

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE
INTERNAL TEACHING REVIEW (ITR)

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND VISUAL CULTURE

9-10 NOVEMBER 2023

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC) was carried out under the University's published process and procedures for ITR which are available here: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/internal-teaching-review-6112.php>.
- 1.2 The School was asked to submit a Critical Analysis document which addressed the following key areas:
- (i) School context: to include student numbers, demographics and outcomes; highlight any areas of teaching and learning practices that are specific to the School and a summary of the School's response to the previous ITR
- (ii) Positive aspects of the School's teaching and learning: to include examples of positive practice and particular strengths of the School as well as how this good practice is shared both within the School and beyond
- (iii) Challenges that have been encountered in the School's teaching and learning provision: to include potential areas identified for improvement and an action plan for how they might be addressed – or whether these were issues for discussion at the ITR.
- (iv) Future plans: to include areas for development in the next few years, e.g. new course/programme developments, partnerships proposed
- 1.3 The ITR Panel was comprised of:
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Dr Isabel Crane | Chair
School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition
Quality Assurance Committee |
| Dr Gareth Norton | School of Biological Sciences
Quality Assurance Committee |
| Professor Susan Stokeld | School of Law
University Education Committee |
| Rhiannon Ledwell | VP for Education, Aberdeen University Students' Union |
| Professor Kirsten Gibson | External Subject Specialist, Newcastle University |
| Dr Warren Maguire | External Subject Specialist, University of Edinburgh |
| Professor Eric Robertson | External Subject Specialist, Royal Holloway University of London |
| Kyra Lamont | Clerk, Academic Services |
| Isabella Fausti | Assistant Clerk, Academic Services |
- 1.4 The Panel considered the documentation provided by the School, by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis (CA) as detailed in 1.2 above. In addition, prior to the visit to the School, members of the Panel were provided with access to the School's Quality Assurance (QA) repository, containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and

APR)), Course Feedback Forms, minutes from meetings of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), and External Examiner Reports (EERs), as well as the minutes from various School Committees. Consideration of this documentation, along with the School's submitted CA, enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration.

1.5 The Panel conducted a visit of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture's facilities and met with a range of staff and students from the School.

1.6 The themes for focused discussion agreed with the School prior to and during the visit were:

- (i) **School Structure and Communication**, particularly in terms of the recent re-structuring of twelve disciplines into three clusters*
- (ii) **Assessment and Feedback**
- (iii) **Employability**
- (iv) **Student Community and Support**
- (v) **Staff Experience and Workload**
- (vi) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

** Cluster A: English, Linguistics, Celtic & Anglo-Saxon; Cluster B: Modern Languages, Translation & Interpreting; Cluster C: Music, Film & Visual Culture, Ethnology & Folklore*

1.7 This report is split into three sections:

(i) Part A gives the **overall impressions** of the teaching provision within the School, formed from the whole ITR process;

(ii) Part B covers the outcome of various meetings with staff and students, focusing on a small number of themes as outlined above. It also details the **Pedagogic Partnership Session**, which involved more free-form discussion; and

(iii) Part C details the School **action plan** which will form the basis of the one-year follow-up report.

PART A: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

2.1 Throughout the review, students praised staff for their approachability and responsiveness to feedback. Discussions revealed that Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLCs) meetings were functioning well - noting the increased focus on sharing elements of good practice in addition to areas for further development. Overall, it is clear that the School is heavily committed to listening to the student voice.

2.2 In general, the Panel noted a strong emphasis being placed on employability throughout the School. It is particularly pleasing that the School maintains a strong relationship with the University Careers Service, and that students are regularly notified of relevant job opportunities and employability focused workshops and tutorials. The use of course guides to detail the specific transferrable and professional skills being gained at each stage is also considered excellent practice.

2.3 It is evident that the School maintains strong links to industry by way of the relevant Research Centres; noting that postgraduate students found the Centre for Modern Languages Research very helpful, and that the Centre for the Novel provides students with a valuable insight into the industry in terms of how events & conferences are organised and funded.

- 2.4 During the review, it became clear that the restructuring of the School into three clusters has been beneficial in terms of research and representation – in part due to good communication from Heads of Cluster and effective collaboration between administrative and academic staff. Overall, the panel was very impressed by the School's approach to teaching and learning, and the dedication to providing a high-quality student experience.

