UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Report from the Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching Learning and Assessment of the Department of English Language held on
Thursday 24 April 2003

Review Panel

Professor Chris Morris	Vice-Principal (Staffing) and Territorial Vice-Principal (Arts-based) [Convener]
Professor John Local	Department of Language and Linguistic Science, University of York
Dr Geoffrey Moores	Senate Assessor on University Court
Dr Erica McAteer	Teaching and Learning Service
Mr James Craig	Senate Office [Panel Secretary]
Ms Jane McAllister	Senate Office [Observer]

A.   Introduction

The Department of English Language was last reviewed internally in 1995. It received an 'Excellent' rating in the Teaching Quality Assessment held in 1997 and a 5* rating in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.

The Department provided a Self Evaluation Report 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 the Head of Department, Professor M.K.C. MacMahon, and subsequently the permanent staff of the Department. The Panel also met five Graduate Teaching Assistants, who represented hourly-paid staff, three MPhil students, and some twenty undergraduate students ranging from Level 1 to Senior Honours.

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

- MPhil in English Language (taught elements)

- MPhil in Medieval & Renaissance Studies (taught elements)

- MA (Hons) programme in English Language

    This programme may be taken as Single Honours English Language or Single Honours English Language & Literature, or as part of a Joint Honours programme. Contributing courses are:

    Level 1 Module 1A
    Level 1 Module 1B
    Level 2 Module 2A
    Level 2 Module 2B
    A selection of eight (in the case of Single Honours) from 22 Honours options.

    The Panel noted also the Department's contribution to the following programmes:

- MA (Hons) programme in English Literature (Two of the Honours options referred to above.)

- MA (Hons) programme in Scottish Language and Literature (Two of the Honours options referred to above.)

- MA in General Humanities (Contributions are made to Level 1 and Level 2 Scottish Literature programmes, and Level 3 Modern Language programme)

B. Summary Report

1. Preliminaries

1.1 As noted above, the Department of English Language achieved a rating of 5* in the Research Assessment Exercise and an "Excellent" in the 1997 TQA. On this occasion the Review Panel was concerned exclusively with teaching and assessment activities, and its findings both justified the TQA outcome and demonstrated that the 5* research rating was all the more remarkable in a department so committed to achieving the highest standards of teaching.

1.2 It was noted that the Review Panel received very positive responses from all the groups it interviewed. Undergraduate and postgraduate students all spoke warmly of the support they received from staff, graduate teaching assistants held the permanent staff in high regard, and the permanent staff displayed not only considerable pastoral concern for their students but strong mutual support in pursuit of common objectives.

1.3 In advance of the review, the Department provided the Panel with a quantity of supporting documentation which was of a very high standard throughout. The Panel felt, however, that the self-evaluation report (SER) failed to do justice to the Department's achievements, and might have benefited from more considered reflection of the challenges and opportunities facing the Department.

1.4 The significance of the warm commendation provided by the External Examiner in undergraduate provision from the University of Edinburgh, was noted and endorsed by the external member of the Review Panel who expressed his own view that English Language students graduating from the Glasgow Honours programme were better equipped than those from most other universities. The Panel concluded that the curriculum was sound and that the Department conscientiously kept it under review.

2 Aims and Learning Outcomes

2.1 General

2.1.1 The Review Panel expressed some concern about the absence from the SER of Departmental aims and how these articulated with curricular development and the learning objectives of individual courses. Reference to the University's mission statement, however, suggested that activity in support of institutional objectives ranked high in the Department's priorities, and the SER gave some indication of what was discovered to be a Departmental ethos for the teaching of the subject and the success of its students. However, course documentation at all levels was clearly explicit in its presentation of intended learning outcomes. Meeting the Review Panel, students answered confidently that they had a clear sense of what they were supposed to derive from academic programmes, and this level of certainty was echoed by Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) referring both to the objectives of individual workshops and to the Level 1 course as a whole.

2.1.2 In its meeting with Departmental staff, the Review Panel asked for evidence that learning objectives were being met. The reply that the proof lay in the calibre of students who emerged from the course did not entirely allay the Panel's concern in terms of quality assurance. The Panel considered that instruments of assessment should be designed to measure the extent to which intended learning outcomes are realised, and the evidence that learning objectives are being met should be found in

the performance of students in these assessments. The Panel's recommendation with respect to learning objectives and assessments appears in paragraph 3.7.1.2 below.

