The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review of Social Policy 2019/20

10 & 11 February 2020

Final report

Section A- Introduction

1. Scope of the review

Range of provision considered by the review: [listed in Appendix 2]

2. **The Internal Periodic Review of Social Policy consisted of**:

- The University's remit for internal review [listed in Appendix 1]

- The subject specific remit for the review, consisting of the following items:

  ➢ Diversifying the curriculum
  ➢ Cohort community building

  [See appendix 5 for further details]

- The Reflective Report and additional material provided in advance of the review [listed in Appendix 3]

- The visit by the review team including consideration of further material

- The final report produced by the review team

- Action by the Subject Area/School and others to whom recommendations were remitted following the review

3. Membership of review team

Convener	Scott Wortley, Edinburgh Law School
External Member	Professor Mary Daly, University of Oxford
External Member	Professor Nicholas Ellison, University of York
Internal Member	Dr George Kinnear, School of Mathematics
Student Member	Ali Khan, School of Engineering
Review Team Administrator	Gillian Mackintosh, Academic Services

4. Situate Subject Area/School within its College

The School of Social and Political Science is one of the largest schools in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh.

In 2019/20 there are nearly 162 students enrolled on the eight programmes that are 'owned' by the Subject Area. In addition there are students on combined Honours degrees owned by other subjects. There are currently 35 members of staff.

5. Physical location and summary of facilities
The Subject Area is located in the Chrystal Macmillan Building, most Social Policy teaching staff (though not all) are based in offices around George Square.

6. Date of previous review

The previous review took place on 11 and 12 March 2014

<u>Reflective Report</u>:

The report was written between September and December 2019 by:
Professor Alison Koslowski, Academic Lead and Head of Subject Area (Social Policy), Professor of Social Policy and Research Methods

With input and assistance from (but not limited to):
Dr Jan Eichhorn, Director of Undergraduate Teaching in Social Policy & Chair of the Social Policy Education Committee, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy
Dr Elke Heins, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy
Richard Brodie, Teaching and Student Development Fellow & Senior Personal Tutor in Social Policy
Professor Jochen Clasen, Deputy Head of Subject Area, Exams Convenor, Professor of Comparative Social Policy
Dr Alan Marshall, Director of the SPS Research Training Centre, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Methods
Dr Sarah Hill, Programme Director of the BMedSci, Senior Lecturer in Health Policy
Dr Sudeepa Abeysinghe, Senior Lecturer in Global Health Policy
Dr Kaveri Qureshi, Lecturer in Global Health Equity
Dr Markus Ketola, Senior Lecturer in Global and International Social Policy
Dr Ingela Naumann, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy
Francis Emmerson, Web, Systems and Learning Technology Team,
University of Edinburgh Careers Service

Consultation:
Some of the data supporting the report was discussed by the Social Policy Committee, attended by staff and PhD student representatives and by the Social Policy Student-Staff Liaison Committee, convened by Richard Brodie and attended by UG students. Alison Koslowski also had consultation meetings with groups of student representatives.

Dissemination:
A developed draft was circulated to Subject Area colleagues and the Head of School, the Director of Professional Services, the Director of Learning and Teaching, the Director of QAE and Course Delivery, the Head of Teaching and Student Services, and the Director of Student Experience and Engagement.

It was the intention to send a draft of the report to three student representatives to solicit their view on whether the reflective report was a fair reflection of the School and its current context, but recent industrial action meant that most students had already left Edinburgh by the time the draft was ready and so were no longer available. However, the draft was circulated to one representative for comment.

Section B - main report

1   Strategic overview

1.1 The review team were impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm shown by the staff and students they met with during the review. The review team **commends** the work being undertaken by the School to reflect and enhance current working practices such as the review of governance structures and the review of the postgraduate tutor role. In addition, the review team **commends** the Subject Area for the importance given to building community and developing the curriculum and the commitment to enhancing these areas.

1.2 The Subject Area is one of the largest Social Policy departments in the UK and is continuing to grow.

A new teaching leadership structure commenced at the start of academic year 2019/20 with the aim of unifying and streamlining the delivery of student support and teaching delivery within the School.

A number of new members of staff are due to join the department by September 2020, whose remit will be to review and redevelop the methods training linked to the School's new Research Training Centre.

Although staff and student numbers have grown and School teaching and learning structures have undergone significant change, the administrative support and teaching governance structures within the Subject Area have remained the same. A Subject Area governance structure review is taking place during 2020 to address these challenges.

These matters will be explored in further detail in subsequent sections of the report.

2.1 The approach to enhancing Learning and Teaching

2.1 In the past five years the Subject Area has undertaken considerable revision across the undergraduate programmes including the introduction of the new Government, Policy and Society programme. The Subject Area is now undergoing a period of consolidation.

Proposals for new programmes and courses are discussed at the Social Policy Education Committee before being submitted to the School Board of Studies. The committee meets during the semester as needed.

2.1.2 The Social Policy Education Committee feeds into the Social Policy Committee comprising of all Social Policy staff.
Although the committee serves as a place for reflection and discussion of learning and teaching priorities, it is **recommended** that the Subject Area consider approaches to strengthen the effectiveness of the committee such as:

- Meet more frequently during teaching time.
- Full representation across all learning and teaching matters, e.g. strategies around diversity could be considered. This would support the subject specific remit item.
- Introduce a formal weekly lunchtime seminar session similar to the one that exists in Politics and International Relations. These sessions comprise of staff meetings, research presentations and teaching focused discussions. In addition, best practice is shared and discussed. The sessions are also seen as an example of community building amongst staff.
- Postgraduate Tutor representation on the committee.