PART B: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT; OUTCOMES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS AND THE PEDAGOGIC PARTNERSHIP SESSION

3.1 Theme: School Structure and Communication

- 3.1.1 The Panel heard that the re-structuring of the School into three clusters comprising (i) English, Linguistics, Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies; (ii) Modern Languages, Translation & Interpreting; and (iii) Music, Film & Visual Culture, Ethnology & Folklore has been a successful way of taking a disparate set of subjects and grouping them together to improve representation. Although it is understood that this approach has resulted in a more representative sample in the School Executive, there were some members of staff who felt it created a false barrier which may have impacted upon collaboration. The Panel learned that although there were some initial fears in terms of navigating this approach; the Heads of Cluster communicated a clear remit which has been central to its success. The Panel learned that, whilst clusters are one way of ensuring a strong voice, there is a need to ensure that they do not become silos and to ensure that discipline specificity is appropriately maintained; noting that a number of staff currently work across multiple disciplines. The Panel was, thereafter, advised that staff and students are invited to various events by way of a shared calendar which helps improve cohesion across the School¹.
- 3.1.2 The Panel heard that the level of communication between Academic Staff and Administrative Staff was generally good, often involving ad-hoc meetings between various Academic Leads and members of the Administrative Team. It was noted that the School Administration Manager compiles and circulates a School Digest which clearly identifies which member of staff is responsible for overseeing certain tasks/initiatives. The Panel was advised that at the start of each session the Director of Education sends out a reminder to all Course Co-ordinators to begin issuing the relevant course guides/handbooks to their students.
- 3.1.3 The Panel heard that Academic Staff found that the clusters work well in general. However, staff intimated that the level of communication across clusters can differ which can be difficult in terms of planning. It was also noted that line managers are cluster based which staff noted may create certain structural effects. That being said, the Panel was advised that a number of staff straddle more than one cluster which helps to improve communication; and the personal relationships between staff often assist with collaboration across the School. Furthermore, it was noted that following the move of the Language Centre from the School, there were some staff who felt that collaboration had been negatively impacted. However, the Panel heard that there was still a good relationship between the School and the Language Centre, and it was noted that building on this would help to improve in areas such as recruitment and internationalization. The presence of various research centres significantly helps to encourage interdisciplinarity by working with multiple Schools in addition to each cluster. The Panel also heard that LLMVC works closely with external partners and local organisations to perform outreach activities to broaden engagement and raise awareness of the programmes on offer.
- 3.1.4 In terms of the wider strategy, the Panel heard that there are certain areas within the School that play a key role in internationalisation, such as modern languages, and that there is a need to connect with students of non-typical age and local markets to enhance recruitment. The Panel heard that the Elphinstone Institute (EI), established in 1995 as a centre for the study of Ethnology, Folklore, and

Ethnomusicology, helps to improve public engagement with these subject areas in general. However, staff commented that there is scope for greater integration within the School itself.

¹The Panel appreciates that the Public Affairs, Stakeholder Engagement and Events team (PASE) based within External Relations does not have the resources to act on behalf of all Schools as a centralised publication resource.