2.2 Writing Skills

2.2.1 The Head of Department acknowledged the Department's necessity to improve the writing skills of its students. Undergraduates, for their part, referred positively to an add-on optional module for Honours students entitled "Enhancing Academic Skills in English Language" (EASEL) which included advice on essay writing and the attainment of other transferable skills. The EASEL programme is referred to again below but the Review Panel **commends** the Department for this initiative.

2.3 Research skills

2.3.1 Departmental staff advised the Review Panel that the combined enrolment on the two MPhil programmes was five, and that students in Mode A and Mode B were distinguished by the length of the dissertation: between 10,000 and 15,000 words for Mode A, and between 20,000 and 25,000 words for Mode B. They advised, further, that, as both categories received teaching and all were given research training, it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between taught and research MPhil students. Asked about the quality of research training, the students reported that it was good, particularly commending the extent to which staff took an interest in what their students were doing, and the sense of belonging to a mutually supportive academic community. They mentioned that financial assistance was available for attending conferences and visiting the British Library and the Bodlean Library in Oxford and, though opportunities for engaging with research projects appeared limited, some work was available with Professor Kay on the Scots Thesaurus. The Panel was concerned, however, that links with the Departments of English and Scottish Literature were weak, and that MPhil students seemed not to have established strong connections with the Faculty Graduate School.

2.3.2 While the Panel was impressed by the extent to which the MPhil students identified with and felt supported by the staff, it **recommends** that the Department encourage a more outward looking approach, promoting links with other postgraduate activity in the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature (SESLL) and the Faculty of Arts.

3   Curricula and Assessment

3.1   General

3.1.1 The very positive appraisal of the Department's curriculum by external examiners has been noted above. In discussion with the Head of Department, the Review Panel encouraged further analysis of subject benchmarks followed by a review of the curriculum and of assessment methods. Departmental staff acknowledged reports from Honours students that the perception of English Language as a difficult, technical subject deterred many of their fellows from applying for admission to Honours but, when the Panel suggested offering the technical components later in the curriculum, staff maintained that they provided a necessary grounding upon which an undergraduate career in the subject could be developed. In the Panel's second meeting with the Head of Department this issue was raised again, and members suggested that disciplines such as Sociolinguistics might be introduced at Level 1 and the difficult technical material hung on this peg once the need for it has been established in the minds of students. It was further suggested that some of the learning of the symbols, vocabulary and definitions of Phonetics might be done online and away from the classroom. The Panel was advised, however, by Professor MacMahon that both the reproduction of sound and the representation of phonetic symbols had proved problematic in computer

applications.

3.1.2 The importance of English Literature to the life of the Department as well as the shape of its curriculum was explained by the requirement that prospective Honours students in English Literature complete the Level 1 course in English Language. This regulation provided the Department with a "captive" Level 1 student base of considerable size, something which had advantages and disadvantages as far as staff were concerned. While it guaranteed a large audience for introductory classes, these students were, for the most part, in their second year and committed to leaving the Department as soon as their obligations had been met. Professor MacMahon said that efforts were being made to break this pattern and to recruit more Year 1 students to Level 1. Advisers were being asked to encourage prospective English Literature students to take English Language in their first year. The Department was in the process of undertaking a mailshot (colourful, informative brochure) about English Language to schools in England where English Language is taught at 'A' level.

3.1.3 Encouraged to imagine what changes they might make to the curriculum should they be relieved of resource constraints, staff suggested that alterations would not be radical but rather would continue the incremental development that had characterised the Department's history over the past few years. New technology might play a greater part, and some traditional elements might be removed but, they noted, the course approval process tended to have a braking effect on experimentation and the rate of change.

3.1.4 While the Review Panel expressed enthusiastic support for the idea that more might be done to make subjects such as Phonetics more exciting for students, it was agreed that the Department was itself best placed to determine the order and structure of the curriculum. Thus, while no formal recommendation is offered, the Panel draws to the attention of the Department the advantages that might accrue from restructuring the degree programme.

3.2   Curriculum development

3.2.1 In preliminary discussion the Review Panel noted that, although first impressions were that English Language was a traditional department doing things in a traditional way, the curriculum was not at all conservative, and contained much that was new and exciting. It noted also that the Department included among its numbers individuals who possessed reputations on the national and international stages. It considered, however, that a certain amount of theory to support the essentially descriptive teaching of the language was missing.

