UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN, INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW

# CENTRE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

*Summary with CLL Responses*

This document is extracted from the full report on the Internal Teaching Review of the Centre for Lifelong Learning conducted in November 2005. It includes the Panel's overall impressions of the provision and a record of the Panel's commendations and recommendations.

Overall Impressions

The Panel was impressed by the teaching and learning opportunities provided by CLL. These cover a wide range of courses and programmes: some provide a route into ‘mainstream’ University study (e.g., Access to Degree Studies, Summer School for Access), some replicate the content of daytime, on-campus provision, but make it available to a different student market (e.g., Science, Christian Studies, Certificate in Philosophy), and some offer the chance to study subjects that the University does not otherwise teach (e.g., Archaeology, Counselling Skills). The Panel considered that CLL provides an outstanding service to the north-east of Scotland, the Highlands and Islands in all three of these categories. CLL’s activities demonstrate that flexible delivery of higher education to address the wider access and lifelong learning agendas does not involve a compromise in quality and academic standards. Without exception students from all programmes whom the Panel met spoke positively about their studies; those who had also attended conventional University classes reported that their experience in CLL was just as good, and often better. Several students explained that their studies in CLL had taken them much further than they had intended, or thought possible – clear evidence that CLL achieves its fundamental objective of helping students recognise and make the most of their academic potential.

The enthusiasm, dedication and professionalism of the CLL’s staff – its Manager, programme co-ordinators, programme assistants and tutors – underwrite its success. Much emphasis is given to close staff-student contact. Students confirmed that excellent support from staff, tailored to individual needs and aspirations, is one of CLL’s major strengths. CLL’s tutors provide authoritative, enthusiastic teaching. The background of these tutors is diverse: some are from the wider University’s teaching staff, whereas others, employed elsewhere, draw on their professional experience. This input from professionals who are subject specialists, but not academics, is a particularly valuable feature of the Archaeology, Christian Studies and Counselling Skills programmes. The work of tutors is supported by comprehensive course workbooks and websites. The best of these are excellent, and merit wider publicity. The Panel recommended that CLL undertake a survey of its teaching resources to identify these examples of best practice, and take steps to share these across its programmes. The Panel also believed that CLL should make more of this specialist expertise to facilitate joint work with Colleges, Schools and Disciplines.

High quality teaching draws on appropriate academic standards. Although CLL makes suitable adjustments to its provision to accommodate the different needs of its students, it does so without compromise to the standard of learning achieved. In fact, the Panel was impressed by the demands made of students registered for some of the Access courses. It also highlighted opportunities to study beyond Level 1 – to degree standard in Archaeology, and to Honours degree standard in Christian Studies and Scottish Cultural Studies – as a key feature. The review confirmed that CLL works with academic standards and rigorous quality monitoring procedures equivalent to those of the ‘mainstream’ University. The Christian Studies programme shares external examiners with the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy. The Panel considered this as an example of best practice that could usefully be taken up by CLL’s other programmes were it to expand its collaborative work with the University’s Colleges, Schools and Disciplines. CLL operates effective course review procedures, as its record of course changes indicates.

The Panel was impressed by the positive, open attitude with which CLL approached the review. The creation of a dedicated Quality Enhancement Team demonstrates CLL’s commitment to improvement of its provision. However, the Panel also identified several strategic obstacles. The most basic of these was the extent to which, outside of its core teams, CLL’s management of teaching quality relies on informal contacts – with tutors, students and academic staff. The Panel recognised the importance of goodwill and shared interest as a force for effective change, but regarded these as a precarious basis from which to take forward the quality enhancement agenda. Without formal support structures to sustain relationships, CLL is vulnerable to any disruption of community spirit. Tensions in the relationship between CLL and teaching managers in the Schools and Colleges, arising from the different priorities expected of different parts of the University, demonstrated the barriers to change produced when a sense of collective enterprise is missing. The Manager of CLL and two of the College Directors of Teaching and Learning admitted that, since the restructuring of the University, strategic co-operation between CLL, the Schools and the Colleges had been disappointing. The Panel strongly recommended that CLL work with senior management to improve the dialogue between CLL and the rest of the University. This will be necessary if CLL is to take forward its more ambitious plans, such as the addition of Honours-level study to the Archaeology programme, major revamp of the Science programme, or introduction of a comprehensive evening-class degree structure.

