

The University of Edinburgh

Internal Periodic Review 2018/19

Teaching Programme Review (TPR) of Philosophy

Final report

Section A- Introduction

1. Scope of the review

The TPR focussed on Philosophy's undergraduate provision. The range of provision considered is detailed in Appendix 1.

2. The TPR consisted of:

- The University's remit for internal review (Appendix 2)
- The subject-specific remit for the review (Appendix 3)
- The Reflective Report (Appendix 4)
- Additional material provided in advance of the review (Appendix 5)
- A two-day visit by the review team
- The final report produced by the review team
- Action taken by the Subject Area and School, and others to whom recommendations were remitted following the review

3. Membership of review team

Convener	Professor Maurice Gallagher, School of Biological Sciences
External Member	Dr Sonia Roca-Royes, University of Stirling
External Member	Professor Michael Brady, University of Glasgow
Internal Member	Dr Jeni Harden, Edinburgh Medical School
Student Member	Ms Apolloniya Vlasova, Edinburgh College of Art
Review Team Administrator	Mrs Philippa Ward, Academic Services

4. Situation of the Subject Area

Philosophy is one of three Subject Areas within the School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences (PPLS). PPLS is in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CAHSS).

5. Physical location and summary of facilities

Philosophy is based in the Dugald Stewart Building with the School's other Subject Areas, and occupies Floors 4 to 6. In addition, the Subject Area makes use of a number of medium-sized classrooms and small group teaching spaces within the building. The School's Teaching and Student Support Offices are located on the ground floor of the building.

6. Date of previous review

The previous TPR was carried out in academic year 2012/13 (18 & 19 March 2013)

7. Reflective Report

The Reflective Report was prepared by the Subject Area's Undergraduate Teaching Director (Dr Bryan Pickel) and the Head of Subject Area (Dr Nick Treanor). Student input was sought in advance of the Report being written.

Section B - Main Report

1. Strategic overview

Summary statement

1.1 The Review Team was impressed by the Subject Area. Philosophy's academic and teaching staff are extremely dedicated, and are delivering high quality teaching to an engaged and motivated student body. Administrative and support staff provide an excellent service and are highly regarded by both teaching staff and students. The Subject Area constantly seeks out, listens and responds to the undergraduate student voice. Where improvements can be made, the Subject Area is generally aware of these and is working hard to make the required changes. Philosophy is operating within the context of a School that comprises 3 diverse Subject Areas, but has developed a clear and strategic plan for the next 3 years.

Strategic planning

- 1.2 Philosophy is 1 of 3 Subject Areas within the School of PPLS. Planning is undertaken at School-level, and the School aims to provide cross-Subject Area support where this is appropriate and economies of scale can be achieved. Organisation of teaching however is devolved to Subject Areas. Quality assurance structures exist at both School and Subject-Area levels with liaison between the two. Each Subject Area organises the Personal Tutor system in the way that best suits their particular context. Administrative support for teaching and student support are provided at School-level, albeit with some members of staff providing dedicated support for Philosophy courses and students. Where skills development is not Subject-specific, this is provided at School level.
- 1.3 The Head of School was interviewed during the review and articulated a clear and strategic plan for the School for the next 3 years. Sustainability is a key consideration on account of huge growth in student numbers across the School in recent years (in Philosophy, from 394 undergraduate students on Philosophy-owned degrees in 2012/13, to 569 students in 2018/19). The School has agreed that there will be no further growth in student numbers in the short term, and that intakes will in fact be reduced going forwards. In order to maintain income, the undergraduate intake will be rebalanced by increasing the proportion of overseas students. The review team agrees that the School and Subject Area are currently operating at or beyond capacity, and therefore **commends** the School's decision to stabilise student numbers. It is however suggested that the School remains mindful of widening participation considerations as it rebalances its student intake. (Widening participation is discussed in more detail under section 2.5)
- 1.4 The Subject Area has relied heavily on temporary Teaching Fellows in recent years (eleven in 2018/19) to cover its standing teaching needs. The School recognises that this is less than ideal for a number of reasons: temporary staff are unable to take on all the duties of permanent staff members, for example Personal Tutoring; it results in significant turnover, which is not beneficial for the community at many levels; a large amount of time needs to be devoted to training temporary staff; and existing teaching-only contracts within the School are not optimally designed to benefit those wishing to pursue academic careers. As such, the School is in the process of appointing 13 additional members of academic staff on open-ended research and teaching contracts, 9 of which will be based in Philosophy. The review team strongly endorses this approach.

