

## Periodic Review of Classics

### Introduction

- 1 An internal review of programmes in Classics was held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The members of the Panel were: -
  - Professor Matthew Almond, School Director of Teaching and Learning, School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy, University of Reading (*Chair*)
  - Professor Alun Rowlands, School Director of Teaching and Learning, School of Arts and Communication Design, University of Reading
  - Dr Elizabeth McCrum, School Director of Teaching and Learning, Institute of Education, University of Reading
  - Professor Matthew Wright, Associate Professor of Classics and Ancient History, University of Exeter
  - Dr Nick Lowe, Reader in Classics, Royal Holloway, University of London
  - Mr Thomas Hurrell, Student Panellist, HBS
  - Ms Rosie Brown, Faculty Support Officer, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (*Secretary*)
  
- 2 The Panel met the following: -
  - Dr Rebecca Rist (*School Director of Teaching and Learning*)
  - Professor Peter Kruschwitz (*Head of Department*)
  - Dr Matthew Nicholls (*Senior Lecturer in Classics, Part 1 Co-ordinator*)
  - Professor Timothy Duff (*Professor of Greek*)
  - Dr Amy Smith (*Senior Lecturer, Curator of the Ure Museum*)
  - Dr Annalisa Marzano (*Deputy Head of Department*)
  - Dr Katherine Harloe (*Lecturer, Admissions Tutor*)
  - Dr Emma Aston (*Lecturer, Senior Tutor*)
  - Dr Arietta Papaconstantinou (*Reader in Ancient History*)
  - Mrs Sue Melia (*Classics Subject Officer*)
  - Mrs Eve Sweeney (*Classics Subject Officer*)
  
- 3 The Panel met students who represented the following degree programmes:
  - BA Classics
  - BA Classical Studies
  - BA Ancient History
  - BA Classical Studies and English Literature

- BA Ancient History and Archaeology
- MA Classics
- 3 PhD students

## General observations

- 4 The overall impression conveyed was one of enthusiasm, dedication and pride in the Department of Classics – both from staff and students.

The Panel felt that the quality of student experience provided by the Department undoubtedly warrants its highly complementary NSS student satisfaction ratings.

The Department was felt to be an engaging, welcoming and friendly community, firmly underpinned by the extensively used resource room and an efficient and supportive Department administration office.

The Panel found that the sense of belonging afforded to students enables the cultivation of a wide-range of co-curricular subject engagement opportunities, which are detailed later in this report.

The meetings with staff were constructive and open and the Review Panel was impressed with the efficient way in which the Departmental staff assisted with the process.

## Academic Standards of the programmes

### Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes

- 5 The Panel was provided with evidence in the form of programme specifications, module descriptions, student handbooks and external examiners' report. These, along with discussion with staff and students, reviewing students' work and the Panel's own deliberations, confirmed that the academic standards of programmes are being met. The programmes offered are informed by a strong sense of the intellectual coherence and distinctiveness of Classics and its sub-disciplines as an integrated multidisciplinary field.

### Curricula and assessment

- 6 The Department of Classics at Reading offers a collection of Single Hons, Joint Hons and MA programmes which are very well conceived, thoroughly coherent, and well delivered by a group of excellent staff. All the major subject areas within classical studies are represented in the taught curriculum, and the various programmes conform to current Subject Benchmark standards (which emphasize variety and intellectual challenge above all). The content of the individual modules is highly stimulating and research-led, the choice and configuration of modules is judicious (though see the following remarks relating to Part I), the intellectual quality is high, and a good balance is maintained between traditional and innovative approaches and between linguistic and non-linguistic work. The Department manages to maintain a full and ambitious range of Latin and Greek language modules from beginners to advanced level (on a six-point scale), and there is ample evidence that these modules are succeeding in their aims and objectives; furthermore, the fact that students are enabled to learn both Greek and Latin *ab initio* in the course of a BA Classics programme is admirable. It is clear that the taught programmes are appropriate and that they are providing a high-quality education to the students who follow them.