3.2 Theme: Assessment and Feedback

- 3.2.1 The Panel learned that the School undertook a review of their assessments roughly 3-4 years ago. The Panel understands that at the time assessments were reduced by approximately 50%. However, since then some assessments have been re-instated. External Examiners are reportedly pleased with the quality and diversity of assessments. Undergraduate students reportedly enjoyed the innovative approaches to assessment including video submissions and podcasts, noting the need to clearly communicate the skills being developed. During discussions, concern was expressed with regards to the difficulty of one of the first-year linguistics courses; stating that the course content, in particular the vernacular used, was quite challenging and the assessment (research project) remained daunting despite the guidance offered. The Panel understands that linguistics recently undertook an assessment audit to ensure greater consistency. However, it is understood that students may benefit from enhanced support during the early stages of their university careers. In terms of feedback, students advised that the three-week turnaround period is not always adhered to and this can be frustrating – especially when the reasons for the delay are not clearly communicated. It was noted that students continue to appreciate clarity in terms of assessment dates and times to ensure they can accommodate their working schedules and/or family commitments without conflict.
- 3.2.2 The Panel heard that the School's recent re-structuring involved combining examiners' meetings; resulting in one Exams Officer (EO) for each cluster except for Cluster B: Modern Languages, Translation & Interpreting which requires multiple officers. The Panel learned that during this busy period the Exams Officers work with the designated Admin Lead for each cluster in order to facilitate this process. The Panel was advised that this arrangement works well, however, it was suggested that a joint examiners' meeting may be more streamlined and efficient. The feedback from students in general was that a return to in-person examinations had been challenging. However, the use of mock exams for language students in their final year were considered helpful in terms of compensating for a lack of exposure during COVID pandemic. It was also noted that the implementation of a mini-viva was beneficial for postgraduate students in terms of preparing for the final examination.
- 3.2.3 Academic staff discussed the ways in which they were navigating the challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in terms of assessment. Although course guides had been designed with information on academic integrity and the use of AI for students; the Panel learned that academic staff felt they were missing a universal steer regarding the topic of Artificial Intelligence. The Panel heard that efforts are underway to demonstrate the ways in which AI can be used with integrity. However, due to the diversity of disciplines, a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be easily adopted. The Panel was informed by students that they were grateful for the guidance that had been made available on how to use AI as a tool and how to avoid the common pitfalls. The Panel heard that Linguistics had adopted more creative forms of assessment to combat AI vulnerabilities by including greater data analysis. However, there were concerns that assessments may remain vulnerable to misconduct, particularly when heavily weighted, and that difficulties associated with language proficiency may play a role in the misuse of AI and engagement in academic misconduct.
- 3.2.4 The Panel was advised that there seemed to be a general rise in academic misconduct hearings, including repeat instances, and that these were placing increased pressure on staff time both administratively and academically. It was noted that there had been a general increase in cases of

misconduct and consideration is being given to distributing workloads where possible. During the discussion with undergraduate students, concerns were raised surrounding the design of a second-year online assessment for Music Theory which inadvertently revealed the answers upon submission. The Panel understands that this was an isolated incident but notes that this resulted in several academic misconduct investigations whereby the Director of Education acted as Investigating Officer.

3.3 Theme: Employability

- 3.3.1 The Panel was advised that students are provided with direct access to the Careers Service and their nominated Careers Advisor upon joining the University. There is also a Virtual Advisor available as an alternative to in-person meetings. The Panel learned that the Careers Service provide access to psychometric testing, such as the Belbin Team Assessment Tool, and that career mentoring is available for a three-month period for all students regardless of the discipline. Additionally, it is understood that students can self-assess themselves against a number of key skills using the MySkills platform on CareerConnect. This webpage also directs students to helpful resources, such as those aimed at improving digital proficiency and resilience.
- 3.3.2 The Panel learned that there is a new Employability Lead for the School covering all 12 disciplines. It is understood the Lead oversees a number of initiatives, including the *Working with Words* event hosted in collaboration with the Schools of DHPA and Social Science. The Panel was advised that work is underway to better integrate employability skills into the curriculum, and that steps are being taken to ensure that these skills are being clearly articulated to students by a variety of means including course handbooks. It was noted that the University's Graduate Attributes are being revised at an institutional level with a view to making these attributes more accessible for current students.
- 3.3.3 The Panel was informed of a number of strong links between the School and local industry and organisations; for example, Big Noise in Torry. However, it is understood that these partnerships are reliant upon external funding and many of these organisations are also struggling financially. It was noted that it is particularly difficult to find desirable placements in film and television. In English, the School provides a Director's Clinic for theatrical performances, emphasising the transferrable skills being developed. In terms of industry exposure, the WayWord Student Festival with links to NESCOL reportedly provides excellent work-based experience, despite not being credit-bearing, and the Panel learned that professional musicians were recently invited to provide master classes on various instruments. Additionally, the Panel was advised that a local theatre company was brought in to discuss professional skills such as scene staging. The Panel was advised that Music spans a wide range of areas such as composition, theory and music history and, in some instances, students have continued their studies further at Conservatoires. It is understood, however, that opportunities in the creative industries are less forthcoming and the PGR community would appreciate greater opportunities in terms of performance and exposure to industry (e.g. externally funded opportunity for large scale 1 hour performance). PGR students felt that there was a lack of transparency in the way teaching opportunities were made available. Undergraduates also commented that the level of practical skills in Film and Visual Culture could be enhanced in the interests of employability. That being said, undergraduate students found the elective on translation and interpreting very beneficial as it clearly laid out the key skills, expected salary, and examples of day-to-day work. The opportunity to interact with subject specialists was also highly valued.
- 3.3.4 In terms of career events, the Panel was advised that the Heads of Cluster meet to discuss suitable events and initiatives. The Panel learned that last March during the Modern Languages Careers and Networking Event, recent graduates were flown in from across Europe to demonstrate where their languages degree had taken them. It is understood that this was very well received by students and would be repeated by the School, subject to funding. The Panel learned that the Goethe-Institut Careers Roadshow was coming to Aberdeen in November 2023 to highlight the importance of