2. Enhancing the student experience

2.1 Supporting students in their learning

The Personal Tutor and Student Support systems

- 2.1.1 As previously noted, each Subject Area within PPLS operates the Personal Tutor system in the way that best suits their context. As such in Philosophy, all permanent members of academic staff (with the exception of the Head of Subject Area and Undergraduate Teaching Director) who are not on research or reduced loads, serve as Personal Tutors. In line with School guidance, the Personal Tutor's main role is to provide academic advice. They also provide an element of pastoral support but this is largely managed by the Student Support Office and course enrolment is carried out by the Teaching Office. School-level oversight and training of Personal Tutors is provided by the Senior Tutor.
- 2.1.2 The review team **commends** the dedicated Personal Tutors it interviewed during the review visit. It also **commends** the Senior Tutor who is very active and is providing high quality training and guidance, particularly for those Personal Tutors who are supporting students on joint degree programmes. Staff working within the Student Support and Teaching Offices are further **commended**: they are considered by teaching staff and students to provide an outstanding and important service, with the mental health support provided by the Student Support Officers being particularly noteworthy.
- 2.1.3 Philosophy's recently introduced approach to Personal Tutor group meetings, whereby students on a single or small cluster of degree programmes are invited to lunch with the relevant Personal Tutor each semester, appears to be very successful and is **commended**. A number of the students interviewed during the review visit commented on the lunches, noting that they are an excellent and effective way of building community.
- 2.1.4 The School, Subject Area and review team recognise that Philosophy's Personal Tutor system is overstretched. In academic year 2017/18, each Personal Tutor had up to 40 tutees, and in 2018/19, the average number of tutees per Personal Tutor is 45. These high numbers inevitably result in Personal Tutors feeling that the service they provide is sub-optimal. The Subject Area's poor performance in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2018 'Personal Tutor' question is thought to be a reflection of the Personal Tutor to tutee ratio. This issue will, to some extent, be addressed over the next few years by the planned recruitment of additional, permanent members of academic staff.
- 2.1.5 However, Personal Tutors interviewed during the review visit consider there to be more fundamental issues with the system: use of the term 'Personal Tutor' results in students having confused expectations; as academic members of staff, Personal Tutors feel qualified to offer academic advice and guidance, but often do not feel best placed to deliver the more challenging aspects of the role prescribed by the University, particularly the pastoral and mental health-related aspects; and the transparency for students of the route to pastoral support is considered to be too opaque for all but the most able to navigate. This can result in the students who require the most support being overlooked. The University is due to undertake a single review of the student support ecosystem starting in April 2019. Philosophy's feedback will be passed to the working group undertaking the review.
- 2.1.6 The majority of the students interviewed during the review felt well-supported by their Personal Tutor and expressed a more positive view of the system than academic staff. However, there is some inconsistency: some students reported being allocated to a number of different tutors over

the course of their studies, or their Personal Tutor failing to make time to meet with them, even during published office hours.

- 2.1.7 The Subject Area's Undergraduate Teaching Director is highly **commended**: the review team heard on numerous occasions during the review visit that he provides outstanding support for students in a variety of contexts.

Support for students on joint degrees

- 2.1.8 Support for students on joint degrees was 1 of 3 subject-specific remit items highlighted by the Subject Area in advance of the review. Philosophy notes within its Reflective Report that joint degrees are a source of concern and that communication with both students and partner Schools and Subject Areas is a challenge. The review team considered the support offered to joint degree students at length. Whilst issues do remain, particularly for those students taking degrees that cross School boundaries, the review team wishes to **commend** the work that is being done at Subject Area and College-levels to address these.
- 2.1.9 At Subject Area-level, Personal Tutors are now allocated by degree programme wherever possible, such that each Tutor develops specialist knowledge of one joint degree programme. This is considered by the review team to be a sensible use of the available resource, and has resulted in students receiving more accurate and detailed advice about their particular programme. The Subject Area has also assigned named contacts for each joint degree programme, which has significantly improved communication with partner Schools. The Review Team would encourage these contacts to attend joint exam boards where possible.
- 2.1.10 At College-level, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies is conducting a review of joint degrees. This will involve producing clear role descriptors for joint degree programme directors, grouping joint degrees in similar subjects to reduce overheads, and improving communication. 'Piazza' has been identified as a potential communication tool, and the review team would encourage CAHSS and Philosophy to investigate this further. The review team is confident that the measures being put in place by the Subject Area and College will address the issues around joint degree programmes over time.

