UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Education Committee - 16 June 2003

Report from the Review of Departmental Programmes of Teaching Learning and Assessment of the Department of English Literature held on Monday 3 March 2003

Review Panel

Professor Chris Morris	Vice-Principal (Staffing) and Territorial Vice-Principal (Arts-based) [Convener]
Professor Susan Manning	Grierson Professor of English Literature, Department of English Literature, University of Edinburgh
Dr Jocelyn Dow	Senate Assessor on University Court
Dr Sarah Mann	Teaching and Learning Service
Ms Jane McAllister	Senate Office [Panel Secretary]

A. Introduction

The Department of English Literature 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 Panel met with the Head of Department, Professor Susan Castillo, and subsequently with key staff. The Panel also met with a probationary member of staff and with three Graduate Teaching Assistants who represented hourly-paid staff. The Panel met with three MPhil students and sixteen undergraduate students.

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

- MA (Hons) programme in English Literature

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

  Level 1A: Introduction to Literary Study;
  Level 1B: Writing and Self;
  Level 2A: Writing and Ideology;
  Level 2B: Writing and Text; and
  A selection from 12 Honours options.

- MPhil (Taught) in Romanticism and the Forms of Modernity

The Department also had involvement in the MPhil in Creative Writing which was excluded from this review. The programme had previously been a joint award with the University of Strathclyde. The University of Strathclyde withdrew from the arrangement as of the beginning of the current session when this University assumed sole responsibility for the programme. It was felt that the programme had not had sufficient time to become fully established in its new form and therefore it was decided that it should be excluded from this review.

B. Summary Report

The Review Panel found the undergraduate provision to be vibrant, attractive but fairly traditional in nature, evidently enjoyed by students and taught by a dedicated team of hardworking lecturers. The programme was supported by course handbooks in which course descriptions were set out in a clear and user-friendly way that looked interesting and helpful to students. The Department had also demonstrated good attention to progression through the levels.

The Department was clearly aware of the QAA English Subject Benchmarking Statement and it was evident that the subject-benchmarking criteria had been addressed. Aims and objectives were set out in full in all course handbooks and students were directed to the official benchmarking statement in Honours years.

The Review Panel considered that assessment procedures within the Department were exemplary. QAA guidelines on formative and summative assessment were properly observed and the University's new Code of Assessment had been adopted and was clearly explained to students. External examiners' reports testified that standards were high and student achievement fully in line with other universities. The Department also used an element of oral assessment to develop students' presentation skills and offered students some choice in the method of assessment of certain courses.

The Department demonstrated well-embedded and robust procedures for self-reflection and self-assessment and was making some use of external resources, such as the Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN), to enhance the quality of provision. One clear and significant example of quality enhancement was the reform of the Honours programme, which had been initiated in recognition of weaknesses in the provision at that level and was in progress at the time of the review. The Panel applauded the move to reform the entire Honours programme and endorsed the direction taken by the Department in developing research-led teaching options which the Panel expected to create a stimulating experience for both staff and students.

The student feedback mechanisms were deemed satisfactory. The Department adhered to standard practices and appeared to be making good efforts to provide feedback to students.

The Review Panel concluded that the provision under review was of very good quality. 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   Writing Skills

    1.1   The Review Panel asked the undergraduate students if they considered that the programme sufficiently developed their writing skills. The students reported that they had not received formal training on writing only a briefing session in lecture format which had not been engaging due to problems with the lecture theatre. They felt that smaller group sessions would have been more effective.

    1.2   The students acknowledged that, in addition to the briefing session, the Department also provided advice on essay writing through course handbooks and departmental web pages. It was reported that this advice was regarded as fairly basic but that some students had used the related information on assessment criteria as guidelines for their essay writing. As a consequence, the Review Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure that all students be made aware of assessment criteria and where to find them.

    1.3   In response to questions on how their writing skills might be improved, the students suggested that a higher volume of formatively assessed writing prior to Honours would be useful, particularly if feedback could be provided before they moved on to the next

assignment. The students stated that the Department encouraged them to do as much formative writing as they wished but very few had done any optional writing. The students considered that there would be some advantage in making some formative writing compulsory and suggested that earlier deadlines would facilitate this. The Panel **recommends** that a selection of formative writing exercises be incorporated into the Level 1 and 2 programmes. Short writing exercises could be an effective way forward and the Panel would commend the *Writing in the Disciplines* initiative at Queen Mary, University of London (http://www.learndev.qmul.ac.uk/elss/widelssindex.html) to the Department.

1.4 The Review Panel commended the Department on the provision of individual half-hour feedback tutorials for all Honours essays. Staff and students acknowledged that the tutorial opportunity was not fully taken up by students but all did receive some form of written feedback. Written feedback was provided either as annotations to essays or on forms, but it was felt that practise in this area could be standardised and the Review Panel **recommends** that the Department provide written feedback on a common or standard form agreed by the Department in consultation with the students.

2 *Computing/Word Processing*

2.1 The Review Panel was concerned to read in course handbooks that word-processing of essays was recommended rather than compulsory. The Head of Department reported that it was now very rare to receive a piece of handwritten work. However, the Panel **recommends** that it be a requirement for all submitted course work to be word-processed.

