University of Aberdeen Internal Teaching Review (ITR)

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, MUSIC AND VISUAL CULTURE

Panel Visit: Monday 19 and Tuesday 20 March 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Internal Teaching Review (ITR) of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture was undertaken under the University's revised ITR Process and Procedures, being piloted and maintained under review by the University Committee on Teaching and Learning (UCTL). This Process and Procedures is available here https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/internal-teaching-review-6112.php].

1.2 The ITR Panel was comprised of:

Professor Kath Shennan Convener, Dean for Enhancement and Quality

Dr Paul Bishop School of Psychology, Undergraduate Committee

Ms Sandra Paterson School of Education, Postgraduate Taught Committee

Professor Michelle Pinard School of Biological Sciences, Quality Assurance Committee

Mr Liam Fuller Students Association and Student Senator

Professor Nigel Harkness External Subject Specialist, University of Newcastle
Dr Elaine Kelly External Subject Specialist, University of Edinburgh
Professor Jeremy Smith External Subject Specialist, University of St Glasgow

Miss Emma Hay Clerk, Academic Services

Mr Matt Fullerton Observer, Academic Services

1.3 The panel considered the documentation provided by the School of Language Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC), by way of an evidence-based Critical Analysis and Subject Benchmark Statements for each of the School's disciplines. In addition, prior to the visits to the School, the internal members of the Panel had access to an ITR repository containing the School's annual monitoring materials (Annual Course and Annual Programme Reviews (ACR and APR)), Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF), minutes of Staff-Student liaison committee meetings (SSLC), External Examiners reports, as well data on the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), information on interactions between the School and the Careers Service and the minutes from various School Committees. Interrogation of this documentation plus the School's Critical Analysis enabled the Panel to identify key themes for further exploration. The Panel conducted a two-day site visit to the School where they met with a range of staff, academic and administrative, and undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research students. The report is split into two sections; Part A covers the quality assurance aspects arising from scrutiny of the material in the ITR repository and the initial

discussions with the Head of School (HoS) and a number of programme coordinators; Part B covers the outcome of discussions with staff and students, separately or in the Joint Pedagogic Session, focusing on a small number of themes identified during Part A.

PART A: QUALITY ASSURANCE

2.1 Preparatory work:

The aim of the preparatory work of the Panel was to gain assurance that the School's teaching provision met with our, and the Quality Assurance Agency's, requirements and to identify areas of good practice, as well as areas for development, in the School's provision. This process would inform the Panel meetings with the School and allow those meetings to focus more on enhancement. As this is a School with diverse areas of study the School was split into three main areas; modern languages, music, and English, linguistics and film studies. Each internal Panel member took oversight of one specific area of study to make scrutiny of the documentation more efficient. Overall, the panel was content with the quality of provision offered within the School, was assured that the School had robust QA processes in place and that External Examiner reports were positive, indicating that the School was maintaining standards. Specific comments on the areas of study are outlined below.

2.2 Modern Languages:

Areas of good practice: Use of a "kahoot" game for revising grammar which was initially used in one course and through dissemination activities subsequently picked up and used in another course. This example indicates some level of sharing good practice, with an impact on another area of the School. There was a clear sense of a supportive relationship between staff and students

Areas for development: Staffing levels were identified as causing some concern, particularly in relation to the numbers of Honours options available. However, there is also evidence of the School using a variety of means to mitigate this issue, for example co-teaching L3 and L4 students in the same course but with alternative assessments for the two levels.

2.3 Music:

Areas of good practice: The assessments in the Community Music programme (e.g., M3521, MU401C) are appreciated by students for their diversity and relevance to the programme learning outcomes. The development of courses and programmes is informed by student feedback and students are confident that their views are heard. Across the board students are very happy both with the range of options on offer and the quality of teaching.

Areas for development: The structure of the Music BMusEd degree would benefit from a review to evaluate how the changes brought in to align the programme with the School of Education's model for GTCS are working for students. Students raised some concerns about the concentration of content in the fourth year and would like opportunities to gain classroom experience earlier in the programme. The growing number of PGR students is taking a toll on some staff, load being not evenly distributed. It was observed that international students need support with academic writing

2.4 English, linguistics and film:

Areas of good practice: The enthusiasm and responsiveness of staff was commented on in the summaries of student feedback for all the programmes in this group. The sense is of an exciting and effective teaching and learning environment within the programmes. There were also mentions of specific good practice such as Flipped Classrooms, course journals and other creative teaching and learning practices. It was evident that there was a caring and supportive relationship between staff and students. This was currently enabled by an open door and welcoming ethos delivered by staff in these curricular areas and across the School in general. Innovative concepts and ideas being brought forward in film/visual culture were supported by departmental staff and Head of School and were noted by students.