Support for transitions

- 2.1.11 Philosophy has thought carefully about support for transitions. For those transitioning to University, a number of induction events are held during Welcome Week, and degree programme lunches and receptions are held during Semester 1 to allow students to meet others on the same degree programme and teaching staff. The Head of Subject Area has also worked with the Centre for Open Learning to ensure that the content of their Access Programme is appropriate for those wishing to undertake a degree in Philosophy. The Subject Area is aware that more could be done to support students transitioning to University, and the review team welcomes the School's decision to undertake a comprehensive review of arrangements for induction, led by the Head of Student Support and Enhancement. The review team **recommends** that this review pays particular attention to students entering the University through non-traditional routes, from widening participation backgrounds, and with additional support needs. The team heard during the review that these students can find existing induction events, particularly the Academic Fair, overwhelming, and some pre-induction support system (e.g. UNFOLD) which provides an initial bridge to the personal tutor may be beneficial in this context.
- 2.1.12 Transition to honours was considered by the review team to be well-managed: a 'welcome to honours' session and dinner offered early in Semester 1 to Year 3 students are well-received. Recent curriculum reforms, discussed in more detail under 2.3.3 have also helped to ease the

transition to honours, although some students did still report there being a large and daunting jump in difficulty between pre-honours and honours courses.

Support for study abroad

2.1.13 **Commendable** support is offered to students who undertake a year abroad. The efforts of the Undergraduate Teaching Director to remain in contact with those students who are studying abroad and to resolve any issues are greatly appreciated. The distance learning options offered to students studying abroad appear to work well, and ensure that they are well prepared for their return to Edinburgh.

Academic support

2.1.14 Academic support is offered at both School and Subject Area levels: in order to achieve economies of scale, the School provides writing support for all PPLS students through the PPLS Writing Centre. Students find the support offered by the Centre very valuable, and the provision is **commended** by the review team. Students did however note that the support would have been most valuable in Year 1 when they had had little, or no experience of academic writing. It is **recommended** that the School considers extending the scope of the Writing Centre's provision to include support for first year students.

2.1.15 The Philosophy Skills Workshops offered by the Subject Area also provides students with useful academic support. The Subject Area is considering fully embedding the Workshops within the curriculum. The review team would strongly support this approach: while some of the students interviewed during the review expressed concern that embedding more skills development would dilute academic content, there are strong arguments around equality of access for embedding a robust portfolio of graduate skills within the curriculum.

2.1.16 The undergraduate dissertation course appears to prepare students well for their final year of study. The online nature of the course means that it can also be accessed by those studying abroad during the third year. In line with comments made above (2.1.15) about ensuring that all students have equal access to opportunities for skills development, the review team did raise concerns about the zero-credit nature of the course. It is **recommended** that the Subject Area considers whether the dissertation course should be embedded within the credit-bearing curriculum going forwards.

2.1.17 Some students would welcome receiving more written resources to support them in their learning, for example guidance on citation, or more detailed information about the content and structure of Year 3 and 4 courses to enable them to make more informed choices. The review team is confident that the Subject Area is already providing such resources, and therefore assumes that students are simply not accessing them at appropriate points in their learning. It is **recommended** that Philosophy reminds students of the resources that are available at relevant points during their programmes.

IT systems

2.1.18 Unreliability and lack of functionality of the IT systems used to support students was mentioned on several occasions during the review visit. The Subject Area struggles in particular with the recording requirements of the Personal Tutor system, engagement monitoring, and inability to access meaningful information in a timely way about students' progress. Philosophy would welcome having a system whereby all students on a joint Honours programme can receive the

same communication, and an efficient mechanism for tracking and monitoring subgroups of students on a programme in order to provide targeted support.

