**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**  
  
**SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**  
  
**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

Panel visit, Monday 30th April and Tuesday 1st May 2007

**OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**  
  
The School of Language and Literature was established in 2003 through a merger of the School of English and Film Studies and the School of Modern Languages.  The Panel recognises and takes into account the changes which the School has been through since the merger.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the School on the reflective nature of the Self Evaluation Document (SED) and particularly for the Action Points included with the documentation.  It was clear from the documentation that the School is committed to enhancing the quality of the provision it offers.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the School on the range of cross-disciplinary courses and programmes it has introduced.  Although some teething problems have been identified with regards to this process, the Panel recognised that the School is committed to tackling any such problems.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the recent renaissance in both Film Studies and Celtic.  Both disciplines have suffered severely from staffing problems in the recent past.  New and forthcoming appointments in both areas have strengthened the disciplines. However, the Panel ***recommends*** that the School do everything it can to prevent such a staffing crisis from re-occurring.  
  
The Panel found student satisfaction within the School to be high on the whole.  In particular, students on the Hispanic Studies programme and the Celtic programme were highly satisfied with the quality of staff and courses taught on these programmes. Staff/student relationships on the Hispanic Studies programme appeared to be particularly strong.  
  
Following on from this, the Panel noted that the School has a very good retention rate with regards to students progressing through the School from undergraduate level to PhD level.  Many of the students the Panel spoke to had studied for their undergraduate degree within the School and had progressed to MLitt and PhD level.  The Panel ***commends*** the School for its success in retaining some of its most accomplished students.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the School for making progress towards extending its marketing strategies into China.  The panel was impressed by the range of articulation agreements in development.  The Panel was also pleased to note that the School is taking an active role in encouraging School pupils from the local area to consider a university career within the School.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the Administrative Staff within the School.  They appear to be a force for unity in the School and are encouraging the development of processes and procedures along centralised School lines.   
  
The School is ***commended*** on the writing support programme it operates within English and Film Studies.  The Panel also commends the publication of the Good Writing Guide which is available through the English Department website.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the School on the exemplary PhD monitoring processes operated within the School.  The Panel was very impressed with the regular meetings held between some PhD supervisors.  This is a good example of the sharing of good practice within the School.  The panel ***recommends*** that the School formalise this process. The Panel also ***recommends*** that the School seriously consider adopting a two supervisor system for its PhD students in line with national recommendations.  
  
The Panel ***commends*** the School on the appropriateness of the Summer Access course for year 1 of the MA English programme.

**2. COMMENDABLE FEATURES**

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

(*Numbers in brackets refer to the relevant paragraph of the Panel’s full report.)*

* the reflective nature of the Self Evaluation Document (SED) and particularly the Action Points included with the documentation (Overall impressions);
* the range of cross-disciplinary courses and programmes it has introduced (Overall impressions);
* the introduction of the new cross-disciplinary initiatives including the development of the new cross-disciplinary MLitt programmes (1.4);
* the School's administrative and support staff for their hard work in implementing cross-School practices and procedures (3.1);
* the creation of the School Administrative Committee (4.2);
* the links between the School and the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies (5.3);
* the introduction of a diagnostic English test for all incoming ERASMUS students in the School (5.4);
* the introduction of the new Ethnography course for Modern Languages students (5.5);
* the early involvement of the School in the SHEFC-funded Teachability Project (5.6);
* the use, in the School, of collaborative teaching (6.3);
* the success of the new Film Studies and Celtic programmes (6.4);
* the method of teaching levels 3 and 4 language students together on some optional courses (6.5);
* the support the School offers to students who have difficulties with academic writing in English (6.6);
* the use of the Special Cases committee prior to the Examiners Meeting in English (8.1);
* the exemplary PhD monitoring processes (9.3);
* the healthy student numbers in French, German and Hispanic Studies (16.1);
* the exploration of new student markets. The panel was impressed by the range of articulation agreements in development (16.2);
* the record of the School in retaining students from undergraduate level through to PhD study (16.3);
* the Access course which in available in collaboration with the Centre for Lifelong Learning.  This course appears to be a very good introduction to study within the School (16.4);
* the steps taken within the School that have led to increasing integration of its various component disciplines (19.2).

# 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Panel invites the School to consider the recommendations in this section and asks that the Head of School and the Head of College, consulting the College Director of Teaching and Learning as appropriate, provide an agreed response to each*.

The Panel recommended that the School:

**Staffing**

* take particular care in the future to prevent, so far as it is able, any staffing crises from affecting students.

**Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval**

* ensure that student representation on the STLC occurs and that all student representatives on courses administered by the School are aware of this over-arching representation.
* review the teaching on the LN courses.  Many students, and indeed the ITR documentation, commented on the 'fragmentation' of teaching within the courses.
* continue to work with the University's Disability Officer and the Dyslexia and Support Adviser to enhance the experience of students with dyslexia.

**Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

* pursue the necessary funding for the refurbishment of the language centre as soon as possible.
* consider the possibility of introducing the Film Studies programme as a single honours option.
* expand the Writing Support Scheme to involve the whole School.

**Course and Programme Monitoring and Review**

* review arrangements for the induction and monitoring of teaching assistants.
* ensure that teaching assistants receive copies of the appropriate Tutor's Handbooks.

**Academic Standards and the Academic Infrastructure**

* consider the use of Special Cases committees throughout the School.

**Training and Supervision of Research Students**

* consider carefully the merits of adopting a formal system of having two supervisors for each research student as recommended in QAA guidelines.

**Staff Training and Educational Development**

* implement a formal mentoring system for new staff across the School.
* consider implementing a School-specific induction programme for new members of staff.
* develop specific School training sessions for new staff.