languages in employment with guest-speakers from various companies and career stalls, including Lufthansa. The Panel noted that the Language Ambassador programme allows students to enhance their professional skills by performing outreach functions at local secondary schools. The Panel heard that undergraduate students felt that there was some disparity across clusters and within disciplines in terms of access to opportunities for placements and internships. For example, Gaelic students have not had the opportunity to engage with the Summer School as advertised and there appears to be more work-placements available for Music Education students than pure Music.

3.4 Theme: Student Community and Support

- 3.4.1 During the review it became clear that the School places great importance on listening to the student voice and ensuring a high-quality student experience. This was evidenced by the shared staff and student opinion that Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) are working well with an increased focus on sharing good practice. The Panel learned that there are thirteen SSLCs, one for each discipline and one for the School in general, providing a forum for student representatives to discuss their concerns and identify any elements of good practice for further dissemination. It was noted that students were encouraged to report course-level feedback directly to the Course Coordinator, in the interest of a timely resolution. The Panel were informed that the Director of Education and Head of School attend these meetings where possible to obtain a rounded view. It is understood, however, that a challenge does exist between the timing of these meetings and the training of Class Representatives and the election of School Conveners which may benefit from further review.
- 3.4.2 Students advised the Panel that there was a good level of support available for students experiencing any mental health concerns. During the discussions, it also became clear that Student Support provide useful support for students with learning disabilities, and this level of satisfaction extends to those with physical disabilities. It is understood that standard support measures were disrupted due to COVID (i.e. unable to access scribe and proof-readers). However, students intimated that the Student Support team worked well to address these challenges in regard to take home examinations.
- 3.4.3 The Panel heard that postgraduate students appreciated having two inductions, one from the School of LLMVC and the other from the Postgraduate Research School, as well as being encouraged to attend as many conferences as possible in the interests of building their networks. However, it was noted that the overall feeling of belonging could be enhanced since the School's PGR community is currently spread across a number of different buildings and workspaces. Therefore, students suggested that the School considers enhancing the available shared social space – particularly as the benefits of peer support cannot be underestimated and PGRs are often less active in terms of societies. PGR students also intimated that they would appreciate the provision of pastoral support that is not linked to their supervisor who may be involved in the marking of their work. The Panel heard students express varied levels of satisfaction with PGR workspaces and it was noted that these areas may benefit from further development. The Panel also heard that PGR students would welcome increased awareness of the various events and projects being undertaken by the School's many different Research Centres e.g. Elphinstone Institute. The Panel noted there appeared to be a slight lack of awareness surrounding the various training and accredited professional development opportunities provided by the Centre for Academic Development (CAD), as well as opportunities to gain professional recognition for teaching contributions such as the AdvanceHE Fellowship.
- 3.4.4 The Panel heard that students felt that many of the facilities are often shared teaching spaces and that some of the performance spaces require further development. The Panel was also advised that gaining access to different types of software, such as Adobe, had been somewhat problematic or delayed; students intimated that this area may benefit from further investment and/or upgrading. In addition, it was noted that certain resources are currently housed within the multi-faith prayer room of the University Library which means they cannot be easily accessed.

3.4.5 The Panel was advised that in regard to student monitoring, QR codes or hand-written registers are used to record attendance and if any student misses two designated learning activities or fails to submit an assignment it triggers a warning – noting that taught PG students must prove in-person engagement every 10 working days during the summer term when subject to VISA requirements. It is understood that in an effort to improve re-engagement, the School modified their communication with students who were at risk of losing their class certificate (C6/C7) by making the process more user-friendly. The Panel heard how there was scope for automatically integrating Personal Tutors into the process but that this would require involvement from the Directorate of Digital and Information Services. Undergraduate students stated that it is sometimes difficult to get a response from their Personal Tutor and that students have been known to approach Course Co-ordinators for support where there is an established relationship. Additionally, it was suggested by undergraduate students on joint-degree programmes that they may benefit from a tutor in both Schools if resources allow.