**Commendable Features**

*Note: numbers in brackets indicate the relevant paragraph of the Panel's full Report.*

The Panel commended the following aspects of the Centre’s provision:

* the range of provision in terms of what was on offer, where it was on offer and when (1.4)
* its success in identifying niche markets and expanding its provision to reflect local demand (1.5)
* its commitment to wider access + lifelong learning and its determination to help students make the most of their academic potential, as reflected in the drive and sense of community exhibited by staff and students (2.1)
* the imaginative approach to the promotion of flexible learning opportunities (2.1)
* the non-proprietary Summer School – students who complete this are not tied to University of Aberdeen entry, and students are able to use their qualification to enter other institutions (2.2)
* the professional commitment of all staff, which the Panel identified as a major strength (3.2)
* the introduction of a dedicated Quality Enhancement Team (4.2) and the enthusiasm with which CLL has embraced the QE agenda (19.1)
* moves to improve CLL’s representation on College and School Teaching & Learning Committees (4.3)
* moves to establish more formal relations with Divinity and Philosophy (4.5)
* the ***exemplary*** support for disabled students (5.2)
* the flexibility of its provision; the motivation, enthusiasm and ability of its students; the range of learning methods provided, including the quality of the technology used for delivery and the use of WebCT; and its preparedness to offer flexible modes of assessment – all strengths rightly identified by CLL in its self-assessment (6.1)
* the work of the Network Support Officer and his team, the use of technology to facilitate distance-learning, and plans to develop this further (6.6)
* achievements in delivering courses beyond Level 1 that, in terms of the sophistication of the material and demands made of students, provide high-quality opportunities for academic progression and personal development (8.3)
* the Christian Studies programme’s use of the same external examiners as the mainstream Divinity programmes in the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy (8.5)
* the provision of placements for postgraduates from the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon’s University studying for appropriate awards (9.1)
* efforts made to strengthen links with the Higher Education Academy (11.2)
* efforts made by the Manager and programme co-ordinators to integrate themselves into relevant professional networks (11.4)
* initiatives to address obstacles and take a firmer strategic approach to tutor training and support with a greater emphasis on the student learning experience (12.2)
* the excellent staff-student relations within CLL (13.1)
* CLL’s intent to explore innovative methods of student representation as an alternative to the standard staff-student liaison committee format (13.3)
* staff’s grasp of the educational background, motivation and aspirations of CLL’s students, and the implications for teaching and learning (14.1)
* the course monitoring sheets recently introduced by CLL, which provide a level of detail that exceeds that available from the University’s institutional profile (14.2)
* the excellent level of student support underwritten by the staff’s flexible attitude and attention to detail, including specialist one-to-one sessions with tutors; staff’s genuine interest in students and encouragement to boost the confidence of students facing a daunting transition to university-level study (15.2 and 15.5)

**Recommendations**

*The Panel invites the Centre to consider the following recommendations, and asks that the Centre’s Director and the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching), consulting with other staff as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each.*

Note:  
Responses are presented as *see italics, boxed*

The Panel recommended that the Centre:

### Range of provision

* working in conjunction with Geography and other cognate disciplines, give serious consideration to introduction of an Honours programme in Archaeology (1.6)
  + *Donald Paterson the Archaeology Programme Co-ordinator is working with Geography and the School of Physical Sciences to develop the programme. The Centre is embedded in the development of the full time Archaeology degree with Geography & Anthropology. Provision has been made within the f/t degree to enable development of an associated Honours degree by p/time study, which facilitates movement between full & p/time study.*

### Staffing

* Working with the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Colleges, should seek to identify wider access/lifelong learning champions to strengthen formal, strategic links between CLL and the Colleges (3.6)
  + *CLL representation has now been established on a number of core College level Committees. CLL will invite ACRs to meetings which we believe relevant to them, including our Awards Ceremonies*
  + *CLSM and CoPS have appointed staff within the College with a remit for widening access and schools outreach activity, CASS is in the process of establishing a similar position. It is envisaged that in addition to the Joint CLSM and CoPS Widening Access Sub Committee the new academic posts will strengthen strategic links with the Colleges and feedback through College Teaching and Learning Committees.*