3.2.2 The Review Panel asked how, in terms of aims and objectives for curriculum development, the Department balanced tradition with the innovative elements. The Head of Department reported that, twenty years before, the curriculum had been very much based on the Oxford model which was essentially descriptive and historical and contained very little in the way of theory. Since then, the Department had attempted to develop a more modern, theoretical approach while retaining the best of the traditional curriculum. He accepted the observation that, despite this, some components that one might have expected to find in a modern Linguistics course were missing, but argued that the Department was providing a course in English Language, not one in general linguistics. The Head of Department and Departmental staff reported separately that they would have liked to have seen more change but that the Department had lacked sufficient resources. to accomplish this. Professor MacMahon added that one member of staff would retire shortly and that it was hoped that the resulting vacancy would be filled by someone who might extend the range of teaching at Honours level. The GTAs responded forcefully to the suggestion of conservatism, insisting that teaching was

very good and too responsive to modern developments to be described as traditional.

3.3   Research impact

3.3.1 Undergraduates who met the Panel were asked whether they were aware of the Department's research strengths influencing teaching. The students reported that it was good to see research in action, and confirmed that it came through strongly in Honours and was fully integrated in the teaching. They added that it had also been in evidence in Level 1 classes.

3.4   Level 3 provision

3.4.1 The Review Panel had noted from the documentation submitted by the Department that it did not offer any courses at non-Honours Level 3, and that within SESLL responsibility had fallen to the smallest department of the School, Scottish Literature, to do so. When asked to comment on this, the Head of Department explained that SESLL had discussed the matter and had decided that, on behalf of all three departments, Scottish Literature should offer a Level 3 course. He explained further that, although Scottish Literature owned the course, all three departments might contribute to the teaching. He noted, however, that the fact that many students at Level 3 had no background in English Language - and hence would not be able to follow a course built upon progression through Levels 1 and 2 - and the extent of existing demands on limited staff resources, had both tended to discourage the development of a Level 3 initiative in the Department. The Review Panel also learned that the Department made a teaching contribution to the Level 3 non-Honours Modern Languages course *Literature in Translation*, and that, within SESLL, Scottish Literature was content to retain ownership of the Level 3 course because it derived benefits from the significant numbers of US and SOCRATES students it attracted. The English Language department already contributed to the teaching in Scottish Literature of relevant language modules at Level 2 and at Honours.

3.5   Scots Language

3.5.1 The SER referred to the Department's teaching of Scots Language as resonating with the University's mission to serve the needs of the West of Scotland. The Review Panel invited the Head of Department to develop this suggestion, and asked whether its inclusion in the curriculum played any part in widening access. The Panel noted Professor MacMahon's acknowledgement that the argument was not a strong one as, in reality, Scots Language seemed to be taken up with greater enthusiasm and enjoyment by non-Scots students.

3.6   Progression

3.6.1 The Review Panel noted that the curriculum demonstrated a clear progression path from Level 1 to Honours. Departmental staff acknowledged that the requirement for academic progression had consistently informed their design of courses; the Level 2 assessment involved much more self-directed work than that at Level 1, while the Honours classes required that students take still more responsibility for learning.

3.6.2 The Review Panel's discussions with the Head of Department addressed the low percentage of students who followed the route from Level 1 to Honours. Professor MacMahon recognized that the high level of participation in Level 1 reflected the requirements of the English Literature curriculum rather than the attraction of English Language as a subject which, he said, was disadvantaged by not being taught in Scottish schools. The Panel noted that it was, therefore, one of the

successes of the Department that so many of its students, while attending classes only because their preference for English Literature required them to do so, were found to hold it in such warm regard.

3.6.3 The Review Panel was surprised to discover that MPhil students, despite their close relationship with Departmental staff, were uncertain as to how candidates for PhD study might be selected. It is recognised that this lacuna might have occurred as a result of the absence on sabbatical of the Postgraduate Convener, but the Panel **recommends** that guidance be given to each group of MPhil students to ensure that they understand the process by which they might extend their postgraduate careers.

3.7 Assessment

3.7.1 General

3.7.1.1 The Department had taken the opportunity in its SER to challenge the wisdom of the standards section of the University's new *Code of Assessment* but the views expressed were not reiterated in discussion nor was the topic explored by the Review Panel. Instead, the Head of Department discussed essays as instruments of assessment and the fact that, in his view, the resource demands of marking were justified since other instruments often failed to address the attainment of learning outcomes. Professor MacMahon referred to the importance of determining whether students had grasped the essential principles of a course, and suggested to the Panel that that was difficult to do.

3.7.1.2 The Panel **recommends** that the articulation of Departmental aims with learning objectives and instruments of assessment be explicitly reviewed so that the relationship among these elements is clearly understood by all stakeholders.

