 2007

Conclusions

The Review Panel was impressed by the industry of the School and the extent of its accomplishments over the past ten years which had seen enormous growth in its research activity and major revision of its flagship LLB programme, the latter partly to accommodate the highly commendable increase in the numbers of Honours students studying abroad in their third year.

The Panel was impressed also by the unprecedented numbers that the School was teaching despite its entrance qualifications being as high as they could reasonably be set. It congratulated the School on its decision to introduce the National Admissions Test for Law and to monitor its effectiveness in predicting performance in the LLB programme.

The Panel noted the enthusiasm expressed by the Honours and postgraduate students that it met. It was concerned, however, by the fact that it met only two postgraduates and, while the Panel appreciated that the School was not in a position to compel its students to attend, it formed the view that a better turnout might have been achieved if the School had made the students aware of the importance of the occasion.

The Panel noted also a higher than usual level of criticism of various aspects of the degree programme being expressed by Level 2 students. It acknowledged that these criticisms should be weighed in the context of course evaluation reports which generally indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision at Levels 1 and 2, but the Panel found it difficult to dismiss entirely a sense that new students were regarded as unprepared for their choice of career and, by their own efforts, should 'shape up' as quickly as possible.

Recommendation 1:

The Panel recommends that the School continues to seek a resolution of the problem of grade profiles in some Levels 1 and 2 courses being abnormal and, in particular, that it determines whether, if local glosses supplementing the Code of Assessment's descriptors are being applied at these Levels, their use is appropriate.. (*Paragraph C.3.2*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The new School of Law has reached the following conclusions:

- The School accepts that it significantly out of line with other departments within the University.
- The School of Law local glosses are regarded as appropriate and do not seem to be the cause of the problem.
- There is a tendency, when A grades are awarded, to award them at the margin. Markers seem reluctant to award marks above A4.
- Calculations we have carried out demonstrates that the tendency to award marginal A grades significantly decreases the likelihood, in any course with multiple instruments of assessment, of a student achieving an A grade overall under the marking scale.

The School has determined two strategies for dealing with this problem:

- Markers should be more forcefully encouraged to use the full width of the A band in marking.
- Grade profiles in all assessments in the School of Law are to be published as a matter of course to all staff and students, and monitored by the Year committees, with the convenors of those Committees reporting to the Undergraduate Committee which then reports to the School of Law. The new ACMR form will require staff to address outcomes when less than 10 per cent of the class obtain an 'A'.

Such monitoring will help to determine the extent to which particular courses may be out of line, and the extent to which the number of instruments of assessment has an impact. The convenors of courses that are significantly out of line across year groups will be asked to look again at the format of assessment within the course, to ensure that the assessment is appropriate to the level of the course.

Recommendation 2:

The Panel recommends that the School reconsiders how information relating to all aspects of assessment and progression is delivered to students, taking account of the fact that repetition in different forms may be appropriate. (*Paragraph C.3.3*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School's Undergraduate Committee has considered this recommendation, taking into account also the National Student Survey results from March 2006. It has reached the following conclusions:

- There is a problem with student lack of appreciation, and lack of recognition, of advising information.
- The quality of the information on the School of Law website is good but students do encounter difficulties in finding the relevant information.
- The accuracy of the information on the School of Law website is good and it is monitored periodically.
- A return to routine and compulsory one-to-one advising meetings for each student would not be a good use of advising resources given the successful

introduction of WebSURF. One-to-one meetings for students who request such a meeting will of course continue to be offered to students in all years at any time during the year, not simply in September or January.

The School has determined the following strategies for dealing with this problem:

- The practice of the Senior Adviser providing an overview of the Advising system at orientation will be resumed. The Student Development Officer and the International Officer will continue to meet students at orientation.
- The Senior Adviser will reinforce this with a subsequent meeting in February with 1st year students. This will hopefully raise the profile of the advising system, and increase awareness of the role of the adviser, the information the adviser can provide, and the range of information resources in respect of advising made available on the School of Law website.
- The School of law advising strategy will be, in so far as possible, to provide the relevant information to students at the most relevant time. This will avoid front-loading students with more information than they can usefully absorb. The strategy will be carried out primarily via scheduled or ad hoc Advising Events. Examples include the Diploma in Legal Practice briefing for 1st year students; the Law fair; a planned Careers fair (primarily aimed at careers outwith the legal profession); an options meeting for Year 2 students in the second semester; study abroad briefings; a briefing about placements for Year 2 students. Personal Development Planning, and employability, will fit into this programme of annual Advising events.
- Information on the website has been reinforced by the production of a single page document, clearly headed 'Important Information for all LLB undergraduates'. This contains reference to key student contacts within the School of Law and the web addresses containing important information. This document was issued in hard copy at enrolment, and was subsequently emailed to all LLB students on two occasions during semester 1.
- Significant time and effort has been put into the School of Law website since September 2006 in an effort to make it more coherent and user-friendly.