Areas for development: There could be more sharing of good practice; there are elements of this process within disciplines but it could be extended more widely. Communication was seen as effective in some areas but this was not the case across the board and it may be an area that would benefit from some reflection on current practice. In order to make effective use of staffing, there is a need to build additional student-numbers in newly developed PGT courses. This challenge has been recognised and will be dependent on future marketing practices in order to attract new students from International, Home and RUK markets. The development of in-house training for staff on aspects of MyAberdeen and online marking may provide a more consistent approach for students in electronic assessment submission and feedback.

2.5 DISCUSSION POINTS FROM INITIAL QA SESSION WITH HOS AND PROGRAMME LEADS:

- 2.5.1 The review of assessment effort that was recently undertaken has led to a 20% reduction in the amount of assessment being done and a review of the types of assessments being used. There has been no negative impact of these measures on either student satisfaction or on student attainment in course grades.
- 2.5.2 The admin team work effectively to support the teaching staff; their restructuring to bring Music into the School was successful. Like all admin staff they find themselves at the centre of much support for students and they have a rota system for dealing with student issues.
- 2.5.3 Staff are encouraged to undertake pedagogic research and to apply for HEA recognition; this is captured in the annual review process. There is a small research fund that can be applied to, for example to support external training courses, but there is recognition that staff on the Teaching and Scholarship route need additional support, particularly to enable them to share their expertise across the School and the University. The workload model in the School contains 50 h highlighted for continuing professional development. Some informal workshops in specific areas are also carried out within the School.
- 2.5.4 The Language Centre was seen as vital from an Institutional point of view but there was a feeling that it was not properly valued within the School and did not feel part of the School. There was limited integration of the Language Centre with the general teaching in the School and the Language Centre staff felt the School could use their expertise better both within the School and also across the Institution, particularly for in-sessional language support for international students. Music staff indicated that they felt that their International students could benefit from more support for academic writing.
- 2.5.5 The School undertakes a number of activities to help generate a good PGR community in response to negative findings in PRES and to support PGR student development. These include presentations after first year which are done as part of a School-wide conference, availability

of a small budget to support off-site activities and the creation of a "research gym" in collaboration with the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy to cover research skills. The School were also looking at developing a virtual conference for off-campus students and the Panel would recommend they pursue this approach.

2.5.6 *School-wide areas of positive practice*:

- The Panel noted significant progress in harmonising processes and practices in the School and the successful incorporation of Music into the School. This has led, or is leading to, interdisciplinary PhD projects and other cross-disciplinary and cross-institution initiatives (the Music/Psychology course 'Music on the Brain' is an example).
- There were clear signs of a vibrant and innovative learning and teaching culture in the School along with the development of new programmes, particularly at PGT level, with the potential for increased International recruitment.
- Cross School courses were praised by students who felt they gave them a new perspective although staff were critical of these joint courses saying that they gave less discipline-specific information.
- The School's assigning a period of CPD to all staff (T&S, R&T) was seen as good practice but there may be opportunities to support applications for promotion more, perhaps using the annual appraisal process to identify and encourage applications, linked to specific objectives.

2.5.7 *School-wide areas for development:*

- Although there was clear evidence of harmonisation of practice (especially in terms of modern languages) the Panel felt, whilst noting the disparate nature of disciplines, that more work needed to be undertaken within the School to better align the School's disciplines. In particular, further steps need to be taken to make the Language Centre more clearly incorporated into the School. Such integration would allow better sharing of expertise from the Language Centre with the School's other language teaching.
- The School needs to ensure that better mechanisms are in place for the sharing of good practice. There were clear examples of good practice in pockets of the School but rather limited transference to other areas of the School
- Steps need to be taken toward achieving consistency (where appropriate) and transparency across the School (in particular, in relation to assessment (see below)).
- There is a potential to grow language provision and the Panel question whether the Doha campus and the links with Wuhan could offer more opportunities to develop Arabic and Mandarin.
- Whilst there have been improvements in DLHE statistics these vary in different subject areas.
 The development of graduate attributes across all the School's programmes should be made
 more apparent to students. The School should investigate ways to improve their
 employability-related provision (see below).

