Periodic Review of Programmes in the School of English and American Literature

1. A Periodic Review of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes in the School of English and American Literature (SEAL) was held on Thursday 8 and Friday 9 May 2008.

The members of the Periodic Review Panel were:
   Professor Janette Dillon, University of Nottingham
   Dr William Greenslade, University of the West of England
   Dr Kristyan Spelman Miller, Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning (Chair)
   Dr Anne Mathers-Lawrence, Department of History
   Mr Nigel Trethewy, Sub-Dean (Secretary)

2. The programmes reviewed were as follows:

   Undergraduate
   Single Honours
   BA English (full-time)
   BA English (part-time)
   Joint Honours
   BA Classical Studies and English
   BA English and European Literature & Culture
   BA English and Film & Theatre
   BA English and German
   BA English and History of Art
   BA English and International Relations
   BA English and Italian
   BA English and Politics
   BA English and Sociology (now withdrawn)
   BA French and English
   BA History and English
   BA Philosophy and English
   BA Television and English
BA Typography and English

Major-Minor Combined Honours
Classical Studies with English (now withdrawn)
English with Classical Studies
English with European Literature & Culture
English with French

Postgraduate
MA English Texts in History 1500-1750 (with the Department of History; now redesigned)
MA Children’s Literature
MA The Body and Representation (inter-departmental; now withdrawn)
MA Victorian Literature and Culture: Relocating Modernity (now renamed).

3. The Periodic Review Panel met Dr Geoffrey Harvey, Head of School, Dr Andrew Nash, School Director of Teaching and Learning, and Mrs Phillipa Hardman, former School Director of Teaching and Learning (who coordinated arrangements in the School, and the provision of documentation for the Periodic Review). The Periodic Review also met fourteen members of academic staff, each holding designated roles within the School.

4. The Periodic Review met eighteen current students drawn from single and joint undergraduate programmes and postgraduate taught programmes. The Periodic Review Panel also met four past undergraduate students, one a current postgraduate student and one a current doctoral student.

5. General Observations

(a) The Panel wishes to express its gratitude to all members of the School of English and American Literature, and in particular to Dr Nash and Mrs Hardman, for the substantial and well-presented documentation provided both in advance and on the Review days, for participating so readily in the Review, and for their full response to queries raised by the Panel.

(b) The Panel commends the School for its extensive range of programmes which are well-designed in relation to the benchmarking statements and reflect the strengths and expertise of the School. The Panel noted that undergraduate student recruitment continues to be healthy.

(c) The Panel commends the School for the high quality support to students, the accessibility of staff, the helpful and constructive feedback to students, and the high standard of documentation to support teaching and learning, particularly the School’s Handbooks.

(d) The Panel commends the School for the excellent quality of teaching and learning, for its provision of learning resources and for what is clearly a friendly and supportive environment for its many students.

(e) The Review has been very positive from all points of view. It has been a
constructive process from which the Panel hopes that the School will benefit. The School is clearly at an exciting and challenging stage being due to merge with the School of Arts and Communication Design (SACD) with effect from 1 August 2008 to form a new School of Arts, English and Communication Design. The present School will need to be clear about its identity in the context of the new larger School. The Panel supports the School in its current and ongoing deliberations concerning new collaborations which might benefit the curriculum and determine the direction of developments, whilst maintaining its existing strengths.

6. **Academic Standards**

(a) **Aims and Outcomes**

(i) The Panel was provided with evidence in the form of programme specifications and external examiners’ reports. These, along with discussions with staff and students, reading of students’ work and the Panel’s own deliberations, confirmed that the academic standards of programmes are being met.

(ii) The Panel is confident that the programmes offered are well designed in relation to the benchmarking statements and reflect the strengths of the School. The programmes are appropriately pitched at the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for Higher Education Qualifications levels.

(iii) The aims and objectives appear well focused and there was evidence from students whom the Panel met and from students’ work that they are appropriately fulfilling programme aims in terms of knowledge and transferable skills.

