

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

FINAL REPORT

PANEL VISIT: WEDNESDAY 16 AND THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2013

PANEL:

Professor David Lurie Quality Assurance Committee and School of Medicine & Dentistry (Convenor)
 Professor Norval Strachan School of Natural and Computing Sciences
 Dr Alastair Macdonald School of Divinity, History & Philosophy
 Ms Hannah Smith Student Senator
 Professor Allyson Fiddler External Subject Specialist, Lancaster University
 Professor Lisa Hopkins External Subject Specialist, Sheffield Hallam University
 Ms Sarah James Registry (Clerk)

SCHEDULE:

Day 1
<p>Head of School Professor Cairns Craig</p>
<p>Undergraduate Programmes: Course Co-ordinators Dr Adrienne Janus – Literature in a World Context Dr Aideen O’Leary – Celtic Dr Glynn Hesketh – French Dr Gundula Sharman – German Dr Katherine Groo – Film Dr Tom Rist – English Dr Will Barras – Linguistics Ms Julie Bray – Language Centre Professor Patience Schell – Hispanic</p>
<p>Postgraduate Taught Programmes: PGT Officer and PGT Course Co-ordinators Dr Shane Alcobia-Murphy (PGT Officer) Dr Aine Larkin Dr David Wheatley Dr Katherine Groo Dr Paul Flaig Dr Tim Baker Professor David Duff</p>
<p>Representatives from UG and PGT Teaching Teams Dr Anna Bokedal – Swedish Dr Catherine Jones – English Dr Katherine Groo – Film Dr Michelle MacLeod – Gaelic Dr Shona Potts – French Ms Alison McBoyle – Language Centre Professor Barbara Fennell – Linguistics</p>
<p>Contract Teaching Staff Mr Nemanja Mitrovic</p>
<p>Deputy Head of School, School Director of Learning and Teaching, College Director of Learning and Teaching, College Director of Graduate School, Discipline Leaders Dr Chris Kee Dr Robert Millar Professor Ali Lumsden</p>

Professor Ed Welch Dr Adrienne Janus – Literature in a World Context Dr Aideen O’Leary – Celtic Dr Glynn Hesketh – French Dr Gundula Sharman – German Dr Katherine Groo – Film Dr Moray Watson – Gaelic Dr Tom Rist – English Dr Will Barras – Linguistics Ms Julie Bray – Language Centre Professor Patience Schell – Hispanic
PGR Officer and PGR Supervisors Dr Tim Baker (PGR Officer) Professor Patience Schell Dr Shane Alcobia-Murphy Dr Robert Millar Dr Aine Larkin Dr Julia Biggane Dr Wayne Price Professor Barbara Fennell
Advisers of Study and Personal Tutors, Disability Co-ordinator, staff involved in Widening Participation Dr Margaret Jubb (Senior Adviser and Senior Personal Tutor) Dr Gundula Sharman (Disability Coordinator) Dr Andrew Gordon Dr Dan Wall Dr David Wheatley Dr Hazel Hutchison Dr Jesse Barker Dr Marsaili MacLeod Dr Nadia Kiwan Dr Steven Lawrie Dr Tim Baker Ms Sonia Domingo
Day 2
School Administrator Mrs Maureen Wilkie
School administrative team/secretaries Ms Clare McIntyre Ms Laura Bowie Ms Lorna Muir
PGR students (including those with temporary contracts as teaching staff)
UG students (Levels 1 and 2) Languages
UG students (Levels 3 and 4) Languages
UG students (Levels 1 and 2) Literature and Film
UG students (Levels 3 and 4) Literature and Film
PGT students

Additional comments on the self-evaluation document were received from:

Equal Opportunities Policy Officer, Policy, Planning & Governance Ms Christina Cameron
 Head of Careers Mr Peter Fantom
 Head of Student Support Dr Lucy Foley
 College Relationship Manager, Information Technology Ms Gail Smillie

Head of College..... Professor Margaret Ross
 Senior Educational Development Adviser, Centre for Academic Development..... Dr Darren Comber
 Deputy Registrar (Quality Assurance), Registry..... Ms Katja Christie
 Convenor, Quality Assurance Committee..... Dr Kath Shennan

Overall Impressions

The Panel was grateful for the co-operation of staff and students throughout the Internal Teaching Review (ITR) and for their commitment to the ITR process. Staff and students provided their opinions freely in the spirit of the ITR process. The principal impression is that the School of Language & Literature provides an open and supportive environment for study. All students commented favourably on the availability of staff – both academic and administrative – and of their willingness to help. In relation to management of the School, a particular aspect to be commended is the School Forum, which has clearly brought benefit to the School and its staff by way of the open dissemination and discussion of information and transparent decision making. Many staff commented favourably on the leadership of the Head of School in relation to this and the collegial culture that he had introduced. Throughout the ITR process, however, it was clear that lack of consistency in approach and practice between the various disciplines is a major issue that has a negative impact on much of the organisation and delivery of teaching within the School and on the learning of its students. Much of this Report is therefore coloured by these inconsistencies and strong recommendations are made for the acceleration of the pace of change towards standardisation across the School.

1 Range of Provision

1.1 The School of Language & Literature offers 333 undergraduate (UG) and taught postgraduate programmes (PGT), as follows:

UNDERGRADUATE SINGLE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (MA)	14
CELTIC STUDIES	
ENGLISH	
FILM & VISUAL CULTURE	
FRENCH STUDIES	
FRENCH STUDIES(MODE B)	
GAELIC STUDIES	
GERMAN STUDIES	
GERMAN STUDIES (MODE B)	
HISPANIC STUDIES (LATIN AMERICA)	
HISPANIC STUDIES (LATIN AMERICA) (MODE B)	
HISPANIC STUDIES (SPAIN)	
HISPANIC STUDIES (SPAIN) (MODE B)	
LANGUAGE & LINGUISTICS	
LITERATURE IN A WORLD CONTEXT	
UNDERGRADUATE JOINT HONOURS PROGRAMMES (MA)	245
MAJOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (MA)	8
ENGLISH WITH CREATIVE WRITING	
ENGLISH WITH MUSIC STUDIES	
FRENCH WITH MUSIC STUDIES	
FRENCH WITH MUSIC STUDIES (MODE B)	
GERMAN WITH MUSIC STUDIES	
GERMAN WITH MUSIC STUDIES (MODE B)	

HISPANIC STUDIES WITH MUSIC STUDIES	
HISPANIC STUDIES WITH MUSIC STUDIES (MD B)	
MINOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (BSC)	14
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH FRENCH	
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH GERMAN	
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH SPANISH	
MATHEMATICS WITH FRENCH	
MATHEMATICS WITH GAELIC	
MATHEMATICS WITH GERMAN	
MATHEMATICS WITH SPANISH	
PHYSICS WITH FRENCH	
PHYSICS WITH GAELIC	
PHYSICS WITH GERMAN	
PHYSICS WITH SPANISH	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH FRENCH	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GAELIC	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GERMAN	
MINOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (BTH)	4
THEOLOGY WITH FRENCH	
THEOLOGY WITH GAELIC	
THEOLOGY WITH GERMAN	
THEOLOGY WITH SPANISH	
MINOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (MSCI)	2
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH FRENCH & INDUSTRY PLACEMENT	
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH SPANISH & INDUSTRY PLACEMENT	
MINOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (MA)	7
ACCOUNTANCY WITH FRENCH	
ACCOUNTANCY WITH GERMAN	
CHEMISTRY WITH MODERN LANGUAGES	
MATHEMATICS WITH GAELIC	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH FRENCH	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GAELIC STUDIES	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GERMAN	
MINOR COMPONENT UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS PROGRAMMES (LLB)	3
LAW AND FRENCH LAW	
LAW AND GERMAN LAW	
LAW AND SPANISH LAW	
DESIGNATED DEGREES (BTH)	4
THEOLOGY WITH FRENCH (NON-HONOURS)	
THEOLOGY WITH GAELIC (NON-HONOURS)	
THEOLOGY WITH GERMAN (NON-HONOURS)	
THEOLOGY WITH SPANISH (NON-HONOURS)	
DESIGNATED DEGREES (BSC)	13
COMPUTING SCIENCE WITH SPANISH	
MATHEMATICS WITH FRENCH	
MATHEMATICS WITH GAELIC	

MATHEMATICS WITH GERMAN	
MATHEMATICS WITH SPANISH	
PHYSICS WITH FRENCH	
PHYSICS WITH GAELIC	
PHYSICS WITH GERMAN	
PHYSICS WITH SPANISH	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH FRENCH	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GAELIC	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH GERMAN	
PSYCHOLOGY WITH SPANISH	
DESIGNATED DEGREES (MA)	15
HISPANIC STUDIES–INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	
THREE EUROPEAN LANGUAGES WITH TWO CULTURES	
CELTIC CIVILISATION	
ENGLISH	
ENGLISH-FRENCH	
ENGLISH-HISTORY	
ENGLISH-SOCIOLOGY	
FILM & VISUAL CULTURE	
FRENCH AND HISPANIC STUDIES	
FRENCH STUDIES	
GAELIC STUDIES	
GERMAN STUDIES	
HISPANIC STUDIES	
LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS	
LITERATURE IN A WORLD CONTEXT	
TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES (MLITT)	6
CELTIC STUDIES	
ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES	
CREATIVE WRITING	
VISUAL CULTURE	
ENGLISH LINGUISTICS FOR ADVANCED TEACHERS OF ENGLISH	
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION	

2 Aims of Provision

2.1 The School states that its aims of provision are:

- (a) To help students acquire the expertise needed for study and for life, combining tradition and innovation.
- (b) To encourage students to think critically, producing well-written and intellectually advanced discussion and analysis, with informed oral presentation being central.
- (c) At all levels to encourage an independent and informed learning experience for all students, the goal being the achievement of each student's potential.

3 Staffing

3.1 The Panel **commends** the School on the commitment of its staff. In particular, the open-door environment and academic and pastoral support provided to students – both by the academic and by the administrative staff.