Recommendation 3:

The Panel recommends that the School takes urgent steps to discover how far student expectation of assessment feedback differs both from what it provides and is capable of providing, and that it devises appropriate means of bridging the gap between expectation and reality. (*Paragraph C.3.5*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School has considered this recommendation, taking into account also the National Student Survey results from March 2006 and its own student focus group information. It has reached the following conclusions:

- There seems to be a substantive problem with feedback which goes beyond the issue of student expectation.
- Feedback has been uneven across LLB courses, leading in some courses to a raised level of expectation which other courses have not met. In the absence of a clear statement of minimum requirements in regard to feedback, students do not know what to expect.

- The system of monitoring feedback turnaround times, which had been implemented, has not continued to be implemented.

The School has determined the following strategies for dealing with this problem:

- A minimum set of requirements on feedback is being drafted to be issued to course convenors.
- These requirements, rather than being overly prescriptive, will take the form of a menu of recommended forms of feedback which may be used in the School.
- All course convenors and teachers in the School of Law will be issued annually with a short document entitled 'Code of Practice'; this will include reminders about deadlines for the return of assessed work. Reasons why a deadline will not be reached will require to be published to students to ensure transparency.
- The Exams office will monitor deadlines in respect of the return of assessed work; return dates will be published to ensure transparency and to allow class representatives to raise this with Year Committees.
- Generic feedback will be provided to students as follows:
 - The average GPA of students in Year 1 and Year 2 will be published annually at the end of the academic session. This will allow students to gauge their own performance against that of their peer group in general.
 - For the same reason, the profile of grades in every assessment will be published as soon as the marks have been confirmed.
 - Annual Course Monitoring Reports have been re-designed. Instead of being available only in hard copy in the Law Workshop, they will now be published on the Web.
 - Students applying for Honours will now be informed, in respect of each Honours course, what the mean entry score in terms of GPA was for students accepted to that course in the previous year.
 - Course convenors are responsible for ensuring that a statement about the content, form, and timing of feedback is contained in course documents. The failure to adhere to this statement is a matter that may be brought to the attention of the Year Committee by the Class Representatives or the Senior Adviser of Studies who has oversight of the content of course documents.

Recommendation 4:

The Panel recommends that the School revisits the 2004-05 External Examiner reports in respect of Civil Law, etc. and European Law, and submits its response to the Senate Office as a matter of urgency. (*Paragraph C.3.6*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The examiner's reports in these subjects were re-considered and responses were sent to Senate Office on 28th April 2006 (Civil Law) and 8th May 2006 (European Law).

Recommendation 5:

The Panel recommends that the School gives consideration to ways in which the practice of limiting admission to popular Honours classes might be discontinued. (Paragraph C.4.3)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School has considered this recommendation carefully. In relation to level 3, the School thinks that there is not a significant problem. It is accepted that courses at level 4 are often over-subscribed. However, class sizes are related to progression. At level 4 courses are taught entirely by seminar rather than lecture and students are expected to do extensive prior reading. The necessity of ensuring that all students are able to participate substantially in classes means that class sizes are limited to 20. The use of lengthy reading lists is a further reason for capping class sizes as we have to ensure it is possible for students to have realistic prospects of being able to obtain the reading. We think, therefore, that there are sound educational reasons for not increasing class sizes at level 4.

Recommendation 6:

The Panel recommends that the School seek to determine the extent to which a sense of detachment from the academic community prevails and, informed by the outcome, consider what action might be appropriate to reduce perceived levels of isolation. (Paragraph C.4.4)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School has considered this recommendation, taking into account also the National Student Survey results from March 2006 and its own student focus group information. It has reached the following conclusions:

- A sense of detachment does exist amongst some students in the School of Law.
- This appears to have arisen since the re-organisation of the LLB in 2003/2004.
- The problem appears to be prevalent primarily in Year 2 of the degree and may therefore be linked with the relatively lower number of contact hours in that year. The number of contact hours is a result of teaching methods employed, for perfectly good educational reasons, in some Level 2 courses.