3.5 Theme: Staff Experience and Workload

3.5.1 In terms of applying for promotion, Academic Staff generally felt well supported by their line managers. However, the Panel heard that some of the promotional criteria does not appear to correlate very well with current workloads, and it can be a struggle to map day-to-day tasks to the promotion criteria. Staff felt it was important that any research gaps associated with the pandemic, and the disruption it may have had to probation and staff workloads, were taken into consideration when applying for promotion. It was noted that whilst there isn't a Head of Discipline, there is a UG Coordinator for each discipline who oversees staffing and workload needs within that unit, as well as PG Coordinators, and that the first three-year term of office for Heads of Cluster will be coming to an end soon.

3.5.2 The Panel was advised that, in general, research leave is granted to Teaching & Research staff once every six or seven half-sessions, though this is delayed for holders of roles on the School Executive (without detriment to eligibility for future research leave). The Panel heard that the cluster system has been moderately helpful for research as it has enabled staff from different disciplines to collaborate and communicate by way of REF Leads. For example, Modern Languages have generated a far more vibrant research culture by joining together in a cluster. It was noted, however, that staff were concerned that clusters might be weighed against each other which is not a fair comparison due to the different levels of time and resources each one requires. It is understood that research leave applications are low within the School but this has been complicated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5.3 The Panel heard that Academic Staff have noted that the Probation Policy seems to be very long compared to other HEIs within the sector. It was noted, however, that under certain circumstances staff can apply for an early exit from their probation. The Panel heard that the process for undergoing early exit was not very straight-forward and might benefit from improvement. For example, there were two instances whereby experienced lecturers had to go through a three-year probationary period which involves a restricted leave allocation and was not considered ideal from a well-being standpoint. It was also noted that long probationary contracts may impact promotional prospects because of a lack of formal experience, making competing institutions with smaller probationary periods appear more desirable.

3.5.4 In terms of staff to student ratios (SSRs), the Panel heard that, although for many subjects these are high, in Film and Visual Culture these ratios are low due to the current recruitment freeze and higher SSRs here and in music would improve the ability to deliver bespoke programmes. It is also noted that smaller teaching groups is a big factor for recruitment and retention. Furthermore, the Panel

was advised that the Study Skills Mentor had not been replaced and although use of digital Student Toolkits is encouraged this area was suffering from being understaffed.

- 3.5.5 The Panel was advised that the biggest challenge for the administrative team is that they are lacking the full complement of staff. It was noted that staff felt that this was impacting upon their overall workload. For example, at present, one member of staff is responsible for the co-ordination of monitoring and engagement of all 12 disciplines which can be quite challenging at times. However, in terms of day-to-day student monitoring, they are being supported by a further four members of staff. It was noted that staff would like greater consideration of grade appropriateness with regards to current workload as similar tasks are often done at different grades across other Schools. The Panel heard that the administrative team feels that PGR communication and support could be improved. Although the team feel supported by the wider directorates of Professional Services, the level of communication surrounding Tier 4 VISA requirements in particular could be improved, particularly as many of these students, usually PGT, must attend campus with respect to monitoring and often require additional support. It was noted that PGR students must prove in-person engagement every 10 days. The Panel also heard that each discipline has a slightly different approach to handling requests for extensions and consideration of mitigating circumstances. It is understood that the use of Microsoft Forms has helped to streamline this process, however, the administration team would welcome greater consistency where possible. The Panel learned that whilst there are regular team meetings, administrative staff would welcome greater consultation in School-level decision making processes as they often have insight into the day-to-day functioning of the School Office.