- 3.2 With a loss of staff and limits placed on the recruitment of replacements, the Panel recognise that School teaching resources have been put under pressure. Formerly the School employed many temporary services teaching staff, which did not sit well with the School's aim to deliver research-led teaching. The School has therefore reduced the number of staff on temporary contracts and instead increased the teaching loads of permanent staff in order to redress the balance in favour of research-led teaching. All staff were involved in this decision. The Panel **commends** the School for this initiative to enrich the School's teaching and learning. The Panel note that in return for extra teaching load, staff have been given a dedicated day each week for research and a guaranteed sabbatical.
- 3.3 Although increasing the teaching load of permanent staff in order to reduce the number of temporary services teaching staff, the Panel noted that the School was reducing the number of contact hours with students and increasing the amount of 'student-led' learning and planned to continue in this direction. The Panel **recommends** the School monitor this carefully to ensure that the students are fully aware of what this means and that the student experience is not harmed.
- 3.4 In relation to 3.2 above, the Panel noted what appeared to be unnecessary delays in the recruitment of replacements for existing posts, with considerable gaps between an existing staff member leaving and a new member of staff commencing. The Panel **recommends** that the College seek to expedite the mechanisms for reviewing replacement staff in order to make swift appointments to existing posts.
- 3.5 The Panel considered that the impact of shortfall in staff numbers could be reduced by the introduction of more standardised practices as this would reduce the overall academic-related workload of the School. It was noted during interviews with academic and administrative staff and with students that the School had significant disparities in its practices, some of which had remained in place since the merging of various departments over 6 years ago to create the School. It was evident that this caused unnecessary difficulties and confusion for the students (particularly those who are on joint/combined degrees, who are the majority), increased the work of the administration team, and hampered effective communication and operations between academic staff in different disciplines. The Panel therefore **recommends most strongly** that the School prioritise work on standardising practices across the School, particularly in language teaching. The Panel **commends** the School Director of Teaching and Learning for having started this process.
- 3.6 The Panel was impressed with the forward-looking approach of the staff in the teaching teams. In particular, the Panel was impressed by the adoption by these members of staff of technologies such as Camtasia in teaching and learning, their comprehensive use of MyAberdeen for submission and marking of assessments, their support of standardisation, and of their positive evaluation of the new student lifecycle system and the Personal Tutors scheme. The Panel **commends** the staff in the teaching teams for keeping up-to-date with professional best practice in these respects.
- 3.7 In interviews with temporary services teaching staff, it was clear to the Panel that they are dedicated to their role and concerned to provide excellent teaching and guidance to their students. The Panel **commends** the temporary services staff for such commitment.
- 3.8 It was evident from the Panel visit that the School's administrative team work extremely well together and have an efficient collective approach to the day-to-day running of administrative duties. The Panel was reassured that robust mechanisms were in place to ensure the accurate recording of marks and classifications. The Panel **commends** the administrative officer and staff for employing good practice in terms of adapting to change and continuing to provide a seamless service to students despite the disparate processes practised by the various disciplines.

4 School Organisation

- 4.1 The School operates a School Forum – open to all staff – in place of an executive group for the dissemination of information, discussion of issues and for all decision making. The staff interviewed by the Panel – across all groups and levels – were unanimous in their support of the School Forum, commenting that it provided opportunity for the open dissemination and discussion of information and for transparent and inclusive decision making. Many staff – both academic and administrative – commented favourably on the leadership of the Head of School in this respect and for the culture of collegiality he had introduced. It was clear to the Panel that the School Forum works better than an executive group for managing operations and it **commends** the use of such a Forum.
- 4.2 The Panel noted that the Head of School uses the Deputy Head of School, School Director of Teaching & Learning, School Director of Research and the discipline leaders as an advisory group. The Head of School commented that it had not been necessary, however, to use this group for decision-making.
- 4.3 The Panel noted in several of the interviews that the Language Centre was viewed to be still somewhat separate from the rest of the School. Though the remit of the Language Centre is different, the Panel saw no reason for this separateness and considered that a more integrated approach would be beneficial both to the Centre and to the rest of the School. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School look at ways by which the place and integration of the Language Centre can become more transparent.
- 4.4 In interviews with the administrative officer and staff it was clear that the team faced a lot of challenges in maintaining support for the increasing number of disciplines (eg the creation of Literature in a World Context and the Sustained Study courses). The Panel noted that the staff were keen to see the implementation of OneSource, even though it would mean a change in how things were done, as it was hoped that it would be done in a better way.
- 4.5 Following 4.4 above, the Panel noted that it was a challenge for the administrative staff to have good cover for all disciplines given the disparate nature of their practices. The Panel **commends** the administrative staff for trying to ensure adequate succession planning by having two people who are familiar with each discipline but recognize this is difficult given the number of staff in the team. The Panel also noted the difficulty of retaining secretarial staff because the work is complex and because of competition from the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen.

5 Course and Programme Design, Accessibility and Approval

- 5.1 The Panel **commends** the School for diversifying its provision with the range of Sustained Study programmes it offers. These have been taken up by a large number of students whose degree is not one of those offered by the School. It is recognised that this puts extra pressure on the teaching staff, but also that this brings extra income in relation to the increased student FTEs to the School. It was reported that although CRef had initially resulted in a ballooning of student numbers taking languages, this had now settled.
- 5.2 The Panel heard that the School had introduced new programmes in the past, such as Literature in a World Context, Celtic Studies and Gaelic Studies in order to attract new and different students and heard that the School was about to introduce Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies. The Panel noted that one of the reasons for the School establishing Literature in a World Context as a separate programme was to give the School's students a 'discipline breadth' option from within the School that was related to their main degree. Many students now opted for these courses as a result of the School making its students aware of the programme, even though Advisers often do not have the same awareness. The staff commented that it remains to be seen whether students will continue to choose these options when they are able to self-select their curriculum.

- 5.3 Following 5.2 above, the Panel **commends** the School for diversifying its provision with new areas of study, but advises caution in creating new courses or programmes for these, especially because of the pressure on staffing caused by retaining students taking 'discipline breadth' options. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School very carefully monitor the impact this has.
- 5.4 The School commented that CRef had resulted in extra students but also in a greater workload as eight courses were being taught each session at levels 1 and 2. Though each was only 15 credits, the planning and administration of eight courses each year was obviously more than required for six. The School also commented that because the University had not kept its offers in line with its prescribed caps for a number of years and was now trying to stay within the caps, the numbers of students in each year was very uneven, which caused problems when planning the teaching.
- 5.5 Even though some courses had large numbers of students, the School aims to have tutorial groups of no more than 15 students. The School had no minimum numbers set for its courses or programmes and did not see this as a problem as level 3 and 4 options were taught together. Students were required to list their first three choices of optional course and were then allocated to one of those options. Not all students were able to take their first choice. Students at levels 3 and 4 commented that very few students appeared to be allocated to their preferred courses and questioned how the allocation was done. The Panel **recommends** that the option selection and allocation process is made more transparent to students.
- 5.6 The overriding impression given to the Panel through interviews with staff and students and from the content of the SED was that there are vast discrepancies in the practices of the various disciplines within the School and therefore problems with the coherence of its learning and teaching. What is more, the rationale for these discrepancies is weak and bears little reflection of best practice or what happens in the rest of the sector. The main concerns of the Panel were (i) inconsistency between the disciplines in the weightings of years and of courses in the programmes; (ii) inconsistency between disciplines regarding the amount of work required and number of credits and therefore a disconnect from the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; (iii) inconsistency in assessment; lack of transparency for students as to the weightings of the elements of assessment and therefore how their degree classification is determined. The Panel **recommends very strongly** that the School scrutinise these discrepancies with the aim of implementing far greater consistency to School learning and teaching practices.
- 5.7 The Panel noted that the School's understanding of the Level 3 French assessments (six pieces of assessed work with CAS marks and feedback plus optional 'mock exams') did not correspond with the reports given by students and some staff in interviews (ie that there were no marks or feedback given at Level 3 French). This discrepancy concerns the Panel and the Panel therefore strongly **recommends** that the School investigate what happens in practice, ensure that it complies with the School policy, and that this is then disseminated clearly in course and programme handbooks so that it is transparent for students and for staff.
- 5.8 The Panel noted that the School had diversified its range of programmes and courses in order to attract new students and to link with staff research interests but that staffing was low. Students from Celtic and Gaelic Studies in particular commented on the very limited scope of the programmes and were concerned that they were not covering the range of topics that their counterparts in other universities might. In addition to this, staff concurred that students on these programmes might encounter teaching from only a few members of staff, thereby not having a normal university experience.
- 5.9 Following 5.8 above, whilst the Panel **commends** the School for having a culture of research-led teaching, the rationale for having separate programmes in these areas is not robust. It is a concern that the School is considering replacing already small discipline degree programmes with another small discipline degree programme, namely Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies. The Panel acknowledges that the School is introducing new courses into this programme but remains concerned about the rationale for running such a programme. The Panel **recommends very strongly** that the School review this area of provision with consideration for the

student experience. The Panel suggests that perhaps this degree should be offered as part of Joint degrees only (eg with History or Archaeology).

