

**UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

**Academic Standards Committee - Friday 26 May 2006**

**Departmental Programmes of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Report  
of the Review of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures held on  
Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 March 2006**

**Jane McAllister, Clerk to the Review Panel**

**Review Panel:**

Professor Andrew Nash (Convener)	Clerk of Senate
Professor Alison Saunders	External Subject Specialist, University of Aberdeen
Professor Rosalind Marsh	External Subject Specialist, University of Bath
Professor Thomas Clancy	Head of Department, Department of Celtic
Professor John Briggs	Senate Assessor on Court
Dr Vicky Gunn	Learning and Teaching Centre
Ms Jane McAllister (Clerk)	Administrative Officer, Senate Office

**A. Introduction**

The School of Modern Languages and Cultures was established in August 2003 from the Departments of French, German, Hispanic Studies, Italian and Slavonic Studies. The School is managed by a Head of School supported by a Depute Head of School and Heads of Sections. In addition to its relationships with other Departments within the University, the School, particularly the German and Italian sections, has significant cooperative links with the University of Strathclyde under the auspices of the *Synergy* agreement between the two Universities.

At the time of the Review, the School was still in the process of transition and was operating under significant pressure due to unexpected loss of staff through the University's recent Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process and a number of other factors as set out in the Self Evaluation Report (SER). The Panel was sympathetic to the current situation and acknowledged that the pressures were largely outwith the School's control and that the School and its staff were responding and adapting to them to the best of their ability.

The component parts of the School were last subject to external review through the SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessment process in 1996-97, when the Department of French achieved an EXCELLENT rating, and in 1997-98, when an APPROVED rating was awarded under the heading of European Languages.

The School's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) was commended by the Review Panel as a full and frank assessment of the School's current position.

The Review Panel met with the Dean, Professor Elizabeth Moignard, the Head of School, Dr Paul Donnelly, and the Depute Head of School, Dr Eanna O'Ceallachain. The Panel also met with Key Staff, four probationary members of staff, eight Native Language Assistants, five

Graduate Teaching Assistants and two Taught Postgraduate students and two representative groups of Undergraduate students drawn from all levels of the School's provision.

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

- M.A. Honours (Single) in French, German, Hispanic Studies (Spanish, Portuguese), Italian and Russian
- M.A. Honours (Joint) in Comparative Literature, Czech French, German, Italian, Polish, Hispanic Studies (Spanish, Portuguese), Russian, Slavonic Studies
- M.A. General Humanities (Contributory courses)
- Law with Languages (60 credits at Honours Level plus the relevant pre-honours courses)
- M.A.(SocSci) Honours with Subsidiary Language (60 credits at Honours Level plus the relevant pre-honours courses)
- MLitt in Atlantic Studies
- MLitt in Modern German Thought
- MLitt in European Culture Thought, and Literature
- MLitt in Slavonic Studies

## **B. Overall aims of the School's provision**

The Review Panel noted and applauded the School's overall aim to "foster a culture of excellence in research in each area of its activities, thereby fomenting an intellectual climate in which learning and teaching of the highest quality can be delivered".

The Review Panel recognised that the School was not long established and that it still bore the marks of the separate managerial, organisational and academic structures of its constituent Sections. It was apparent that both staff and students identified with their home Section rather than with the School as a whole. The students who were studying Comparative Literature were the exception to this, reporting that they had an overview and broader experience of the different Sections. They expressed the view that a change of focus towards the School rather than to the Sections would bring a range of benefits. The Panel encouraged the School to promote itself as a collective entity while recognising that the strong cultural ethos and style of each Section was integral to the subjects and should be retained. Staff could see the benefits of sharing good practice and promoting shared practice where possible and expressed the view that the formation of the School was a positive step that strengthened their position both within and outwith the University.

The Review Panel noted that the Self-Evaluation Report did not mention the School's work with other departments and significant contributions to other programmes. It was acknowledged that such information had not been included because the programmes concerned were not the subject of this review. However, the Panel would encourage the School to make the best of any opportunities to highlight such collaborations to strengthen further its value to other parts of the University and to strengthen the University's perception of that value.

## **C. Undergraduate and Taught-Postgraduate Provision**

### *C.1 Aims*

The Review Panel found the School's overall aims for the different undergraduate programmes and specific aims for individual courses to be broadly aligned to benchmark statements where these existed and to be available to students through their inclusion in the relevant handbooks. However, the Panel was concerned that there were inconsistencies across Sections in the nature of the Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes and the manner in which they were expressed.

The Panel **recommended** that the School should consider revising its aims and ILOs to follow a standard pattern using consistent terminology and to ensure they are easily accessible to students through consistent placement and formatting in all handbooks.