Since the last Review in 2007 the Department has seen extensive staff changes, as well as a contraction of staff numbers involving the loss of two posts (both in Latin literature, which has left the balance of provision under a different kind of pressure which has been elegantly addressed for now by a gentle “Greekwards” shift in the balance of some bicultural modules). This Review coincides with the early stages of the Department's own engagement with the reconfiguration of the existing Part 1 in the light of changes in the range of specialism and expertise, of larger considerations of student progression and development over the course of the degree, and of new opportunities afforded by changes at Faculty level to the credit requirements for Part 1 programmes. Under the existing system it is not possible for Single Honours students in Classical Studies or Ancient History to take more than 60 credits of non-linguistic modules at Part 1, or to take more than 80 credits of modules in their home Department. While the flexibility of the Reading system is a defining and distinctive structural feature, making a large number of extra-Departmental modules mandatory rather than optional not only restricts students' commitment to the field but requires the two compulsory modules to carry a disproportionately heavy load in preparing a very diversely pre-qualified cohort with the intellectual tools and knowledge base needed for the challenges of Parts 2-3, and some expansion of the range of options in first year is already under active consideration, with the existing Athens and Rome modules likely to be rethought or replaced entirely. The Panel welcomed the Department's speedy address to this issue, which is likely also to offer an opportunity to differentiate earlier between the needs of students on Classical Studies and Ancient History pathways (a recommendation of the 2007 Review whose original implementation has been somewhat unwoven or superseded by subsequent staffing changes) [**Desirable recommendations (a) and (b)**].

The Panel is content that the assessment design and process enables students to demonstrate achievements of the learning outcomes. The Department is to be commended upon the wide range of assessment methods that it employs. This is inclusive allowing students of different learning abilities to demonstrate their knowledge and this aspect of the degree programmes is clearly appreciated by the students. External examiner reports are very positive and the Department fully engages in responding fully to these comments. Marking schemes are very clear and are communicated well to the students. However, the Panel would like the Department to consider whether it is using the full range of marks available to full effect [**Advisable recommendation (b)**].

### **Use of student management information**

- 7 Both statistical and qualitative data are effectively captured and closely engaged with at multiple levels. Among numerous displays of good practice, particularly impressive is the gathering of and response to module feedback through module conveners reporting to SSLC meetings.

## Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

### **Teaching and learning**

- 8 The Panel finds that the mechanisms for maintenance and enhancement of Teaching and Learning are exemplary. The use of Peer Review and SDRs is excellent. In particular the

Department is to be commended on the way it has integrated many new staff and has encouraged amongst these staff a clear commitment to Teaching and Learning. What comes across strongly is that this is a collegiate academic community in which the development of their students is seen as a cherished goal. The Department employs a number of sessional lecturers and it does a very good job of integrating these staff into the Departmental framework and making them feel a part of things. The more permanent members of staff are all engaged in research and this is used to inform teaching with modules being developed around the research expertise of individuals. New modules are always under consideration as new research areas are developed within the Department.

One outstanding feature that the Panel noted was the encouragement given to undergraduate students to engage in research. This is reflected in the large number of UROP projects funded within the Department and the fact that students actively engage in the writing of academic papers for publication as both co- and sole-authors. Indeed students are very actively engaged in the curriculum in this Department. The Panel notes as exemplary practice the provision of student-led modules and of peer assisted learning. Particularly noteworthy successful modules in this respect are Alcohol Consumption, Abuse and Addiction in Antiquity (CL2AXX) and Digital Silchester (CL3SIL) [**Good practice (a) and(b)**].

Another point of particular note is the way that the Department disseminates good practice both within the Department and across the university. Within the Department this is done both informally – by conversations between staff – and formally through the Teaching and Learning committee. The Panel commends the committee structure within the Department where SSLC, Teaching and Learning committee and Board of Studies all interact to full advantage, providing a forum for every aspect of curriculum development. Within the university the Department of Classics is seen as a leader in good practice. This is testament to the efforts that staff within the Department make to inform those across the University of good practice through the medium of Teaching and Learning meetings and electronic means e.g. Teaching and Learning blog [**Good practice (c)**].