3.6 Theme: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 3.6.1 In terms of a gender balance, it was noted that there is a lack of females currently engaged in the promotion process and, most notably, only five of the nineteen professors within the School are female. The Panel learned that within certain disciplines, however, there is a better gender balance compared to the School at large – recognising that three of the five female professors belong to Modern Languages. The Panel were advised that efforts are underway to ensure that female colleagues feel supported in preparing for promotion, including updating and drafting their CVs.
- 3.6.2 The Panel heard that efforts were being made to ensure that the curriculum is not discouraging students from studying abroad as it is considered highly beneficial in terms of employability and enhancing language skills via cultural immersion. However, it is thought that the overall uptake of study abroad opportunities appears to have declined, and some students commented that they had received less support than they had hoped for from the wider University and GoAbroad Team when preparing to go abroad and on arrival. Additionally, it was noted that some students were given study abroad opportunities within their home country which was not ideal. There were also concerns that various financial and socio-economic inequalities may act as barriers to these types of opportunities. Although it is widely recognised that Brexit and the loss of Erasmus funding has been detrimental to many of these opportunities; it is understood that visa complications, coupled with a lack of funding guarantees, may be discouraging students from going abroad. In particular, the Panel heard that students did not feel equipped to deal with the visa application process as guidance and support on these matters is limited. In light of these concerns, the Panel was informed that efforts are underway to consider appropriate alternatives for students who cannot study abroad due to their mitigating circumstances. Additionally, the Panel learned that the School is taking steps to ensure greater consistency across disciplines in terms of applying for and considering applications to opt-out of compulsory year abroad schemes. The Panel was reassured to note, however, that the Stevenson Exchange Scholarship provides financial aid ranging from £250-£3,000 to allow students the opportunity to undertake a year abroad in either Germany, Spain or France.

- 3.6.3 The Panel noted that Gaelic students felt somewhat sidelined in terms of opportunities for cultural immersion and the GoAbroad context. Therefore, students requested the consideration of exchanges to Gaelic speaking regions, such as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig or Stornoway, in order to provide them with the equivalent experience. The Panel noted that the School is considering ways to delineate degree programmes involving a year abroad. The Race Equality Champion highlighted that the potential reductions in staffing in Modern Languages' is of wider concern, particularly against the backdrop of the commitment to internationalisation and decolonising the curriculum.
- 3.6.4 The Panel learned that the administration team works closely with the Disability Service to ensure each student is adequately supported which can range from the provision of extra time to the use of a scribe. It is understood that there is quite a large proportion of students who have disabilities or long-term mental health concerns. Therefore, it can be challenging for the School to accommodate support requirements during exams as it often requires the use of additional rooms subject to availability and a greater number of invigilators. The Panel heard that undergraduate students are in favour of raising awareness of the various screening tests for students who suspect they might have an undiagnosed learning disability. It is thought that this may help prevent students slipping through the net and allow for the timely application of provisions.

3.7 Pedagogic Partnership Discussion

- 3.7.1 The pedagogic partnership discussion supported many of the points mentioned during the focused meetings. The group highlighted several additional points for consideration, which can be found in Appendix A. The School is invited to consider this appendix to help inform future practice. Please note: the student comments are written on pink post-it notes whereas staff comments are written on yellow. Below is a summary of the main points raised during the session.
- 3.7.2 There was agreement between staff and students on most of the issues discussed. The feedback was generally very positive, particularly in relation to the approachability of staff, the quality of learning resources, and the diversity of course offerings. Students appreciated the use of diverse, innovative methods of assessment and teaching, notably a more positive outcome associated with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, students found the practical assignments for film very engaging and requested more guidance on how to use filming equipment and editing tools; although it is understood that there are limited resources available. Undergraduate music students advised that enjoyed having public recitals and that there was a good variety of ensembles. However, some commented that the essays do not always feel as connected and relevant within this discipline. Staff noted the strength of links with local Schools, particularly in terms of Creative Writing and Scots Language, although they noted the importance of varying these partnerships in order to expand their reach.
- 3.7.3 In relation to communication and feedback, both staff and students agreed that the School is responsive to feedback and that SSLC meetings are working well. However, students commented that they would appreciate greater advance notice of cross-cluster events. Both staff and students felt that, in some instances, there were too many emails relating to societies or disciplines that are not directly relevant – some of which were duplicates. Staff also felt that courses could be more widely promoted to assist with the recruitment and retention of students. It was also noted that timetable clashes between departments can make joint degrees challenging. That being said, students advised that studying a language as part of a joint honours course enhanced their university experience greatly and they appreciated the highly interactive nature of the classes as well as having student teachers from the region and extra resources on blackboard. In the interests of equality, students studying Gaelic requested the opportunity to study for a semester in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig or Stornoway.