3.7.2 Double marking

3.7.2.1 The Review Panel asked undergraduate students whether feedback from staff provided a clear understanding of progress, and of performance relative to expectations. The students expressed satisfaction with the formative aspects of assessment, their only complaint being that double marking sometimes resulted in delay in their receiving results.

3.7.3 Examination schedules

3.7.3.1 On the subject of examinations, the Review Panel noted that the students said that they would like to see a shift in balance from examinations to term essays, and that they would prefer to take examinations at the end of each completed module rather than in the main diet at the end of the session.

3.7.4 Automated assessment

3.7.4.1 The Review Panel suggested to the Head of Department that, given the student numbers and the demands on staff time, the balance of instruments of assessment used might be adjusted. Professor MacMahon referred to the questionnaires, made available on the Computing Service website, which the Department also used. The Panel expressed some surprise that the Department had elected to use the now rather dated *Edpac* system which required the purchase of expensive stationery and imposed comparatively severe constraints on the design of the assessment.

3.7.4.2 Departmental staff supported the introduction of multiple choice testing at Level 1 because it had led to a reduction in the amount of marking of written work in the first module and subsequently allowed more time for scrutiny of essay answers in the second. But staff asserted that multiple choice testing was also a good way to determine objectively whether ILOs were being met. The Panel endorsed the judicious, selective recourse to "multiple choice" instruments of

assessment but **recommends** that the Department investigates alternatives to *Edpac*.

3.7.5 Formative assessment

3.7.5.1 The Review Panel noted that GTAs were given structured lists of criteria for analysing the content of answers so that the formative assessment of students' written work would be consistently thorough. This was borne out by undergraduate students who confirmed that they found formative assessments helpful and encouraging. The Panel was especially pleased to discover that formative assessment was not confined to core studies but extended also to generic and transferable skills.

4 Teaching and Learning

4.1 General

4.1.1 Asked to comment on the suggestion that their teaching loads must hamper research activities, the staff were reluctant to concede any tension between the demands of teaching and research, maintaining that one was informed by the other.

4.2 Honours recruitment

4.2.1 An examination of the documents submitted by the Department suggested a need to boost Honours recruitment. This matter was raised early with the Head of Department who concurred and welcomed the suggestion that Honours students might be recruited to talk to Level 1 cohorts to encourage a higher level of progression. Staff reported that effort that had been put into poster and leaflet campaigns, and students who had stayed with English Language after fulfilling the requirements set by English Literature were happy to report that the Department had more than lived up to their expectations for the Honours years. The Review Panel was satisfied with this response; the related matter of recruitment to Level 1 in Year 1 has been discussed above (Paragraph 3.1.2).

4.3 MPhil recruitment

4.3.1 The Review Panel noted that, compared with what had been provided in respect of the undergraduate courses, the documentation supplied by the Department for the MPhil programme failed to convey a clear picture of teaching activity. Evidence received from taught postgraduate students themselves, however, revealed no serious problems except that they considered that their numbers were too few. It was noted that the Arts Faculty had been attempting to increase recruitment to such programmes. The external member advised his colleagues that the structure of the MPhil programmes was good and ought to be attracting numbers of students from overseas.

4.3.2 Departmental staff spoke of a strategically imperative campaign to recruit more postgraduates. They identified the source of the problem as the lack of financial support provided by the two funding councils - Arts & Humanities Research Board and the Economic & Social Research Council - which together currently supported only 12 taught postgraduate places nationally in English Language.

4.3.3 The Head of Department also recognised the need to invest time in the recruitment of more taught postgraduate students from overseas. He reported that, in this respect, the Department was already very active and that there were ongoing discussion with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Director in an attempt to establish overseas contacts.

4.3.4 The Head of Department drew attention to opportunities in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) market, particularly citing the training of teachers of English in the event of the Scottish Executive electing to proceed with plans for including English Language in the secondary school curriculum.

4.3.5 In light of the comments above, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Department, in conjunction with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (SRAS), increase its efforts to attract students to its MPhil courses. The Department should consult SRAS about conducting a programme of market research, particularly in North America, to determine what courses might be most attractive to prospective applicants.