2.2 The Review Panel noted that the Department had reported low uptake of the Literary & Linguistic Computing for English course offered by Software for Teaching English Language and Literature and its Assessment Project (STELLA). Staff believed the reasons for this were that the course focussed on metrics and was more suited to English Language students. The software was also fairly elementary and most students could teach themselves how to use it at drop-in sessions if they were interested.

3 *Research Skills*

3.1 In response to a question from the Panel, the Head of Department reported that the Department did not hold seminars on research skills for undergraduate students and expressed the opinion that the Department could learn from other departments on this issue. The Review Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department investigate the forms of research seminar being offered by other departments in the Faculty of Arts and consider introducing the most appropriate for their own Honours students.

Curricula and Assessment

4 *Progression*

4.1 The Review Panel noted that the progression between levels 1 and 2 was strong and well documented but was concerned that progression between Junior and Senior Honours years, generally regarded as a defining characteristic of the Scottish Honours degree within the Credit and Qualifications Framework, was not described explicitly. Undergraduate students reported that the transition into Honours had been smooth and that they had perceived a difference between Junior and Senior Honours but found it hard to describe. The Panel **recommends** that information on progression between levels be set out in all course handbooks and that this should include an overview of the whole programme and the position of a course within it.

5   Dissertation

5.1   The Review Panel was concerned that the Department did not offer Honours students the opportunity to undertake a dissertation. Panel members considered the dissertation to be an important component of degree level study, providing experience of independent, self directed study, important transferable skills for all students and a valuable experience for those going on to graduate studies. The inclusion of a dissertation option also helped to demonstrate progression between Junior and Senior Honours, and could release staff resources. The absence of a dissertation option did not appear to be in keeping with normal practice in the Faculty of Arts which recommends that all departments have a dissertation option, at least for Single Honours students.

5.2   The Head of Department reported that a dissertation option had been discussed as part of Honours Reform. The proposal had been opposed and, therefore, set aside for the time being. Staff expressed the view that the current structure provided equivalent learning objectives by allowing students to devise their own titles for essays and allowing them to submit an extended essay of 10,000 words in place of the examination for one paper. The Panel strongly **recommends** that the Department introduce a dissertation option in line with normal and recommended practice in the Faculty of Arts. The dissertation should provide credit equivalent to two Honours options and should be a requirement for Single Honours and an option for Joint Honours.

6   Creative Writing

6.1   The Review Panel noted that the MPhil programme in Creative Writing had previously been a joint award with the University of Strathclyde. The University of Strathclyde withdrew from the arrangement and this University assumed sole responsibility for the programme as of the beginning of the current session, session 2002-03. It was felt the programme had not had sufficient time to become fully established in its new form and therefore it was decided to exclude it from this review.

6.2   However, the Panel noted there was some uncertainty regarding whether the programme was the responsibility of the Faculty or of the Department and that the position of the programme in relation to the School of English & Scottish Language & Literature (SESLL) was also unclear. The Panel considered that English Literature was a natural home for a programme in Creative Writing but acknowledged that other departments such as Theatre, Film and Television Studies and Scottish Literature had a direct interest. The Panel **recommends** that academic and administrative responsibility for the MPhil in Creative Writing be clarified as a matter of urgency and that, in light of the programme being excluded from this review, the Faculty conduct a review of the MPhil in Creative Writing before the end of session 2004-05.

6.3   Having noted that undergraduate students were interested in creative writing and that there was abundant expertise in the Department, the Review Panel asked if there were any plans to extend creative writing provision to undergraduate level. The Head of Department reported that the Professors of Creative Writing had also expressed some interest with the caveat that adequate funding be made available in advance. The Panel considered that expertise in Creative Writing was a unique feature of the Department that should be fully utilized and therefore **recommends** that the Department pursue the development of provision in creative writing at undergraduate level. The Panel is unclear as to the issue regarding funding and would not accept the caveat expressed as a precondition for engagement with the recommendation. The Panel suggests the introduction of a single seminar in creative writing for Honours students as a starting point.

7   Level 3 Provision

7.1   The Review Panel noted that the Department did not offer any dedicated Level 3 courses. This position seemed to be at variance to the Faculty's goal of providing a full range of Level 3 courses for non-Honours students. Level 3 provision was also required for those who intended to enter teaching but did not wish to pursue an Honours degree. The Head of Department reported that SESLL had previously offered a Level 3 course entitled "Literatures in English" and that, although this had been withdrawn, it had been replaced by one in Scottish Literature. The Department was content with this situation and did not wish to compete with their colleagues for these students. The Panel considered that the Department's lack of interest in Level 3 courses was unsatisfactory and **recommends** that the Department review its position in consultation with the Faculty and the other departments within SESLL, perhaps with a view to re-instating a SESLL course, embracing all three departments.

8   Assessment

8.1   Assessment of Contribution to Tutorial and Presentations

8.1.1   The Panel noted that it was extremely difficult to ensure consistency in the assessment of the contribution across the different tutorial groups. It was also concerned that variables such as the dynamics of the group and the skills of the tutor as a facilitator could contribute an element of variability to the assessment. Doubts were expressed over the effectiveness of assessing contribution as a means of encouraging participation and the Head of Department reported that the Department had not included any contribution element in the new topic papers and had considered discontinuing the practice for all courses. The Panel **recommends** that the Department canvas student opinion on the assessment of contribution with a view to discontinuing the practice.