## **Student admission and progression**

- 9 The Panel commends the Department on the high quality of its student intake. The Department clearly recognises the current challenges with recruitment. Its short and mid-term measures as outlined in the Self Evaluation Document are appropriate and the Panel would encourage further engagement with relevant Schools and outreach activities (Twilight Sessions, student ambassadors) to enhance the number of applications [**Advisable Recommendation (c)**].

The admissions strategy, which includes the proposed revisions to promotional material both in print and online, is proactive. There is good use of social media to convey the liveliness and community within the Department. The Panel support both the Department and School's exploration of including interviews as part of the admissions process. Alongside timely visit days, interviewing prospective candidates could assist with conversion. The Department is keenly engaging and maintaining contact with prospective students and applicants through various mechanisms including good luck with exams letters, newsletters and social media.

Progression throughout the programme, including transitions is appropriate to the stated

aims and consistent with the aims of the programme. The Department's reconsideration of Part 1 will further enhance progression. There are effective arrangements for language support and notably the specific language provision within the Department facilitates vertical year teaching that forges a cohesive learning community. This is enhanced through good practice of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) for language support that is an excellent initiative in supporting study [**Good practice (b)**].

## Learning resources

- 10 The Panel wished to commend the Department on the excellent use of the Department Resource Room which is vital to the learning environment. It is clear both through the Pathfinder report and through staff and student panels that the use of the dedicated resource room is central to the community feel of the Department. As a space for both students to study, with its provision of books for loan and reference, and as a space for group work, discussion and rehearsal of presentations, the resource room contributes to a positive student learning environment. Students make use of the space effectively to work on projects and share informally. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students primarily work across the Department's resource room and the University Library which has an excellent holding of key texts and journals. The URE Museum provides a dedicated resource that is well integrated into undergraduate teaching provision. The museum additionally affords opportunities for students to gain experience working with objects, collections and education outreach. [**Good practice (d), (e) and (f)**].

The availability and openness of staff was commended by students, who cited the large uptake of 'feedback day' sessions [**Good practice (g)**].

The use of Blackboard across the Department appears inconsistent. Students reported a range of uses, from minimal to informative, dependant on module and member of staff. Given the Department's use of learning technology is distinctive in its use of social media and fosters student use of online discussion in support of modules, the Department should seek to ensure a more consistent use of Blackboard. The Department should consider their approach mindful of university policies regarding minimum use of virtual learning environments [**Advisable recommendation (d)**].

The Panel encourages the Department to consider the formative and summative uses of Turnitin for future assessment [**Advisable recommendation (e)**].

## Employer engagement

- 11 The Panel notes that graduate employment figures for the Department are lower than for the University and for Classics Departments in comparable institutions. The Panel recognized that the Department has already begun to address issues with the accuracy of the data collected and noted the recent improvement secured in graduate destinations.

The Panel notes that students are required to undertake either a work placement module (CL2PL- Work placement for Classicists and Ancient History Historians) or a careers module (CL2PR- Prospects for Classicists and Ancient History Historians). Uptake for the former is lower than for the latter. The Prospects module includes input from a Reading Classics Alumnus. The Panel recommends that the Department review the content, uptake and

assessment of these modules and provides further support to students for securing relevant placements. **[Advisable recommendation (a)]**

The Panel also advises that the Department consider building up a database of potential employers and/or providers of placements to help increase employability figures across the Department. **[Advisable recommendation (f)]**

Discussions with Departmental staff revealed involvement of staff and students in a range of external projects including work with schools via the Minimus and Iris schemes; the work of the URE museum with schools; and involvement in Reading Classical Association. Informal links with alumni are in place and used to support students in securing employment opportunities. Teaching and learning and assessment methods with modules work to develop student employability skills.

The Panel identified scope for further involvement of stakeholders in curriculum development/design. The support of employers and/or alumni and current students could be further harnessed through formal forums such as a course advisory or a steering group. **[Desirable recommendation (c)].**

## Enhancement of quality and academic provision

- 12 The Panel notes that staff have begun to engage with the Pathfinder process and have provided written and oral submissions to the review team. An action plan has been drawn up in response to the Pathfinder process.

Throughout the Department staff engage in the sharing of good practice and work together on development opportunities. The Departmental Teaching and Learning Committee is a valuable forum for this and has been commended in this report.