2.1.3 On the whole, students who met with the review team were positive about the Fundamentals course and recognised its contribution to community building amongst students. In addition, the students spoke very highly of the course organiser and the positive impact the execution of the role has on the student experience.

Among the positive comments made were that the course provided a space to ask questions in an informal setting.

In addition, some of the new Personal Tutors who met with the review team reported that they had attended and taught on the Fundamentals course as a way of getting to know students.

They commented that the course was important in the first semester to support community building and reported that less connected students gradually became more integrated and engaged with their cohort by virtue of participating in the Fundamentals course.

The Personal Tutors suggested given its proximity, more engagement with the Parliament could be included as part of the Fundamentals course and this supports the suggestion of internship opportunities by students later in the report.

The review team **commends** the Fundamentals course in supporting community building.

2.1.4 There were mixed views from students on how lectures and tutorials relate to each other and some students reported that they often found it difficult to make the connections.

2.1.5 The Subject Area noted that programme and course changes can often be very bureaucratic. The review team **suggests** that to continue working within the existing system there may be ways to create some flexibility around these processes. e.g. in the School of Law, a level 10 course was created with generic course objectives and learning outcomes with a course name indicating that contemporary issues would be considered. This gave the area the flexibility to deliver a class responding to staff availability and research interests (and possibly allowing the involvement of visitors to the subject area).

2.1.6 The Subject Area is keen to explore ways in which diversity and inclusion can be embedded in the design and delivery of curricula. In preparation for the internal periodic review, students suggested that the curriculum could be more diverse. In addition, the reflective report notes that the external examiner also encouraged the Subject Area to consider diversifying the curriculum. As a result of these reflections, the Subject Area identified diversifying the curriculum as one of the subject specific remit items.

Some of the students who met with the review team suggested that courses could be more topic based. They suggested focussing on policy areas such as gender, parental leave, LGBT+ and climate change. They also discussed possible opportunities for collaboration with the Sustainable Development Subject Area. A number of the students commented that some of the themes across the current first year courses seem similar and whether there are opportunities to condense these. They also enquired whether current themes could be looked at through a different lens e.g. discussing education issues from the viewpoint of race or gender.

2.1.7 The School received an Athena Swan Bronze Award in 2017. It is noted that the award application process and associated action plan already provide a structure to review diversity however it appears disconnected and not central to any diversity activity in the Subject Area. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the School and Subject Area review the award application details on what has already been agreed and use this as a starting point to further enhance diversity and/or improve community.

2.1.8 In addition, the review team **recommends** that the Subject Area consider using the Education Committee to systematically consider how to use staff research interests to reflect on possible diversity topics, especially for new members of staff who may have relevant research interests.

The review team **suggests** that diversity issues be embedded within the course creation or review system. To that end it would seem sensible to have a requirement in the

creation or updating of new courses that as a matter of course, diversity issues be considered as part of the process. Given the role of the Director of Quality and Enhancement in generally reviewing such proposals regarding courses for quality assurance purposes and the importance the subject area has attributed to improving diversity, the review team **suggests** that this activity could be treated as part of the enhancement aspect of the subject area Director of Quality and Enhancement's remit. This would ensure that there was a member of staff within the Education Committee with responsibility for ensuring that the issue was considered during discussions of the committee. The review team **commends** the Subject Area for its commitment to diversifying the curriculum and **recommends** that it continues with planned changes in this area and consider the topic-based suggestions noted above.

2.1.9 The Subject Area offers a number of joint degrees and is also the second named subject on a wide range of joint degrees with other subjects (see Appendix 2).
This can create a number of issues around communication and community building for students on these programmes. Some of the students who met with the review team reported a lack of a sense of belonging to the Subject Area. In addition, they reported issues with a lack of School and subject specific communications and a lack of clarity on who best to approach for information. Alternatively some students on joint programmes felt that they identified more with the Subject Area than the other part of their programme, even when it was the second-named subject.

The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science and the School are currently undertaking a review of Joint Honours degrees to consider numbers, including the implications for academic and administrative workloads. It is hoped that the comments noted in this review will be helpful to ongoing work in this area.

2.2 Assessment and Feedback

2.2.1 Since the last internal periodic review, the Subject Area has made a deliberate effort to diversify its assessment methods. These now include a range of formats including exams, essays, take home assignments, policy briefs, policy blogging, seminar participation and public policy research briefs.

2.2.2 The School and Subject Area use the ELMA system for marking and moderation. However, challenges were noted with this system around inefficiencies in handling high volumes of submissions and moderation processes for large courses.
It was noted that ELMA is currently under review and changes are currently being implemented that aim to address the issues noted above.

2.2.3 All courses are required to provide an element of formative feedback. Students also receive informal feedback during their studies, e.g. in tutorials, weekly guidance and feedback hours.
The students who met with the review team expressed mixed experiences around feedback.
Some of the students noted a lack of clarity in the feedback that made it difficult to ascertain ways in which to improve. Some students reported that marks were given without any feedback to help them to understand where improvements could be made for the next piece of coursework.
Guidance on what makes a good essay was reported as something students would find useful.
Some of the students also reported uncertainty around who to speak to about feedback on coursework. Some students commented that they felt uncomfortable asking their tutors for more detail on the feedback as they knew that the tutors would not be paid for this extra work.

2.2.4 Students receive both general exam feedback which is provided to the entire course cohort and individual feedback summarising strengths and weaknesses of their answers and how they might improve.

Despite the considerable efforts by staff to provide this feedback, many of the students present expressed dissatisfaction around the length of time taken to receive the feedback given that such feedback was received after marks had been confirmed by the board of examiners a number of weeks after the assessment. Overall students seemed to feel that it was not a very productive or helpful process.