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

3.1 The themes agreed with the School for focused discussion prior to the visit were feedback and assessment, programme development and review and creating a PGR community. Discussions regarding the PGR community led into more general discussions regarding developing a sense

of community at undergraduate level as well as the effectiveness of communication with students.

3.2 Theme: Assessment and Feedback

- 3.2.1 Panel discussions with staff and students highlighted that there was good practice in some areas of the School in terms of giving students feedback on their work. This included the use of grading rubrics and getting a good balance of criticism of specific issues with formative and constructive commentary. This had been positively reported in External Examiners' reports for some areas of the School. Online marking was described as "mostly" being done and there was a will to experiment with different types of feedback. Inconsistency was apparent, however, with some areas tending to focus on what had been done wrong in the assignment whilst other areas had a better approach of telling the student what else could have been done to make the work better. Workshops on feedback practice, as initiated in some disciplines, were commended as good practice, and could be profitably rolled out across the School. The joint pedagogic session highlighted the need for consistency in marking practice across the School. Students particularly did not like some feedback being on paper and some being online (for the same assignment).
- 3.2.2 Discussions with students showed that less, but more precise, feedback was preferred to large quantities. Whilst staff indicated their frustration that students did not take up the option to discuss feedback directly with the staff member, students explained that the onus on them to initiate 1-to-1 discussions with staff, on an optional basis, was inhibiting (at least early in their programme) even though they appreciated the staff members' 'open door' and 'drop-in' arrangements. Students suggested that sign-up arrangements which were made compulsory, as in some disciplines within the School, were in fact preferred, especially in early years, and could actually be more economical with staff-time.
- 3.2.3 PGT students felt there was a lack of advice on how to structure an essay and felt it would be beneficial to have a short workshop early in the programme on essay writing.
- 3.2.4 Regarding student feedback to staff, it was clear that feedback loops were not being properly closed. Students felt that although the class rep system allowed communication with staff, communication of the outcome of SSLCs, for example, to the whole student body was not as optimal as it could be. Students felt that more could be done by staff to promote the SCEF process. Discussions revolved around use of class time to feedback to the whole class and use of MyAberdeen to post "You said, we did/didn't" notes to show how the University uses the feedback students give.

3.3 Theme: Programme review

- 3.3.1 Discussions with the HoS and programme leads illustrated an active, on-going review of the School's UG and PGT provision. Staffing constraints have been seen as an opportunity to adapt and the School is looking at cross-disciplinary staffing appointments and development of cross-disciplinary programmes, such as Masters in International Business Management with Languages. PGT programmes have been rationalised and the School is planning to develop more practice-led programmes as well as considering online delivery to open up new markets.
- 3.3.2 The School undertakes forward planning for research leave but there are instances where the implications of such plans for delivery of student programmes have not been made as clear as they might be; the perception is that things can at times fall between cracks between teaching and research priorities.

- 3.3.3 Whilst Brexit can be seen as a major threat, this might be the moment to build international links where Aberdeen has distinctive cultural/geographical advantages. Distinctive and focused offerings at PGT (e.g. TESOL, Creative Writing) are promising.
- 3.3.4 Although the School has several discipline-specific teaching committees these all feed into the School T&L committee so there is an opportunity for top down and bottom up approaches and sharing of good practice. Despite this structure, though, the Panel felt there was a need for more opportunities to learn from other disciplines within the School and to increase the level of consistency of practice across the School. Discipline away-days are good but could be used to better effect to share practice across the disciplines.
- 3.3.5 Whilst increased harmonisation in the School is evident, students felt there were still some areas of discrepancy in the amount of work required for assessments of similar "worth" in terms of credits and how prepared students are for Honours years after years one and two.
- 3.3.6 Given the discrepancies across the School in DLHE statistics, the School are encouraged to give employability a higher profile across its programmes. This would be a valuable means of engaging students in enhancing their experience, drawing on several initiatives across the School (year-abroad activities, involvement in staff research projects, placements etc.), as well as linking more traditional activities such as essay-writing to the development of valuable transferable skills. Practice-type activity with potential strong relevance for employability, which is already under way in parts of the School, could be valuably built into more dissertation-courses.
- 3.3.7 There was good feedback on the promotion of activities though the Careers Service (good website, well-promoted internships).
- 3.3.8 Music PGR students specified that although there was a good balance in their programme between the academic and practical they felt they were not well supported for future careers. Similarly, other PGR students commented that they would like sessions on life outside of academia as their current support tended to assume a future career in academia.
- 3.3.9 The Panel felt that closer and more explicit link with the School's many employability strengths at all levels could be built into recruitment packs, especially in driving forward outreach activity in MD40 areas.