(iv) The Panel commends the range of programmes offered by the School as being varied, well designed and attractive, as was confirmed by student feedback.

(v) The Panel noted and welcomed adjustments being made to MA and MA (Res) provision and a rationalisation of staffing.

(vi) The Panel noted a strong commitment to teaching, particularly in the face of current research pressure, for example through use of formative assessment, for which it commends the School.

(b) **Curricula**

(i) The Panel has confidence in, and commends the School on, the quality and scope of the curricula. They are varied and attractive, offering a wide range of modules based upon the School’s strengths and expertise.

(ii) The Panel commends the School on the successful management of the curricula and the careful progression in the Undergraduate curriculum from Part 1 to Part 3.

(iii) The Panel noted that the 60 compulsory credits at Part 1 provided a sound foundation. It noted that the School is reviewing its Part 1 provision and that this may entail a revision to the breadth of provision. In particular, the Panel supports a broadening of the Part 1
compulsory module ‘Revisioning Shakespeare’ in order to render it more compatible with the other two compulsory Part 1 modules. The Panel recommends that the review of Part 1 should include consideration of types of assessment.

(iv) The Panel noted the good structure for Part 2 and Part 3 provision and, in particular, commends the diversity in Part 3 with the inclusion of innovative modules in Careers, Communications at Work, and Creative Writing.

(v) The Panel noted the good support offered to students in respect of dissertations and, in particular, commends the support for study skills

(vi) The Panel noted the very positive student response to the School’s part-time provision and commends the School on the commitment from a high proportion of staff to evening teaching.

(vii) The Panel expressed some concern at an apparent lack of support from the University for part-time provision and was aware of problems caused, for example, by the late announcement of examination timings. The Panel recommends that the University become sensitive to implications of central administrative processes for part-time students.

(viii) The Panel noted comments from part-time students regarding lack of continuity in tutorial support during their studies. The Panel recommends that the School develop the role of a Senior Tutor for Part-time Students with a view to providing greater consistency in tutorial support for the duration of part-time students’ studies.

(ix) The Panel welcomes the development of the MA portfolio, capitalising on the School’s strengths, and in particular the integration across the suite of programmes of modules delivering research-methods training in an economical and innovative way.

(c) **Assessment**

(i) The Panel commends the School for the rigour of marking and consistency of standards, which have been commented on favourably by External Examiners. The Panel recommends that in its review of Part 1 provision the School considers issues of assessment and, in particular, take on board External Examiners’ comments about developing students’ awareness of context.

(ii) The Panel recommends that the School review the balance between examinations and coursework and suggests that coursework might provide more opportunities to synthesise and to prepare students in Part 2 better for their dissertations.

(iii) The Panel recommends that the School consider diversifying its modes of assessment throughout the programme, and especially at Part 3, through such means as portfolios, group assessments, and oral presentations manipulating a range of media. The Panel commented that it was important to develop the skill of making oral presentations and encouraged the School to include these opportunities.
(iv) In supporting students’ progression to dissertation work, the Panel felt that more opportunities could be taken to set extended writing assessments (over a 2,500 word limit) at Part 2.

(v) The Panel commends the presentation in the Handbook of the feedback proforma but recommends that the School consider developing this template for use across the School, by highlighting criteria of particular relevance for specific assignments.

(vi) The Panel commends the School’s practice with respect to non-assessed work and the time spent on feedback on a one-to-one basis as well as through seminars. The Panel commends the School for the quality of helpful and constructive feedback to students.

7. Quality of Learning Opportunities offered by programmes

(a) Teaching and Learning

(i) The Panel heard very positive remarks regarding the teaching and learning experience from current full-time and part-time students and from past students.

(ii) The Panel commends the School for what is clearly a friendly and supportive environment for students, who spoke warmly about the commitment and enthusiasm shown by academic staff towards their discipline, and their accessibility and willingness to help. External Examiners also commented favourably on the commendable quality of the teaching and learning.