2.2.5 The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area review and reflect on feedback provided to students to ensure it is effective, transparent, useful and timely. The team also **recommends** that the Subject Area consider ways to make exam feedback more useful and meaningful.

2.3 Supporting students in their learning – all aspects of support relevant to students' learning including:

2.3.1 The Personal Tutor and Student Support system is currently being reviewed through a University-wide consultation and it is expected that there will be significant changes to the current system, likely to take effect from Academic Year 2021/22. Comments noted in the internal periodic review will be reported to the working group for consideration. The Subject Area and School welcome the review.

The Subject Area operates within the framework of the Personal Tutoring statement. Support for students is reinforced through the inclusion of pastoral care as part of the Cohort Community Building subject specific remit item. The Subject Area is **commended** for its commitment to student support at all stages of the student journey.

2.3.2 Pastoral and academic support is primarily provided via Personal Tutors (PT) and a Student Support Officer (SSO).

Subject level teaching and administrative support is provided by the Subject Area Support Officer (SASO). The role also provides support to the Head of Subject Area.

The SASO role is part of the School level team and is assigned to a Subject Area. The Undergraduate Teaching Office have introduced new structures to better support Subject Areas. Standard processes and procedures have been developed to build resilience and to enable work to be 'pooled' across the team. In addition, new weekly 'stand up' meetings have been introduced for the SASO team to flag workload pinch points and review capacity. The Social Policy SASO is currently a 0.6 FTE.

The Subject Area is supported by one SSO who has shared responsibility for both Social Policy and Politics students.

The Student Support Officer role is very highly thought of by the Personal Tutors and students and the review team **commends** the role and the way it is currently executed within the Subject Area.

2.3.3 The Student Support Officer is situated in a shared open-plan office on the ground floor of the Chrystal Macmillan Building.

It was noted that the shared office approach has enabled the Student Support Officers opportunities to share practice and support one another.

There are a number of private spaces and mechanisms in place to enable students to contact SSOs and arrange meetings discreetly and confidentially. However, despite the efforts to make the SSO office more visible and easier to find, these changes have received mixed feedback from students. Views were expressed that the location of the office did not create a sense of privacy. In addition, some students were not aware of the

different mechanisms in place to allow meetings to be arranged discreetly and many were unaware of the location of the SSO office. The SSOs also recognised that some students have concerns around the location and noted that it would be helpful to have additional private consultation rooms.

Furthermore, there continues to be a lack of understanding and clarity for students around who to go to for support, the purpose and differences of the PT and the SSO roles, and how these roles relate to other support services such as the Advice Place.

Despite the increase in the number of students and staff in the Subject Area, the administrative and student support resources have remained much the same.
The review team **recommends** that the School considers upgrading administrative support structures to 1 FTE to reflect the increase in staffing in the Subject Area.
In addition, the review team **recommends** that the School and Subject Area review communications to ensure that all students are aware of the location of the SSO office and the mechanisms to book appointments and rooms confidentially.

2.3.4 The group of Personal Tutors that met with the review team were committed to supporting the student body both academically and/or pastorally.
The visibility of the Senior Personal Tutor role encourages students across the year groups to feel a connection to the Subject Area. In addition, the Senior PT liaises with the Student Support Officer on a regular basis. The review team recognises the importance of the Senior PT role and **commends** the commitment with which it is carried out.
Some of the Personal Tutors new to the role raised concerns around the lack of training in areas such as mental health and gender-based violence.

The newer PTs reported finding the role challenging in the early stages especially around offering advice on course choices and familiarising themselves with Subject Area and School policy and practice. Some of the PTs noted that they tend to refer students to the SSO for course information.

The Senior PT offers advice and guidance and mentors the newer PTs. It was noted that paired meetings used to happen when PTs were first in role however staff were unsure if this is still in place.
The majority of PTs are in shared offices which is a challenge as staff are unable to have an open door approach and often have to find an alternative space to meet with students in private.

2.3.5 It was noted that Engagement and Attendance monitoring has improved over this semester. The SSO contacts students who fall below the engagement threshold as a supportive mechanism to check whether students require further support or a follow up appointment with the SSO.
The Senior PT is made aware of students who are flagged as causing concern. However there appears to be a disconnect with communicating the purpose and timing of the engagement emails as some of the Personal Tutors were unaware of these emails and felt unable to offer appropriate help or advice to their tutees.

To further support students and enable good working practices, the Teaching Office are keen to introduce monthly meetings with Personal Tutors to flag students that may be causing concern and the review team **commends** this approach.

2.3.6 Social Policy students are also supported by peer support schemes including PPALS (Policy Peer assisted Learning Scheme) which was launched in 2017.
There is also a student led Social Policy Student Society, supported by Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA).

The PPALS sessions are aimed at first and second year students. The scheme is run by honours students and training for the leader role is provided by the Students' Association.

The sessions focus on study skills, exam preparations and essay writing taken from their own perspectives as students.

The PPALS leader role is voluntary and it was reported that in some Schools these are paid positions funded by the School.

2.3.7 The Social Policy Student Society is a non-academic society running various social events. It reported some challenges around promoting events and low attendance. Some leaders noted that students tend to more receptive to attending events when they are promoted by a member of staff they are familiar with.

The society reported that it had tried to run some sessions incorporating a social activity however attendance was poor and the leaders wondered if students were confused of its purpose and perhaps viewed it more like an academic exercise.

2.3.8 The review team **commends** the PPALS scheme, the commitment of the leaders and the contribution to community building. To further strengthen the scheme, the review team **recommends** that the School consider ways in which additional financial assistance could be provided.