8.1.2   On the related matter of assessing presentations, the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) reported that this was also problematic. The GTAs reported that they had not received advice about what direction to take in helping students working on presentations or information on what criteria should be used in the assessment of presentations. The Panel considered that this could lead to differing practice across the Department and felt that, together with reports from undergraduate students that they had been slightly disconcerted to find that other tutorial groups were doing different things, pointed to a need for greater consistency between tutorial groups.

8.1.3   The Panel noted reports from staff and GTAs that the quality of presentations was impressive and **recommends** that the Department ensure that practice is consistent across tutorial groups by providing guidance for GTAs on presentations and on assessment criteria for presentations. The Department should also facilitate sharing of good practice and alternative modes of presentation amongst staff and GTAs. Other alternative means of assessment such as peer group assessment might also be considered.

8.2   Double Marking

8.2.1   Having identified inconsistencies between statements in the Self Evaluation Report and in the Annual Course Monitoring Reports, the Panel asked for clarification of the Department's policy on double marking. The Head of Department reported that double marking was carried out on examinations but not on coursework due to the size of the classes. The Panel **recommends** that the Department seek to ensure that documentation is consistent and accurately reflects Departmental assessment policy.

8.3   Double Credit

8.3.1   The Review Panel was concerned to note comments from external examiners that students had received double credit for work by submitting previously marked essays as their extended essay to be marked in lieu of an examination. The Head of Department acknowledged the examiners' comments and reported that this had been dealt with, to some extent, by the Honours reform. She agreed that, while it was acceptable to develop existing work, it was not acceptable to submit the same piece of work twice. The Panel **recommends** that the Department actively seek a solution to close the loophole that allows students to submit the same or similar work for separate assessments.

8.4   Integration of Marks and Assessment outwith the Department

8.4.1   The Review Panel noted that the external examiners had also noted problems in relation to combining marks for joint Honours degrees and was told that this had been a problem for Joint Honours programmes between the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences where different marking schemes were being operated. The issues had been dealt with by the Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Degrees Committee and the introduction of the Code of Assessment would resolve the matter.

8.4.2   The Review Panel enquired about the assessment of Junior Year Abroad students and the integration of their marks when they returned. Staff reported that they had some difficulties, particularly where institutions had very different grade structures. However, as very few students went abroad, they were able to deal with problems satisfactorily by adjusting grades on an individual basis.

8.5   Examination Dates

8.5.1   Undergraduate students reported that the timetabling of some examinations very close to the end of teaching had caused some problems for revision and that the late publication of information on dates of examinations had prevented them from making cost effective arrangements for their travel home. The Review Panel **recommends** that these points be forwarded to Registry for information.

Teaching and Learning

9   Staff Workloads

9.1   The Review Panel noted that the Department had a workload model in place. The Head of Department reported that there were some concerns about the existing model and that the new Faculty model was welcomed with the exception of the weighting of research via the hierarchy of publishers. The Panel expressed concern that the current practice where some staff did very little teaching leaving others with little time for research might not maximise the Department's rating in the next Research Assessment Exercise. It was reported that several different models were under consideration including one which required research submissions from all staff. The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department actively and urgently revisit the issue of staff workloads within a formula which ensures for the future both overall equity and a balanced (but not necessarily identical) contribution across all areas (research, teaching and service) from all members of staff.

9.2   The Panel was pleased to note the Department's practice of allowing younger members of staff time to develop their research. The probationary member of staff confirmed that she had no administrative load which released time for research and developing lectures and teaching methods.

10   Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

10.1   Departmental Policy on GTAs

10.1.1   The Review Panel noted that the Department relied heavily on GTAs for staffing tutorials and asked for some clarification of the Department's policy in relation to GTAs. The Head of Department reported that GTAs were appointed from the Department's PhD students normally between their second year and writing-up. Appointments were made following interview procedure by the Postgraduate Convener, the Head of Department and Level 1 and 2 conveners. It was noted that only PhD students who were considered suitable for the work were accepted as GTAs.

10.1.2   Contrary to the Head of Department's statement above, all the GTAs met by the Panel had worked through their writing-up period and beyond. They reported that, effectively, demand for suitable GTAs meant they could continue working after completion.   The GTAs reported that their duties had not adversely impacted on their research or writing-up. They viewed the work as valuable teaching experience and important for their personal development as it helped to keep their horizons open beyond their own research areas.   The work also provided an important source of income, which, although limited [£1600 per module for approximately 6 hours work per week], was earned in a more rewarding and relevant way than working in a café or bar.

10.1.3   Undergraduate students supported the Department's use of GTAs and reported that, although their experience was not so widespread, they generally found them easier to talk to than staff.

10.2   Training for GTAs

10.2.1   The GTAs reported that they had attended the training course provided by the University's Teaching and Learning Service and that Course Conveners held meetings at the beginning of each course to go over practical matters.   The Course Conveners also monitored marking and provided feedback on some sample marking before the GTA continued to mark the bulk of the material. The GTAs reported that they had found the advice and help of the Course Conveners to be more beneficial than the formal training. However, the GTAs identified the assessment of presentations to be an area where further training would be welcomed. This issue is discussed in more detail at paragraph 8.1 above.