3.4 Theme: Communication and building a community

- 3.4.1 The biggest issue identified in discussion with students was a mismatch between staff and student perceptions about the effectiveness of communication mechanisms.
- 3.4.2 Although students appreciated the personal tutor system, it worked better when there was an alignment between the tutor and the student's discipline although it was appreciated that this was not always possible because of staffing constraints. There was a sense that some tutors were not aware of where to go for information, perhaps indicating a need for better training or better communication between senior personal tutors and the other tutors in the School. Staff, on the other hand stated that there was limited use of the personal tutor system by students indicating a disconnect between staff and student views of the value of the personal tutor system.
- 3.4.3 The School's plans for enhanced induction at all levels were praised as a valuable way of building a community and may lead to better communication with students. Ongoing induction, perhaps including cross-School 'enhancing academic skills' sessions (with expectation of attendance), was commended to the School's attention, building on numerous examples of good practice within individual programmes and explicitly addressing the achievement of graduate attributes.

- 3.4.4 Social events for the whole School were also noted as possible ways forward, though the recommendation was that these should be student-led, perhaps seeded by a small sum from the School's discretionary budget. Students felt that making academic events available to UG and PGT/PGR students was a good way to promote the community but staff expressed disappointment that despite their best efforts students often did not attend these events. Discussions with students suggested that perhaps greater general use of announcements in lectures might be better than use of email. Suggestions of using student societies to promote such events was also discussed as a potential option.
- 3.4.5 Peer mentoring by older students of those earlier in earlier years was also suggested as a means of developing a sense of community. Students felt this would also help with a perceived disconnect between years, especially in the move into Honours.

3.5 Overall impressions

- 3.5.1 Students were overwhelmingly positive about the support they received from staff in the School
- 3.5.2 A major challenge identified was in how to effectively communicate with the student body with a disconnect between student and staff opinions. This issue was flagged up in discussions over the lack of community feeling in some areas of the School (not all), with staff appearing confused over a lack of engagement of students with events being put on to try and create that sense of community but with students stating that the communication they received about such events was inadequate. It was clear that staff and students need to work together to understand the blocks in communication.
- 3.5.3 Feedback, what constitutes feedback and how this is delivered, was also identified as a major disconnect between staff and students. This disconnect applied both to staff giving students feedback and students giving staff feedback. Again the joint pedagogic session identified a number of areas where this gap could be bridged.
- 3.5.4 Overall the Panel were impressed by the engagement of both staff and student in the new ITR process. The students seen over the two days are a credit to the School and appeared to appreciate the opportunity to work with the School to enhance what is already a good learning experience. The points raised in the above and which constitute the action plan for the school (Part C) should be viewed as areas where learning and teaching in the School could be further enhanced. Appendix A captures the discussions of the joint pedagogic session and the School is encouraged to share this document widely within the School and consider adopting the many positive ideas that have come out of this session.
- 3.5.6 As a result of this ITR, the panel recommends **unconditional revalidation** of all the School's programmes at UG and PG level.

PART C: SCHOOL ACTION PLAN

- 1. Develop a more long-term induction for students with "just in time" advice throughout the year instead of being front-loaded at the start of term. For example, consider developing essay writing workshops early in programmes for PGT students.
- 2. Improve communication generally with the student body and work with student societies (academic-related societies in particular) to generate a better sense of community within the School.

- 3. Improve feedback to students and ensure consistency of practice across the School; consider feedback templates that outline a) good things about a piece of work, b) things that weren't so good, c) what to focus on next time.
- 4. Consider ways to close the feedback loop for students, engaging with the whole student body not just class reps.
- 5. Incorporate more opportunities to promote employability in the curriculum, for example using the year abroad for credit, developing, or using University-wide, credit-bearing internships or work-related learning opportunities, more consideration of skills for careers outside of academia.
- 6. Set up better fora for sharing good practice across the School.
- 7. Integrate the Language Centre better within the School so there could be better use of its expertise and more cross-fertilisation of ideas between the Language Centre and the rest of the School.
- 8. Support staff on Teaching & Scholarship route, using objectives set at annual appraisal to suggest CPD activities, encourage dissemination of good practice and encourage promotion applications.
- 9. Consider opportunities that may arise from Doha campus and relationship with Wuhan for programme review.