- 3.7.4 In terms of enhancement, students requested that reading lists be made available sooner and some students said that they would like better support for their dissertations; staff reminded them that there are dissertation courses/workshops available. In addition, students asked for greater consistency in terms of teaching and learning policies across the disciplines, noting that different departments have different guidelines for submitting assignments. Staff suggested the implementation of School-wide assessment calendar in response to concerns regarding deadline “bottlenecks”. However, it was noted that the School must be mindful of assessing students at the appropriate time. It was noted that it would be easier if lectures for the same subject could be held in the same areas of the building, however, this is understandably influenced by University-wide timetabling constraints.
- 3.7.5 In relation to academic development, academic staff felt that there was a lack of probation and mentoring opportunities for teaching and scholarship staff compared to teaching and research staff, noting sizeable workloads for one-person specialisms. It was suggested that the induction for new staff could be improved upon, including a designated person to guide scholarship staff, and that there may be scope for improving the relationship between Academic Line Managers and their staff. It was noted that whilst staff felt that top-down communications were strong, horizontal cross-cluster channels of communication could be improved; and that there is an overall need to respect the balance between research and teaching commitments.

PART C: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 Continue to enhance the student experience by:
- (i) Standardising and further supporting the study abroad experience for students (including opting out) in conjunction with the GoAbroad Team, where possible, and considering an equivalent for Gaelic. Reviewing opportunities for meaningful alternative international experiences, such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), especially for those who may not be in a position to spend a term or a year abroad;
 - (ii) Exploring the School’s approach to artificial intelligence and clearly communicating the implications of its use in terms of academic integrity;
 - (iii) Continue to strengthen the support for students who have been affected by a lack of in-person examinations.
 - (iv) Further improving student facilities and access to software where possible
- 4.2 Aim to enhance the experience of postgraduate research students by:
- (i) Ensuring the PGR coordinator is known to postgraduate research students;
 - (ii) Providing opportunities for postgraduate research students to foster a sense of community, despite working across different buildings and clusters;
 - (iii) Reviewing the existing workspaces for these students and access to resources to ensure an equitable experience across the School;
 - (iv) Improving transparency, including in teaching opportunities, and awareness of training, professional development and accreditation opportunities such as the AdvanceHE Fellowship, in conjunction with the Centre for Academic Development;
 - (v) Providing greater awareness of the activities of various Research Centres within the School.

- (vi) Considering whether PGR admin would benefit from support by specific staff: consider pastoral support from an academic staff member who is not linked to supervisory team.

4.3 Aim to enhance recruitment, employability and outreach activities by:

- (i) Continuing to enhance and embed employability skills into the curriculum, and providing access to a range of appropriate work-based learning opportunities across all clusters;
- (ii) Consider ways in which the Employability Lead can be further supported within each discipline. For example, consider the use of discipline-specific careers and employability academic liaisons and/or an Employability Committee, as implemented in other Schools.
- (ii) Clarifying the engagement opportunities with the Summer School for students studying Gaelic;
- (iii) Continuing to explore opportunities for outreach activities, particularly in relation to widening access; and, where appropriate, rotating engagement with local Schools;
- (iv) Enhancing the relationship between the School and its various Research Centres (e.g. Elphinstone Institute) to promote engagement and awareness of research activities;
- (v) Ensuring that the range of courses and programmes available within each cluster are well-promoted to students within and out-with the University in order to enhance recruitment, and consider innovative solutions that allow focus on programmes attractive to applicants e.g. linkage to wider Liberal Arts programmes.

4.4 Continue to enhance the staff experience by:

- (i) Ensuring that students are appropriately signposted to the correct services and School administrative team; improving visibility of the School office.
- (ii) Clarifying responsibilities at the varying levels within the administrative team and ensuring that the administrative team are able to contribute more widely to and feed into any decision-making within the School, as appropriate;
- (iii) Standardising the process for the consideration of extension requests and mitigation across all clusters in order to streamline this process and improve overall consistency and student satisfaction;
- (iv) Explore opportunities for more staff to gain knowledge and understanding of School processes and procedures, such as academic disciplinary investigations, to avoid the potential for any single points of failure;
- (v) Consider providing greater probation and mentoring opportunities for teaching and scholarship staff whilst noting the sizeable workloads for one-person specialisms;
- (vi) Consider providing increased opportunity for cross-communication between clusters to avoid siloed communications.
- (vii) Continuing engagement with Athena Swan