10.3   Facilities and Conditions

10.3.1   The Panel noted that GTAs had not had access to computing facilities or private office space since [DATE - Department to clarify] when a departmental computer cluster had been removed to create additional office space for staff. The GTAs reported that the lack of facilities had forced them to use their home computers, email accounts and, on occasion, their home phone numbers. Academic staff and the GTAs considered the current arrangement of a single shared office to be an unacceptable environment for GTAs to carry out work, which was often sensitive or confidential. The GTAs considered that the lack of private or semi-private space discouraged students from approaching or making appointments with GTAs, particularly when there were others working in the office. As a result, this might be a disadvantage in comparison to students whose tutors had their own offices.   The Panel agreed that it was unsatisfactory for all GTAs to be accommodated in a single shared office and **recommends** that the Faculty of Arts give full consideration to providing appropriate accommodation and office facilities for the Department's GTAs in any reallocation of space.

11   Teaching Methods

11.1   External Resources

11.1.1   The Panel congratulated the Department on the success of a Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN) seminar on plagiarism which it had hosted recently and enquired if the Department made use of any other advisory resources such as the University's Teaching and Learning Service (TLS). The Head of Department reported that feedback from the plagiarism seminar had been very positive and that she intended to suggest that her successor investigate possibilities for workshops or other events on dyslexia, creative writing and e-learning. The Panel supports these initiatives and **recommends** that the Department give some priority to developing collaborative projects with the LTSN, TLS and any other relevant advisory bodies. This might be done in conjunction with the other departments in SESLL.

11.2   E-learning

11.2.1   The Head of Department reported that there had been a tendency to neglect the Department's development of innovative teaching practices while staff had been focussed on the Honours Reform but she felt that such development would now become a priority, particularly in the area of e-learning. She pointed to the Irish Literature Honours course and the MPhil in Romanticism and Forms of Modernity programme where online discussions boards had been introduced. The MPhil students confirmed that their email discussion list had been very successful during the first term but commented that activity had now dropped off slightly. They felt that the discussions had been more worthwhile when subsequently developed in seminars.

11.2.2   The Panel commends the Irish Literature Course Team for its positive approach and good use of webpages to provide information for students. The Panel **recommends** that other staff within the department consider adopting the approach used by Irish Literature and developing e-learning resources where possible and appropriate.

11.3   Advance Reading

11.3.1   The MPhil students reported that they had had no contact with the Department between being accepted onto the course and arriving in Glasgow. They felt that a list of suggested reading to do in advance of the start of the course would have been useful. The Review Panel **recommends** that the Department/Course Team give consideration to providing new MPhil students with a list of advance reading at the time of their acceptance letters being issued. It should be made clear that this reading should be optional but beneficial.

11.4   Teaching Methods

11.4.1   The Review Panel noted that the undergraduate programme used traditional teaching methods of lecturing and tutorials. They questioned why the Department had not taken the opportunity of the Honours reform to lighten the teaching burden by introducing alternative teaching methods such as seminar-based teaching. Staff reported that there was slightly more emphasis on seminars in the new topic papers but there were not enough small teaching rooms available to accommodate more seminars. The Panel asked if this had prevented the Department moving towards seminar teaching to which the staff responded that the lack of space had been a contributing factor but that, despite much debate, they remained unconvinced that seminar teaching was the best way forward and considered that it was still more economical of staff time to lecture even though,

for certain courses (mainly at Level 1 and 2), each lecture had to be delivered twice with video conferencing links to Crichton Campus.

11.4.2 The Panel **recommends** that the Department revisit the issue of seminar-based teaching and fully explore the possibilities for time saving. The Department should reconsider introducing more seminar teaching in two-hour blocks to encourage students to develop autonomous learning skills.

Student Progression and Support

12   Student Support

12.1 The Review Panel commends the Department on the support provided for students as evidenced by the undergraduate students. The students noted that they could be much more anonymous in a large department but they felt that staff in English Literature made sure they were aware that support was available, if needed.

12.2 The Panel noted that the Head of Department spoke to Senior Honours students and directed them towards counselling services, particularly prior to the stressful final examination period. The Panel expressed the view that it was not possible to predict when students would need counselling and **recommends** that the information about counselling services provided to Senior Honours students should be extended to all students at the beginning of each year. Such information should be highlighted in inductions, included in the student documentation for all courses and reinforced prior to examination periods.

13   Widening Access and Participation

13.1   Widening Access and Participation Aims

13.1.1 The Review Panel was interested to know how the Department aimed, as stated in the Self Evaluation Report (SER), to contribute to the University's stated goals of widening access and participation in Higher Education. The Head of Department responded that the Department's contribution was directly influenced by admissions which were controlled by the Faculty.

13.2   Widening Participation through Syllabus Design

13.2.1 The Panel enquired whether the Department had considered introducing texts by authors from ethnic minorities as a means of widening participation through curriculum design. The Head of Department reported that the Department had hoped to develop in this direction but was constrained by the expertise of existing staff and the necessity of appointing staff to teach existing options.