4.4 Independent learning

4.4.1 Questioned about the Department's commitment to independent learning and where it was embedded in the curriculum as a whole, Professor MacMahon, replied that little was expected of the students in this regard until Honours classes due to the Department's concern to avoid withdrawals from a difficult and demanding subject. The undergraduates confirmed that independent learning was encouraged at Honours level and referred the Review Panel to a web page that had been set up as a students' self-help facility. The STELLA[1] laboratory was cited as also providing independent learning opportunities including some that might be encountered at an earlier Level. Departmental staff noted that innovations in teaching methods such as the workshops had also promoted independent learning.

4.5 Workshops

4.5.1 The attention of the Review Panel had been drawn to the Level 1 Workshops by the SER which referred to these as providing an

> **opportunity for students to make sensible and realistic assessments of their own understanding of, and progress in, the subject. The introduction of workshops, superseding the more traditional tutor-led group-tutorial format**

had recently been undertaken after consideration of

> **the effectiveness of tutorials as a learning mechanism, as well as from the very practical need of coping with larger tutorial groups at a time of reduced financial support … for employing graduate tutorial assistants.**

4.5.2 Asked how the effectiveness of the workshops was monitored, the Head of Department referred to weekly debriefing sessions attended by the GTAs and to feedback received from students. The Review Panel accepted that it was too early to judge what effect the workshops had had on results but was pleased to note that the students, for their part, described the workshops as good insofar as fellow students were prepared to participate fully. They reported that taking it in turn to act as group leader was one of the most positive aspects of the workshops. Although not unreservedly popular, the workshops had, according to one member of staff, breathed fresh air into the traditional dynamic of the relationship between lecturers and students.

4.6 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

4.6.1 It was noted that GTAs played a significant part in the Department's teaching and, given the high proportion of all teaching which is conducted at Level 1, this was considered entirely appropriate. The Review Panel recognised, however, that GTAs needed to be well organised and trained, and that the Department had a responsibility to demonstrate that this was so. Staff reported that a compulsory training programme was provided by the Teaching and Learning Service, and that further training was available on a voluntary basis. One of the GTAs met by the Panel commented that he had made use of the optional tuition and had found it very helpful. Staff said that they met the GTAs each week to discuss matters

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[1] Software for Teaching English Language & Literature and for its Assessment

arising from workshops, and the GTAs reported that they found these meetings beneficial and felt that their frequency was appropriate. The Panel was satisfied with these arrangements.

4.7   Staff development

4.7.1   The Review Panel noted from the Department's written submission that there did not appear to be a staff development policy in place, the SER referring to two individual instances of training rather than any clearly defined development programme. The Panel noted, however, that staff training was well established, that Departmental staff were, on the whole, very experienced, and that there had been no recent appointments.

4.8   Staff workloads

4.8.1   The Panel's single greatest concern related to staff workloads. It was alerted to this first in the SER and the accompanying documentation which indicated the high levels of contact hours staff shared with their students. This impression was borne out in the discussion with students who consistently described the readiness of staff to listen to their problems and to help them find solutions. Whilst staff were responsive to student needs, the Head of Department acknowledged that, particularly in more demanding and unfamiliar areas such as Old English, it was very easy for students to fall by the wayside, and that all reasonable efforts must be made to prevent this happening. But the Head of Department also told the Panel that he had conducted his own SWOT analysis and had identified the Department's greatest strength to be a loyal and committed staff while a discernible threat was the workload that it carried.

4.8.2   The concern about workloads and whether or not staff were teaching too much was explored also with Departmental staff. Staff considered that there was no alternative if no new teaching appointments were to be made. The staff were inclined also to reject the idea that more of their undergraduate teaching could be transferred to assistants - there being limits to what could be delegated to GTAs. The GTAs themselves also defended the *status quo*, admitting that a great deal of energy went into teaching at Level 1 while insisting that this was justified by results.

4.8.3   The Review Panel noted not only the weight of workload but the absence of a genuine workload model. It was felt that the model offered in the Department's submission was more a reporting device which did not provide any information about research activity and the effect of teaching on research. The Panel drew attention to this, pointing out that it demonstrated considerable variation, from one member of staff to another, in respect of the number of hours reported. While the Head of Department conceded that something along the lines of the Faculty of Arts' pilot model might be useful, the staff said that they did not see the need for such a tool because they worked as a team and any differences - in terms of who did what - were arrived at by mutual consent.

4.8.4   The Review Panel also raised with the Head of Department the number of different modules that were offered to comparatively small numbers of Honours students, and suggested that some courses might be made available only in alternate years. Professor MacMahon expressed concern that such a move would result in classes growing beyond their optimum size in the years when the option was taught. The Panel **recommends**, however, that the Department re-examines this proposition with a view to reducing the teaching burden on staff.