- 5.10 Following 5.8 and 5.9 above, the Panel noted that the School has retained discrete disciplines in the languages rather than having embraced the move towards 'Languages and Cultures', for example, as a single unit. Similarly, it wondered why Literature and Film has not been brought together. The Panel considered that many of the issues regarding the lack of coherence in the School's learning and teaching and the subsequent lack of clarity for students could be solved by a merging of the School's discreet units. Such a rationalisation would also go a long way towards reducing academic-related administration and therefore pressures on staff time. The Panel therefore **strongly recommends** that the School review the infrastructure of its constituent academic units with the aim of remodelling its programmes and disciplines and bringing consistency to its learning and teaching.
- 5.11 From the SED and from interviews with students, the Panel was surprised of the limited emphasis on library and research skills. These were introduced to some students embarking on their dissertation but there was no consistency across the School in relation to this. Students studying on taught postgraduate programmes commented that they were encouraged to book themselves onto the Library's courses but that they were not compulsory. Students from other Schools had courses that included library and research skills in the very early part of the first year of their undergraduate degree. A student who had been through the Summer School for Access commented that this included library and research skills and that engaging in this had provided an advantage over their peers. The Panel noted that the School reports that it includes some reference to Library and other resources in lectures and other teaching, generally at the beginning of a course. This is formalised in some courses, such as EL1008 Reading/Writing. However, it was clear to the Panel that students felt they had less knowledge of these skills than did their peers in other Schools. The Panel **recommends** that the School introduces library and research skills within all disciplines in a more formalised manner in the very early part of the undergraduate degree so that *all* students, at the outset, have the skills they require for university level study.
- 5.12 Students at levels 3 and 4 commented on the large jump between level 2 and level 3; generally they felt unprepared for this even though they had been told that it would be the case. The Panel suggests that by implementing the recommendation of 5.11 above, students might not find the leap so great, having been better practised at using research skills at levels 1 and 2.
- 5.13 The Panel noted with concern staff comments that even when staff could be replaced, there was a high turnover of staff, which led to difficulties in building progression into the curriculum. Students commented that staff 'disappeared on sabbatical' and that visiting teachers were brought in but one never knew whether or not they would stay. The Panel **commends** the School for continuing programmes in the face of staff turnover but **recommends** that the School look at ways to build progression and consistency into the programmes that is not dependent on the presence of individual members of staff.
- 5.14 The Panel heard that the School had reviewed its provision at taught postgraduate level following a change in College policy to retain only those programmes with sufficient recruitment. The number of programmes had been reduced but these programmes now incorporated courses from and elements of the programmes that had been discontinued. The Panel was impressed with this strategy and **commends** the School for having thought creatively about the structure of its taught postgraduate provision.
- 5.15 The Panel heard that students who were embarking on their undergraduate dissertation received training in research methods and genres, visits to special collections and training in internet research. This had proved useful in itself but also for progressing to a taught or research postgraduate programme. The Panel **commends** the training given to students in preparation for their dissertation, and **recommends** that this training is given to all students undertaking dissertation or in the early stages of a postgraduate programme

and that it is in addition to training in library and research skills at an early stage of a student's undergraduate studies (5.11 above).

6 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- 6.1 As a result of the change noted in 3.2 above, all teaching at honours level, other than in language proficiency, is done by research-active staff, with temporary services staff teaching at levels 1 and 2 only, predominantly level 1. In Hispanic Studies, non-research-active native language speakers offer teaching throughout the levels. Gaelic also has one permanent teaching fellow. In French and German, native speaking *lecteurs/lectrices* are employed for a session or more.
- 6.2 The Panel noted from interviews with students and staff that use of MyAberdeen is patchy. The Panel notes comments from staff that the staff-facing screens of MyAberdeen are counter-intuitive. The Panel **recommends** that staff feed this back to the e-Learning Team of the Centre for Academic Development with the hope that improvements can be made. Some staff also commented on the increase in administrative work that MyAberdeen has introduced for academic staff, for example the uploading of materials and input of marks. The Panel notes these concerns but consider that such technology-related administration reduces the overall amount of work for academic staff and is common practice across the sector. The Panel noted from interviews with the administrative staff that they help the academic staff to set up their courses and grade centre and to upload materials.
- 6.3 The Panel noted that many members of staff were making excellent use of technology such as Camtasia and MyAberdeen and that there were pockets of staff that were not. The Panel was concerned to hear from students of one member of staff who would deliver lectures using only transparencies projected on an overhead projector; the students did not consider that this outdated mode of delivery was appropriate. The Panel had concerns that students who had timetable clashes, students with disabilities, and students whose first language was not English would be better served by a more comprehensive use of technology such as Camtasia and MyAberdeen. The Panel **commends** those staff who are making good use of these technologies and **recommends** that other staff follow suit. Staff should note that training in the use of MyAberdeen is available from the e-Learning Team in the Centre for Academic Development.
- 6.4 Staff commented that less use is made of technology in taught postgraduate programmes, mainly because of the nature of the teaching, which is all seminar based and not based on lectures. The group size at taught postgraduate level tends to be small, with no more than 10 students in a seminar, on average.
- 6.5 The Panel heard that assessments are submitted through drop-boxes in the School Office and returned to students via the School Office. Students reported that they had to provide two paper copies, one anonymised, and for some courses also submit through MyAberdeen. Students commented on the inefficiency of this and the excessive use of paper and it was clear from interviews with the administrative staff that this consumed a great deal of their time. Students also mentioned that having to pick up marked assessments from the School Office caused congestion at certain times of day. In the case of assessments which cannot be returned electronically (see 6.6 below), the Panel **recommends** that assessments are returned to students in tutorials rather than from the School Office, using a mechanism that maintains anonymity.
- 6.6 Following from 6.3 and 6.5 above, some staff used MyAberdeen for the submission and marking of assessments whereas others did not. Staff reported that there was no School policy on the use of MyAberdeen or of TurnitinUK. Students reported unanimously that they favoured electronic submission and marking of assessments, saying that it was much more efficient, reduced the carbon footprint, and was common practice elsewhere and did not understand why the School was so committed to the use of paper. Students also commented that though they were required to type assessments, staff were not required to

type marks and feedback, which they considered to be unacceptable. The Panel **recommends** that, alongside the standardisation of practices, the School considers adopting the submission and marking of assessments through MyAberdeen as normal practice.

- 6.7 Staff reported that all assessments and examinations at levels 3 and 4 are blind double-marked. The School reports that its policy is that all Honours level examinations are blind double-marked (at the request of External Examiners and students) and that a number of disciplines generally follow a practice of moderation rather than double marking in other Honours assessments. Whilst the Panel might consider double-blind marking of all assessments at levels 3 and 4 to be commendable, it felt that it was unnecessary and **recommends** that those disciplines that are doing so review this practice and fall in line with School policy. Marking takes a considerable amount of time and the reduction in blind double-marking would free up a significant amount of staff time.
- 6.8 The Panel noted that the School has a robust mechanism for the input of marks and calculation of the classification. Administrative staff set up spreadsheets for the marks, with relevant weightings applied to the elements of assessment in order to calculate the course CAS mark; these were checked by a senior member of the administrative team. Administrative staff then input the marks to these spreadsheets, which were then checked by the course co-ordinators to ensure that the overall CAS marks were correct. Once signed off by the course co-ordinator, the administrative staff would then enter the marks into the student records system. Similar spreadsheets were set up for the calculation of classification. The Panel **commends** the administrative staff for ensuring the accuracy of student marks given the very many different weightings systems that operate within the School. While the procedures do seem to be robust, nevertheless there appears to be a number of different spreadsheets in use by the different disciplines. The Panel **recommends** standardisation across the School of procedures for marks recording and classification determination, where appropriate.
- 6.9 Students commented that the content of a tutorial session could vary significantly between groups – depending on which tutor took the group. Students felt this to be unfair as some students felt better prepared for assessments than did others, covered a wider range of topics or had topics covered more comprehensively. The Panel **recommends** better communication within the teaching teams as to the content that should be covered in tutorials, in addition to improving the training for and checking the uniformity of the teaching delivered by temporary services staff.
- 6.10 Students complained that reading lists were often produced too late, many not being produced until the first or second week of term. This caused problems as the books then had to be ordered and were often not available in time for when they had to be read. Staff commented that a reading list might be produced late because it had changed along with a change in course co-ordinator and added that students did not select their courses until the start of the term anyway. It was clear to the Panel, however, that students had a good idea about which courses they were planning to take the following year and that they wanted to start reading during the summer. Given the amount of reading required for the literature courses in particular, the Panel was surprised that there was no requirement for a core reading list for each course, published before the summer break, that could be supplemented with additional reading at the preference of the course co-ordinator closer to the start of the term. The Panel **recommends** that core reading lists for each course are published before the summer break.
- 6.11 The Panel noted that staff were generally available to meet with students who were writing their masters dissertation over the summer. Students reported that whilst the meetings might not be that frequent they were usually able to speak with someone when they needed to.
- 6.12 Some students commented that in certain courses the lecturers do not complete their lecture and left students without the information they need to do their assessment. Lecture notes sometimes were not provided. The Panel suggests that cases where lectures are not completed should be very rare and

recommends that where this occurs comprehensive lecture notes must be provided on MyAberdeen. The Panel also **recommends** that lecture notes should be provided on MyAberdeen as normal practice.

- 6.13 The Panel noted that the School had good mechanisms in place for ensuring Good Cause (GC) and Medical Certificates (MC) were taken into account when considering borderline cases and that information was only made available on a need-to-know basis, with cases being discussed in a separate meeting before the examination meetings. The School Director of Teaching and Learning sat on all such meetings to ensure consistency of approach. Where it is known that a student has a disability with special provisions these will be taken into account at the point of marking only and there is no double-counting of this under GC/MC.

7 Course and Programme Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The Panel was disappointed that external examiner Annual Reports had not been submitted with the School's ITR documentation. The Panel therefore obtained Reports for the last two academic years through the Registry prior to the Panel visit.
- 7.2 The Panel noted that many external examiners commented in their Annual Reports either that suggestions had not been acted upon or that they had not been informed whether or not changes had been made as a result of their suggestions. In interviews with course and programme co-ordinators it became clear that changes did occur as a result of external examiner comments. Discussions with external examiners takes place at examination meetings but actions resulting from these or from the Annual Reports are not routinely reported back to the examiners. The Panel **recommends** that the School ensure that all proposed action is reported in the formal School Responses to external examiner Annual Reports and that a mechanism is put in place for reporting back on any issues that are not raised in the Reports but at examination meetings, for example.
- 7.3 In interviews with staff the Panel noted that external examiner Annual Reports are given to the course or programme co-ordinators for comment and that the main issues arising from the Reports are then sent on to other staff. Given that external examiners' Annual Reports are an essential part of the regulatory framework within UK higher education for programme review and academic standards, the Panel **recommends** that external examiners' Annual Reports should be made available to all staff. In addition, the Panel asks the School to note that the requirement of the Quality Assurance Agency that external examiner Reports are made available to students makes it particularly important that they are also made available to all staff.
- 7.4 The Panel noted that external examiners have no opportunity to meet with students. It is common practice in some disciplines that examiners have the opportunity to meet a selection of students when the examiners visit Aberdeen for the examination meetings and this is found to be a very useful exercise. The Panel **recommends** that the School consider introducing such a practice.