The review team **commends** the leaders of the Social Policy Student Society and its commitment to fostering a social policy community. It is **recommended** that the School consider ways in which additional financial assistance could be provided to support student-led events and activities.

2.3.9 Students can participate in a year abroad exchange agreement monitored by Edinburgh Global or through a Social Policy specific agreement, monitored by the Junior Year Abroad Coordinator.

Some students noted that the course content focussed mainly on Politics rather than Social Policy and this may be due to a misperception of the social policy subject outside of the UK.

It is **recommended** that the Subject Area review course content with partner institutions.

2.4. Listening to and responding to the Student Voice

2.4.1 The Subject Area is committed to enhancing the student voice and this is reinforced through the inclusion of Community as one of the subject specific remit items.

The students who met with the review team conveyed a clear sense of identity as Social Policy students.

There also appears to be a good level of informal engagement between staff and students which is largely due to the size of the cohort and the efforts made by staff. This environment enables informal discussions and opportunities to gather feedback from students.

2.4.2 In addition, the Education Committee provides a formal mechanism to consider the student voice e.g. feedback received on a 3rd year compulsory course indicated that students felt there were too many lectures and would prefer more tutorials resulting in a change.

Staff and students highlighted a number of examples which contributed to community building and these are **commended** by the review team:

- One day dissertation writing retreat

- Fundamentals course

- Community outreach working with local schools via the Festival of Social Science events which has led to the setting up of the Q-Step Academy to work with a range of local schools and their Modern Studies teacher.

Furthermore a number of students suggested several ideas to improve community building and enhance communications. The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area and School consider approaches such as the following suggestions:

- Communication mechanisms:
  The review team notes that the School is in the process of reviewing communication mechanisms and is considering a student led project on how students communicate and the need to engage with the media students prefer such as YouTube and Instagram.

  A number of students noted that the Law School has a community tab on Learn for the undergraduate community which is used to post events, announcements and opportunities. Some of the students on joint degrees with Law have found this helpful.

  The School may also wish to consider using Piazza which is an online platform. An example was given as to how this has been used in the School of Mathematics to build community e.g. students are able to post questions anonymously and discuss amongst themselves, the academic member of staff can contribute if necessary to clarify any issues. Students appear to feel comfortable posting questions knowing that it is anonymous.

- Community building

  Consider extending the Dissertation writing retreat beyond one day. The Politics and International Relations retreat takes place over three days.

  Consider introducing a dissertation poster event and invite 2nd year students so as to build community amongst the cohorts.

  The Social Policy Society could be invited to do a joint event with staff incorporating a seminar session with a social event afterwards hosted in a space out with the School with catering provided.
  The Subject Area could consider inviting an external speaker to present at the seminar session and students could be invited to meet with the speaker and write a blog piece on the session.

- Consider an induction/welcome event for all 1st year Social Policy students at the start of semester that could include staff, again hosted in a space out with the School with catering.

- Consider events to engage Social Policy students from other universities

- Consider collaboration with the other PPALS schemes in the School, and with the Edinburgh Political Union (EPU)

- In regard to community outreach developments continue the work with local schools. The Subject Area could consider voluntary opportunities or involvement in social enterprise initiatives where students are using their learning to give back to the community. The Subject Area may wish to consider a session on community skills as part of the Fundamentals course.

During discussions, staff highlighted various mechanisms for students to provide feedback. Students confirmed awareness of these systems, including Guidance and Feedback hours, Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs), mid-course feedback, course evaluation questionnaires, and the Student Representative system.

<u>2.5 Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation</u>

2.5.1 Social Policy programmes comply with university policy on mainstreaming adjustments.

The Subject Area do not record lectures as normal practice. However students are allowed to record lectures themselves or have lectures recorded for them for their personal use. The review team noted that the Subject Area had a pedagogical rationale for this approach.

2.5.2 The Subject Area has engaged in a number of initiatives around Equality and Diversity such as involvement with the School level People+ committee which focuses on challenges and solutions to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion; well-being and work life balance across the School.

The issues of diversifying and decolonising the curriculum have been raised through various feedback mechanisms and are not unique to the Subject Area. The School are working on these issues through various ways, such as a School hosted presentation from the student-led LiberatED campaign seeking to decolonize the curriculum, and the UncoverED exhibition which tells the stories of alumni of colour.

The Subject Area is also involved in wider initiatives to embed equality and diversity across all of its work such as the University-wide initiative genderED, an interdisciplinary hub promoting gender and sexuality teaching, research and impact across the University. A similar initiative called RaceED is due to be launched from 2020/21 led by the School.

2.5.3 The School and Subject Area are aware of the challenges around retaining Widening Participation (WP) students. The School is keen to set up a working group on 'Support to Succeed' focussing on WP students.

<u>2.6 Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes</u>

2.6.1 Some of the students who met with the review team expressed interest in possible opportunities for internship/placement opportunities for example, within the Scottish Parliament. It is **suggested** that the School/Subject Area explore internship/placement opportunities with the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

Some students noted that they were not clear on appropriate destinations in relation to their degree.

Comments were noted around the University Careers Fair as it was felt that there was a gap in voluntary and public sector opportunities.
It was noted that some Subject Areas such as Economics have their own Careers Fair and that this may useful for Social Policy as some students felt that there was a general lack of understanding of the subject and appropriate destinations.

2.6.2 The Student Development Office (SDO) offers skills and employability training through a range of interactive workshops, work shadowing opportunities, Professional Development Awards and placement-based dissertations. Throughout the academic year, the SDO offers a wide range of academic and professional development workshops. These interactive sessions, led by experienced tutors and guest speakers, are tailored for different levels of study, allowing students to select the level of expertise most appropriate to their interests and needs.