4.8.5   The Review Panel learned that Departmental payments to Graduate Teaching Assistants were three times higher than the Department's allocation for this purpose, the remainder coming from other income, notably its premium for

achieving a 5* RAE. The Panel noted that a case might be made for reducing expenditure on Level 1 support, and for the Department giving thought to finding alternative ways of using windfall income. The Panel was mindful, however, that any recommendation to this effect would make it more difficult, in the short term, to reduce staff teaching loads.

4.8.6   The Review Panel **commends** the Department for the *esprit de corps* and for the commitment demonstrated by all its members. However, it was concerned that this commitment should not be exploited and, while not wishing to undermine the team spirit which so distinguished the staff's contribution to the discussion, the Panel **recommends** that the Department adopt a workload model after the pattern of the Faculty of Arts' pilot model to assist the process of making workloads transparent.

4.8.7   While the Review Panel noted with concern the workloads carried by members of staff in the Department, it recognized that additional time might be profitably invested in student recruitment and the expansion of Honours and postgraduate numbers. The Panel **recommends**, therefore, that staff contact hours with Level 1 undergraduate students should be significantly reduced with greater emphasis placed on independent learning and the workshops now successfully established. It **recommends** also that the Department should follow the example of its counterpart at the University of Edinburgh by offering several of its Honours options only in alternate years, thus freeing more staff time for MPhil teaching and research.

4.9   Management of resources

4.9.1   The Review Panel recognised that staff members of the Department were deeply conscious of its discrete identity, and the Panel appreciated that the ethos embedded in that identity had been responsible for remarkable achievements in respect of both teaching and research. For these reasons it hesitated to propose any change which might jeopardise the academic community of the Department.

4.9.2   Against the background of staff workloads already discussed, however, the Panel felt that the Department might benefit from greater support in administrative areas such as the management of accounts, and **recommends** that the Faculty considers the formation of a closer administrative relationship among the partners in SESLL.

4.10   Statistics

4.10.1 The Panel had serious concerns regarding the presentation and usefulness of centrally produced statistics. It noted, in particular, the Markov modelling of trends which, without explanation or commentary, it was sure had been of no assistance to the Department. The Panel **recommends** that this matter be brought to the attention of the Planning Office which is responsible for the preparation of this data.

4.11   Accommodation

4.11.1 With office space known to be at a premium, the Review Panel asked the GTAs about the facilities available to them. They confirmed that they did not have their own room but reported that this did not prevent them seeing students individually. They would, however, very much welcome the provision of some GTA / graduate studies space.   The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews use of accommodation to determine whether such provision might be made.

4.11.2 The documentation received from the Department by the Review Panel referred to the size of the Level 1 class and the need for lectures to be relayed from the main theatre to an overflow room where students followed the presentation on television monitors. In its meeting with the undergraduate students, the Panel was pleasantly surprised to learn that students were very happy with the video-linked

arrangements which involved a division of the class alphabetically, each taking it in turn to attend the live lecture.

5 Student Progression and Support

5.1   Student support

5.1.1 Undergraduate students spoke of the "family atmosphere in the Department" which compared well both with the smaller Department of Celtic and the much larger English Literature. While the supportiveness of the Department was generally appreciated, a few of the students found it overly intrusive. Some staff felt that the ratio of lectures to workshops should be increased to allow them more contact with students and to provide for a perceived need for greater support in Level 1. The Panel was not convinced of the validity of this view and, taking account of issues already discussed above, **recommends** that the Department consider means of reducing the level of general support and of targeting it towards those students who evidence greatest need.

5.1.2 Postgraduate students also described the Department as a good one in which to work because they enjoyed close contact with supervisors and because of the friendly and sociable environment. Asked about opportunities to present their work, the students said that there was an internal forum at which they could do this but the sole MPhil student in Sociolinguistics admitted to some sense of isolation although this was eased by the fact that two PhD students were also working in this subject. Postgraduate students also had access to the Graduate Centre for Medieval & Renaissance Studies which provided opportunities for sharing ideas.

5.1.3 Both undergraduate and postgraduate students reported that staff asked for their views on matters relating to course provision, and that their suggestions were often acted upon. One very helpful response from the Department had been the purchase of a laptop computer that the students might take with them when visiting the Library's Special Collections Department. Following suggestions from students, a teaching room had been made available for one hour a week for students to meet and discuss their work and related issues.