8 Academic standards and the academic infrastructure

- 8.1 The Panel noted that some external examiners had concerns regarding the standard of language achieved in the Sustained Study programmes, commenting that it did not meet the standards that would be expected for university study. The Panel **recommends** that the School monitor the standards of the Sustained Study language programmes to ensure that the content and achievement objectives meet the appropriate SCQF levels.
- 8.2 As noted in various Sections of this Report, the Panel noted the significant discrepancies in practices between the disciplines in relation to their methods of assessment, course weighting, and classification. The Panel had

concerns about the impact of these discrepancies on academic standards, particularly because the different practices led to lack of transparency for students.

- 8.3 A particular issue arose in French language, which has an examination at the end of year 4 but no feedback on informal assessment in year 3. Students in year 3 were not informed how they were progressing and students reported that they would only discover if they were below the standard required at the very end of year 3 or in year 4, by which time it might be too late. As noted in 5.7 above, the School's understanding of the Level 3 French assessments (six pieces of assessed work with CAS marks and feedback plus optional 'mock exams') did not correspond with the reports given by students and some staff in interviews. This discrepancy concerns the Panel. The Panel **recommends** that the School introduces formal assessments into year 3 of the French language programme with CAS marks and formal feedback within the University's feedback framework, if it is found that this is not happening. Most of all, the Panel **strongly recommends** that the School institute a common assessment policy for ALL its languages and one that ensures students are informed of their progress on an ongoing basis.
- 8.4 Students who were interviewed reported that they were generally unclear as to how their classification was calculated. They were aware of the University Grade Spectrum and knew that how their degree was classified depended on the mix of courses they took. No student interviewed was clear about precisely how the mixture of course weightings and year weightings were put together to create the classification. When asked whether they knew about the University Calendar, students said they did but it was not helpful as it did not show clearly how programmes were classified (ie it specifies which courses and how many courses should be taken but does not specify how many of these count towards classification and how they are weighted). The Panel notes that the School reports that all disciplines produce Guides, which are freely available to students and which outlines how their degrees are calculated, Undergraduate Programme Coordinators and tutors regularly directing students to these guides. It was clear from interviews with students that there remains a great deal of confusion about this. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School review what is communicated to students regarding classification and that this is reworded to make it clear, especially for students who are on joint programmes.
- 8.5 Students were particularly confused by the amount of work required for a course and the amount of credits awarded. The School reports that there are undoubtedly discrepancies. Celtic Studies asks for a 10,000-11,000 word dissertation weighted at 30 credits; all other disciplines ask for a dissertation of around 8000 words with the Modern Languages awarding the dissertation 15 credits and English, Film and Visual Culture, Language and Linguistics and Literature in a World Context awarding 30 credits. The School reports this is in order to achieve consistency in terms the dissertations' weighting with the rest of the courses in the degree but the Panel was particularly concerned with this type of discrepancy, questioning how the School's courses 'credit weightings' therefore align with the Credit and Qualifications Framework.
- 8.6 Following points 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5 above, the Panel **recommends** that the School review its practices – both to ensure compliance with the Credit and Qualifications Framework and to ensure that the mechanisms for classification are consistent and transparent.
- 8.7 The Panel noted that the School was waiting to hear whether or not equipment in the Language Centre laboratories could be upgraded so that it was fit for purpose and could be used more for the day-to-day teaching within the School. The Panel **recommends** that the University does invest in an appropriate equipment upgrade so that the School is able to provide similar facilities to its competitors and remains attractive to students.
- 8.8 The School administrative staff commented that student self-certification of sickness through MyAberdeen for absence of 7 days or less was working well. It resulted in a central single record of a student's absence with the option to attach medical certificates that could be accessed as relevant. This was seen to be a great advantage over the previous system where paper certificates were held by the Registry, College or School

with not all necessarily being aware of their existence. The system was particularly helpful for examination meetings and resits.

- 8.9 Staff commented on the excessive paperwork caused by the UKBA reporting sign-in sheets. All students in all classes are required to sign a sheet to confirm they were present; these are then filed in the School office for the purposes of UKBA audit. The administrative staff questioned why it was necessary to obtain the signature of every single student when it was only Tier 4 students who needed to be monitored. Teaching staff also questioned the rationale of this process. It was suggested that a weekly sign in of all Tier 4 students at the InfoHub would be a more efficient way to monitor the whereabouts of Tier 4 students. The Panel agree that the mechanism in place currently seems unnecessarily onerous and creates a lot of paperwork. It was unclear to the Panel whether this process was required by Registry or whether it was the mechanism the School had developed (see 8.10 below).
- 8.10 Tutors monitor academic attendance for the purposes of C6 (students at risk) and C7 (course certificate withdrawn). This was perceived by staff to work well generally and the administrative staff reported that they would alert non-attendance to tutors who had not spotted it. Following 8.9 above, the Panel **recommends** the School consider ways to combine the process for monitoring attendance with that of Tier 4 monitoring so that the amount of paperwork produced is reduced. If the Tier 4 monitoring process used by the School is one required by Registry, the Panel **recommends** that the Registry review this with the aim of centralising Tier 4 monitoring and reducing the amount of paperwork involved.
- 8.11 In many interviews the issue of timetable clashes arose. Some of these were the result of too few teaching rooms being available and the wide range of students wanting to take the courses. However, it was clear that clashes appeared between the disciplines within the School. The Panel felt in speaking with staff that better communication between the disciplines would remove some of these clashes and that some of the 'historical timetabling problems' might be found to be solvable.
- 8.12 Administrative staff commented that timetabling was a major issue for the team because of the high number of courses. The team was dependent on the academic staff providing instruction on their individual timetabling needs before these could be fed back to Registry.
- 8.13 As indicated in 3.2 above, staff have been given a dedicated research day and guaranteed sabbatical in order to pursue research. Whilst the Panel is supportive of the need for dedicated research time it **recommends** the School ensure there is sufficient flexibility with the allocation of the 'research day' such that limited staff availability does exacerbate the problems with timetabling.
- 8.14 Following from points 8.11, 8.12 and 8.13 above, the Panel **recommends** that the School review the way in which it plans its timetables and that the disciplines within the School work together on this, so that it might work better with Registry to improve the availability of its courses to its students. Where clashes remain, the Panel **recommends** that the School make more comprehensive use of MyAberdeen together with Camtasia for the recording of classes so that students who cannot attend because of timetabling clashes do not miss important sessions.

9 Training and supervision of research students

- 9.1 The Panel heard from interviews with staff and students that the School's aim was that each postgraduate research student should have two supervisors. Staff and students confirmed that this supervision was not joint supervision as such, as one supervisor was the main academic supervisor and the other served more as a procedural and pastoral supervisor. The majority of students interviewed were happy with the level and quality of the supervision they received.

- 9.2 It was acknowledged by staff that some students had only one supervisor but students themselves confirmed that this was only in cases where expertise in that area of research lay with only one member of staff. Students with only one supervisor commented that the Head of School and the School PGR Co-ordinator were also available to them should they need this.
- 9.3 Staff confirmed that the School follows the University's 36-month Postgraduate Research Monitoring Framework, administered by the College, though the School reports that its operation is being modified at a College level to ensure that it is effective in practice. Progression Reports are completed every 6 months by the student and supervisor and have to be signed off by both. Following the submission of each Report, a monitoring meeting is held with the student by two independent members of staff. The Reports and monitoring outcomes are submitted to the College Director of Research. Students submit a 12,000–15,000-word progression piece after the first 8 months that determines whether they progress to the full PhD or to an MPhil. Based on feedback from this progression piece, students who have not met the standard required are given objectives for the following 6 months, and if they meet these they can then progress to the PhD.
- 9.4 The School has some postgraduate research students who spend time at a distance, some overseas, and these have regular communication with their supervisor via email and Skype. Postgraduate research students on campus meet with their supervisor every 2 weeks or as required. The majority of students interviewed said that meetings with their supervisor were frequent enough. Staff reported that meetings were usually minuted by the student and that these were then signed as a record of the meeting, or agreed via email. Some students commented that the meetings with their supervisor were not minuted. The Panel **recommends** that all meetings should be minuted and these agreed and shared between student and supervisor.
- 9.5 The Panel noted from interviews with staff that quality assurance for postgraduate research sat with the College, and that assessment of the quality of an individual student's work sat with the principal supervisor.
- 9.6 Students said that they had heard unofficially that all postgraduate research students in the School – perhaps in the College – were registered initially as MPhil (leading to PhD); however, they did not know whether or not this was actually the case. It was clear that students felt that the School had not been open with them about this. They thought it important that their registration status was transparent – for various reasons. The Panel agreed with this and **recommends** that the College and School make students' registration status clear to them.
- 9.7 The Panel was impressed with accounts of the PG Forum, which is student-led, and The Burn PGR Weekend, which is staff led. Students were very enthusiastic about the value of both in preparing them for poster presentations at conferences, for example, and for providing advice on being published in academic journals. The Panel **commends** the School for enabling the postgraduate students to have these support mechanisms.
- 9.8 The Panel noted that College policy is that postgraduate research students should not be allocated an office, but they do have shared office space, allocated by College, and a common room. The College also ran an induction for its postgraduate research students. Students were generally happy with the facilities that the College and University provided, though most commented that the College induction was more social than it was informative and they would appreciate an induction session that explained everything they needed to know in relation to their studies. The School reports that induction sessions are offered to students at both the beginning of the academic year and at other points throughout the year and that students are kept informed about these by e-mail.
- 9.9 The Panel noted that there were College-wide and University-wide areas for postgraduate research students on MyAberdeen. Students commented that this was useful as the sites included access to the Doctoral training materials and links to courses run by the Centre for Academic Development.