(iii) The Panel commends the School that staff teach across all levels, participating in Part 1 lectures and part-time (evening) programme.

(iv) The Panel noted that whilst students had to analyse short pieces of text they appeared not be developing an awareness of their contexts. The Panel recommends that students’ awareness of context is developed, perhaps by them giving oral presentations on the context of a piece of text.

(v) The Panel noted that the School Student/Staff Committee was not particularly active but that this reflected a general level of student contentment. Nevertheless, the Panel encourages the School to continue attempts to promote the student voice. Freshers’ and ReFreshers’ Weeks offered valuable opportunities for engagement.

(vi) The Panel noted students’ comments that the Personal Tutor System was working very well as an alternative means of support and communication.

(b) Student Admission and Progress

(i) The Panel noted the School’s generally healthy position with respect to undergraduate recruitment, both in terms of quantity and quality of intake.

(ii) The Panel noted an issue concerning numbers of students transferring in after Part 1 from other subjects, notably from Film, Theatre and Television. The Panel recognises the consequent difficulty in planning
for additional Part 2 student numbers and in being able to provide appropriate facilities and resources. The Panel encourages the School to continue to monitor this.

(iii) The Panel noted continued recruitment to the part-time BA English which appears to be healthier this year and commends the School for its continued commitment to the part-time programme.

(c) **Learning Resources**

(i) The Panel commends the School on its highly-motivated, committed and professional staff. The Panel commends the practice that staff teach all levels and the regular one-to-one support for students.

(ii) The Panel commends the School on its Student and Staff Handbooks and for the inclusion of separate Handbooks for Part-time Students and Visiting Students.

(iii) The Panel noted, and was impressed by, positive responses from students to library provision and the availability of learning resources. The Panel commends the School’s excellent communications with the Library School Liaison Officer who carefully monitors the School’s needs. Liaison between the School and Library is clearly working very well.

The Panel noted that the use of Blackboard and availability of modules was patchy across the School, but accepted that changes were anticipated with the development of Blackboard. The Panel **recommends** that the School adopt a consistent approach to Blackboard provision with some baseline presence in respect of module content and information. This might include, for example links to external sites/resources to encourage students to use web resources.

**8. Quality Maintenance and Enhancement**

(a) The Panel is confident that quality assurance procedures are in place and appear to be robust. It is clear that mechanisms are working effectively.

(b) The Panel noted the strong remit and wide-ranging responsibilities of the School’s Teaching Committee and commends the School for the effective performance of the Teaching Committee.

(c) The Panel noted that administrative/clerical staff were organised on a Part level with secretarial support designated to each of Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3. This organisation works well and the support forthcoming from each office with clear responsibilities for each Part is greatly appreciated by students. The Panel commends the School on the organisation of its administrative/clerical staff who provide helpful support, as evidenced by student feedback.

(d) The Panel commends the excellent work being carried out by the School’s staff in major roles and indeed in all designated roles.
9. **Main Characteristics of Programmes covered by the Review**

The Panel considers that the programmes:

(a) are well-designed and offer an extensive range of choice;
(b) offer students a rich and diverse learning experience;
(c) are well-delivered and well-resourced;
(d) draw clearly on the expertise and research strengths of staff;
(e) provide appropriate and good opportunities for students to gain subject knowledge and transferable skills.