**School organisation**

* extend measures to improve CLL’s representation on College and School Teaching & Learning Committees (4.3)
  + *The Deputy Director sits on CASS T & L Committee; Sally Middleton the Science Co-ordinator sits on Life Sciences T & L Committee, and on Physical Sciences when required. The Christian Studies and Philosophy Co-ordinator sits on DHP T & L Committee. The Director representing CLL at UCTL.*
* consider measures to involve tutors and students more directly with the management of the Centre’s programmes (4.4), including the appointment of student members to its main strategy teams (13.4)
  + *CMT did not think that it was appropriate to have tutors/students on main strategy teams but would consider ways to develop measures to work more closely with tutors/students. For example an annual Learning and Teaching Forum.*
* ensure that the work of CLL forms part of the induction provided for new Heads of School (4.5)
  + *It will be important for the Director and Deputy Director to establish mechanisms to inform Heads of School about the work/new developments. Director and Deputy Director of CLL are in the process of meeting with Heads of School individually on a rolling programme. HR will be approached to discuss appropriate measures to incorporate this suggestion into any induction plans within the Colleges.*
* consider admitting College representatives to its strategy teams (4.6)
  + *CLL will invite College representatives to specific meetings but CMT was of the opinion that College representatives would not wish to attend/and it was not appropriate to attend all strategy team meetings. CMT will invite College representatives to attend its annual Teaching & Learning meeting –* ***Action Plan point 1.Colleges are represented in the newly established advisory group***
* establish a strategic dialogue with Colleges and Schools. The Panel ***strongly recommended*** that, as part of the review follow-up, the Manager of CLL, the Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) and the College Directors of Teaching & Learning meet to consider how best to work together (4.6) and (20.3)
  + *Director of CLL will report directly to Vice Principal Learning and Teaching on all matters relating to teaching and learning in the Centre, including the development of policies and strategies in the area of lifelong learning*, *and the induction for Heads of School with regard to CLL*.
  + *A new Strategic Advisory Committee comprising of the VP L&T, Deputy Secretary, Director and Deputy Director CLL and the College Directors of Teaching &Learning has been established.*

**Course and programme design, accessibility and approval**

* consider production of an inclusivity statement to consolidate its equal opportunities achievements (5.3)
* *The Centre for Lifelong Learning, in line with the University of Aberdeen is committed to a comprehensive policy on Equality and Diversity for its students. The policy aims to prevent discriminatory practices and seeks to create a culture where students can reach their full potential.*
* *Entry to courses offered through the Centre is made on the basis of the applicants merits only and irrespective of colour, race, nationality, national origins, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, family circumstances, political beliefs, gender, gender re-assignment, trade union membership, age or any other unfair distinction.*
* *The Centre is committed to providing a learning environments in which the rights and dignity of all its students are respected, which is free from discrimination, prejudice, intimidation and all forms of harassment and bullying.*
* *Through audio and video conferencing and also through web based study we endeavour to enable all students including students living in remote or rural locations as well as homebound students to access the learning opportunities offered through the Centre. Audio- conferenced courses can be taped and or digitally recorded similarly the video-conferenced courses, thus enabling students with specific requirements access to these courses in an alternative format.*
* *The introduction of WebCT as an additional resource within all programmes as well as Podcasting availability will further enhance the accessibility and inclusive nature of the Centre programmes.*

#### Teaching, learning and assessment

* investigate potential measures to improve the quality of feedback to distance-learning students, to take account of their particular mode of study (6.4)
* *Programme Coordinators are currently engaged in discussion about this with tutors and other staff from the University’s new Centre for Learning & Teaching.*
* *CLL will establish a pilot scheme for peer-review of teaching on the Counselling Skills programme.*
* *Improving IT network facilities is ongoing;* *in 2006/07 we will seek to maintain a cutting edge position in distance learning delivery by moving our delivery into web-streaming and podcasting.* ***Action Plan point 6***
* undertake an internal audit of its handbooks, workbooks, websites, mark schemes and feedback to share best practice and improve consistency (6.5)
  + *The Programme Co-ordinators met to carry out an internal audit of programme materials. Best practice throughout the Centre will have the consistency appropriate to each Programme. A check list/best practice guide is being developed.*
  + *Feedback forms have been re-designed*
* consider adjustments to its timetabling so that classes are taught on alternate time slots in alternate years to offer students improved choice and flexibility (6.8)
  + *This has been considered by CMT. It should be appreciated that different courses are taught in some Programmes on a two or three year cycle, and there is already movement on delivery days and times. CLL do everything possible to offer students improved choice and flexibility but CLL have to adhere to the availability of and preferred/possible time slots for tutors. In some Programmes, delivery already changes time and day every year.*