### *C.2 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)*

The Review Panel noted that the SER stated that all ILOs fulfilled the aims of their respective programmes and that they had been recently revised, in consultation with External Examiners, to comply with the University's Code of Assessment. The Panel was content that this was the case but, in the course of their meeting with Postgraduate Taught Students, became concerned that low student numbers in the Postgraduate programmes could make it impossible for students to achieve outcomes that related to group or team work. Options available outwith the School and the ability to participate in honours classes had alleviated this problem for the individuals who met with the Panel but it was **recommended** that the School should reflect on the achievability of its ILOs and take action to ensure that students were offered alternative activities where circumstances, such as low numbers, prevented them meeting the desired outcomes.

### *C.3 Assessment*

The Review Panel noted that the School used a wide range of assessment methods both across the School and within Sections and was supportive of this. The Panel commended the Sections on their willingness to respond to changing circumstances and adjust their assessment methods accordingly and with imagination. The Panel **recommended** that the School take an overview on the administrative practices related to assessment and explore the potential for harmonisation e.g. common policies for late submissions, common approaches to the prevention of plagiarism, and School level co-ordination of assessment schedules to spread student workload where possible.

The Head of School informed the Review Panel that the School had already taken steps in this direction with regard to aligning credit ratings. The Panel welcomed this particularly for its potential for facilitating collaborations across Sections, Faculties and the University and for simplifying student choices. Students also expressed appreciation of credit ratings being aligned with those at the University of Strathclyde, reporting that they no longer needed to take extra classes to make up the discrepancies.

The Head of School expressed the view that some work was also needed to harmonise assessment practice at a deeper level, in particular the manner in which the Code of Assessment was applied and communicated to students. The Review Panel agreed, having noted variation in the presentation of the Code in handbooks and heard in discussions with students that the attitude to the Code amongst staff appeared to be variable. The Panel was broadly confident that the rigour with which assessments were marked was appropriate and that standards were equitably applied. Native Language Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants confirmed that they had been briefed about the Code of Assessment and the associated marking schemes and reported that they considered the marking regimes to be well organised and thorough, with double marking processes well embedded. The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School consider providing all staff involved in marking (including NLAs and GTAs) with a further briefing session to update them on the recent changes to the Code of Assessment (e.g. the 22-point Scale) and to refresh their knowledge of how the School wishes them to apply the Code. The School should also ensure that the most up-to-date information about the Code of Assessment is published in a consistent manner in all course handbooks.

## *C.4 Curriculum Design and Content*

### C.4.1 New Postgraduate Taught Programmes

The Review Panel was interested to discuss the School's recent proposals regarding the introduction of a generic Postgraduate Taught (PGT) programme. The Head of School reported that the SER had been written before the proposals had been submitted to the Board of Studies therefore it had not been possible to include much detail. The Head of School explained that, in response to the Faculty's call to increase the numbers of PGT students, the School had decided that a core programme with different pathways would enable the School to continue to offer students the maximum choice and flexibility while bringing together the current small groups of PGT students into a single programme that could recruit viable numbers. The pathways were still under development and still to be defined but would include Languages, Women's Studies, European Cinema and other cultural options that would draw upon and contribute to other MLitt programmes in the Faculty of Arts and across the University.

The programme had been initiated in response to University and Faculty strategic objectives but that the School now recognised the benefits that increased PGT recruitment would bring in terms of funding and its potential for encouraging and preparing students to go on to Postgraduate Research. Staff also welcomed the development of the new generic PGT programmes as an opportunity to increase their teaching at the higher level and to develop collaborations, bringing together their expertise with that of colleagues in their own and other departments. This positive attitude towards new developments was also extended to service teaching, i.e. providing basic language instruction for students of other departments, where the Head of School reported that staff were now aware of the potential for developing interesting, meaningful courses in this area without lowering their expectations or standards.

### C.4.2 Oral practice

The Review Panel heard that the number of classes devoted to oral practice in parts of the School had been reduced as a result of the recent staff losses. The School justified targeting this type of class, arguing that there had been a lack of a demand from students that was demonstrated by poor attendance, particularly at Level 1, and poor or inconsistent levels of participation. The students that met with the Panel expressed disappointment that the number of hours for oral practice had been reduced. They felt this would particularly affect those about to embark on the year abroad and those recently returned who relied on the input from staff at these classes to correct informal registers adopted during their residence abroad. The students acknowledged that they had been directed to alternative learning resources such as Moodle and the Video Library but were anxious that their ability to speak would not develop without the formal practice classes.