13.3   Accessibility

13.3.1 The Panel asked whether the Department had taken any steps towards removing barriers to access. The Head of Department reported that the Department had a Special Needs Adviser and that he had met with the University's Special Needs Adviser to identify any action that needed to be initiated. The Panel was aware of a Staff Development Service Seminar on Disability Equality in Student Provision and **recommends** that the Department's Special Needs Adviser attend one of these seminars as soon as possible. [The next available seminar would be on 5 June 2003]

13.3.2 The Panel congratulated the Department on the quality of its course handbooks which were considered very informative. However, it was agreed that a number of improvements could be made. It was felt that the focus on regulations gave

rather a stern tone and the use of a very small typeface made the handbooks less accessible. Staff explained that they had tried to use more friendly language for Levels 1 and 2 but felt that some emphasis on regulations was necessary at Honours level. They also noted that the use of the small typeface had been a paper saving device and that the handbooks had been made available on the web for anyone who required to increase the font size. Staff also noted that uniformity of terminology across courses could be improved. The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider accessibility issues in the production of course handbooks for next session ensuring that existing comprehensible, jargon-free language is maintained.

13.3.3 The Panel noted the Department's use of the term 'papers' which it considered to be rather out-dated and assessment orientated. The Panel **recommends** that the Department replace the term 'paper' with 'Honours options' or 'Honours modules'.

14 *Employability and Careers Information*

14.1 The Department's Careers Adviser reported that there had been a move towards co-ordination of careers activity within the SESLL and that a careers sub-committee had been established to meet twice a year. The committee would be liasing with the Careers Service to publicise events and organise dedicated events for SESLL students. It was planned that the committee would invite student members to join the committee to encourage ownership of the activities.

14.2 The Panel asked about industrial liaison in the context of contact with alumni to promote employability issues and placement activities. It was reported that the Careers Service was in the process of quantifying subject specific skills and that it was departmental practice to contact students just before the summer to encourage them to maintain contact. However, it was acknowledged that it was a difficult task to track graduates over the longer term.

15 *Learning Resources*

15.1 The Panel noted that the students reported problems of obtaining the books they needed from the University Library, even well in advance of essay deadlines. The students were aware of Library policy that registering demand for texts led to more copies being ordered. The Panel recognised that this was a perennial problem and noted the resourceful approach of Honours students in turning to journal articles when the recommended texts were not available. The Panel **recommends** that the Department extend the advice provided to Honours students on the use of journal articles to Level 1 and 2 students.

16 *Advisers of Studies*

16.1 The Panel noted that the Department had not nominated the quota of Advisers required by the Faculty. The Head of Department reported that there were negative feelings towards the role amongst staff and a reluctance to give up the time in September. The Panel noted that the Faculty of Arts intended to introduce a financial penalty on departments that did not fulfil the quota in the form of a reduction in GTA budget. Given the Department's reliance on GTAs this could be seriously detrimental to the Department, therefore, the Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department should clarify the implications with the Dean and ensure that staff are made fully aware of the consequences of the Department failing to meet its quota of Advisers of Studies, or failing to engage in a collegial manner with standard Faculty activities. Any negative perceptions should be countered by allocation of time within a work-load model for taking on this obligation (as well as a small personal honorarium).

Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards

17   Honours Reform

    17.1 Background

        17.1.1 The Review Panel noted from the documentation that the Department's external examiners had commented that the curriculum, which had remained largely unaltered for several decades, was in need of revision and that this had prompted an extended discussion within the department of possible modifications. Discussion had been facilitated by an Honours Reform Committee which had met frequently over several years (Minutes were provided from May 2000). At the time of the review, the Department's proposals had been approved by the School of English and Scottish Language and Literature (SESLL) Board of Studies and Faculty of Arts and were to go forward to the April meeting of the Academic Regulations Committee. All being well, the phased implementation of the reformed curriculum would be introduced for Junior Honours in October 2003 with two new research-based topic courses and would be completed by session 2005-06 (faster track) or session 2006-07.

    17.2 Chronology vs Topic

        17.2.1 The Panel was concerned that the final proposals seemed to constitute only notional change, diluted from more far-reaching reform. The existing Honours curriculum offered students a choice of eight from twelve papers, the majority of which were chronologically arranged studies of English, Irish and American Literature. The Panel was informed that all existing material would continue to be taught but that room had been made for the new topic papers by redrawing the boundaries of each paper. The external member of the Panel noted that this was contrary to the general trend among other English departments across the UK which was to offer a range of thematically structured options based around the current research expertise within the department. She considered this approach had pedagogical advantages and allowed for exploration of wider issues.

        17.2.2 In response to this, staff reported that it was considered important to retain chronologically arranged or 'period' papers in order to protect certain rubrics, such as early period literature. The undergraduate students, particularly the Honours students, with whom the Panel met, supported this position and were enthusiastic about the historical aspects of their study. They reported that they were able to explore particular issues of interest through their individual selection of essay titles. The Head of Department expressed the view that, while some students would still opt to study mainly chronological papers, topic papers would see increased student demand over time as students became more aware of their content and purpose

        17.2.3   The Panel would wish to **recommend** that the Department take note of the External member's views and respond in a positive manner towards providing more topic honours options and lessening the emphasis upon chronological options.