Community

- 2.1.19 The development of community was one of the review's subject-specific remit items, with the team being invited to comment on the Subject Area's strategies for fostering a community of peers in which all students feel integrated and represented. The review team **commends** the work Philosophy is already doing in this area. Students particularly appreciate the degree programme lunches that are now offered (also discussed in 2.1.3); changes made to the honours curriculum, which have helped to develop cohort identity (2.3.3); and the involvement of academic staff in Year 2 tutorials, which helps students to build relationships with staff members (2.3.4). Students' overall sense is that staff at all levels are approachable and willing to help. Administrative and student support staff and postgraduate tutors are invited to participate in undergraduate social events, an approach which is clearly valued by both staff and students and which adds to a sense of coherence within the Subject Area.
- 2.1.20 Students did note that a number of Philosophy's social events take place in the evenings, and suggested that there may be benefit in scheduling more events during the working day.
- 2.1.21 The Philosophy Society is extremely active and helps to build community. It is **commended** by the review team. Students would welcome more academic staff members attending meetings of the Society, though recognise that those with caring commitments may find this difficult because meetings take place in the evening.
- 2.1.22 The undergraduate students interviewed expressed a desire to be exposed to more of Philosophy's research activity and to be better integrated with the postgraduate community. The review team **recommends** that undergraduate students are made more aware that they are welcome to attend Philosophy's research seminars.
- 2.1.23 As discussed in more detail in section 2.6, the Dugald Stewart building, which lacks social space, constrains Philosophy in its efforts to build community. Students also made reference to a 'culture of needing to be quiet in the corridors', which discourages informal conversation and community building. The School and College are strongly encouraged to give this further consideration.

2.2 Listening and responding to the Student Voice

- 2.2.1 Philosophy is highly **commended** by the review team for seeking out, listening and responding to the student voice. A key observation made by the third and fourth years students interviewed was that they had a strong sense of their views being heard and acted upon by the Subject Area. This was particularly apparent in relation to changes made to address concerns around community and joint degrees as discussed in 2.1.
- 2.2.2 The Review Team discussed the Subject Area's NSS results. Whilst Philosophy performs relatively well in the NSS as compared with other University Subject Areas, its performance as compared with other institutions, particularly those within the Russell group, is less favourable. This Review Team was unable to identify clear reasons for this, and recognised a disparity between NSS scores and the positive views expressed by students interviewed during the review visit. It is possible that those students who graduated and completed the Survey in 2018 did not have the opportunity to benefit fully from the recent improvements made by the Subject Area, although significant increases between 2017 and 2018 in the scores achieved for 'learning community', 'learning opportunities' and 'academic support' would suggest that the changes were beginning to have a positive impact. The Subject Area received a score well below the University average for the 'Personal Tutor' question. The Subject Area attributes this to its high Personal Tutor to tutee

ratio as discussed at 2.1.4., although the impact of other factors, such as the frequency of Personal Tutor rotation, should also be reflected upon.

- 2.2.3 Evidence of specific engagement with the University's Student Partnership Agreement appears to be limited at this stage, although the review team noted that the School has used Student Partnership Agreement Small Project Funding to develop high quality student resources promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. Philosophy does not currently make use of co-creation in its courses, and some of the potential benefits of this were discussed during the review visit. The Review Team **recommends** that Philosophy considers ways in which it can strengthen and develop its student partnerships in the future, making use of the resources and support available through the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) where appropriate.
- 2.2.4 The Subject Area makes good use of mid-semester feedback, including using this to make immediate changes to courses where appropriate. At present, the feedback is collected on blank postcards. The Subject Area may be able to gather more specific feedback by using a more prescriptive format which asks students a small number of direct questions about their experience of the course.