Student sheet

What works well currently

Employability

Good balance between theory and practice;

MSc level is good preparation for employment

Turnitin

Good use of electronic systems for submitting assignments

Celtic studies

Teachers take time to meet with every student to give feedback on essays and answer questions - very helpful, especially in first year

Staff response: Thanks for appreciating us!

Supportive staff

open door policy is a reassurance for students

<u>Music</u>

Approachable staff
Good community within
students as it is a
small group and
constantly working
together in and out of
class

Some society support is great

Music

Communication
between lecturers and
tutors is good as music
is a practical activity
and everyone is
working together and
communicating with
each other

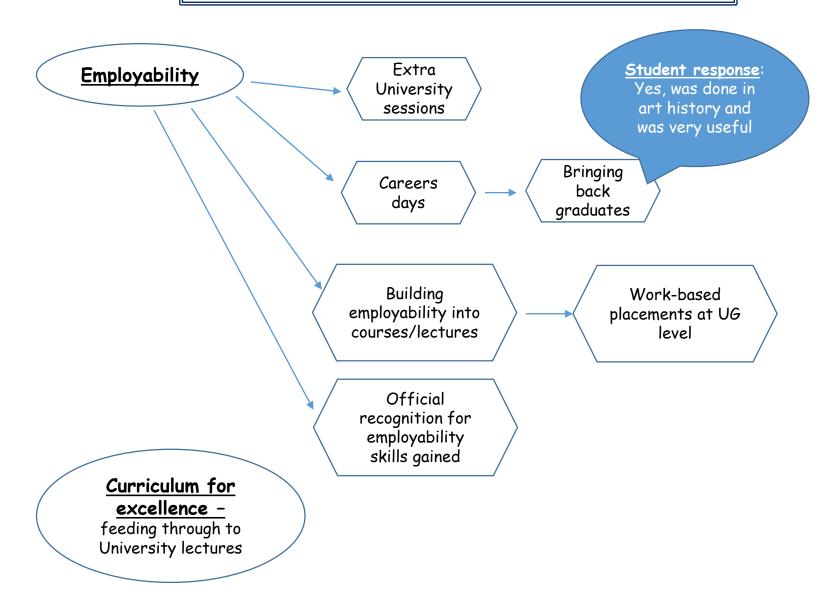
All disciplines

Supportive and approachable staff. There's a good network

Staff response:
Societies should approach Schools for support/event material; we want to support