The students also identified a number of issues with the remaining classes that explained the disengagement highlighted by staff. They considered that the groups were too large to allow everyone enough time to participate, that the classes were not frequent enough to develop confidence and encourage weaker students to participate, and that the environmental conditions in some rooms were so uncomfortable when the class was fully attended that students became less inclined to attend. The students also reported that they had experienced incidences of lecturers not appearing for classes. This had been explained by confusion over cover arrangements but the students expressed the view that communication and co-ordination amongst staff on such matters should be better, although they did note that there was variation in experience across the sections. The Review Panel was concerned that the consequences of the recent staff losses suffered by the School were such that the ability of staff to maintain standards and the learning experience of the students would be adversely affected. This issue is discussed further below (E.1).

#### C.4.3 Residence Abroad

The Review Panel discussed aspects of the residence abroad with students and staff and confirmed that both groups considered it to be an essential feature of language programmes in terms of developing fluency and of experiencing the culture of a country where the language being studied was spoken. The Panel noted that students were able to undertake a choice of different activities during this time. These were mainly work experience, usually in the form of English Language Assistantships, or study placements at foreign universities arranged through SOCRATES or the University's own links. The Panel accepted that it would be impossible for the School to offer the same activity to all students undertaking residence abroad but wished to draw the attention to a number of issues raised by students that might be usefully considered in improving the overall experience of residence abroad. Against a background comment that the value of the experience was largely dependent on what the individual made of it, the students raised the following:

- There was variability in the arrangements for briefing/debriefing - by comparison, the arrangements in the School of Law were praised. In particular, the evaluation process in which returning students completed a short form or report to be held on file and used to inform outgoing students in subsequent years.
- The level of assistance available for making arrangements was dependent on destination - this was an issue raised by students in Hispanic Studies who reported that little or no help was offered to those wishing to spend their time in Latin America in comparison to those going to Spain or Portugal.
- Students questioned whether Joint Honours students studying two languages could have an equitable experience in their second language. They noted two aspects to this: they would have less time in the second residence; and would have to re-integrate and study with students who had spent more time abroad when they returned.

The Review Panel was concerned by the lack of a requirement to undertake any academic task during the year abroad. The Panel gained a very positive impression from students who were studying on Law with a Language programmes. These students told the Panel that they were required to continue their third year studies at a University in their destination country and that they had found this to be a rewarding experience that had been of enormous benefit to their fluency. Conversely, students who had undertaken English Language Assistantships reported that teaching English had not been as beneficial in terms of gaining fluency because most of their contacts had been learning, and keen to practise speaking in, English. The Panel **recommended** that the School consider introducing some minimum requirement for academic work to encourage students to remain engaged with their studies and to introduce a level of consistency of experience across the different activities. The School should also take a more proactive approach to maintaining contact with students while they were away to ensure that they have access to assistance should they need it; a regular email with standard text should be sufficient.

#### C.4.4 Introduction of Compulsory Dissertations

Honours students expressed confusion about the introduction of the compulsory dissertation component for all Honours programmes, including Joint Honours programmes. They reported that they had received different explanations within the School that were not consistent with what they had been told in other departments in the Faculty of Arts and felt that there was a lack of organisation and instruction to help them prepare. The Review Panel asked staff if they could clarify the situation, to which they responded that there had been confusion at Faculty level on how the compulsory dissertations were to be managed for Joint Honours students, particularly in relation to the dates for implementation of the change which had altered in the course of the session. With that in mind, the Panel **recommended** that the Faculty ensures that guidance for session 2006-07 is provided to students through handbooks and other means in a clear, consistent and timely manner.

#### C.4.5 Employability

The Review Panel was disappointed to note that the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) did not explicitly refer to the School's engagement with the employability agenda, given that they considered Language programmes, by their nature, to be "employability" friendly. The School, when prompted, confirmed that the skills learned through translation, interpretation and work and organisational experience provided through spending a year abroad, all contributed to students' employability. Students were not aware of the term employability but agreed that their studies were providing them with the skills noted above. The Panel **recommended** that the School engage with the Careers Service and the Learning and Teaching Centre with respect to employability and take some time to make explicit their existing practices in terms of employability as the Panel believed that significant improvements in the perceptions of students, staff and employers could be gained with relatively little effort.

#### C.4.6 Other comments

Students also made the following suggestions for changes to the curriculum. The School should consider these and respond directly to the Students, possibly through the relevant staff student liaison committees.

- Students would like a Spanish equivalent of the Legal French course.

[Clerk's note: The Panel was subsequently informed that this point had been raised and dealt with at the 15 December meeting of the Hispanic Studies Student Staff Committee (Item D3.3 of the Review Documentation)]

- Students felt it would be useful to introduce the Theories of Reading course at an earlier stage. It was thought to be a very complex topic that would benefit from more time and would be useful in terms of facilitating Honours study.