- 9.10 The Panel noted that only AHRC funded postgraduate research students are required to attend doctoral training though others are encouraged to go. Most students knew about the Researcher Development Framework and all but one of the students interviewed had done some of the training available. Those students who had attended training commented that it was useful.
- 9.11 The Panel noted staff concerns that funding for postgraduate research study in the arts and humanities is scarce and that the School currently has no grant funded research projects offering postgraduate research studentships. This, and the cost of living in Aberdeen, has led to a noticeable reduction in postgraduate research numbers over the last few years.
- 9.12 Many students reported that they could not always obtain the books they required. It transpired that only one of the students knew that there was a Library representative in the School through whom books could be ordered and interlibrary loan vouchers obtained. However, that student was not aware of who the library representative was. Students also were not aware of who their contact was within the Library. The Panel **recommends** that the School makes these procedures and facilities transparent so that the students are able to make use of them.
- 9.13 The Panel noted the comments of many students that completing a PhD in 36 months probably would not be possible for most of them, given that they were not funded and having to work as well as study.

10 Personal development and employability

- 10.1 The Panel **commends** the practice in German of students being required to write CVs and job applications as part of their language instruction, this being an excellent integration of employability skills applicable to the discipline. It **recommends** that other language disciplines do the same.
- 10.2 Students on the taught postgraduate programmes spoke very highly of the placements scheme, specifically mentioning placements in journalism, publishing, theatre, and film and television. Many students see postgraduate study in the arts as an opportunity for improving employment and not as a precursor for research. The Panel **commends** the School for recognizing this and for providing such opportunities.
- 10.3 Staff commented that there are no specific careers events or careers involvement with the taught postgraduate programmes for the reason that most students have a very clear idea of the direction they want to take after their studies, whether that is employment or research. Students confirmed that they know that they can go to Careers if they want an appointment and that this works best for them.
- 10.4 The Panel noted that all School courses had graduate attributes as an integral part of the course, and that this had been the case before the implementation of CRef. Staff in the teaching teams welcomed the Personal Tutors scheme as it would provide a forum for the discussion of graduate attributes and make the link between the attributes and the students' learning more visible to students, thereby enabling the students to articulate the attributes better. This was the aspect of graduate attributes that one did not have time to cover in class.
- 10.5 Students and some staff commented that they considered it would be better if, wherever possible, Personal Tutors come from the same discipline as their Tutees.

11 Professional units/bodies

- 11.1 The Panel noted the documentation provided by the School relating to professional units and bodies. This area was not explored during the review other than in relation to Section 12, below.

- 11.2 The Panel noted that none of the programmes offered by School is accredited by a professional or statutory body.

12 Staff Training and Educational Development

- 12.1 The Panel noted from interviews with undergraduate students that some temporary services teaching staff are less suited to the role than are others and that the quality of teaching is reported to be extremely variable. Students expressed frustration that where they had reported the quality of teaching to be poor, too little was done to remedy the situation. The Panel noted that teaching assistants and temporary services staff were assigned to an individual member of permanent staff as 'mentor' and to provide training. The Panel **recommends** that the School reviews the appointment, induction and training of temporary services teaching staff, ensuring that those who are appointed are suited to the role and that once in post are monitored more closely and given guidance and support as necessary. The Panel **recommends** that there should be a centralised approach to this so that there is consistent training, supervision and mentoring of such staff.
- 12.2 The Panel was concerned that postgraduate students involved in teaching might be working longer than the required maximum. The Panel **recommends** that the School monitors this, in particular hours spent on marking or other related activities that might not be within the official hours claimed, so that postgraduate research students have sufficient time for their research.
- 12.3 From the interviews it was clear that there are pockets of staff employing best practice in terms of teaching, learning and assessment and pockets of staff where this is not the case. Some staff had limited knowledge of the courses and guidance offered by the Centre for Academic Development, considering them to be for inexperienced members of staff only. The Panel **recommends** that all staff within the School keep up-to-date with best practice in learning, teaching and assessment and take more advantage of the continuing professional development offered by the Centre for Academic Development. If staff think that the courses offered are not suitable, the Panel encourages them to advise the Centre for Academic Development of this and of the courses they would like them to provide.
- 12.4 Following 12.3 above, the Panel heard that temporary services staff who had served for a few years often had to guide new members of staff. The Panel **recommends** that the School ensures that all new staff have induction and training from the Centre for Academic Development to prepare them for teaching and that the School ensures new staff have a good understanding of the School's and University's practices (eg referring staff to the Academic Quality Handbook).
- 12.5 The Panel notes the School's comment that all probationary staff are expected to attend induction sessions at the beginning of their tenure in the University (individual inductions are organised by the School Administrative Officer and the Head of School) and to attend appropriate training courses throughout their probationary period. These are discussed in the annual probationer review meetings with the Head of School. Other members of staff are also encouraged to take part in such courses and these would normally be noted in appraisal meetings with the Head of School or his deputy.
- 12.6 The Panel was surprised that peer observation was not conducted in the School, given that it is common practice within higher education. Some staff viewed it as being useful only for new members of staff though others realised its potential benefits for all staff. The Panel noted that some members of staff had mentors but that the mentoring process did not necessarily include peer observation. The Panel **commends** the use of mentors but **recommends** that all staff within the School engage in peer observation on a regular basis.

13 Student involvement in quality processes

- 13.1 The Panel **commended** the commitment of the School in encouraging informal student feedback through various mechanisms and heard evidence that informal routes of communication and face-to-face meetings with members of staff worked well for many students at an individual level.
- 13.2 Formal feedback mechanisms such as the Staff–Student Consultative Committees (SSCC) and student representatives on School Learning & Teaching Committee and School Postgraduate Committee did not appear to work as well yet these are the fora that give students a direct voice in the planning of courses and programmes. Ensuring student representation on Committees would provide such a voice. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School make greater effort to advertise the Committees to students and to work with AUSA to ensure representatives attend, having reserved agendas if necessary, with the minutes being posted on MyAberdeen.
- 13.3 The Panel heard that because of previous problems getting student representation on its Committees, the School was part of the AUSA pilot for the restructured Class representative system and on-line elections. The School hoped that this would eliminate the problems they had experienced previously. The Panel **commends** the School for its commitment to the student representative system and for working with AUSA to be part of this pilot.
- 13.4 Students themselves commented that they probably did not make enough effort to use the class representative system and realised that if they made the effort to do so it would be beneficial.
- 13.5 Students from several of the groups commented on the feedback they were asked to give to the University, saying that they were asked to complete too many forms. They were particularly frustrated with the Student Course Evaluation Form (SCEF) exercise, saying that the repeated reminders led to filling in the form with very little thought just to get it out of the way. Students generally were in agreement that on-line forms were better than paper forms, as handwriting could not be identified, but said that there were too many forms to complete. In addition, they queried the value of having one SCEF form for every single course and thought there must be a better way to evaluate the courses. The students interviewed were unaware of the Institutional Student Survey (ISS).
- 13.6 In relation to 13.5 above, students suggested that feedback would be better if the SCEF forms were distributed at the very end of each half session, rather than in the middle of when students were trying to revise for examinations. Some students also suggested it would be better to have just one form for each year or each programme, that asked students to name the course(s) that was/were excellent or very good, and the course(s) that was/were poor or very poor, and to give reasons for this. They said this would lessen the feedback fatigue and result in better quality feedback.
- 13.7 Following 13.5 and 13.6 above, staff also commented on student feedback fatigue, particularly the SCEF exercise which many considered would be better with a standard set of University-wide questions plus an option for free text. The Panel also noted concerns voiced by staff about the ISS, questioning the value of this exercise. Whilst staff saw the value of trying to put things right at an early stage before students had to complete the National Student Survey (NSS), they felt that making changes as a reaction to the results of a survey was not the right approach. Staff considered that to encourage a culture of continuous improvement regardless was a better approach. The Panel agreed somewhat with the School in this respect and **recommends** the University review the SCEF system and the use of the ISS, with a view to rationalising the number of feedback forms that students are required to complete.

14 Public information/management information

- 14.1 The Panel noted that in the large part the School noticeboards for students were up-to-date and populated with timetables, sign-up sheets for meeting with tutors, and general information of interest to the disciplines. It was noted that, with the exception of the minutes of the Staff–Student Liaison Committees, School-specific information was up to date. However, it was noted that University-specific information – such as the University’s Appeals and Complaints Policy – was out of date. The Panel therefore **recommends** that a regular check of the notice boards is conducted by the School’s administrative staff to remove information that is out of date. The Panel also suggests that students should be referred to the web pages and the InfoHub from which they can obtain information and printed leaflets on University policies and procedures, rather than having printouts on the School noticeboards.
- 14.2 In interviews with postgraduate research students, the Panel noted that the students would prefer handbooks online in MyAberdeen, rather than the hard copy that is handed out at the beginning of their PhD. Students commented that the postgraduate research handbook was very out of date – even the latest version that had been produced, which was at the beginning of academic year 2012–2013. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School updates the postgraduate research Handbook every year, and posts it online for the students to access, posting any major changes as they occur and notifying students of these.
- 14.3 Comments were made by several staff and students about the duplication of information, particularly information that can be obtained centrally. Staff commented that because of the presence of the InfoHub and the web pages for students, much of the information that the School produces is simply a duplication of this. Staff suggested that there should be references and links to the central policies within the course and School Handbooks rather than a duplication of the information. It was also suggested that MyAberdeen could have a central section for the same purpose.
- 14.4 Undergraduate students reported that most of their course handbooks were clear for aims and objectives but that a lot of information was just told to them in class rather than being in the handbook or on MyAberdeen. The students commented that it would be better if all the handbooks were on MyAberdeen and covered the same things, so that they could compare what was required for one course with what was required for another.
- 14.5 The Panel noted that Section 14.2 of the SED stated *‘Neither the School nor its constituent disciplines make any attempt to assess or monitor student achievements or progress in terms of racial, gender, social or other groupings.’* This lack of monitoring was confirmed by staff during the Panel meetings. Following comments on the SED statement by the University’s Equal Opportunities Policy unit, the Panel suggests that it is important to monitor student outcomes in terms of these factors, as it is the only way of determining the effectiveness of the School’s equal-opportunity policies and strategies. The Panel **recommends** that the School begins to monitor student progress and achievement in terms of racial, gender, social or other groupings, according to usual practice.