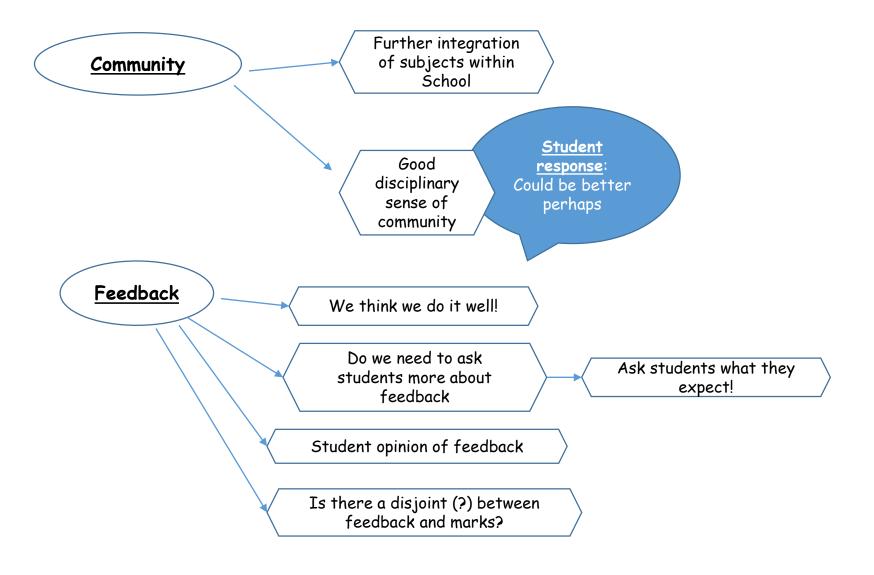
Staff sheet

What works well currently

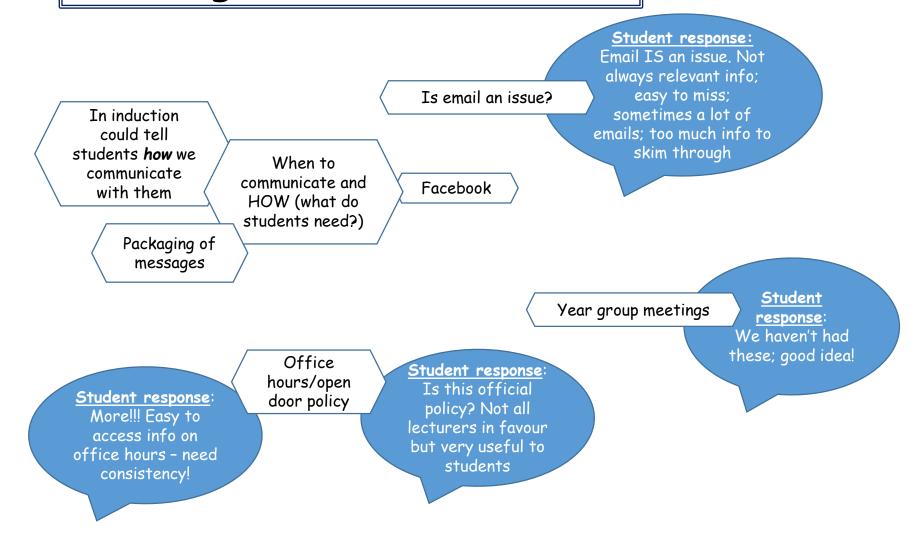


Staff sheet

What works well currently



Challenges - communication



Student sheet

Staff response: Could HoS do this or UGCs?

Challenges - general

Class rep

meeting minutes

aren't sent to

non-class reps

Staff response: Yes, School supports this

too!

Staff response:

We use social media to enhance comms

Staff response:

Showcase on MyAberdeen

Communication

e.g. re strike (university-wide problem)

> Only 1 or 2 class reps per year Not always clear who class rep is meeting minutes aren't sent to non-class reps

Staff response:

Use MyAberdeen App to show reps Simple info being up to date

Staff response: Create UG common

room

No sense of community/lack of student involvement

Staff response:

If you come to our events you will start to feel like part of the community

Would like a community space

Staff response:

Yes, we lament the lack of student involvement too! How can we fix this?

shared by all

Staff response:

would you like to take a linguistics course as elective or us to work with ling. programme?

Staff response:

We don't have linguistics on staff in HS; some theory built into language courses

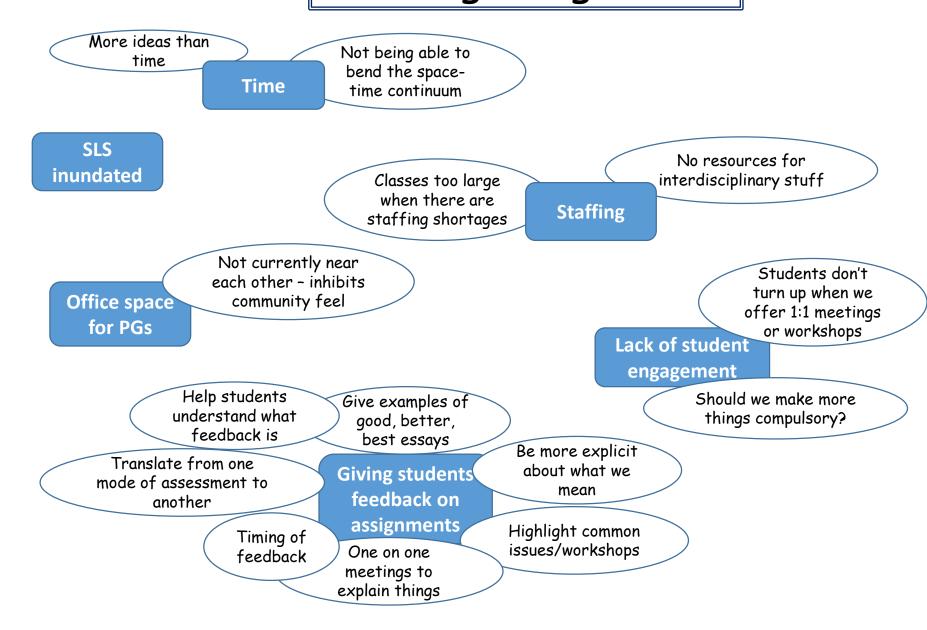
Hispanic Studies: Too few linguistics/theory of language courses

Language courses: Problem with students having different language levels

Need more support between years AND communicate with us!