#### C.5 *Student Recruitment, Support and Progression*

The Review Panel noted that most of the students reported having been attracted to School for its range and diversity of Language and Cultural options. The availability of Slavonic Languages was seen as particularly positive.

##### C.5.1 Availability of programme/course options

Both Undergraduate and PGT students expressed disappointment at changes in the courses that were available to them between their application and their arrival at the University or at the relevant stage of their studies. They were understanding of this to some extent, recognising that the retiral or research/study leave of the staff responsible was to some extent outwith the School's control but they were concerned that it limited the choice in some areas. The PGT students balanced their criticism by acknowledging that alternative choices from outside the School had been offered and had provided good opportunities to mix and work with different larger groups. This had been particularly appreciated given earlier comments regarding the small number of PGT students within the School. The Review Panel **recommended** that the School take steps to emphasise to students that advertised options may not all be available in any particular year. Efforts should also be made to ensure that information supplied to PGT students prior to arrival is as accurate as possible to avoid confusion and disappointment on arrival. The Panel acknowledges that the unplanned changes in staffing as a result of the University's Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process may have exacerbated the situations reported by the students in session 2005-06.

##### C.5.2 Information for Postgraduate Taught Students

The Review Panel discussed a number of issues with the PGT students although the small number of students that met with the Panel meant that the discussion was focused on individual experiences rather than the collective student experience.

In addition to the point noted above regarding the inaccuracies of information on the availability of options, PGT students reported that they had not received clear information on a number of other aspects that would have been useful to them, such as a main contact person in the appropriate section (pre-arrival and throughout study) and when and where to go on arrival. The students pointed out that if PGT student numbers increased as planned, providing such information in good time, prior to arrival would be vital. The Review Panel **recommended** that the School ensures that it has in place robust administrative and support processes to enable it to deal with enquiries, applications and reception of increased numbers of PGT students before the introduction of its new generic postgraduate taught programme.

## *C.6 The Effectiveness of Provision*

### C.6.1 Moodle

The Review Panel was impressed by the School's responsiveness in adjusting its teaching methods to accommodate the recent reductions in staffing levels and noted that the use of the Virtual Learning Environment, Moodle, as an aid to learning and teaching, was felt to have allowed staff to maintain the standards of their teaching under the pressures of increasing workloads. The Panel was particularly interested in the use of Moodle for language tests and heard from staff that a significant time commitment had been required for the development of the tests and that there had been some initial problems. The tests were now working well but staff were reluctant to extend the practice until further facilities were available. It was explained that a large computer cluster was needed to carry out the tests in an appropriate way for bigger groups, and that the back-up of a second, available and equally large cluster was also needed in case of faults. Staff also expressed the need for the support of dedicated technical staff to assist with the implementation of their Moodle projects particularly at the set up stage, which was time consuming for non expert staff.

### C.6.2 Teaching Methods

The Review Panel noted that the School engaged in team teaching to different extents on its programmes, most noticeably in Comparative Literature. The Panel was interested to hear what action, if any, the School had taken to ensure that courses did not become fragmented in the perception of the students. The Head of School informed the Panel that this had been recognised as a potential problem and that a mid-term forum between students and all teaching staff involved had been introduced in an attempt to bring the different elements together. He also clarified that, in practice, the teaching was not done as part of a cohesive team but as each member of staff delivering material based on their expertise. The Panel **recommended** that the School consider how its definitions of Team, Partnership and Research-led Teaching could be expressed more clearly.

### C.6.3 Graduate Teaching Assistants and Native Language Assistants

The Review Panel was interested to explore the relative roles of the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and the Native Language Assistants (NLAs). The Head of School explained that the roles were different but sometimes carried out by the same person. Native Language Assistants represented an importation of culture to whom students responded very well: GTAs were employed to relieve research-active staff from small group teaching classes in language, literature and cultural elements. This gave valuable teaching experience to postgraduates. The Head of School confirmed that the School limited the number of hours worked by GTAs to six according to University policy, and reduced or monitored the workload when the GTA was nearing completion of their PhD. Responsibility for supporting NLAs and GTAs rested at Section level due to differences in the ways in which their services were utilised.

The Review Panel heard from the NLAs that it was normal practice for the most senior to take responsibility for organising and mentoring the other NLAs, the exception to this was in German where a Language Co-ordinator had been appointed. This organisational role was

outwith the main NLA job description but those who had undertaken it confirmed that it had been a good developmental experience for them. The Panel also heard that there was variation in the extent to which NLAs were involved in the development and organisation of the courses they were involved in. Those who had less of this type of opportunity reported a degree of demoralisation when they compared their roles to those of their colleagues in other Sections. The Panel **recommended** that the School develop a common job description for NLAs that reflects the current workload, describes the appropriate level of contribution and provides an additional paragraph or section to describe the role of the senior NLA or co-ordinator.