15 Student support, retention and progression

- 15.1 The Panel **commends** the strong commitment of staff to both academic and pastoral support, and of their efforts to refer students to the appropriate professional support services within the University as appropriate. It was clear to the Panel that staff within the School dedicate a considerable amount of time to their students. Students across all levels and disciplines commented favourably on the availability of staff and said that someone was always available to answer a question or discuss a problem or piece of work.
- 15.2 The Panel **commends** the commitment of the Advisers of Study and Personal Tutors to being as flexible as possible in meeting students. Some students commented that they had not yet seen their Personal Tutor though these were in the minority.

- 15.3 Concerns were raised by some Personal Tutors that duplication of effort is taking place as they are finding they have to spend time with their Personal Tutees correcting Advising errors. Concerns were also raised by some staff that the expectations of the Personal Tutors role had changed. Staff expressed surprise that a Personal Tutor should be expected to provide a reference as they did not know how this could be possible unless one knew a student and the quality of their work well. Other staff commented that Personal Tutors had far too wide a variety of students and were concerned that they would not know how to advise them. However, there were other staff who were in favour of the new Personal Tutor system, seeing it as introducing a much needed rounded approach to advising and who welcomed a system that brought the University in to line with what happens in other universities across the UK.
- 15.4 In interviews with students, it transpired that none of the students interviewed had been informed officially of the change to the Advising/Personal Tutors scheme. Students had heard about it 'through the grapevine' and had no idea what the official purpose of the scheme was or how it was supposed to work. The Panel heard mixed reports from students on their Advisers of Study, some reported good advising, others very poor.
- 15.5 The Panel noted that the administrative staff were often required to advise students in an informal capacity when members of teaching staff were not available or where an issue was urgent. Whilst the Panel might commend the administrative staff for assisting the students in this way, it **recommends** that they do not allow this to become too frequent as students should be referred to their Adviser or Personal Tutor whenever possible.
- 15.6 Although students felt well supported whilst abroad, with support being provided by the Erasmus Office located within the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, they commented that often they would have liked better preparation and found the transition back to the UK difficult. For example, some countries had a more research-focussed undergraduate degree with few if any lectures, and students found moving to and from this without any preparation was difficult. The Panel therefore **recommends** that the School introduce a session to explain the potential differences to students before their year abroad, so that they are better prepared and have more realistic expectations.
- 15.7 The School's disability officer reported that there was no specific training available for disability officers but she had undertaken the University's 2-day Counselling Skills course. Staff reported that the School continued to struggle with provisions for students with dyslexia as spelling within languages needs to be accurate for the meaning to be correct. There were also issues in finding scribes – partly because scribes who had sufficient ability in the language were few, and also because one had to ensure all scribes were trained sufficiently well that it was clear that their scribing reflected the student's ability in the language and not their own. The School works on a case-by-case basis with Student Support on these matters. The Panel **commends** the School for the time and thought put into this process.
- 15.8 The Panel heard that writing support is required to be taken up by all students at levels 1 and 2 for whom a problem is identified. Take up by other students is very good as the students find it to be very useful. One person in the School delivers the writing support. Students can also be referred to the Student Learning Service in the Centre for Academic Development if more appropriate (for example, for copyright and referencing issues).

16 Recruitment, access and widening participation

- 16.1 The Panel noted from the SED the School's high level of engagement with local Schools, being involved in Easter revision sessions for sixth year pupils, for example. Staff reported that schools liaison consisted mainly of visits to the schools, open days, revisions sessions, and that these were to provide advice and information as well as to market the University's programmes. In English, school students were able to visit the School

and sit in on lectures, for example, to get a taste of what university study was like. The Panel **commends** the high level of engagement of School staff with secondary schools in the North-East of Scotland.

16.2 Staff reported that the Access courses were delivered in conjunction with the School of Education. The Panel noted that staff reported good figures for widening participation within Aberdeen and the Shire, with distance learning programmes available for students who were further afield. The Language Centre provided a number of evening courses for staff and members of the public and the Panel **commends** the School for providing such courses for the wider community.

16.3 In interviews with staff, the Panel heard that there was a wide range of support available for the School's very wide cohort. The School has a large proportion of students whose first language is not English, and a very large number of incoming ERASMUS students. Staff commented that the School has some excellent students from Europe. Students who are struggling with academic-related issues such as writing or study skills, including the norms of academic writing in the UK relating to referencing, copyright and plagiarism, for example, are referred to the Student Learning Service.

16.4 The Panel had concerns regarding the inaccessibility of all but the ground floor of the Taylor A building and that the offices of most members of staff were not accessible to some students with disabilities. The Panel noted, however, that the administrative team put a great deal of effort into changing classrooms and setting up meetings with members of staff for students with disabilities and **commends** them for trying to ensure the equality of the student experience in this way.

17 QAA quality enhancement engagements

17.1 The Panel noted the documentation provided by the School relating to QAA quality enhancement engagements. This area was not explored during the review.

18 Recent developments

18.1 The Panel noted that, on the whole, School staff welcomed the introduction of the Personal Tutors scheme and felt that it would provide the pastoral support and opportunity for discussion of academic-related issues, such as employability, that the Advisers of Study role did not have time to cover. It was noted that many staff saw the Advisers of Study role as one that was largely technical – enrolling students onto courses for example.

18.2 In the main, staff were positive about the new students records system and hoped that it would work as planned, that is that it would provide the proper resource to obviate the need for academic advising and ease the administrative burden of determining curriculum validity, progression and classification. Staff were aware of the need for the programme rules to be clear in order for this to happen.

19 Quality enhancement and good practice

19.1 The School uses the best practice fairs (College and University-wide) to disseminate and learn from best practice across the University. Staff commented that some attend conferences – mainly within the UK – though the budget available for this activity is limited and travel from Aberdeen is expensive. The Panel **commends** staff who attend conferences and **recommends** that staff look at using on-line professional fora for the sharing of best practice across the sector.

- 19.2 The Panel particularly **commends** the Head of School for introducing a culture of transparency and inclusive decision-making thereby adopting best practice in departmental and operational management.
- 19.3 The Panel **commends** the School Director of Teaching & Learning for beginning the process of standardisation of the School's learning and teaching practices.
- 19.4 The Panel particularly **commends** the Teaching Fellows for their forward-looking approach to teaching and learning practice and for being supportive of change.

20 Impediments to quality enhancement

- 20.1 The Panel noted staff concerns that the lack of a fit-for-purpose student records system and different manual modes for the calculation of course marks and classification had been an impediment to enhancement for very many years. Staff were very supportive of the need for a new system.
- 20.2 Staff commented that the lack of University-wide standardised practices also caused problems for marking and classification. Some staff commented that they hoped that, along with the new student records system, more prescription was introduced to the University's regulations regarding what constituted a valid curriculum and what of this counted towards the calculation of classification, for example. Concern was expressed that if this more prescriptive approach did not happen, major issues could arise with the increasing complexity introduced by the inclusion of enhanced study. The Panel agrees somewhat with this and **recommends** that the University Registry consider how the University might work towards a more prescriptive culture, especially bearing in mind the need for more transparency for students and a student records system that is able to cover the University's processes.
- 20.3 The Panel noted from feedback and the SED that despite the collegial culture within the School there are still very separate academic disciplines with very separate practices. In interviews with students and staff it was clear to the Panel that this impeded effective communication between the disciplines regarding harmonisation of academic practices. In order to enhance the quality of the student experience, the Panel **recommends** that the School work towards harmonisation of the various disciplines.
- 20.4 In relation to 20.3 above, the Panel had the overriding impression that the number of separate disciplines within the School was unnecessary and out of step with much of the rest of higher education. The Panel was of the view that in order to facilitate the much needed standardisation, disciplines might be merged to produce a more streamlined structure. The Panel therefore **recommends** that, alongside harmonising practices, the School considers merging disciplines within the School, looking to other UK universities for how this might be done.

21 Issues for discussion with external subject specialists

- 21.1 *No issues were raised by the School for discussion with the external subject specialists.*

22 Production and approval of self-evaluation document

- 22.1 The Panel noted that the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) had been collated and edited in the most part by the School Director of Teaching and Learning using sections written by various members of staff. All staff and postgraduate research students were offered the opportunity to comment on the draft SED with electronic and paper copies available. The Panel received feedback from postgraduate research students that they had not seen the SED. For reasons of timing, it was not practical to distribute the SED to undergraduate students.

- 22.2 The School's documentation did not provide as much supporting evidence and data as the Panel would have wished to see, particularly in relation to the lack of external examiners' Reports, Student Course Evaluation, data on retention and progression, and national subject benchmarks. Whilst it is acknowledged that excessive paperwork is not always helpful in these processes, the Panel felt that there should have been adequate evidence provided to support the commentary of the SED.
- 22.3 The Panel **recommends** that the full Final Report of the Panel is distributed to all staff and all student representatives so that they may contribute to the School's formal response. In particular, the Report should be distributed to the staff and students who participated in the interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

The panel recommends **unconditional revalidation**.

Where this report makes **recommendations**, the Panel requests that the School provide, as part of its 1-year follow-up report, an overview of what progress has been made and, where the recommendations have not been followed, the School's arguments leading to and justifying this decision.

Internal Teaching Review of School of Language & Literature

Initial School Response

The Final Report received on 29th January 2014 has been circulated to all staff in the school, and distributed to students via the School Student Representative. The School welcomes the overall verdict of unconditional revalidation, and notes the many commendations of good practice. Since the release of the draft report, meetings and discussions have been underway to evaluate and pursue the panel's recommendations. Our initial response to the recommendations made is dealt with below, updated in response to the amended version of the report supplied on 2nd June 2014.