Challenges - general

Staff sheet



Challenges - student views on giving us feedback

Staff response:

There are posters all over the School and notifications on plasma screens

Staff response:

We use social media to enhance comms

Show us the "you said, we did" (we'll give you more

Be clearer to us what we should be feeding back on via SCEF

Don't use jargon, e.g. SCEF explain it! Feedback not always clearly defined

Staff response:

Could we have a "feedback week (School-wide) to help explain value of student feedback to students?

When evaluating feedback we get, we think only about assessment feedback

Staff response:

Use MyAberdeen App to show reps Simple info being up to date

We want more opportunity to give feedback on courses focus groups or use open sessions to ask questions and give feedback informally?

Staff response:

Open up SSLC to all students if that would help Or use the "open door" to arrange a meeting with us

School of Language, Literature, Music & Visual Culture

ITR Action Plan 2018-19

Action	Intervention	Owner	Completion date	
Develop a more long-term induction for students with "just in time" advice throughout the year instead of being front-loaded at the start of term. For example, consider developing essay writing workshops early in programmes for PGT students.	 Develop January inductions (week one of HS2) to focus on feedback Run Academic Writing diagnostic test for PGT students, with follow-up workshops Include subject-specific induction sessions within first-year core courses, focusing on 	 Head of School/Director of Teaching and Learning Director of Postgraduate Study All Undergraduate Programme Coordinators 	 January 2019 September- October 2018 September- November 2018 	
Improve communication generally with the student body and work with student societies (academic-related societies in particular) to generate a better sense of community within the School.	specific skills Member of administrative staff with responsibility for social media and other communicative strategies Improved coordination with student societies Creation of improved School noticeboards	School Administrative Officer All Undergraduate Programme Coordinators, including presence at inductions Administrative staff, Dr Sharman	 June 2018 September 2018 September 2018 	

Improve feedback to students and ensure consistency of practice across the School; consider feedback templates that outline a) good things about a piece of work, b) things that weren't so good, c) what to focus on next time.	 Continued sharing of best practice, through the School Forum, Teaching and Learning Committee, and other appropriate avenues. Introduction of more consistently structured feedback comments across the School 	Director of Teaching and Learning	 End of AY 2019-20 (and ongoing) End of AY 2018/19
Consider ways to close the feedback loop for students, engaging with the whole student body not just class reps.	 Circulation of SSLC minutes and staff responses on MyAberdeen Discussion with School Convenor/reps about other appropriate avenues for communication 	 UPCs of relevant disciplines Director of Teaching and Learning 	 End of AY 2019-20 (and ongoing) October 2018
Incorporate more opportunities to promote employability in the curriculum, for example using the year abroad for credit, developing, or using University-wide, credit-bearing internships or work-related learning opportunities, more consideration of skills for careers outside of academia.	 Meeting between UPCs and Career Service Regular visits from Career Services and alumni Development of new work- related, credit- bearing course 	 Director of Teaching and Learning, Career Services Career Services, UPCs, Director of Postgraduate Study Prof Welch 	 May 2018 End of AY 2019-20 (and ongoing) End of AY 2020-21

Set up better fora for sharing good practice across the School.	 Pedagogic Partnership Workshops for Modern Languages Annual Teaching Away Days 	 Dr Bokedal Director of Teaching and Learning 	•	May 2018 June 2018
Integrate the Language Centre better within the School so there could be better use of its expertise and more crossfertilisation of ideas between the Language Centre and the rest of the School.	 Inclusion of Language Centre staff on the Teaching and Learning Committee Scoping meeting on better integration with Director of Language Centre 	 Director of Teaching and Learning, HoS DoTL, HoS, Director of the Language Centre 	•	May 2018 September 2018
Support staff on Teaching & Scholarship route, using objectives set at annual appraisal to suggest CPD activities, encourage dissemination of good practice and encourage promotion applications.	Targeted use of Annual Review meetings	Head of School, ALMs	•	End of AY 2019-20 (and ongoing)
Consider opportunities that may arise from Doha campus and relationship with Wuhan for programme review.	Focus on Modern Languages and Language & Linguistics opportunities	Dr Macleod, relevant staff	•	End of AY 2019-20 (and ongoing)