### Course and programme monitoring and review

* work more closely with Colleges, Schools and Disciplines to update its portfolio of courses and programmes (7.1)
  + *Colleges are now more involved in the approval of SENAS forms both for courses and programmes. Programme Co-ordinators are developing relationships with Colleges, Schools and Disciplines.e.g.*
    - *Sally Middleton (Science) is working closely with Chemistry to ensure the p/time on-line delivery matches on-campus delivery*
    - *Donald Paterson (Archaeology) is working closely with Geography to develop a part-time Hons degree in Scottish Archaeology*
    - *(Christian Studies /Philosophy) has been working with DHP to ensure equivalences between distance and on-campus courses. CLL is also working closely with both Philosophy and School of Education to ensure that the Certificate in Philosophical Studies meets the GTCS requirements for teachers wishing to add Philosophy to their teaching portfolio. CLL is working with the School of Education to roll out this model and expand CPD provision.*

### Academic standards and the academic infrastructure

* review its study materials to ensure that workbooks and mark schemes fully reflect advanced levels of study (8.3)
  + *The co-ordinators have met to take this forward and a checklist/procedure is being developed through CLL’s Quality Enhancement Team.*
  + *CLL will pilot a scheme for peer-review of teaching on the Counselling Skills programme****. Action Plan point 4***
* e-examine the range of Access courses to identify those that might reasonably count as credit points towards any University award, subject to the existing degree regulations (8.4)
  + *This has been successfully completed - Students can now register for the MA or BSc with Foundation Studies. This allows any of the Access courses, with the exception of PHE,  to count as credits at year 0 of the Foundation degree.*

### Personal development and employability

* explore with Careers the potential to develop a dedicated information and support service that addresses possible requirements of CLL’s students and prospective students (10.2)
  + *Sally Middleton is currently working with Peter Fantom of the Careers & Appointments service on the development of an accredited careers module, modelled on what the Careers service currently offers to Biology students prior to their placements. For CLL, this course would be targeted at the specific needs of Lifelong Learning students, introducing them to career planning, CV's, applications, interview panels etc. The module would be jointly taught by the careers service and Sally Middleton and organised to bring in elements of peer evaluation. It would be hoped to roll this out across the University, with the courses jointly taught by the careers service and a member of the academic discipline involved*

### Staff training and educational development

### investigate additional training for tutors tailored to the specific demands of distance learning (12.4)

### [Although it made no other specific recommendations about staff development, the Panel asked for a progress report in one year’s time]

* + *As from August 2006, CLL will require all new off-campus tutors to attend an Induction Programme modelled on the three-day course offered to all new lecturers. This course was developed & delivered by the new Centre for Learning & Teaching in collaboration with CLL, and at the time writing has been offered on-campus. Evaluation on this first event noted that it was well received.* ***Action Plan point 2***

### Student involvement in the quality processes

* take steps to improve its SCEF returns and publicise action taken as a result (13.2)
  + *This issue may be resolved with the introduction of electronic SCEFS. We await the findings of the Working Group on Student and Graduate Feedback.*
  + *This will inform discussion at the yearly Learning and Teaching Forum.*
  + *CLL will explore utilising the website as a mechanism for publicising the action taken*
* report on measures to improve operation of the staff-student liaison committee in one year’s time (13.3)
  + *SSLC has met electronically for 2005/06. Plans are in development for the future approach to this challenge. CLL is exploring the use of a virtual SSLC on the model currently piloted with the School of Education.*  ***Action Plan point 3***

#### Student support

* consider provision of an evening or weekend office service to current and potential students (15.5)
  + *CMT discussed this issue at length. We appreciate that our students may have need to make out-of-hours contact with the Centre, but as the vast majority are students remote from Aberdeen, it did not seem necessary to open the Centre at weekends. Rather it is important that they are aware that they can make contact at the weekend. There are also security issues in such an opening. In light of all of this, CMT decided that from the beginning of the 1HS, each Co-ordinator will take it in turn to be a weekend contact and have the Centre’s mobile phone. CMT will review this after a few months. CMT did not feel there was a need to provide an evening or weekend office service.*