Recommendations Response

Standardisation

- a. (5.6) Sets out 3 key aspects where standardisation was recommended:
 - i. Inconsistency between the disciplines in the weightings of years and of courses in the programmes
 - ii. inconsistency between disciplines regarding the amount of work required and number of credits and therefore a disconnect from the Credit & Qualifications Framework
 - iii. inconsistency in assessment: lack of transparency for students as to the weightings of the elements of assessment and therefore how their degree classification is determined

Significant progress has been made within the school to address discrepancies. Modern Languages programmes have agreed a 30/70 weighting for language/content courses when calculating degree classifications. This will be implemented for students entering honours from 2014/15. There has also been significant progress in working towards standardisation of language assessment in modern languages. Further recommendations were made in respect of French Language (8.3) where it was recommended both that the School “introduces formal assessments into year 3 of the French Language programme” and in addition the Panel “strongly recommends that the School institute a common assessment policy for ALL its languages” (8.3). The School fully accepts the principle of a common assessment policy for its languages. After a review of assessment policy the language programmes have agreed in principle to work towards deciding final language marks at the end of level 4. This is the consistent practice across the modern languages with the exception of the Hispanic Studies programme, which only recently introduced a level 3 language exam, and the ways of amending this are currently under review as part of a school-wide working group.

The Panel's recommendation for the introduction of formal level 3 assessments in French was made in the context of reported concern from students that “Students in year 3 were not informed how they were progressing and... that they would only discover they were below the standard required at the very end of year 3 or in year 4, by which time it might be too late” (8.3). This worrying claim has been thoroughly investigated. We have checked with the programme staff involved in teaching of French at level 3 and we have established fully that this statement does not reflect actual practice in the teaching of French in the school. In fact Level 3 students of French submit six pieces of work for continuous assessment, which are marked and returned

with individual written feedback and a CAS score, and then gone over in class providing a clear check on progress. In addition students may write two exercises under exam conditions as a 'mock' exam or 'dry run' for finals. This is not compulsory, but it does provide any students desiring further feedback with a clear progress check towards their final performance. Feedback is also offered in classes for which students prepare language exercises that are not individually marked, but which are nonetheless discussed in the group, often with suggested versions or fair copies provided for them to check their own work. Having established that feedback and opportunities for feedback are regularly presented to students, we sought to identify the nature of any student concerns. Accordingly the ITR report comments in 8.3 were specifically discussed with student representatives from the French programme after circulation of the full report in order to try to clarify any action that might be taken. The student representatives testified to the widespread availability of feedback and could only suggest that the comments might relate specifically to oral assessment on the French programme. These comments have been passed on to the relevant staff to ensure that the availability of feedback and of progress checks are fully advertised to students. The student representatives from across the school also commented more generally that there was widespread support for the principle of formal language assessment taking place in the final year only, but noted that an element of anxiety over degree outcomes was a normal consequence of this system. After thorough investigation then, while we are unable to account for the reported comments in 8.3, we are able to clarify that that they do not reflect actual practice in the programme, or the experience of students. Given the appearance of confusion reported in the ITR document, however, the importance of clear and accurate programme information has been highlighted and the school will make every effort to prevent misinformation from circulating (dealt with more fully below).

As a general principle it has also been agreed that there will be more explanation and transparency of how degrees are calculated. We have consulted with student representatives to consider how this can be best achieved, with the use of briefing sessions and careful use of MyAberdeen (dealt with as a more general issue below).

It is acknowledged that there is a difference in the weighting of programme years towards the final degree calculation between the English programme and other programmes in the school. This did lead to a particular anomaly in the case of one course which would constitute a different percentage of a degree result depending on the student's programme, but this course has been withdrawn and replaced with programme specific options. In the larger issue of programme year weightings, there has been some consideration of possible changes within the school however the university as a whole is currently reviewing these issues with discussions university-wide about marking scales, the grade spectrum and degree classifications. New policy outcomes are being implemented and the School would be required to adhere to any new rules and regulations implemented.

The apparent discrepancy over dissertation lengths and credits within the school was flagged up in 8.5. There has been consultation within programmes and at the school-wide level as well as with students reps, over the relevant rationales and requirements. In terms of length the Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies programme has agreed to alter its dissertation word-length in order to ensure consistency with other programmes in the School. This means that the length and weighting of all the non-language programmes in the school has been standardised at 7-8,000 words and 30 credits. The dissertation serves a different function in the language programmes, where it may be written in a second language and also be submitted earlier in the Honours programme. Here there are some apparent discrepancies and the Modern Languages programmes have agreed to work together to review their rubrics and harmonise where that is possible.

Other discrepancies noted include several related to marking:

(6.7) “Whilst the Panel might consider double-blind marking of all assessments at levels 3 and 4 to be commendable, it felt that it was unnecessary and **recommends** that those disciplines that are doing so review this practice and fall in line with School policy”

This relates to the Linguistics programme, but upon further investigation we have established there is no double-blind marking undertaken but only extensive moderation of marked work. In effect the use of second marking for small enrolment honours courses is simply a pragmatic form of moderation where sample assessments for all grades are not necessarily available.

The recommendation that we consider making submission and marking via MyAberdeen standard practice (6.6) also requires clarification. This comprises three aspects:

(i) Submission of work

In relation to (i) all programmes require as standard the submission of assessed work via MyAberdeen.

(ii) Recording of marks

In relation to (ii) we are reviewing our practice and have agreed in principle to move towards the use of the grade centre function. To ensure conformity it has been agreed that School Office staff will set up the grade centre for all courses on MyAberdeen in consultation with Course Coordinators. These changes will need to be made in the light of current discussions at Senate over changes to grade spectrum and marking scales.

(iii) Electronic Marking

In relation to (iii) the move towards electronic marking has significant workload implications. Formats for electronic feedback are being piloted within the school, with a view to informing school policy.

Suggestions were also made in relation to skills training:

(i) Integrating Library Skills as standard at level 1 (5.11)

The integration of programme specific library skill training at level 1 has been agreed.

(ii) Dissertation research skill training at UG and PG level (5.15)

Dissertation research skills training will be reviewed as part of the School’s evaluation of current dissertation arrangements.

Administrative and Discipline Units

The ITR report recommends the merging of disciplines within the school (20.4) and makes various suggestions for how the modern languages and other programmes might be incorporated (5.10). The School is asked to “review the infrastructure of its constituent academic units with the aim of remodelling its programmes and disciplines and bringing consistency to its learning and teaching”. Following extensive discussion within the individual programmes, in the open School Forum praised in the report, and in discussion with student reps from across the school in specially convened meetings there is strong opposition to this idea. The School has only just established structures for disciplines and there is great reluctance to unpick this work at such an early stage. The students in particular gave overwhelming

support to the current programme model, and the specialist provision it is able to deliver. We nevertheless recognise that this places an even greater onus on us to ensure the consistency of our practices across the school and undertake to make this a priority.

Particular reference is made to some of the smaller programmes within the School, notably the programmes run by the Celtic Studies academic unit. Criticism is reported from students over the lack of range of courses available to Celtic Studies students (5.8). The School accepts that there have been problems in the past with the range of options available to students. As a result, it launched an extensive review of the programmes offered within the Celtic Studies academic unit. Following extensive development work and examination of comparable programmes across the sector, the new degree of Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies was introduced in September 2013. Documentation on the approved new programme was supplied with the School's ITR submission set out as part of the Programme Review Report, which noted the limitations of previous course choices as part of the rationale. This new programme represented effectively a rationalisation of offerings since it replaced the former programme of Celtic Studies and Celtic Civilisations, which has been withdrawn, with a broader based approach to the teaching of Celtic studies, adopting a comparative approach to incorporate aspects of Germanic material that open up the subject to new students, and bring on board members of staff from other areas to contribute to the programme. As well as offering a broadening of the student experience, the new programme also better reflects staffing capacity, research interests and the philological traditions of comparative study embodied by the Grierson Centre. This new programme is not "being considered" but rather had just been introduced when the ITR panel visited. The student dissatisfaction with options has been noted, but given that the new programme had only been in place for two months at the time of the ITR visit, the obvious conclusion is that they represent a response to the limitations of the former programme and the particular staffing issues that affected the delivery of that programme.

The Report continues

..the Panel commends the School for having a culture of research-led teaching, the rationale for having separate programmes in these areas is not robust. It is a concern that the School is considering replacing two already small discipline degree programmes (Celtic Studies and Gaelic Studies) with another small discipline degree programme, namely Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies. The Panel acknowledges that the School is introducing new courses into this programme but remains concerned about the rationale for running such a programme. The Panel recommends very strongly that the School review this area of provision with consideration for the student experience. The Panel suggests that perhaps this degree should be offered as part of Joint degrees only (eg with History or Archaeology). (5.9)

The School understands the concerns of the panel based on the responses of students, however given the extensive work that has gone into the development of the new replacement programme around precisely the issues raised by the panel, that is, combining consideration of the student experience with the intellectual and staffing rationale, we feel that the new programme should be given an opportunity to establish itself. This new programme has gone through the University's rigorous procedures for scrutinising academic standards and rationale. It was approved by the Quality Assurance Committee, along with the new range of courses. As with all new programmes, however, the School will carefully monitor its progress and the possibility of joint associations will be borne in mind in this process.

With reference to the Gaelic programme, this is a separate academic discipline. There is no intention to replace Gaelic Studies and we are unclear where this suggestion in the report could have come from. Aberdeen is one of the few universities in the UK to offer a Gaelic Studies

programme and its existence is closely allied to the strategic aims of the School and the University as a whole, which has a published Gaelic-language policy. While the comments over course choices in 5.8 are recorded as made by students from Gaelic Studies, we believe this to be an error since we were unable to recruit any students from the programme to attend for the days of the ITR visit. Nevertheless while the programme staff are few, the breadth of coverage and course options is in keeping with the range offered at other institutions.

Staff Training and Development

The Report makes a number of helpful suggestions in this regard that we intend to act upon.