In discussions with the GTAs, the Review Panel confirmed that arrangements for support and mentoring were satisfactory although with variations in level of support offered by particular course conveners. The main issue reported by the GTAs was the lack of access to office space to allow them to meet students in a professional setting and also to act as a social space to meet and integrate with other GTAs. The GTAs related the lack of office space and office facilities (e.g. photocopying, printing, access to Moodle as a teacher) to a lack of status in the School and expressed a view that they should be introduced to students as integral members of the teaching team in order to fulfil their function. The Panel **recommended** that the School consider removing any hierarchical lists of staff from noticeboards, handbooks, etc, and replace them with alphabetical lists of all those involved in teaching the relevant programme or course, identifying those with key roles rather than positions or titles.

On a related issue, the Review Panel noted that NLAs and GTAs relied on their Head of Section to keep them informed of changes in University policy. The Panel agreed that it would be preferable for both groups (and those staff transferred from Strathclyde) to be included in staff email lists, both those belonging to the School and to the central University Services. It was felt that this would be particularly beneficial for receiving information directly about staff development courses and Learning and Teaching seminars. The Panel **recommended** that the School and the individual Sections attend to any lists they operate and that HR systems and the University Postmaster be consulted with regard to the possibility of including GTAs and other staff falling outwith the standard groups, in the staff databases used to create automatic email lists.

#### C.6.4 Accommodation

The Review Panel noted that the School was currently accommodated in two separate buildings, the Modern Languages Building and the Hetherington Building, and that this appeared to be having an adverse effect on the development of the School as a single unit. Both staff and students noted that there was little opportunity for members of the different sections based in the different buildings to mix. Staff reported that the involvement of staff from across sections in the Comparative Literature programme was helping to bring the groups together and develop stronger relationships. The suggestion that the School be accommodated on a single site was welcomed with the proviso that there was sufficient space for all staff and for the Language Centre and the Learning and Teaching facilities currently located in the Hetherington Building. The Panel **recommended** that the Faculty of Arts place a high priority on the relocation of the School to an appropriate space and that the School be kept informed and consulted at an early stage of any alternative accommodation being considered for it, and in turn, the School should ensure that staff are informed of any discussions and have the opportunity, where appropriate, to provide input to reduce the potential for stressful and unsettling effects caused by lack of information.

#### C.6.5 Language Centre

The Review Panel acknowledged that the facilities of the Language Centre were integral to the delivery of the School's programmes. These include: the provision of live satellite television for the languages taught in SMLC; the maintenance and servicing of the Tandberg language laboratory and the Arts Faculty languages computing cluster housed in the Hetherington Building; the servicing and replacement of the DVD and VCR machines in the Audio Visual



Library and classrooms in the building; the distribution of television and audio signals to the classrooms in the building; frontline support for desktop computing faults in Hispanic Studies, Italian and Slavonic Studies. An essential element is the Language Centre Library (also known as the Audio Visual Library) through which students have access to a bank of foreign language audio-visual materials, direct access to 15 foreign language television stations as well as to foreign-language press materials and language reference works. The Panel noted that the Centre was not part of the Arts Faculty Resource Unit and **recommended** that, because of its importance to the function of the School, its remit should clearly state that such services are an integral part of its function and that any change in them must be negotiated with the Faculty and School.

#### C.6.6 Synergy

The Review Panel was interested to hear the School's views on the "Synergy" arrangements with the University of Strathclyde. It was apparent that staff perception of its usefulness varied across sections. Members of staff involved in Synergy activities reported intrinsic difficulties with the arrangements in that staff time is split between the two campuses and staff, therefore, are not able to provide students with the full experience at either. They noted that the use of Moodle and videolinking had been useful but were aware that students saw the arrangements as transitional and that the students at the remote site did not receive the same vibrant, interactive experience as those in the same room as the lecturer.

Enthusiasm within the School for further development of Synergy arrangements was also measured by some uncertainty over the future of Synergy generally and concern that the current funding arrangements were not reflective of the commitment of the respective partners. The Panel **recommended** that the Dean of the Faculty Arts and the Head of School consult with the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) to make a decision on the future of the Synergy arrangements, taking into account financial arrangements, staffing issues and the impacts on Learning and Teaching of maintaining courses on two campuses.

### D. The Maintenance and Enhancement of Standards of Awards

The Review Panel was confident that the Department was operating effective measures to maintain the standards of awards. As indicated in the SER, and through discussions with staff and students, the School operated robust assessment procedures, responded to external examiners' reports where necessary and demonstrated awareness and monitoring of grade profiles. The School pointed out that the statistical information regarding grade profiles at the University level were not particularly useful for monitoring in language courses as they did not provide the detail required to distinguish between the different expectations of students entering language courses with different levels of previous knowledge.