10. **Conclusions on Innovations and Good Practice:**

Examples of innovative good practice include the following:

(a) the extensive range of programmes offered to students which reflect the strengths and expertise of staff;
(b) the sound foundation offered to students at Part 1;
(c) the range of modules and solid structure at Part 2 and Part 3 and, in particular, the inclusion in Part 3 of innovative modules in Careers, Communications at Work and Creative writing;
(d) the accessibility of academic staff who also teach at all levels, participating in Part 1 lectures and in part-time (evening) provision;
(e) the development of a MA (Res) portfolio and delivery of research methods training across the suite of programmes in an economical and innovative way;
(f) the significant time spent by staff on feedback to students especially on a one-to-one basis as well as through seminars;
(g) the quality of the Student and Staff Handbooks and the inclusion of separate Handbooks for Part-time Students and Visiting Students;
(h) the wide-ranging remit and effective role carried out by the School’s Teaching Committee;
(i) the organisation of administrative/clerical staff on a Part level with and office designated to each Part of undergraduate programmes, which clearly provided friendly and helpful support to students and staff;
(j) the excellent communications with the Library.

11. **Conclusions on Quality and Standards**

The Panel concludes that the learning outcomes of both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes are clear and appropriate and are being met by students. Appropriate quality and standards are being achieved and the programme specifications are being delivered.

The Panel consider that the School offers a rich academic environment in which there is a successful blending of research, teaching and learning.
12. **Recommendations**

The Periodic Review Panel recommends to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Board for Teaching and Learning that the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a period of a further six years:

- BA English (full-time)
- BA English (part-time)
- MA Children’s Literature
- MA Victorian Literature and Culture: Relocating Modernity (now renamed).

The Periodic Review Panel also recommends that the following programmes be re-approved to run until such time as the next Periodic Review is held of the relevant subject:

- BA Classical Studies and English
- BA English and European Literature & Culture
- BA English and Film & Theatre
- BA English and German
- BA English and History of Art
- BA English and International Relations
- BA English and Italian
- BA English and Politics
- BA French and English
- BA History and English
- BA Philosophy and English
- BA Television and English
- BA Typography and English
- English with Classical Studies
- English with European Literature & Culture
- English with French
- MA English Texts in History 1500-1750 (with the Department of History; now redesigned)

There are no necessary conditions to the re-approval of programmes but the Periodic Review Panel wishes to make the following recommendations (located in the section indicated):

(a) The Panel noted that the School is reviewing the Part 1 provision and that this may entail a revision to the breadth of provision. The Panel recommends that such broadening of Part 1 provision might be well reflected in change to, and different types of, assessment. The Panel also
recommends a broadening of the Part 1 compulsory module ‘Revisioning Shakespeare’ in order to render it more compatible with the other two compulsory modules at Part1. (Section 6 (b)(iii))

(b) The Panel recommends that the University’s central administration be more explicitly aware of the needs of part-time students... (Section 6 (b)(vii))

(c) The Panel recommends that the School develop the role of the Senior Tutor for Part-time Students with a view to providing greater consistency in tutorial support for the duration of part-time students’ studies. (Section 6 (b)(viii))

(d) The Panel recommends that in its review of Part 1 provision, the School review assessment and, in particular, take on board External Examiners’ comments about developing students’ awareness of context. (Section 6 (c)(i))

(e) The Panel recommends that the School review the balance between examinations and coursework and suggests that coursework might provide more opportunities to synthesise and to prepare students in Part 2 better for their dissertations. (Section 6 (c)(ii))

(f) The Panel recommends that the School consider diversifying modes of assessment and introduce more varied assessment especially at Part 3, for example through portfolios, group assessments, and oral presentations manipulating a range of media. (Section 6 (c)(iii))

(g) The Panel considers that the School could set longer essays (with over a 2,500 word limit) at Part 2 in order to prepare students better for dissertations. (Section 6 (c)(iv))

(h) The Panel commends the feedback template as presented in the Handbook coversheet but recommends that it is adapted to identify criteria of particular relevance. (Section 6 (c)(v))

(i) The Panel recommends that students’ awareness of context is developed, perhaps by them giving oral presentations on the context of a piece of text. (Section 7 (a)(iv))

(j) The Panel recommends that the School adopt a consistent approach to Blackboard provision with some baseline presence in respect of module context and information, including links to external sites/resources. (Section 7 (c) (iv))