    17.3 Reductions of Workload

        17.3.1 The Review Panel considered that the proposals were expensive in terms of staff time and perceived some reluctance to use the reform as an opportunity to ease the pressure on staff. The Panel was concerned that teaching elements of the old curriculum in combination with the new research-based topic courses would increase the burden on staff. Staff reported that reducing workloads had not been an objective in the reform and that student contact hours had purposely been

maintained. However, staff also acknowledged that the formulation of the new papers would create additional work in the short term. The Panel **recommends** that, in a general context of reduced resources, the Department revisit the balance of the courses with a view to reducing workload on staff.

17.4 Implementation

17.4.1 The Review Panel was concerned that, having taken several years to achieve consensus on the proposals, the implementation of the Honours reform would be drawn out over a further three- or four-year period. The Panel asked the staff if they could speed up the introduction of the new Honours programme. Staff were reluctant to introduce further courses at an earlier stage as they felt it was necessary to gauge the success of the first courses before proceeding. Nevertheless the Panel **recommends** that the Department revisit the issue of the timescale for the implementation of Honours reform.

17.4.2 The students with whom the Panel had met reported that they had not been consulted on the proposals. The Panel initially thought this had been due to the time delay between initial consultations to implementation but the Head of Department reported that students on the Staff/Student Liaison Committee had been consulted at a meeting on 4 December 2002 and had provided positive feedback. Nonetheless, the Panel remained concerned that the Level 2 students who met with the Panel, and who would enter Junior Honours in 2003-04 were unaware of the Honours reform. The Panel was also concerned that the GTAs reported that they had had no input into the reform since a brief email consultation several years ago and did not feel they knew enough about the current proposals to offer their views to the Panel. The GTAs also made the point that they only teach at Level 1 and 2, therefore, the Department might have felt it unnecessary to consult them further.

17.4.3 The Panel **recommends** that the Department routinely consults GTAs in relation to modifications to the curriculum and ensures that Staff-Student Liaison Committees are fully representative of the full range of students the Department teaches.

18 MPhil in Romanticism and Forms of Modernity

18.1 The Student View

18.1.1 The Review Panel met with three MPhil students who spoke positively about their experience on the programme. They had found it to be intellectually stimulating and praised the span and current relevance of material covered and the sense of community within the Department. They considered the programme to provide good preparation for their future academic careers.

18.2 Academic Leadership

18.2.1 The MPhil students reported that there had been a few problems since Professor Siskin, the Course Leader, had left for Columbia University on Research Leave. The students reported that the lack of clear academic leadership had reduced student morale despite the best efforts of the remaining staff. The sense of unity which had been developed within the group during the first term had reduced, as had activity in the email discussion group. Staff accepted these comments as true to some extent but noted that there had been some difficulties with staffing. They explained that the MPhil had developed around the expertise of several members of staff who had now left the Department and had not been replaced. Notwithstanding the staff view, the Panel considers that an Acting Course Leader should routinely be appointed when a Course Leader is absent for a significant

period and **recommends** the Department adhere to this procedure in all such cases in future.

18.2.2 The staff noted complaints from students that feedback on their essays had been delayed. They responded that one essay had been sent to Professor Siskin in Columbia for marking and obviously had taken some time to come back but that the majority of the essays had been returned within a few days. The Panel expressed concern at any long delay but considered that this should be an operational matter addressed at the departmental level.

18.3 Staff Student Liaison

18.3.1 The Review Panel asked the students if they had raised these issues at their Staff/Student Liaison Committee and was informed that there was no formal committee. The students reported that they did not feel any need for a formal liaison committee as they met as a group several times each week and could raise issues with their tutors or other members of the Department at any time. They also reported that they did not have any substantial complaints that they felt should be raised formally. Nevertheless, the Panel **recommends** that the Department review mechanisms for students to raise concerns and provide feedback on a formal basis, in line with standard practice across the Faculty of Arts.

18.4 Programme Handbook and Information

18.4.1 The Panel noted that the documentation received from the Department had not included a handbook for the MPhil programme. The students confirmed that they had not received written information on what to expect in terms of assessment or feedback. The Panel considered that documentation providing guidelines, assessment criteria and advice on good practice, etc, was essential and that, where it existed, all students should be made fully aware of where to find it. The Panel **recommends** that without delay the Department provide students with an MPhil handbook containing the above information. The students suggested that information on the level of achievement required for acceptance to PhD study would also be welcomed.

18.5 MPhil Development

18.5.1 The Review Panel expressed the view that a Department of this size would normally be expected to offer more than one MPhil programme and to have a higher number of taught postgraduate students. The external member of the Panel reported that a similar programme at her University had approximately 70 students. Staff reported that, although another MPhil was being developed, they were reluctant to admit more students to a Department where departing staff were not being replaced. The Panel considers that the Department has to accept the reality of the current straightened circumstances, and **recommends** that the Department look to developing further PGT programmes as a means of income generation (especially with overseas students) which itself would then be a means of ensuring financial support for replacement staff.

19 Successor to Head of Department

19.1 The Review Panel was concerned to hear that the current Head of Department would demit office on 1 July 2003 and that a successor had not yet been identified. The Head of Department also expressed concern that the opportunity for a successor to shadow her duties was running out. She felt that this would be important for continuity within the Department even though she would still be available to offer help and advice to her

successor. The Head of Department reported that she had made her views known to the Dean and had urged that the decision be made soon.

19.2 The Review Panel remained sufficiently concerned to refer this matter directly to the University Management Group and Court by means of a confidential annex to this report.