The following changes may influence this problem:

- The adjustment in the academic year will have the effect of raising the number of contact hours in Year 2.
- Commercial Law, a 20 credit course commonly taken in year 2, will be split into two 10 credit courses. The contact time in Semester two will increase significantly, at the point in the year when otherwise it is at its lowest.
- The School of Law website, in particular the forums on the website linked to particular courses, is being used increasingly as an informal channel of communication between course convenors and students and between students inter se.

The School has determined the following strategies for dealing with this problem:

- The number of contact hours in Level 1 and Level 2 courses will be reviewed by the relevant course teams. This will form part of ongoing discussions within the School in preparation for the move to the new academic year structure in September 2008.
- Involving students in the social life of the Law School is a matter that ought to be student-led, but supported by the School of Law.
- The student Law Society has been re-launched, with a new constitution. It will be encouraged to expand its activities and to renew the social activities within the School in which students have traditionally engaged. This falls within the remit of the Student Development Officer and the Student Development Committee.
- Feedback from the Student Law Society committee has suggested that the School revive a 'buddy system' to help new students adjust to learning in the School of Law. This would not operate in competition with Peer Assisted Learning, but would primarily a social aspect. This proposal has been adopted by the School and is already being implemented.
- A clear programme of Student Law Society events should be published at the beginning of the year and all students should be issued with a Student Law Society membership card.

The School of Law and the Student Law Society have decided to introduce an initiative intended to increase a sense of community amongst students. The intention is to establish a link with a different charity each year and to encourage students to raise funds across the year for that charity. Some law students have experience from school of charitable fundraising activities, and the School would seek to develop this; but the aim is to include all students and to invite them to become engaged in an outlet for sociable, fun, and rewarding activities. These activities may in due course feature as part of personal development planning for students. This initiative will have three aspects:

- a) Events organised by the School of Law (e.g. organised hill-walking; sporting competitions; abseiling);
- b) Events organised by the Student Law Society;
- c) Events organised independently by groups of students, or individual students.

These activities will be targeted particularly at students in years 1 and 2, and ongoing activities and achievements will be reported on the School of Law website. The sum raised will be awarded to the nominated charity by the outgoing president of the Student Law Society, at the School of Law prize-giving each year.

Recommendation 7:

The Panel recommends that the School give consideration to establishing a Learning and Teaching Committee with responsibility for reviewing the delivery of the curriculum as a whole. (*Paragraph C.4.6*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School has appointed an Undergraduate Committee which has responsibility for reviewing the delivery of the curriculum as a whole. The Committee meets every four weeks during term time. It has already reviewed a number of issues and recommended significant changes to departmental policy and practice.

Recommendation 8:

The Panel recognised that applicants should compete for places on a level playing field but recommends that the School continues its exploration of the relatively small numbers of students from ethnic minorities on the LLB programme, and consider, as appropriate, how it might encourage more applications from ethnic minorities. (*Paragraph C.5.3*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The admissions team is currently reviewing the intake of students from ethnic minorities within our Widening Participation programme. We are currently encouraging applications from all schools within the GOALS programme, many of which have a large mix of ethnic pupils. Two members of staff have recently been appointed as Academic Student Recruitment Officers within the University and have a remit to visit various schools throughout the year. We are encouraging applicants to attend our Law Summer School which has been revised this year to offer a more accessible and structured programme to the participants. Attendance at the summer school can be taken into account once the results of Higher examinations are known in August.

Recommendation 9:

The Panel recommends that the International and Postgraduate Service should be advised that MLL students from overseas had indicated that they would have appreciated more assistance settling into Glasgow and that, whether independently or in conjunction with the School of Law, it might consider whether it would be practicable to offer further support, or whether more might be done to advise overseas students of the support that is already available on request. (*Paragraph C.5.5*)

Action: The Director of the International and Postgraduate Service

Response:

Action has been taken at both departmental and faculty level. The Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences has appointed a Postgraduate Officer who has created a programme of social and educational events aimed at encouraging the integration of overseas students. The School of Law invites all PGT students to a welcome event at the beginning of the first semester. In addition, the induction programme for LLM students has been revised and arrangements for admissions (which may have a knock-on effect on this problem) are being revised.

Recommendation 10:

The Panel recommends that support for postgraduate students published on the School's website should be brought up to the same standard as that provided for undergraduates. (*Paragraph C.5.6*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School of Law recognises the need to bring information for postgraduates on the School of Law website up to the same standard as that for undergraduates. We are in the process of completing the necessary revisions.