#### D.1 External Examiners

With regard to responding to external examiners' reports, the Head of School clarified that reports were sent simultaneously by the Senate Office to the Head of School and to the Head of Section or Programme Convener and that the appropriate person responded as requested. He reported that, as the Head of School, he was not always informed that a response had been made or what had been said in that response. The Review Panel **recommended** that the School develop a mechanism for monitoring responses at School level to allow the Head of School to manage and maintain an overview of the completion of the process.

#### D.2 Feedback from students

The Review Panel noted that the School operated a varied structure of staff student liaison committees to allow each section to arrange meetings according to the student numbers and programmes involved. The Panel was satisfied that the committees operated well although they had noted comments from students that there was variability in the effectiveness of their staff

student liaison committees. The students had explained that, while they accepted that their views were being listened to, the effectiveness of action resulting from their comments was variable. They did, however, acknowledge that some of the issues were outwith the control of staff in the School and that direct action was not always possible.

## **E. The Maintenance and Assurance of Quality**

### *E.1 Staffing levels*

The Review Panel noted that the reduction in staffing levels was such that remaining staff were under extreme pressure and that students were aware that it was affecting their experience in terms of the choices available to them and the level of contact they were receiving. The Panel also noted that in some areas GTAs were involved in teaching at Honours level. This was of some concern to the Panel in terms of an excessive load being placed on GTAs, given that it would normally be expected that GTAs would be heavily involved in teaching at lower levels only. The Panel questioned whether the quality of provision was sustainable in the current situation.

Students reported that the situation had been explained to them and that they had had the opportunity to discuss their concerns at staff student liaison committees and, in one case where the situation was severe, the School had responded and bought in extra staff to cover for study leave. They acknowledged that the remaining staff were working very hard to minimise the effects, but they commented that they were not as aware of problems in other departments that claimed to be short of staff, and attributed this to the extent and suddenness of the reduction in the School.

Staff expressed their view that the pressures were coming from many different sources and that they could not point to any single factor where an improvement would resolve or relieve the pressure. They identified ongoing major stress factors to be administrative work required to comply with University procedures, such as invigilation, completion of registry lists etc, and changing objectives and targets being imposed by Faculty and University. They reported feeling that the normal pressures of their work had been exacerbated at this time by the reduction of staff, including secretarial support staff, through the Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process which they considered to have been carried out in a very unstrategic manner, and by the creation of the School which had brought a certain amount of additional administration and bureaucratic work. Staff expressed a hope that the second of these additional burdens was transitional and that benefits would be seen as the School's structures and administrative processes became established.

The Panel asked if reducing the number of options being taught would ease the stress and would help staff to concentrate on maintaining the quality of teaching on those remaining. Staff confirmed that they were maintaining the quality of their teaching at the moment but accepted that it was becoming difficult to continue to do so. It was reported that a reduction in the number of single honours programmes had been considered, but on investigation, it had become apparent that the "cost" of these programmes could be reduced by restructuring and by using Synergy and other creative measures, such as the introduction of a 25% component of single honours programmes being made up of elements from other sections or other departments in the Arts Faculty<sup>1</sup>. Staff remained committed to maintaining the range of options as long as possible, as this was known to be one of the main attractions of the School to students.

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<sup>1</sup> Students reported that programmes offering a 75/25% split were difficult for students to set up and for participant departments to manage. The students requested that the some encouragement be given to departments in organising these arrangements more efficiently.

### *E.2 Annual Course Monitoring and Student Feedback*

The Review Panel noted that teaching and student support in the School was reported to be very good but was surprised to find little evidence of student feedback in some of the Annual Course Monitoring Reports provided in the Documentation for the review. The lack of any Annual Course Monitoring Reports in some areas was also noted and it was questioned whether the School was using the ACM process to its full advantage. Staff explained that there was a feeling of resentment because no feedback or action was apparent after the submission of the reports to Faculty, therefore staff were reluctant to engage with the process. However, it was acknowledged that feedback had improved recently. The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School ensure that Annual Course Monitoring Reports are completed in compliance with the University's procedures in future and encouraged the staff to use the ACMR process to record positive as well as negative feedback from students and external examiners.

### *E.3 SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessment Reports*

The Review Panel noted that there had been three recommendations arising out of the 1998 SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessment Report of European Languages and asked what responses had been made. The Head of School explained that the report had been addressed to an organisational unit that did not exist, i.e. European Languages, and therefore no unified response or effort had been made to address the recommendations. He noted that there had been good discussions and sharing of good practice in preparation for that review but that the concerns raised through the report were no longer relevant or were not within the control of the departments then or the School now.