Workshops are open to all SPS staff and students, with the suggested level of study noted beside each workshop.

Mixed views were noted about the SDO in that some students were not aware of the office, and for those who were, they were not clear of its purpose and felt that some of the workshop topics were too general.

The review team **suggests** that the School and Subject Area better publicise the SDO, perhaps through PPALS or the Fundamentals course.

2.7 Supporting and developing staff

2.7.1 On the whole, Social Policy is seen as a positive place to work. It is felt that the Subject Area has a strong impact and influence on citizenship in the School.
Staff community building exists through a number of examples that were introduced since the last review including, staff lunches and weekly staff coffee sessions. However, the Subject Area recognise that there is more work to be done in this area.

2.7.2 It was noted that the Head of Subject Area will be leaving during this semester and at present there is no successor in place. The review team noted the Subject Area's reliance on a small number of key individuals and **recommends** that the School and Subject Area consider succession planning and are mindful of the reliance on a small number of people during the interim period.

2.7.3 The review team were impressed with the structures and systems to support and develop staff.
Academic and professional development is supported by the annual review process and through the assignment of a mentor for all staff.
The high numbers of reviews to be carried out does create an intense workload for the senior members of staff despite this being a shared task.
There is a clear development focus to the annual reviews and they are viewed positively by staff.

2.7.4 The Subject Area employ a large number of tutors to teach and mark on their undergraduate courses, especially the large pre-honours courses. The tutors play a vital role in supporting teaching and marking in the Subject Area, and this contribution is recognised by the School and Subject Area staff and students.

Nevertheless the School are aware that more could be done to support and develop tutors and as a result, is undertaking a full review of tutoring during 2020. The following areas will be included; training, recruitment, employment conditions, line management, quality monitoring and costs. UCU (University and College Union) will be involved in the review. The review team **recommends** that tutors are involved in the review process if this has not already been agreed.

2.7.5 A number of staff who support the tutor role met with the review team and were extremely positive about the tutors and the teaching they provide.
It was noted that one of the teaching staff holds a group marking exercise to work through examples with the tutors. Towards the end of the course, the staff member reviews tutorial engagement and carries out a tutorial observation. The outcome of the observation and tutorial engagement is discussed with the tutor. **This is commended as an example of good practice**.
It was noted that some of the teaching staff provide feedback to the tutor after moderation.

2.7.6 Teaching staff are keen that tutors understand and acknowledge how the tutoring role contributes to their own development. They commented that some of the tutors may not recognise that marking exercises are part of the training process. At the same time,

staff recognised that aspects of the training programme could be improved to support the tutors in their role.

A small number of tutors met with the review team and commented that they appreciated the opportunity to teach, to make tutorials more useful and meaningful and to enhance the overall student experience. However, concerns were noted about workload and support for their development, for instance the lack of pay to reflect the extra work involved in the moderation process.

2.7.7 The reflective report details the annual induction and training session which takes place at the start of semester to cover topics such as leading tutorials, marking assessment and feedback, and payment and contract information.

Nevertheless, comments were noted that the training outlined in the reflective report did not accurately reflect experience. Although the training sessions were welcomed, it was felt they were not adequate in terms of content and the number of sessions to prepare for the role. In addition, inconsistencies were noted around support and policy expectations.

2.7.8 Staff and tutors both commented that although the University's agreement with the UCU to further enhance the employment conditions of teaching and research staff employed on Guaranteed Minimum Hours and Fixed-Term contracts was good in principle, it was noted that it has had an impact on building community between the course organisers and tutors in that the arrangement can often feel contractual rather than collegiate.

There is also an impact on the workload and conditions of work; tutors are not paid for 'guidance and feedback' hours and there is a need to ensure balance between contracted hours for leading the tutorial and providing feedback to students during the allocated time. Time pressures mean that students are often unable to receive feedback from tutors and consequently have to follow up with the course organiser, which results in an increased workload for the latter that is not adequately reflected in the workload model.

Challenges were noted around capped hours for tutoring especially when there is a need for more tutors in the School.

There appears to be an imbalance around the amount of time allocated for preparation and marking compared to the actual time required. This is particularly evident where tutors are asked to adjust marks and feedback after moderation has taken place, and the administrative tasks that are involved to complete this process are not taken into consideration.

2.7.9 There were some issues noted around perceptions of the tutor role; whether tutors should be viewed as permanent members of staff or as students. In addition, conditions do not correlate in terms of line management arrangements, and in a lack of a systematic approach to HR matters. It was also noted that tutors do not have access to office space. The review team **recommends** that a dedicated space is considered to enable tutors to do marking, to meet with students and to meet as a group to facilitate opportunities to share practice.

2.7.10 The reflective report notes the tutor teaching observations take place once during the academic year; the course organiser attends one tutorial group per tutor and gives feedback through a standardised form, which is shared and discussed with the tutor. However variable experiences were noted, with some observations not taking place, and yet some tutors found the process helpful when it did take place.

2.7.11 It was felt there were no formal structures in place to report issues, grievance, concerns or suggestions. A workshop on facilitating tutorials and sharing good practice

was organised by one of the tutors, and it was suggested to the School that similar sessions could be organised again however this was not taken forward.

2.7.12 The School /Subject Area promotes participation in the Edinburgh Teaching Award (EdTA) however it was felt by some that there is little or no incentive to do the course as its voluntary and there is no increase to the rate of pay once the award is received. In addition, it was felt that more could be done to publicise and promote the course.