### Recruitment, access and widening participation

* consider how best to build on its established reputation to formalise its internal and external recruitment strategies (16.3)
  + *Strategies to include: more targeted advertising & marketing for specific courses rather than centre-wide programmes; working with local groups; taking advantage of regional activity eg Highland Year of Culture. For session 2006/7, accredited courses on “Highland Culture” have been mentioned specifically in newspaper adverts and in editorial, and 2 non-accredited short series have been developed relating to the theme of highland Culture – one of these is being organised jointly with the National Trust for Scotland. One area to be improved upon is the Highland and Island database, which needs revised to enable us to extract special interest groups simply.*
  + *Internal recruitment can be improved by working within the University system. To facilitate this, contact has been made with the Alumnus Association who can assist internally and externally.*
  + *CLL is developing a fact card detailing useful statistics to support both internal and external marketing.*
  + *It is important that the opportunities available to undergraduate students in taking CLL courses are pointed out to Advisors – enabling students to pick up credits where they have fallen behind, and thus assisting with retention and progression. To this end CLL has contacted the Registry and students who may be failing to progress have been advised to contact CLL, a number of students have registered on the Science Programme courses as a result. CLL will continue to work with the Registry to embed the process.*
* ask SRAS to include more detailed information on the full range of courses and programmes available in CLL in the University prospectus (16.4)
* *Pre Entry Team have responsibility of this area of activity & will work with SRAS with a view to expanding CLL’s entry in University Prospectus. Attempts in the past to be allocated extra pages have not been successful, but this will be pursued for the 2007/8 Prospectus.*
* *Other possibilities include having a “pop-up” on the University Home Page at Clearing, which points to CLL courses as a stop gap. This was explored in August 2006, and although each person contacted was welcoming of the idea, no one would give the final authority. On the basis that the idea was not excluded, we will start the process of including a pop up at an earlier stage for session 2007/8.*

### Impediments to quality enhancements

* discuss the problems associated with limited access to the Regent Building, the Inverness office and some of the other study centres with the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) (20.1)
  + *Plans for radical deployment of the Regent Building and link corridor facility have been approved.*
  + *New premises within Inverness City centre are being sought.*
  + *At present we have no formal contacts in the Central Belt who can offer video conference facilities. In 2006/7, staff of CLL – through the Assistant Director and the Network Co-ordinator will explore re-opening links with Herriot Watt, and making contact with Perth College. The latter, as a UHI partner, is well equipped with VC resources, but here we may be seen as a competitor.* ***Action Plan point 5***
* discuss concerns about CLL’s relationship with the UHI Millennium Institute with the Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching) (20.2)
  + *The Director and the VP (L&T) have had an initial meeting with UHI resulting in discussions and negotiations to develop an articulation agreement.*

**PROGRAMME REVALIDATION**

*Recommendations to the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate)*

Given the evidence obtained in the course of the review, the ITR Panel recommends ***unconditional******revalidation*** of the following programmes for the period 2005/06 to 2011/12:

* Access to Degree Studies
* Christian Studies
* Counselling Skills
* Philosophy
* Scottish Archaeology
* Scottish Cultural Studies
* Summer School for Access

As CLL is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the **Science** programme, the ITR Panel recommends that the current period of validation should be extended by one year to allow CLL to complete the review process. The Panel asks for an update on changes made as part of the one-year follow-up report, and invites ASC to suspend final judgement on revalidation of the Science programme until this update is available.

**Action Plan**

The Panel endorsed all six action points:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Action Point | Position at 1 September, 2006 |
| 1 | Introduction of an annual programme review meeting of the Centre Management Team: | * *CLL will invite College representatives to specific meetings but CMT was of the opinion that College representatives would not wish to attend/and it was not appropriate to attend all Centre team meetings. CMT will invite College representatives to attend its annual Teaching & Learning Forum.* |
| 2 | More formal meetings between tutors and programme coordinators | * *Programme Coordinators are currently engaged in discussion about this with tutors and other staff from the University’s new Centre for Learning & Teaching.* * *As from August 2006, CLL will require all new off-campus tutors to attend an Induction Programme modelled on the three-day course offered to all new lecturers. This course was developed & delivered by the new Centre for Learning & Teaching in collaboration with CLL, and at the time writing has been offered on-campus. Evaluation on this first event noted that it was well received. The video-conferenced delivery is scheduled for September 2006*. |
| 3 | Virtual methods to improve participation in the staff-student liaison committee | * *SSLC has met electronically for 2005/06. Plans are in development for the future approach to this challenge* |
| 4 | Establish a pilot scheme for peer-review of teaching on the Counselling Skills programme | * *Under discussion* |
| 5 | Identification of a new Central Belt Study Centre for the Christian Studies programme | * *Deputy Director to contact Perth College in the first instance* |
| 6 | Cutting edge IT network facilities | * *Network Officer and Deputy Director are in discussion with DITT and other external bodies* * *Podcasting is being piloted in first half session* * *CLL is utilising an LTU project to evaluate web streaming software* |

and ***recommended*** that CLL provide an update in its one-year follow-up report.