**Student Involvement in Quality Processes**

* ensure that there is student representation on all School committees that plan and/or review postgraduate courses.

**Student Support, Retention and Progression**

* consider passing some non-honours advising duties to more experienced members of staff in the School.
* ensure that direct links are provided to each of the Modern Languages subjects from the School web-site home-page.

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

Response to the ITR Report

The School of Language and Literature is grateful for the professional, thorough, and courteous way in which the Internal Teaching Review was conducted. The manner in which it was undertaken allowed us to prepare productively and profit from the experience. We are especially grateful for the Panel’s recognition of our various efforts.

The following remarks detail responses to concerns and recommendations noted by the Panel.

3.1 – We seek to build staffing in these areas as soon as possible in order to move past the currently lean provision. Strong planning in the current configuration should protect us from the kinds of turbulence that afflicted the film programme in the past.

* 1. -- The remark concerning variation in workloads for new staff is slightly puzzling to us since we are bound by fairly firm guidelines for probationary staff. It is true, however, that we assign duties according to the experience, abilities, and desires of each individual. Some new staff seek more duties than others, and it is our aim to meet their requests whenever it is possible and reasonable to do so. The concern about advising duties appears quite well founded and we will review policy in this area.

5.1—The School Administrative Committee identified student representation, at both graduate and undergraduate levels, as an area of concern in the 2006-2007 term. A new system for the election of class representatives is to be put in place, possibly making use of the online voting facility that AUSA piloted this year. We will seek to be sure that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in the area of representation.

Student representatives have been added to the School Administrative Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Research Committee (including the Post-Graduate Committee, a sub-committee), and the Teaching Review Committee.

5.2 –The School has already undertaken a review of the teaching structure of the LN level-2 courses and has put in place a strategy for ensuring greater cohesion in the teaching programme.

5.3—We have appointed a School M.Litt co-ordinator (separating this function from that of Ph.D. supervision).

5.7—The first Dyslexia workshop in the School was held on May 17, led by Gary Hilton, Dyslexia Support Adviser. The session was well attended, with representatives from every part of the School. Guidelines and procedures for referring students for help with suspected dyslexia were discussed, and it was felt that clear lines of communication between Mr. Hilton and School were established. It is anticipated that further sessions will be held next session. Mr. Hilton assured the group that he would make every effort to get Mr. Jackie Stewart to attend.

6.2—See section 20.3 below.

6.4—The single honours option for Film Studies has been designed and will be put forward.

6.6—Both the School STLC and the School Administration have agreed that Writing Support should be extended across the School. Although this decision has resource implications, discussions between the Acting School Director of Teaching and Learning and a representative from Student Learning Services have revealed that a number of students from Modern Languages have approached SLS to discuss their writing, since they prefer the anonymity and confidentiality of their service. It was agreed, therefore, that students should be reminded that they were free to approach either SLS or the School Writing Support Tutor. The SLS also expressed willingness to offer workshops on specific aspects of writing, if the Tutor identified a group of students who shared the same problem. It was finally agreed to change the name of the Writing Support Tutor to “Writing Tutor”, since “Support” seems to have negative connotations for students and some very good students want to improve their writing.

7.1—A training day for Teaching Assistants has been organised for Wednesday, Sept. 19, 2007. It will be compulsory for all Teaching Assistants in the School who have not received any training. The morning session, led by Dr. Darren Comber (Educational Development Adviser) and Dr. Jeannette King (Acting School Director of Teaching and Learning), will be generic, dealing with strategies for small-group teaching. There will also be sessions on the specific issues faced by Teaching Assistants who are not native teachers of English, run by Dr. Barbara Fennell, and on administrative issues and paperwork, led by Ms. Maureen Wilkie, who will also distribute the revised Handbook for Teaching Assistants.

10.1—The School will work to keep a more careful record of alumni addresses and “success stories”, in collaboration with a new effort underway in Student Recruitment related to this issue.

12.1—A strong mentoring for probationary staff currently exists. The School has also sought to ensure that every member of staff has a mentor (this verification will be formalized). The School prefers to allow staff beyond probation to identify their preferred mentor and work with them as they see fit, without formal oversight (for reasons of confidentiality). However, it is recognized that all staff, with the exception of senior professors, should have an individual whom they consider a mentor available to them.

12.2—Given the small number of newly appointed staff in any given half-term, it seems advisable to pursue induction and any necessary training on an individual basis within programmes (and in coordination with the School Administrative Officer), with an eye to particular needs.

13.1—Student Representation in post-graduate programmes has been attended to, as noted in point 5.1 above.

15.1—See 3.2 above.

15.3—Work on the School website is ongoing. The recommendation of the Panel is a useful one.

20.3—The School is working with the College office to identify sources of funding for the investment in question.

In the section of **Overall Impressions**, a note is made to the effect that the School is not in line with general practice as regards the use of two Ph.D. supervisors. The School is prepared to adopt the recommendation that it conform with general practice, though it would like to note that it currently encourages Ph.D. students to seek advice from multiple sources, and has a rigorous review procedure in place in which students and their advisors are interviewed.

The precise wording of a new policy will be established by the Research Committee. However, the School Administrative Committee has indicated the general guidelines that should be followed in this wording. It has indicated that each Ph.D. student should have two advisors: a principle and second supervisor. The second supervisor will provide practical knowledge and oversight in progress, together with appropriate advice; they need not be specialists in the specific area covered in the dissertation. The School will appoint junior staff to the role of second supervisor when it is clear that they are suitably qualified and that their experience in this role will benefit them in their training.