5.2   Library and study space

5.2.1 Students reported that finding study space was not a particular problem, that the number of study places in the Library was adequate, and that its extended opening hours were welcomed. On the subject of the book collections, however, they said that the "squirreling" of volumes – removing them from their shelves only to hide them in other locations within the building - was a problem. Students also reported, however, that even when books were borrowed legitimately they were not always returned on the expiry of the loan. They said that the short loan system worked well but that sometimes books were not put on reserve lists quickly enough. Their suggested solution was the purchase of more books for the Library. The Review Panel recognised that there were no easy answers to the problems referred to by the students but **recommends** that their remarks be brought to the attention of the relevant subject librarian.

5.3   Information and Communications Technology

5.3.1 The Review Panel's attention was drawn by the Head of Department in the SER to the lack of ICT resources – machines, software and trained assistants – which now represented a problem at Level 1 despite the fact that, in the past, the Department had been a leader in this field. The undergraduate students described the STELLA laboratory as a good facility though they wished that it might be open in the evening[2]. Staff acknowledged that the STELLA laboratory's 21 PCs were not

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[2] The Panel discovered that its opening hours were from 8.30 am to 4.45 pm

sufficient for the student numbers, and reported that providing access to STELLA software from the Library was seen as a possible solution to the limitations of the laboratory itself.

5.3.2 An alternative strategy known to the Department was to make the programs web-accessible, and it had been estimated that the work required to achieve this would cost £20,000. Staff said that a contribution of £10,000 towards this from a development fund held by the Vice-Principal Learning and Teaching had not yet materialised. This point was later confirmed by the Head of Department and the Dean. One program, dealing with punctuation, and whose translation to a web-accessible format cost £5,000, had already been converted, using a grant from the English Subject Centre LTSN. It was also noted, however, that students could obtain all of the software on CD-ROM for £10 and that it was available in the Faculty of Arts laboratories and the University Library. The Panel concluded that with the software so readily available, further investment to the extent indicated was not justified.

5.4 Employability and careers information

5.4.1 Asked about employability issues, the undergraduate students reported that staff from the Careers Service had attended a session of EASEL (see Paragraph 2.2.1) and their contribution had been very helpful. The students spoke also about training in time management and presentation skills. On the subject of working in groups, they reported that this was addressed by the workshops and was compulsory although not assessed.

6. *Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards*

6.1 The SER demonstrated that the Department took a thoroughly responsible approach to the maintenance of standards of awards. The Department adhered closely to subject benchmarks, and valued highly the contributions from its External Examiners whose evidence suggested both a high level of performance from the Department's students and a degree standard which, at the top end, matched that of Cambridge. The Review Panel also noted that members of the Department's staff participate in the activities of several national bodies supporting teaching and research in English and Linguistics.

6.2 The Review Panel had some misgivings that the Department did not appear to assess the effectiveness of the methods by which it ensured the maintenance of standards, and that these methods themselves seemed to rely on subjective evidence. Although graduates at the upper end of the Department's 2.1 Honours range were described as comparing favourably with those from Cambridge, the External Examiner noted a longer and diminishing tail at Glasgow which the Department had appeared to accept without comment. The Department had been unable to provide an extended time series of awards it had made and, in this respect, commented only on the small number of First Class Degrees awarded by English Language and English Literature combined in 2000. The Department appeared unaware of the availability from the Planning Office of comparative grade profiles for the Faculty of Arts at large.

6.3 The Review Panel noted the Department's hope that SHEFC would follow the recommendation of the Cooke Report and require Scottish universities to publish information on degrees awarded. In the meantime, the Panel **recommends** that the Department brings together such data as is currently in its possession to establish a record that might support comparison of its degrees and other awards over time.

6.4 Earlier sections of the report attest to the Department's commitment to ongoing quality enhancement and it should be noted that one of its number had been

invited to join the QAA Consultative Group on the Quality Enhancement Theme of Responding to Student Needs. Others were involved in the Learning and Teaching Support Networks (LTSN) both for English and Linguistics. The Panel warmly **commends** the Department for its forward looking approach and its total commitment to providing an effective and fulfilling learning experience for its students.

C Conclusions and Recommendations

The Review Panel was enormously impressed during its visit to the Department of English Language by the vigour and commitment demonstrated by the permanent staff, and the warm regard in which they were held by undergraduate and postgraduate students and by the Graduate Teaching Assistants. The Panel noted that, in respect of matters such as accommodation, IT facilities and video-linked lectures, it might have expected to hear expressions of discontent. The fact that these were entirely lacking in the presentations made to the Panel suggests strongly that the approachability, helpfulness and commitment of staff has created a climate in which a positive outlook has become a social norm. The Panel was impressed also by the quality of course literature provided for undergraduate students, and welcomed the introduction of Workshops at Level 1 for their innovative contribution to the learning experience.