2.7.13 The review team **recommends** that the Schools' review includes the following, in line with the [policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators](#):

- A more robust training programme which includes topics such as facilitating tutorials, a formal mechanism to allow tutors to feedback on courses to enhance course content, enhanced marking guidance.
- A Tutor Convenor role at School level to act as the key contact for the tutors with responsibility for academic development as well as a point of contact for HR and Administrative matters.
- Formal 'Guidance and Feedback' hours for tutors to include payment to enable tutors and students to discuss questions after tutorials. The review team recognise there are implications around ensuring feedback hours are used for that purpose rather than as a pastoral support for students, which tutors are not trained to provide. In addition, recognition of the challenges around allocation of office space to carry out these feedback hours.
- A review of contracts to ensure they adequately reflect appropriate time for marking and to consider any additional remuneration
- The conclusions from the internal periodic review feed into the School review.

2.8 Learning environment (physical and virtual)

2.8.1 The School and Subject Area are committed to enhancing the student experience and this is reinforced through the inclusion of cohort community building and the physical learning environment as one of the subject specific remit items.

The issues around the School estate have now reached a critical stage, in that there is no more space for the coming five years, a growing number of students and staff, resulting in pressures on space. In order to address this, the School is currently reviewing and discussing a number of space allocation options with staff and the College.

There have been some been some recent developments in the learning environment that have had an impact on building community. A café space has been made available on the ground floor of the main school building which students welcomed as a blended social/academic space, although it can be very busy at certain times during the day e.g. lunchtime.

Nevertheless, a number of students reported that a general lack of study and group project work space as well as social space meant they felt little sense of belonging to the School and noted the impact this has on community building.

2.8.2 In addition, students and staff regularly have to travel between different parts of the campus for teaching, often with a short transition time between classes. This has an impact on student–staff interaction as well as accessibility and health and dignity implications.

2.8.3 Some of the students commented on the quality of the teaching space. For example, it was felt that the study room in the basement was not fit for purpose, mentioning poor lighting, lack of daylight and unattractive surroundings. As the space is now used by both

undergraduate and postgraduate students, it has resulted in an increased number of students trying to access the space. Furthermore, some students were not aware of the study room or who was permitted to use the space.

A number of the quantitative methods courses require specific software and lab space. Some students noted issues around limited availability with software only available on one set of computers and lack of clarity on how to book the lab space.
Some of the teaching rooms were highlighted as poor quality, e.g. too small for the size of classes, windowless, airless and uncomfortable seating.

A number of students highlighted confusion around building access hours for undergraduate students, with some noting they had understood the building was no longer accessible after 6pm or at the weekend.
The review team **suggests** that the Subject Area confirm building access arrangements with the students.

2.8.4 The review team **commends** the School for their approach in recognising the need to review growth and space options. However, in the meantime, it **recommends** that the School consider ways in which current study and teaching spaces can be improved to enhance the student experience and consider where any unused spaces could be used as social spaces for students to come together. The Student User group should be involved in these discussions if not already invited to do so.

Furthermore, the review team **recommends** that the Timetabling Unit consider the allocation of teaching rooms across campus to reduce transition time between classes. This could have a positive impact on community building between students and staff by enabling and encouraging after class conversations.

With these points in mind, the review team also **recommends** that the University Estates' Space Management Group are mindful of the factors noted above and the impact that the pressures on the School estate is having on the student and staff experience

3. **Assurance and Enhancement of provision**

3.1 <u>Setting and maintaining academic standards</u>

The Subject Area operates within the University's Quality Framework and the review team is confident that academic standards are high. Courses and programmes map onto the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level descriptors and to the relevant Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement.

The reflective report notes that external examiners are often impressed by the high quality of the work they review.

Section C – Review conclusions

<u>Confidence statement</u>

The review team found that Social Policy has effective management of the quality of the student learning experience, academic standards, and enhancement and good practice

Key Strengths and Areas of Positive Practice for sharing more widely across the institution

No	Commendation	Section in report
1	The review team **commends** the work being undertaken by the School to reflect and enhance current working practices such as the review of governance structures and the review of the postgraduate tutor role. In addition, the review team **commends** the Subject Area for the importance given to building community and developing the curriculum and the commitment to enhancing these areas.	1.1
2	The review team **commends** the Subject Area for its commitment to diversifying the curriculum	2.1.8
3	The review team recognises the importance of the Senior PT role and **commends** the commitment with which it is carried out.	2.3.4
4	The Student Support Officer role is very highly thought of by the Personal Tutors and students and the review team **commends** the role and the way it is currently executed within the Subject Area.	2.3.2
5	Staff and students highlighted a number of examples which contributed to community building and these **are commended** by the review team	2.4.2
6	The review team **commends** the Fundamentals course in supporting community building.	2.1.3
7	It was noted that one of the teaching staff holds a group marking exercise to work through examples with the tutors. Towards the end of the course, the staff member reviews tutorial engagement and carries out a tutorial observation. The outcome of the observation and tutorial engagement is discussed with the PG tutor. **This is commended as an example of good practice**.	2.7.5
8	The review team **commends** the PPALS scheme, the commitment of the leaders and the contribution to community building.	2.3.8
9	The review team **commends** the leaders of the Social Policy Student Society and its commitment to fostering a social policy community	2.3.8
10	The review team **commends** the School for their approach in recognising the need to review growth and space options	2.8.4
11	To further support students and enable good working practices, the Teaching Office are keen to introduce monthly meetings with Personal Tutors to flag students that may be causing concern and the review team **commends** this approach.	2.3.5

| 12 | The Subject Area operates within the framework of the Personal Tutoring statement. It is conscious of the need to support students at all stages of the student journey and is **commended** for its commitment to student support. | 2.3.1 |