The Department has a strong culture of shared academic engagement, both informally throughout the Department and more formally across the University and beyond. The Panel noted that the strong academic community has been borne out in the high number of UROP placements which the Department has secured in recent year (9 UROP students over 3 years). Of particular note was the extent to which students at UG level are genuinely engaged in the research culture of the Department, including staff-student collaborative research projects and student attendance at research seminars **[Good practice (a)]**.

The Panel notes a high level of student engagement in gathering feedback to enhance the quality of the Department's academic provision. This is achieved through informal channels, such as a strong open-door culture and regular non-teaching contact between staff and students, and through the formal Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC). Notably, the use of co-opted Module Representatives alongside the institution wide Course Representative system significantly increases the volume, breadth and quality of student feedback, and provides many opportunities to close the feedback loop **[Good practice (h) and (i)]**.

## Main characteristics of the programmes under review

- 13 The programmes under review are highly regarded providing students with a stimulating and unique teaching and learning experience. The programmes provide excellent opportunities for varying forms of assessment and for students to become part of the research community. The Department has successfully created a very positive and welcoming community for its staff and past and present students.

## Conclusions on innovation and good practice

- 14 The Panel **commends** the Department on the following examples of good practice:
- a. Students at UG level are genuinely engaged in the research culture of the Department, including staff-student collaborative research projects and student attendance at research seminars
  - b. Use of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and student-led modules, giving clear evidence of student engagement in the curriculum.
  - c. The Department has a strong culture of exploration and innovation in teaching, which is very effectively flagged and disseminated both within the Department (informally through habits of effective collegiality, and formally through such mechanisms as the presence of Innovation in Teaching as a standing item on the T&L Committee) and across the wider University.
  - d. The shared physical academic community; the welcome to Part 1 students and the provision of a continuous sharing of ideas throughout the degree.
  - e. Excellent use of internal learning resources, including the Library and the valuable Resource Room. Use of the Resource Room for group work and informal engagement.
  - f. Excellent use of locally available resources and antiquities (especially the Ure Museum collection, the archaeology of Silchester, etc.), for volunteering and academic opportunities.
  - g. The overall strong community feel across the Department.
  - h. Strong committee structure which is clearly working well. There is a forum for every aspect of the curriculum.
  - i. Exemplary use of the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, in particular the collation and response to module feedback and the use of module representatives.
  - j. The Departmental Office is an invaluable resource and a key place for support for both staff and students.

## Conclusions on quality and standards

- 15 The Panel felt that the intended learning outcomes of the programmes are being obtained by students; that the quality and standards are being achieved to a good standard; and that the programme specifications for the degrees are appropriate.

## Recommendations

- 16 The Panel **recommends** to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning in Arts, Humanities and Social Science that the following degree programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years:

The Panel **recommends** that the following issues should be addressed by the Department:

### **Advisable**

- a. The Panel recommends that the Department review the content, uptake and assessment of the two modules – Prospects for Classicists (CL2PR) and Work Placement for Classicists (CL2PL) – and provides further support to students for securing relevant placements.
- b. The Panel encourages the Department to monitor the use of the whole of the marking range throughout all parts of the programme available.
- c. As part of a long-term plan the Department should consider further engagement with schools in order to explore an avenue to improve recruitment.
- d. Being mindful of University policies, there should be a more consistent approach across the Department to the use of Blackboard.
- e. The Department should look into the formative and summative uses of Turnitin.
- f. The Panel advises that the Department consider building a database of potential employers and/or providers of placements.

### **Desirable**

- a. The Panel encourages an increase to Part 1 optional modules whilst being mindful of the effect on joint honours and Part 2 modules.
- b. The Department should consider separate pathways for Classics and Ancient History earlier on in programmes.
- c. The Panel identified scope for further involvement of stakeholders in curriculum development/design. The support of employers and/or alumni and current students could be more harnessed through formal forums such as a course advisory or a steering group.

## Conclusions on new degree programme proposals [where appropriate]

- 16 The Panel does not have a recommendation to the Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning as to whether any proposal(s) for new degree programmes should be approved as this is not applicable.