As indicated above, the single greatest concern derived from the Review of the Department of English Language was the teaching workload carried by individual members of staff. The Panel was particularly concerned that this might have long term consequences for the health both of individuals and the Department as a whole. It concluded also that research and administration (which were not strictly part of the remit of the Panel) were consequentially denied an appropriate level of attention and, while the matter of research lay outwith the immediate remit of the Panel, it wished to record its concern that the Department's 5* rating might be put in jeopardy by the effort currently invested in teaching, especially at Level 1.

While it recognised that the Department must ultimately determine for itself how it deployed its resources, the Panel's recommendations in respect of these and other issues discussed in the report are summarised below.

Aims and Learning Outcomes

Recommendation 1. While the Panel was impressed by the extent to which the MPhil students identified with and felt supported by the staff, it **recommends** that the Department encourage a more outward looking approach, promoting links with other postgraduate activity in the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature (SESLL) and the Faculty of Arts. (Paragraph 2.3.2)

Action: Head of Department

Curricula and Assessment

Recommendation 2. The Panel **recommends** that guidance be given to each group of MPhil students to ensure that they understand the process by which they might extend their postgraduate careers. (Paragraph 3.6.3)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation 3. The Panel **recommends** that the articulation of Departmental aims with learning objectives and instruments of assessment be explicitly reviewed so that the relationship among these elements is clearly understood by all stakeholders. (Paragraph 3.7.1.2)

Recommendation 4.   The Panel endorsed the judicious, selective recourse to "multiple choice" instruments of assessment but **recommends** that the Department investigates alternatives to *Edpac*. (Paragraph 3.7.4.2)

Action: Head of Department

Teaching and Learning

Recommendation 5.   The Panel **recommends** that the Department, in conjunction with the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (SRAS), increase its efforts to attract students to its MPhil courses. The Department should consult SRAS about conducting a programme of market research, particularly in North America, to determine what courses might be most attractive to prospective applicants. (Paragraph 4.3.5)

Action: Head of Department, Head of SRAS

Recommendation 6.   The Panel **recommends** that the Department adopt a workload model after the pattern of the Faculty of Arts' pilot model to assist the process of making workloads transparent. (Paragraph 4.8.6)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation 7.   The Panel **recommends** that staff contact hours with Level 1 undergraduate students should be significantly reduced with greater emphasis placed on independent learning and the workshops now successfully established. (Paragraph 4.8.7)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation 8. The Panel **recommends** that the Department should follow the example of its counterpart at the University of Edinburgh by offering several of its Honours options only in alternate years. (Paragraph 4.8.7)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation 9.   The Panel **recommends** that the Faculty considers the formation of a closer administrative relationship among the partners in SESLL. (Paragraph 4.9.2)

Action: Head of Department, Head of SESLL, Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Recommendation 10.   The Panel had serious concerns regarding the presentation and usefulness of centrally produced statistics. It **recommends** that this matter be brought to the attention of the Planning Office which is responsible for the preparation of this data. (Paragraph 4.10.1)

Action: Acting Head of Planning Office

Recommendation 11. The Panel **recommends** that the Department reviews use of accommodation to determine whether further provision might be made for Graduate Teaching Assistants and postgraduate students. (Paragraph 4.11.1)

Action: Head of Department

Student Progression and Support

Recommendation 12. The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider means of reducing the level of general support afforded its undergraduate students and of targeting it towards those who evidence greatest need. (Paragraph 5.1.1)

Action: Head of Department

Recommendation 13. Students said that the squirreling of books – removing them from their shelves only to hide them away in another location within the Library - was a problem and that, that even when books were borrowed legitimately, they

were not always returned on the expiry of the loan. They said that the Library's short loan system worked well but that sometimes books were not put on reserve lists quickly enough. The Library's extended opening hours were welcomed. The Panel **recommends** that these remarks be brought to the attention of the relevant subject librarian. (Paragraph 5.2.1)

Action: Subject Librarian for English Language

Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards

Recommendation 14. The Panel **recommends** that the Department brings together such statistics of degrees awarded as are currently in its possession to establish a record that might support comparison of its awards over time. (Paragraph 6.3)

Action: Head of Department