Recommendation 11:

The Panel recommends that the review of the adviser system being undertaken in the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences should include a survey of student opinion on the matter, and that the results of that consultation should be taken into account. (*Paragraph C.5.8*)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences

Response: Head of School

This recommendation was to be addressed primarily by the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences. However, the School of Law has already decided to make some changes to advising of LLB students. See responses to recommendation 2 above.

Response: Dean of Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences

This recommendation has been based on misapprehensions as to what the Faculty Review of Advising had entailed and when it took place. The Faculty Review was a survey of Advisers only and was completed in April 2006. Thus, the survey had already been concluded at the time of the above recommendation.

Following the completion of the Faculty Review of Advising all final year students across the Faculty were encouraged to respond to the National Student Survey, which included questions on academic support. Additionally, the Faculty also undertook a survey of LBSS undergraduate students regarding employability skills. Given that the Retention Working Group of the Learning and Teaching Committee was also indicating that it might be undertaking a survey of students across the University, the Undergraduate Studies Committee (UGSC) agreed that it would not be useful to undertake another Faculty survey of students at that time.

It was instead agreed that several focus group sessions might be organised to ask students their opinions on the advising system as an alternative to a survey and this proposal was subsequently actioned, in conjunction with providing a follow-up to the National Student Survey results on academic support.

In the area of academic support, many scores for relevant Departments/subject areas were below 4 for the question "I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies". There were also some low scores for the question about good advice being available when students needed to make study choices. UGSC Members queried what the survey meant by academic support and advice being available to students since this could be provided by not only Advisers of Studies but also other academic and administrative staff in Departments as well as other University support services. The Committee felt that the questions asked by the survey about academic support were quite broad and perhaps not sufficiently detailed to be able to respond to.

The Committee agreed that an investigation into what students had meant by the answers in the academic support section of the National Student Survey would be useful. It was also noted that the survey responses had been consistent across the Faculty's three degree programmes and their differing advising systems. Student focus groups were a means to identify specific student academic support issues and how the Faculty and Departments could address these. It was therefore agreed that student focus groups would be drawn from the student representatives in Departments and graduate students recruited to conduct the group sessions.

A meeting of the Associate Dean (Undergraduate Studies), the UGSC Clerk, Chief Adviser (Social Sciences), the Senior Advisers for Law and Accountancy and the

Effective Learning Adviser was held to consider the questions on academic support that should be put to the student focus groups.

The academic support student focus groups were held by Dr Mary McCulloch, Learning and Teaching Centre, on behalf of the Faculty in the weeks beginning 22 and 29 January 2007. The transcriptions of Academic Support Focus Groups were received in March and a meeting arranged for Friday 13 April with Mr Guthrie, Convenor of the Faculty Undergraduate Studies Committee, and Dr McCulloch to put together some initial conclusions and recommendations that will then be discussed by the Chief/Senior Advisers and Faculty Undergraduate Studies Committee.

Recommendation 12:

The Panel recommends that the School consider how formal communications with students' representatives might be improved. (*Paragraph C.5.9*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School accepts that the system of student representatives was not given sufficient priority, and that the School had insufficient mechanisms in place to gauge student views last session. Student perceptions that this aspect of quality assurance required urgent attention were correct. Since the start of this session, meaningful steps have been taken to ensure that a positive culture now exists in which the School of Law makes explicit its commitment to receiving and responding to students' views. We have actively attempted to implement the Senate Code on Student Representation, and to this end, the following key points should be noted:

- In order to ensure effective representation, we have chosen to exceed the recommended number of student reps: there are (on average) 6 appointed representatives each year.
- In addition to a minimum of 3 meetings for each year committee per session, two informal meetings – a 'Student Rep. Forum – take place to provide additional training and support for representatives and to enable wider discussion of common issues.
- Action is being taken to publish all ACMRs, Year Committee Minutes, minutes of School of Law meetings, the DPTLA report, and Undergraduate Committee Minutes on the 'virtual classroom'.
- Year committee coordinators have discussed improving the workings of the year committees by ensuring students can raise items on the agenda, that action points are followed through, and by circulating draft minutes as soon as possible.

Recommendation 13:

The Panel recommends that the School should consider how students might be made more aware of its expectations of them, and how they might be assisted to acquire the necessary skills. (*Paragraph C.5.11*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The School agrees with the panel that this is not an easy question with which to deal, and is one that cannot be addressed in the context of a short initial induction to the study of law.