## **F. Enhancing the Student Learning Experience**

### *F.1 Course and Programme Handbooks*

The Review Panel was of the view that students should be encouraged to see the School as a single unit and considered that the development of a house style for course and programme handbooks would assist this aim. The Head of School explained that some of the anomalies in the course handbooks that the Panel had identified were due to difficulties in the updating and preparation of the documents for session 2005-06 caused by the loss of secretarial staff through the Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process. The Head of School described a proposed new "pooled" arrangement for secretarial support that would facilitate the development of a common structure, content and style which in turn would make it easier for secretarial staff to manage the School's suite of handbooks.

The students confirmed the Panel's observations on the variation in the quality and content of the handbooks and expressed the view that the reality of their experience was not reflected in the handbooks. They noted that some of the handbooks were very good, e.g. French, but that there were problems such as recommended textbooks being out of print, lack of clarity and accuracy on which options would be available, in others. Students expressed a preference for paper based course handbooks which they considered helped them to recognise their official status and provided a definitive statement of what they should expect during their study. The Panel **recommended** that, to promote the School as a single, cohesive unit, the School should adopt a common style for its handbooks with standard structure and content to form the basis of the individual documents. The School should also consider providing students with paper copies of the handbooks, as well as online versions, to emphasise the importance of this document as a source of information.

## **G. Summary of Key Strengths and Areas to be Improved or Enhanced in relation to Learning and Teaching and Conclusions and Recommendations**

### *Key Strengths*

- The range of the School's provision at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels which provides a broad spectrum of topics and includes cultural subjects which stand alone and complement language study
- The availability of the range of Slavonic languages which is unique in Scotland
- Continuing (albeit reduced) emphasis on spoken language training
- Excellent library, IT and AV facilities including the use of the University Library Special Collections and the "hands on" access that students had to the material held there
- The friendly and helpful attitude of staff towards students
- The willingness to respond to changing circumstances and adjust assessment methods and other practices accordingly and with imagination
- The availability to students of external resources, e.g. free membership to Alliance Française which they reported was a very useful resource (It was later noted that the German Section had taken out a special subscription to the Goethe-Institut which allows staff and students free access to its library)

### *Areas to be improved or enhanced*

- Assessment practices
- Annual Course Monitoring Reports
- Communications with students and others
- Employability
- Management and Status of Native Language Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants
- Faculty and University support for the School

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

#### Conclusions

The Review Panel commended the School on the overall quality of its provision and its maintenance of standards under adverse conditions. The Panel urges the Faculty to support the School and to act upon all opportunities to lower the levels of stress being experienced by its staff. The Panel was pleased that the meeting with key staff showed that staff remained committed to their Sections and their subjects and were increasingly positive about the future of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Glasgow through the formation and development of the School.

The Panel also commended the School for its collective input into the Self-Evaluation Report and was appreciative of its open and frank approach to the review.

#### Recommendations

The recommendations interspersed in the preceding report and summarised below are made in the spirit of encouragement to the School of Modern Languages and Cultures continue to evolve and overcome the difficult circumstances of the past few years. The recommendations have been cross-referenced to the paragraphs in the text of the report to which they refer. They are

grouped by the areas for improvement/enhancement noted above and are ranked in order of priority.

## Assessment Practices

### *Recommendation 1:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School take an overview on the administrative practices related to assessment and explore the potential for harmonisation e.g. common policies for late submissions, common approaches to the prevention of plagiarism, School level co-ordination of assessment schedules to spread student workload where possible. [Paragraph C.3]

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

### *Recommendation 2:*

The Panel recommended that the School consider introducing some minimum requirement for academic work during the Residence Abroad to encourage students to remain engaged with their studies and to introduce a level of consistency of experience across the different activities. The School should also take a more proactive approach to maintaining contact with students while they were away to ensure that they have access to assistance should they need it; a regular email with standard text should be sufficient. [Paragraph C.4.3]

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

### *Recommendation 3:*

The Panel **recommended** that the Faculty ensures that guidance on compulsory dissertations for session 2006-07 is provided to students through handbooks and other means in a clear, consistent and timely manner. The School should also clarify and communicate to students, the situation as it relates to session 2005-06. [Paragraph C.4.4]

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

### *Recommendation 4:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School should reflect on the achievability of its ILOs and take action to ensure that students were offered alternative activities where circumstances, such as low student numbers, could prevent the desired outcomes being met. [Paragraph C.2]

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

### *Recommendation 5:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School should consider revising its aims and ILOs to follow a standard pattern using consistent terminology and to ensure they are easily accessible to students through consistent placement and formatting in all handbooks. [Paragraph C.1]