20 *Staff Support*

20.1 *Mentoring*

20.1.1 The Panel noted that new members of staff were mentored by one of the class conveners and asked how this mentoring system fitted with the appraisal system advocated by the University. It was reported that the most recent appraisals had been done in 1999 by designated appraisers rather than class conveners therefore there had been no conflict with mentoring duties. The probationary member of staff reported she had had a formal meeting with the Head of Department as her mentor. They had met informally since then to discuss progress.

20.2 *New Lecturer Programme*

20.2.1 The Panel asked for the opinion of the probationary member of staff on the University's New Lecturer Programme (NLP). She reported that she had been exempt from the requirement to participate in the programme as she had held teaching posts previously but that she was interested in attending parts of the programme next session. She noted that she had not received information about start dates for the NLP before she arrived. She also noted that, as a probationary member of staff rather than a new lecturer, she had not had much contact with other staff that had started at the same time and felt that an opportunity to meet other new staff outside the NLP would have been helpful. The Panel noted that information on the NLP should have been included with the details of appointment and **recommends** that the Teaching and Learning Service ensure that full information on the New Lecturer Programme including timing is included in appointment packs.

C.   Conclusions 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.

The Review Panel recognised that the Department was about to undergo an extended period of change with the implementation of the new Honours programme but, while welcoming and supporting the changes being made, considered that the reform had been limited by the pursuit of total consensus amongst staff. The Panel was concerned that resistance to more radical change might affect the quality of provision in the longer term. The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the Department of English Literature to be more innovative in its approaches to teaching. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer.

Aims and Learning Outcomes

Recommendation 1   The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure that all students be made aware of assessment criteria and where to find them. (Paragraph 1.2)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 2   The Panel **recommends** that a selection of formative writing exercises be incorporated into the Level 1 and 2 programmes. Short writing exercises could be an

effective way forward and the Panel would commend the *Writing in the Disciplines* initiative at Queen Mary, University of London (http://www.learndev.qmul.ac.uk/elss/widelssindex.html) to the Department. (Paragraph 1.3)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 3   The Panel **recommends** that the Department provide written feedback on a common or standard form agreed by the Department in consultation with the students. (Paragraph 1.4)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 4   The Panel **recommends** that it be a requirement for all submitted course work to be word-processed. (Paragraph 2.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 5   The Panel **strongly recommends** that the Department investigate the forms of research seminar being offered by other departments in the Faculty of Arts and consider introducing the most appropriate for their own Honours students. (Paragraph 3.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Curricula and Assessment

Recommendation 6   The Panel **recommends** that information on progression between levels be set out in all course handbooks and that this should include an overview of the whole programme and the position of a course within it. (Paragraph 4.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 7   The Panel strongly **recommends** that the Department introduce a dissertation option in line with normal and recommended practice in the Faculty of Arts. The dissertation should provide credit equivalent to two Honours options and should be a requirement for Single Honours and an option for Joint Honours. (Paragraph 5.2)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 8   The Panel **recommends** that academic and administrative responsibility for the MPhil in Creative Writing be clarified as a matter of urgency and that, in light of the programme being excluded from this review, the Faculty conduct a review of the MPhil in Creative Writing before the end of session 2004-05. (Paragraph 6.2)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Recommendation 9   The Panel considered that expertise in Creative Writing was a unique feature of the Department that should be fully utilized and therefore **recommends** that the Department pursue the development of provision in creative writing at undergraduate level. The Panel is unclear as to the issue regarding funding and would not accept the caveat expressed as a precondition for engagement with the recommendation. The Panel suggests the introduction of a single seminar in creative writing for Honours students as a starting point. (Paragraph 6.3)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 10   The Panel considered that the Department's lack of interest in Level 3 courses was unsatisfactory and **recommends** that the Department review its position in consultation with the Faculty and the other departments within SESLL, perhaps with a view to re-instating a SESLL course, embracing all three departments (Paragraph 7.1)

Action: The Head of Department
The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

The Chair of the School of English & Scottish Language & Literature
The Departments of English Language and Scottish Literature

Recommendation 11   The Panel **recommends** that the Department canvas student opinion on the assessment of contribution with a view to discontinuing the practice. (Paragraph 8.1.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 12   The Panel **recommends** that the Department ensure that practice is consistent across tutorial groups by providing guidance for GTAs on presentations and on assessment criteria for presentations. The Department should also facilitate sharing of good practice and alternative modes of presentation amongst staff and GTAs. Other alternative means of assessment such as peer group assessment might also be considered.   (Paragraph 8.1.3)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 13   The Panel **recommends** that the Department seek to ensure that documentation is consistent and accurately reflects Departmental assessment policy. (Paragraph 8.2.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 14   The Panel **recommends** that the Department actively seek a solution to close the loophole that allows students to submit the same or similar work for separate assessments. (Paragraph 8.3.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 15   Undergraduate students reported that the timetabling of some examinations very close to the end of teaching had caused some problems for revision and that the late publication of information on dates of examinations had prevented them from making cost effective arrangements for their travel home. The Review Panel **recommends** that these points be forwarded to Registry for information. (Paragraph 8.5.1)