The School acknowledges that student awareness of expectations placed upon them does link closely to the question of feedback. What seems to be required is a more effective means of providing students with reasonable foreknowledge of the relevant standards to be applied and requisite skills to be tested. The system of embedding the development of legal skills within the compulsory LLB courses, which was seen as the most desirable mechanism for developing students' skills when design changes were last made to the degree, does not seem, on its own, to have been sufficiently successful.

The ability of students to appreciate what the necessary skills are, and to develop, use and articulate those skills, may be improved by means of a stand-alone skills component. This could take place in the context of developing a response to changes in the academic year structure; in particular, by moving to a model which front-loads more intensive teaching to the beginning of first-year.

The responses made to recommendations 2 and 3 above indicate changes which will assist in this area. Consideration of this issue is affected by the introduction of Personal Development Planning. One aspect of Personal Development Planning will involve encouraging students to reflect upon their own performance, and it is recognised that addressing the issue of student expectations will be essential.

In the light of these considerations, the School intends:

- To produce a pack of materials dedicated to the development of legal skills (e.g. examples of a variety of assessed-but-anonymous work, with an explanation of how the mark awarded reflects the quality of the work); written comments on how to approach problem questions; how to write a good essay.
- These materials will be issued to students in preparation for one or two dedicated study skills sessions early in semester one of Year 1. These sessions will constitute an expansion of induction, rather than a stand-alone course. They would be non-credit bearing. The substance of these sessions will relate to compulsory first-year LLB courses.
- The School takes the view that it is not sufficient to give written guidance or examples in regard to skills development. Such material must be more explicitly reinforced in lectures and tutorials. The emphasis on skills in a stand-alone component delivered in the early weeks of the course, as students begin to acquire substantive legal knowledge, may be a more effective means of encouraging students to appreciate and reflect upon subject-specific skills. This reflects the recognised need to explain issues such as plagiarism to students in a class setting, rather than relying on written guidance no matter how prominently displayed or drawn to their attention.

Recommendation 14:

The Panel recommends that the School should play a more proactive role than at present in determining whether teaching - delivered other than by members of School staff - is of appropriate quality. (*Paragraph C.6.4*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

In general, the quality of teaching provided by external teachers is high and receives positive feedback from students. The School of Law intends in future to decrease its reliance on external teachers but considers that it would be undesirable and not feasible to avoid entirely relying on external teachers. The Head of Department and the Quality Assurance Officer will ensure that there is careful scrutiny of the quality of external teachers hired, that they are made fully aware of University policies and procedures, and that they are adequately trained.

Recommendation 15:

The Panel recommends that the School should explore its concerns about the level of IT support with the Dean of the Faculty. (*Paragraph C.6.6*)

Action: The Head of Department and the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences

Response: Head of School

IT support has been discussed with Faculty. Some concerns related to IT provision in centrally booked teaching rooms, and these problems have been highlighted to the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) and the Director of Estates and Buildings by Faculty in relation to the Department of Management DPTLA review. The issue of IT support will be kept under review by the department.

Response: Dean of Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences

The teaching technology equipment has been upgraded in CRB rooms. However, as highlighted in the Faculty QAEO PG report, there are still problems relating to poor and inadequately maintained equipment, and a lack of e-learning resources and easy web access in teaching rooms. These problems have been highlighted to the Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) and the Director of Estates and Buildings.

With regard to IT support for computer labs and staff PCs, the School shares two computer managers with the Department of Accounting & Finance and the Department of Management for whom cover is provided by other members of the Faculty IT team. Problems with the School's VLE should be resolved when the School moves to Moodle.

Recommendation 16:

The Panel recommends that a statement of the deficiencies of the teaching accommodation it uses should be made available to the Director of Estates and Buildings. (*Paragraph C.6.6*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

This has been done by Professor Murdoch. Our complaints tend to echo those of other departments – see, for example, the Faculty response to the Department of Management DPTLA review.

Recommendation 17:

The Panel recommends that staff in the School be reminded again of the importance of adhering in a timely manner to quality assurance requirements notably in respect of the prompt completion of Annual Course Monitoring Reports. (*Paragraph E*)

Action: The Head of Department

Response:

The Head of Department has reminded staff of their responsibilities in this area and adherence to quality assurance requirements will be monitored by the relevant officers and the year committees.

Prepared by: Janet Fleming, Senate Office

Last modified on: Wednesday 2 May 2007