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

### *Recommendation 6:*

The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School consider providing all staff involved in marking (including NLAs and GTAs) with a further briefing session to update them on the recent changes to the Code of Assessment (e.g. 22-point Scale) and to refresh their knowledge of how the School wishes them to apply the Code. The School should also ensure that the most up-to-date information about the Code of Assessment is published in a consistent manner in all course handbooks. [Paragraph C.3]

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

*Recommendation 7:*

The Review Panel **recommended** that the School develop a mechanism for monitoring responses to External Examiners reports at School level to allow the Head of School to manage and maintain an overview of the completion of the process. *[Paragraph D.1]*

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

## **Annual Course Monitoring Reports**

*Recommendation 8:*

The Panel **recommended** that the Head of School ensure that Annual Course Monitoring Reports are completed in compliance with the University's procedures in future and encouraged the staff to use the ACMR process to record positive as well as negative feedback from students and external examiners. *[Paragraph E.2]*

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

## **Communications with students and others**

*Recommendation 9:*

The Panel **recommended** that, to promote the School as a single, cohesive unit, the School should adopt a common style for its handbooks with standard structure and content to form the basis of the individual documents. The School should also consider providing students with paper copies of the handbooks, as well as online versions, to emphasise the importance of this document as a source of information. *[Paragraph F.1]*

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

*Recommendation 10:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School take steps to emphasise to students that all advertised options may not be available in a particular year. Efforts should also be made to ensure that information supplied to PGT students prior to arrival is as accurate as possible to avoid confusion and disappointment on arrival. The Panel acknowledges that the unplanned changes in staffing as a result of the University's Voluntary Severance/Early Retirement process may have exacerbated the situations reported by the students in session 2005-06. *[Paragraph C.5.1]*

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

*Recommendation 11:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School ensures that it has in place robust administrative processes to enable it to deal with enquiries, applications and reception of increased numbers of PGT students before the introduction of its new generic postgraduate. *[Paragraph C.5.2]*

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

*Recommendation 12:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School consider how its definitions of Team, Partnership and Research-led Teaching could be expressed more clearly. *[Paragraph C.5.2]*

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

## **Employability**

### *Recommendation 13:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School take some time to present their existing practices in terms of employability as it believed that significant improvements in the perceptions of students, staff and employers could be gained with relatively little effort. [Paragraph C.4.5]

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

## **Management and Status of Native Language Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants**

### *Recommendation 14:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School develop a common job description for NLAs that reflects the current workload, describes the appropriate level of contribution and provides an additional paragraph or section to describe the role of the senior NLA or co-ordinator. [Paragraph C.6.3]

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

### *Recommendation 15:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School and the individual Sections attend to any lists they operate and that HR systems and the University Postmaster be consulted with regard to the possibility of including GTAs and other staff falling outwith the standard groups in the staff databases used to create automatic email lists. [Paragraph C.6.3]

**For the attention of:** The Head of School  
Heads of Section  
Programme/Course Conveners  
HR Systems  
University Postmaster

### *Recommendation 16:*

The Panel **recommended** that the School consider removing any hierarchical lists of staff from noticeboards, handbooks, etc, and replace them with alphabetical lists of those involved in teaching the relevant programme or course, identifying those with key roles rather than a position or title to encourage the integration of GTAs as full members of the teaching team. [Paragraph C.6.3]

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

## **Faculty and University support of the School**

### *Recommendation 17:*

The Panel noted that the Language Centre was not part of the Arts Faculty Resource Unit and **recommended** that, because of its importance to the function of the School, its remit should clearly state that such services are an integral part of its function and that any change in them must be negotiated with the Faculty and School. [Paragraph C.6.5]

For the attention of: **The Director of the Language Centre**

*Recommendation 18:*

The Panel **recommended** that the Faculty of Arts place a high priority on the relocation of the School to an appropriate space and that the School be kept informed and consulted at an early stage of any alternative accommodation being considered for it, and in turn, the School should ensure that staff are informed of any discussions and have the opportunity, where appropriate, to provide input to reduce the potential for stressful and unsettling effects caused by lack of information. [*Paragraph C.6.4*]

For the attention of: **The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**

*Recommendation 19:*

The Panel **recommended** that the Dean of the Faculty Arts and the Head of School consult with the Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) to make a decision on the future of the Synergy arrangements, taking into account financial arrangements, staffing issues and the impacts on Learning and Teaching of maintaining courses on two campuses. [*Paragraph C.6.6*]

For the attention of: **The Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching)**  
**The Dean of the Faculty of Arts**  
**The Head of School**

*Prepared by: Jane McAllister*

*Last modified on: Wednesday 2 August 2006*