- (i) Peer Observation: All staff to engage in peer observation on a regular basis (12.6)

While peer observation is already widespread on some team taught courses in the Hons programme, we recognise the value of more systematic engagement in reflective practice. A school policy on peer observation has been drawn up for the approval of the School Teaching & Learning Committee and will be passed on to the programmes for implementation in the coming academic year.

- (ii) Temporary Staff

The Report recommends that we “review the appointment, induction and training of temporary services teaching staff, ensuring that those who are appointed are suited to the role and that once in post are monitored more closely and given guidance and support as necessary. The Panel **recommends** that “there should be a centralised approach to this so that there is consistent training, supervision and mentoring of such staff” (12.1). In addition the diversity of tutorials is commented upon and better communication in teaching teams as well as improved TA training and monitoring recommended (6.9).

In response the School has agreed to reinstate training workshops for new TAs before the start of term, delivered in collaboration with CAD staff. Tutors who have been hired for the session, and who have taught previously, will also be invited so that they can be updated on any changes that have come into effect. The School is satisfied with the principle of diversity within tutorial teaching and intend to retain this, although we will need to address student expectation here, and we will liaise with Student Reps over this issue. To uphold the quality of tutorial teaching we have agreed to introduce more formal guidelines for the mentoring of tutors by course convenors.

A review of marking loads and teaching hours of TAs will be undertaken to ensure that tutorial teaching is not affecting the research time of postgraduate students as suggested in (12.2). It should be noted, however, that the teaching loads of PhD students are always agreed with supervisors. Any failings in this procedure will also be addressed via the revised monitoring processes for PG students.

- (iii) Induction: (12.4) recommends that “all new staff have induction and training from the Centre for Academic Development to prepare them for teaching and that the School ensures new staff have a good understanding of the School’s and University’s practices (eg referring staff to the Academic Quality Handbook).”

We will review the mentoring procedures for all staff. We currently assign mentors for all new probationary staff from outwith their discipline alongside the school-wide induction

procedures. We will seek to ensure that the induction of all new staff, whatever their level of experience, incorporates a programme-specific meeting and an identified point of contact. We also recognise the need to improve the information provided to new staff about Programme, School and University practices. As a result we have undertaken to develop a new Tutors' handbook for issue to all staff.

Several further recommendations were made regarding staff training. In response to (6.2.) the School Director of Teaching & Learning has undertaken to collate staff problems with MyAberdeen and liaise with e-learning over how to resolve them. The DoTL will also be the conduit for promoting training opportunities (6.3), including the opportunities for harnessing best practice provided by CAD (12.3).

Information for students

A number of the issues raised in the ITR report concern the circulation of inaccurate information, or the failure to communicate effectively with our students. Consequently we are reviewing the processes through which we disseminate programme information to students, seeking to streamline our use of MyAberdeen to make communication simple and more effective (8.4). This is a priority item for the TLC and we are consulting on best practice. The input of Office staff is being sought and we are also actively looking to involve students in this process. We have set up a new school-wide meeting of Student reps, to garner student views on this and other issues. The first meeting took place in February and focused on the ITR report, providing highly productive input into our School Response. Through this forum, and with the assistance of the principal School Rep, we got a good turnout of Student Reps at the School Forum (13.2). At the more general level of the Student representation system, SLL was one of the pilot schools in the introduction of electronic elections. The introduction of this system, administered by AUSA, was not entirely successful and we have provided feedback on our concerns to the organisers.

Several specific recommendations were made with regard to Student information.

- (i) Information session for outgoing Erasmus students (15.4)

There have been changes in the University Erasmus unit. All information is now on-line and the Unit will be organising yearly meetings for students who want to participate in exchanges. The School is monitoring this situation to see whether discipline specific Erasmus advisers remain necessary.

- (ii) Reading Lists to be published before summer break (6.10)

The switch to MyAberdeen, where course sites are only available to enrolled students, made this a difficulty last year. We have identified alternative ways of supplying this information through MyAberdeen, ie via the MyOrganisation section.

- (iii) Lecture notes to be provided on MyAberdeen as standard (6.12)

It is current school policy for lecture notes to be provided via MyAberdeen for all courses. Lecture formats vary however across disciplines, as do pedagogic approaches, and the appropriate format for notes to be supplied also varies – for example annotated lecture powerpoints figure in some courses as opposed to text synopses. The School has undertaken however to make sure clear explanations are provided over the format of lecture notes in each course.

- (iv) More comprehensive use of MyAberdeen and Camtasia so that students who can't attend because of clashes don't miss important session (8.14)

The school is systematically expanding the use of Camtasia. There are issues over how this may impact on lecture attendance and we have sought the input of student reps to enhance best practice. Implementation of the MyCurriculum in OneSource this autumn should mean that students cannot select a course which has clashes with compulsory courses.

- (v) Transparency of Honours Option Selection Process for students (5.5)

Again this will be shaped by the MyCurriculum rollout. Students will be no longer be allocated to courses on a first-come-first served basis. Course choices will instead be allocated via the MyCurriculum software. For the coming academic year (2014-15) an interim system has been in place but a fully-worked out university-wide procedure will be introduced for the following year, and students will be kept informed of changes.-

Postgraduate Issues

Changes to the monitoring of PhD students have recently been introduced. College level 6-monthly audit for all PhD students was introduced in January 2014. CASS will identify needs where highlighted in relation to Research training and PG teaching loads (12.2). In response to the further specific suggestions contained in the report:

- (i) Standardisation/Enforcement of agreed minutes of all meetings between PGs and Supervisors (9.4)

PG students are to be responsible for preparation of the minutes – instructions to that effect are to be included in Tutors' handbook and PG handbook.

- (ii) Clarity for PGs over registration status (9.6)

Registration status refers to monitoring and progression where students are not approved for progression and drop back to MPhil. The revised PG Handbook will clarify this.

- (iii) Procedures for PGs to order books and ILLs (9.12)

The school policy on ILLs and further information on requesting books will be included in PG handbook.

- (iv) Annual Updating of PG handbook, making it available online, and posting to MyAberdeen of updates/changes (14.2)

The PG is annually updated. Currently, however, PhD students do not have MyAberdeen access as not enrolled on specific courses. The School will look into ways that access can be provided.

External Examiners

The report makes two recommendations relating to external examiners

- (i) External Examiners' Reports to be made available to all staff (7.3)

The School has agreed to make these available on the shared drive to discipline staff.

- (ii) Review mechanisms for ensuring External Examiners' recommendations, whether from report or other contact, are followed up, particularly in the formal responses (7.2)

We are grateful to the panel for identifying this breakdown in the response loop. The audit of issues raised by External Examiner and the monitoring of the school response was formerly undertaken at a university-wide level and the School Administrator is investigating what new procedures are in place.

General Planning Issues

The report identifies a number of longer term issues for review and monitoring:

- (i) (8.14) The planning of timetables is a complex problem, beyond the immediate control of the school, but the introduction of OneSource presents a new opportunity to address this.
- (ii) (5.13) The School is looking at ways to build progression and consistency into programmes.
- (iii) (3.3) School will monitor reduction in contact hours, seeking the input of students on this issue.
- (iv) (5.3.) School will consider carefully impact of introducing new programmes.

Further Specific Recommendations:

- (i) Equal Opportunities: Monitoring by race, gender, and social grouping (14.5) –

The School Director of Teaching and Learning is seeking clarification from the Equal Opportunities Unit on this recommendation. The SCEF system does incorporate the opportunity for any issues raised by individual courses in relation to these issues.

- (ii) Languages to follow German practice of incorporating CV and job-applications in language training (10.1)

Modern Language departments are to look at best practice across disciplines and incorporate where appropriate.

- (iii) Return of Essays via tutorials rather than via the office because of office staffing problems (6.5)

We are reviewing our procedures for the return of essays in light of this recommendation, in liaison with office staff. We are proposing that mid-course essays would be returned in class and end of course essays through the School Office, but there are issues over how office feedback sheets are to be deposited with the office that need to be worked out.

Where the report makes recommendations for action beyond the school – notably (3.4).“ that the College seek to expedite the mechanisms for reviewing replacement staff in order to make swift appointments to existing posts”; and (8.7) investment in Language Lab facilities – the Head of School will act to feed through the panel's views.

Andrew Gordon, Acting School Director of Teaching and Learning, June 2014

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
**INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW FINAL REPORT OF THE PANEL
AND SCHOOL RESPONSE**

Date: 02 September 2014

School: School of Language and Literature, College of Arts and Social Sciences

ATTACHED:

Final Report

School Response

Other please specify: N/A

OUTCOME OF PANEL VISIT:

Revalidation Recommended

Revalidation Not Recommended

Other please specify: _____

QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE RESPONSE:

The Committee would wish to extend their thanks to the Head of School, Director of Teaching and the School as a whole for the response provided to the ITR report. The Committee were very grateful for the responses provided and found the response to be, on the whole, positive. Members were encouraged by the many commendations that the school were afforded.

Specific comments:

1. The Committee acknowledges the good progress that has been made towards standardisation of practices in the different disciplines within the School.
2. The Committee appreciates the investigation undertaken by the School regarding the reported lack of feedback in level 3 French and are content with the School's response and their assurance that feedback is available. The Committee were also pleased to note that the School is increasing explanation/transparency around degree classification.
3. The Committee acknowledges the rationale behind the School's reluctance to remodel/merge its programmes and disciplines. It further accepts the rationale for the design of a new programme (Celtic and Anglo Saxon studies) but would like the school to monitor and consider recruitment onto, and student satisfaction with, the new programme.
4. The Committee are pleased to note the School are actively reviewing their processes for disseminating information to students via MyAberdeen.

Overall, the Committee were encouraged by the report provided and look forward to the one year follow up report.

Date: 21 October 2014

School's One-year Follow-up Due: 1 September 2015

School Response Received:	29 July 2014
Submitted to QAC:	02 September 2014
Considered by QAC:	24 September 2014
QAC Response forwarded to School:	22 October 2014
Webpages updated:	22 October 2014