Recommendations for enhancement/ Areas for further development

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility of
1	The review team **recommends** that the Schools' review of Tutors and Demonstrators is in line with the University	2.7.13	Head of School
	The review team **recommends** that tutors are involved in the review process if this has not already been agreed.	2.7.4	
	The review team **recommends** that a dedicated space is considered to enable tutors to do marking, to meet with students and to meet as a group to facilitate opportunities to share practice.	2.7.9	
2	The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area review and reflect on feedback provided to students to ensure it is effective, transparent, useful and timely.	2.2.5	Head of Subject Area
	The team also **recommends** that the Subject Area consider ways to make exam feedback more useful and meaningful.		
3	The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area and School consider approaches to improve community building and enhance communications	2.4.2	Head of School and Head of Subject Area
4	It is **recommended** that the Subject Area consider approaches to strengthen the effectiveness of the Education Committee	2.1.2	Head of Subject Area
	In addition, the review team **recommends** that the Subject Area consider using the Education Committee to systematically consider how to use staff research interests to reflect on possible diversity topics, especially for new members of staff who may have relevant research interests.	2.1.8	
	The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area continues with planned changes and consider the topic-based suggestions	2.1.8	
5	Therefore the review team **recommends** that the School and Subject Area review the award application details on what has already been agreed and use this as a starting point to further enhance diversity and/or improve community.	2.1.7	School and Subject Area
6	The review team **recommends** that the School considers upgrading administrative support structures	2.3.3	Head of School & Director of

	to 1 FTE to reflect the increase in staffing in the Subject Area.		Professional Services
7	In addition, the review team **recommends** that the School and Subject Area review communications to ensure that all students are aware of the location of the SSO office and the mechanisms to book appointments and rooms confidentially	2.3.3	School and Subject Area
8	The review team **recommends** that the School consider ways in which current study and teaching spaces can be improved to enhance the student experience and consider where any unused spaces could be used as social spaces for students to come together. The Student User group should be involved in these discussions if not already invited to do so.	2.8.4	Head of School
9	The review team **recommends** that the Timetabling Unit consider the allocation of teaching rooms across campus to reduce transition time between classes. The review team also **recommends** that the University Estates' Space Management Group are mindful of the factors noted above and the impact that the pressures on the School estate is having on the student and staff experience	2.8.4 2.8.4	Timetabling Unit University Estates' Space Management Group
10	The review team **recommends** that the School and Subject Area consider succession planning and are mindful of the reliance on a small number of people during the interim period.	2.7.2	School and Subject Area
11	The review team **recommends** that the School consider ways in which additional financial assistance could be provided for the PPALS scheme. It is **recommended** that the School consider ways in which additional financial assistance could be provided to the Social Policy Student Society support events and activities	2.3.8	Head of School
12	It is **recommended** that the Subject Area review course content with partner institutions.	2.3.9	Head of Subject Area

Suggestions for noting

If an issue is minor but the review team nevertheless wants to flag it as a potentially useful action, it will be couched as a suggestion rather than a formal recommendation. Suggestions are not tracked in onward reporting.

No	Suggestion	Section in report
1	The review team **suggests** that to continue working within the existing system there may be ways to create some flexibility around programme and course change processes	2.1.5

2	The review team **suggests** that diversity issues be embedded within the course creation or review system	2.1.8
3	The review team **suggests** that this activity could be treated as part of the enhancement aspect of the subject area Director of Quality and Enhancement's remit.	2.1.8
4	It is **suggested** that the School/Subject Area explore internship/placement opportunities with the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.	2.6.1
5	The review team **suggests** that the School and Subject Area better publicise the SDO, perhaps through PPALS or the Fundamentals course.	2.6.2
6	The review team **suggests** that the Subject Area confirm building access arrangements with the students.	2.8.3

Appendices

The University remit provides consistent coverage of key elements across all of the University's internal reviews (undergraduate and postgraduate).

It covers all credit bearing provision within the scope of the review, including:
- Provision delivered in collaboration with others
- Transnational education
- Work-based provision and placements
- Online and distance learning
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD)
- Provision which provides only small volumes of credit
- Joint/Dual Degrees
- Massive Open Online Courses MOOCs (even if non-credit bearing)

1. **Strategic overview**
   The strategic approach to:

   - The management and resourcing of learning and teaching experience,
   - The forward direction and the structures in place to support this.
   - Developing business cases for new programmes and courses,
   - Managing and reviewing its portfolio,
   - Closing courses and programmes.

2. **Enhancing the Student Experience**
   The approach to and effectiveness of:

   - Supporting students in their learning
   - Listening to and responding to the Student Voice
   - Learning and Teaching
   - Assessment and Feedback
   - Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation
   - Learning environment (physical and virtual)
   - Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes
   - Supporting and developing staff

3. **Assurance and Enhancement of provision**
   The approach to and effectiveness of maintaining and enhancing academic standards and quality of provision in alignment with the University Quality Framework:

   - Admissions and Recruitment
   - Assessment, Progression and Achievement
   - Programme and Course approval
   - Annual Monitoring, Review and Reporting
   - Operation of Boards of Studies, Exam Boards, Special Circumstances
   - External Examining, themes and actions taken
   - Alignment with SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level, relevant benchmark statements, UK Quality Code
   - Accreditation and Collaborative activity and relationship with Professional/Accrediting bodies (if applicable)

March 2019

Appendix 2: Range of provision covered by the review

Global Health Policy (BMedSci Hons)

Government, Policy and Society MA(Hons)

Social Policy and Economics (MA Hons)

Social Policy and Law (MA Hons)

Social Policy and Politics (MA Hons)

Social Policy and Sociology (MA Hons)

Social Policy with Quantitative Methods (MA Hons) (Full-time)

Government, Policy and Society with Quantitative Methods (MA Hons) (Full-time)

In addition, the subject area are second-named on a wide range of joint degrees with other subjects: Economics, French, Geography, German, Italian, Law, Politics, Quantitative Methods, Russian Studies, Scandinavian Studies, Social Anthropology and Sociology.