Action: The Head of the Registry

Teaching and Learning

Recommendation 16   The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department actively and urgently revisit the issue of staff workloads within a formula which ensures for the future both overall equity and a balanced (but not necessarily identical) contribution across all areas (research, teaching and service) from all members of staff. (Paragraph 9.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 17   The Panel agreed that it was unsatisfactory for all GTAs to be accommodated in a single shared office and **recommends** that the Faculty of Arts give full consideration to providing appropriate accommodation and office facilities for the Department's GTAs in any reallocation of space. (Paragraph 10.3.1)

Action: The Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Recommendation 18   The Panel **recommends** that the Department give some priority to developing collaborative projects with the LTSN, TLS and any other relevant advisory bodies. This might be done in conjunction with the other departments in SESLL. (Paragraph 11.1.1)

Action: The Head of Department
The Chair of the School of English & Scottish Language & Literature
The Departments of English Language and Scottish Literature

Recommendation 19   The Panel commends the Irish Literature Course Team for its positive approach and good use of webpages to provide information for students.   The Panel

recommends that other staff within the department consider adopting the approach used by Irish Literature and developing e-learning resources where possible and appropriate. (Paragraph 11.2.2)

<div align="right">Action: The Department</div>

Recommendation 20   The Panel **recommends** that the Department/Course Team give consideration to providing new MPhil students with a list of advance reading at the time of their acceptance letters being issued. It should be made clear that this reading should be optional but beneficial. (Paragraph 11.3.1)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department
The MPhil in Romanticism and Forms of Modernity Course Team</div>

Recommendation 21   The Panel **recommends** that the Department revisit the issue of seminar-based teaching and fully explore the possibilities for time saving. The Department should reconsider introducing more seminar teaching in two-hour blocks to encourage students to develop autonomous learning skills. (Paragraph 11.4.2)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department</div>

Student Progression and Support

Recommendation 22   The Panel **recommends** that the information about counselling services provided to Senior Honours students should be extended to all students at the beginning of each year.   Such information should be highlighted in inductions, included in the student documentation for all courses and reinforced prior to examination periods. (Paragraph 12.2)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department</div>

Recommendation 23   The Panel was aware of a Staff Development Service Seminar on Disability Equality in Student Provision and **recommends** that the Department's Special Needs Adviser attend one of these seminars as soon as possible. [The next available seminar would be on 5 June 2003] (Paragraph 13.3.1)

<div align="right">Action: The Departmental Special Needs Adviser</div>

Recommendation 24   The Panel **recommends** that the Department consider accessibility issues in the production of course handbooks for next session ensuring that existing comprehensible, jargon-free language is maintained. (Paragraph 13.3.2)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department
The Departmental Special Needs Adviser</div>

Recommendation 25   The Panel **recommends** that the Department replace the term 'paper' with 'Honours options' or 'Honours modules'. (Paragraph 13.3.3)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department</div>

Recommendation 26   The Panel **recommends** that the Department extend the advice provided to Honours students on the use of journal articles to Level 1 and 2 students. (Paragraph 15.1)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department</div>

Recommendation 27   The Panel **recommends** that the Head of Department should clarify the implications with the Dean and ensure that staff are made fully aware of the consequences of the Department failing to meet its quota of Advisers of Studies, or failing to engage in a collegial manner with standard Faculty activities. (Paragraph 16.1)

<div align="right">Action: The Head of Department
The Dean of the Faculty of Arts</div>

Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards

Recommendation 28   The Panel would wish to **recommend** that the Department take note of the External member's views and respond in a positive manner towards providing more topic honours options and lessening the emphasis upon chronological options. (Paragraph 17.2.3)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 29   The Panel **recommends** that, in a general context of reduced resources, the Department revisit the balance of the courses with a view to reducing workload on staff. (Paragraph 17.3.1)

Action: The Department

Recommendation 30   The Panel **recommends** that the Department revisit the issue of the timescale for the implementation of Honours reform.(Paragraph 17.4.1)

Action: The Department

Recommendation 31   The Panel **recommends** that the Department routinely consults GTAs in relation to modifications to the curriculum and ensures that Staff-Student Liaison Committees are fully representative of the full range of students the Department teaches. (Paragraph 17.4.3)

Action: The Department

Recommendation 32   The Panel considers that an Acting Course Leader should routinely be appointed when a Course Leader is absent for a significant period and **recommends** the Department adhere to this procedure in all such cases in future. (Paragraph 18.2.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 33   The Panel **recommends** that the Department review mechanisms for students to raise concerns and provide feedback on a formal basis, in line with standard practice across the Faculty of Arts. (Paragraph 18.3.1)

Action: The Head of Department

Recommendation 34   The Panel **recommends** that without delay the Department provide students with an MPhil handbook containing the above information. The students suggested that information on the level of achievement required for acceptance to PhD study would also be welcomed. (Paragraph 18.4.1)

Action: The Head of Department
The MPhil in Romanticism and Forms of Modernity Course Team

Recommendation 35   The Panel **recommends** that the Department look to developing further PGT programmes as a means of income generation (especially with overseas students) (Paragraph 18.5.1)

Action: The Department

Recommendation 36   The Panel **recommends** that the Teaching and Learning Service ensure that full information on the New Lecturer Programme including timing is included in appointment packs. (Paragraph 20.2.1)

Action: The Director of the Teaching and Learning Service