Appendix 3: Additional information considered by review team

Prior to the review visit:

Reflective report

School Quality Assurance Reports

External Examiners Summary reports

School organisation chart

Current subject area staff information:
• Social Policy staff list
• Professional Services Organisation Chart
• Officerships in Social and Political Sciences

Programme Handbooks

Programme specifications

Statistical Information

National Student Survey (NSS) Results and reflection

Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) meeting minutes

University of Edinburgh standard remit

Subject specific remit

Edinburgh University Students' Association School Report

List of programmes and courses included in the review

Previous report & response to recommendations

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark statement

School Personal Tutor Statement

Glossary of Terms

Academic Standards comments

Student Voice arrangements (link to webpage)

Student Representation arrangements (link to webpage)

Quality Assurance arrangements (link to webpage)

Appendix 4: Number of students

	2015/6	2016/7	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0
	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT
BMedSci (Hons) in Global Health Policy		3			
BMedSci (Hons) in International Public Health Policy	2				
MA (Hons) in Government, Policy and Society		7	5	13	13
MA (Hons) in Government, Policy and Society with Quantitative Methods			1	2	1
MA (Hons) in Social Policy and Economics	2			3	6
MA (Hons) in Social Policy and Law	6	1	4	4	
MA (Hons) in Social Policy and Politics	6	7	12	11	14
MA (Hons) in Social Policy and Social and Economic History	2			1	
MA (Hons) in Social Policy and Sociology	7	7	6	5	8
MA (Hons) in Social Policy with Quantitative Methods		1			1
MA (Hons) in Social Policy with Social and Political Studies	5	1			
TOTAL	**30**	**27**	**28**	**39**	**43**

Appendix 5: Subject specific remit items

Student experience in a context of physical challenges to pedagogy and cohort community building
We would appreciate advice on how best to manage to maintain the high quality of teaching and learning experiences in Social Policy in the context of increasing demands on space at the University of Edinburgh (largely as a result of growth of student numbers across the University, including in Social Policy). The physical environment can create barriers for students and staff. We are concerned about the inconsistency of the physical learning environment available to our students both inside and beyond the classroom/lecture space. We are also keen to maintain a sense of cohort and community in the subject area.

There are some exemplary learning and teaching spaces at the University of Edinburgh, including the recently opened Lister Learning and Teaching centre, which have the potential to match the ambitious range of teaching and learning experiences on offer to our UG students. However, as a School, we do not have much control around centralised room allocation and so it is quite common that students are learning in sub-optimal pedagogic environments rather than the more exemplary spaces. Students report a sense of being 'randomly allocated strange spaces' that were far from the School of Social and Political Science hub. The students confirmed things that we know to be common sense, and so perhaps not talked about, such as it being difficult to concentrate for long periods in rooms without natural light. They also reported how common it was to struggle to get from one class to another in time, given the potential distance between venues, which was particularly pertinent for those with physical accessibility needs. The University struggles with mainstreaming of physical access in part due to the nature of the estate, but it was raised during consultation with students that more might be done to make the student and staff experience more inclusive for those with accessibility requirements.

In addition to formal teaching spaces, students report that they are struggling to find appropriate spaces for independent study. Those students not living the classic student lifestyle in a halls of residence commented that they do not have a space to go. They cannot necessarily work at home and they find it difficult to get a space in the Library.

We are keen to encourage and support a sense of a cohesive cohort among students in our subject area. In consultation about the IPR, students expressed concern about the difficulties in having a strong sense of cohort, which was perceived to be of much value. They related this to physical space. Students suggest that if there was an allocated physical space for Social Policy used by staff and students, this would be an excellent way to prevent isolation. This would be particularly useful for international and mature students (of which there are perhaps more than in some other subject areas). As the Social Policy staff do not have an allocated physical space, this is a challenge, but we do have several hubs, and we would welcome ideas to develop and create physical (and perhaps also virtual) spaces for all Social Policy students and staff. There was the perception by students that our School was less valued by the University as they compared their situation to what is perceived to be a superior learning and community environment to the one in which their peers in e.g. Law, Medicine and Business found themselves.

Diversifying the curriculum
We would welcome comments on to the extent to which we as a subject area offer a diverse curriculum, thus reflecting the research portfolio of staff. We understand 'diversifying the curriculum' to refer to a means by which academics may be asked to look at their teaching practices and syllabi, and identify where there is little to no focus on figures from under-represented communities, despite their presence in the academy. We also understand this as an opportunity to consider where certain narratives may result in a hidden curriculum – the unintended and/or unacknowledged learning that takes place during a course of study, which can unwittingly lead to the 'absorption of attitudes, values and perspectives' (Higher Education Academy, 2017). As such we aim to improve critical thinking skills, using taught content to build conceptual frameworks to challenge unconscious bias and assumptions.

In consultation about the IPR, students suggested that our curriculum could be more diverse and talk more routinely about gender, age, race, lgbt+, disability, social class etc. They considered that we might work more closely with members of these communities, and be aware of how our curriculum may impact on members from the various communities. We intend to carry out curriculum reviews and add material on diversifying the academy to required readings, as well as increasing the proportion of readings by authors from under-represented groups. We would welcome advice on how we might extend diversity in teaching and learning by enabling those involved in the design, delivery, assessment, evaluation, review, reporting and management of our undergraduate programmes to make increased and sustained representation a permanent part of routine activity.