2.3 Learning and Teaching

Curriculum

- 2.3.1 The review team is content that Philosophy has appropriate courses in place across all years of study, and **commends** both the range and the research-led nature of the fourth year courses offered. Recent appointments will bring expertise in the areas of race, gender, Africana philosophy and social standing, and will provide opportunities to extend the range of courses further.
- 2.3.2 The team discussed progression across programmes given that all Year 1 and 2 courses are at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 8, while Year 3 and 4 courses are at SCQF Level 10. It was noted that such an arrangement is not uncommon within CAHSS, and that the Subject Area considers there to be a progression in skills across years. Students expressed the view that courses do become more challenging year on year, but as discussed in 2.1.12, noted that there is a large and often daunting jump in difficulty between pre-honours and honours years.
- 2.3.3 'Curriculum' was another of the review's subject-specific remit items, and the team was asked to comment on recent curriculum reforms. The review team **commends** the changes that have been made at both honours and pre-honours levels. At honours level, a distinction has been drawn between courses usually taken in Year 3 and those taken in Year 4, and students have been encouraged to take courses in the correct year. This has been successful in reinforcing a sense of progression across years, ensuring that students are well-prepared to take more specialised courses, and facilitating smaller group teaching in Year 4. The changes have also helped to develop cohort identity: year groups are now, in the main, taught together, whereas under the previous system, students in Years 3 and 4 and at postgraduate level were taught in mixed groups. This hindered the development of community, and some Year 3 students reported finding classes intimidating. Whilst a small number of the students interviewed during the review reported that the changes to the Year 3 and 4 structures had restricted their course choice, most were very positive about the curricular changes that had been made.
- 2.3.4 The changes made at pre-Honours levels are also considered by the review team to have been successful: reduction in the number of lecturers used in most courses has improved course coherence and allowed students to develop stronger relationships with academic staff. This has been reinforced by using academic staff as tutors on some Year 2 tutorials.

- 2.3.5 To date, fewest changes have been made to Year 1 courses, and students appear to find the content of the Year 1 curriculum quite knowledge intense and somewhat less stimulating than that of later years. The review team therefore **recommends** that the Subject Area builds on the success of its recent curricular changes by reviewing the Year 1 curriculum. The Subject Area may benefit from considering the pedagogical value of a wider variety of styles of educational interaction, and engaging with the University's 'Edinburgh Learning Design Roadmap' (ELDeR) programme: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/learning-technology/supporting-learning-and-teaching/learning-design/about>. Reducing the number of lecturers involved in delivering all pre-honours courses may also be beneficial in this respect.

Joint degrees

- 2.3.6 The majority of the joint degrees students interviewed during the review had chosen their programme because they had equal interests in two different subjects and were keen to pursue both independently. However, some were keen to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which the two subjects related, and felt that opportunities to do this were limited. Philosophy may wish to discuss with partner Schools the potential to develop more interdisciplinary courses that would be of interest and add synergy to their joint degree students.

2.4 Assessment and Feedback

Assessment

- 2.4.1 Philosophy makes extensive use of coursework essays and exams for assessment purposes. Some courses also use alternative forms of assessment including short assignments, presentations, special projects, take home tests and quizzes. The review team spent time discussing styles of assessment with staff and students during the visit and heard a number of different views.
- 2.4.2 It was noted that Philosophy tends to be taught using relatively traditional teaching methods. Edinburgh therefore, in assessing primarily through essays and exams, is not unusual within the sector and may in fact be making more use of alternative forms of assessment than other, comparable institutions. Teaching staff reported that students are often risk averse and reluctant to undertake non-standard assessments. Students expressed concerns about an entire course being assessed through only one or two pieces of work; the word limits for essays, which were sometimes too small to allow students to demonstrate independent, critical thinking; and the small amount of credit associated with some assessed work, which provided little incentive to complete the task. Students also questioned the guidance provided around take home tests, which states that students should complete the work on their own. However, as this cannot be enforced, and recognising that there are educational benefits associated with students discussing their work, the view was expressed that those students who wished to confer with others should be permitted to do so.
- 2.4.3 The Review Team considered some of the concerns expressed to be unfounded. It recognised, for example, the skills that students can acquire by adhering to strict word limits. However, taking the different views into account, the review team **recommends** that the Subject Area continues looking carefully at the variety, appropriateness and timing of the assessments it uses. 'Logic 1' in particular may benefit from adopting an alternative approach: while some students enjoy the course, others find the perception of the course a natural barrier and that the progressively challenging content results in disengagement. In addition, assessment via a single written exam at the end of the course is unpopular. The review team is of the opinion that the course material might readily lend itself to a degree of continuous assessment that in turn, might provide a mechanism to incentivise continuous engagement. The Subject Area may also wish to consider the

way in which it advertises and presents 'Logic 1', for example, marketing this course as 'Critical Thinking' or similar may lessen student concerns.

Feedback

- 2.4.4 The students interviewed appeared to have a limited understanding of formative feedback, and suggested that opportunities to receive formative feedback do not exist in all courses. The review team **recommends** that Philosophy reviews its approach to formative feedback in line with course learning outcomes and ensures that all courses adhere to Regulation 15 of the Taught Assessment Regulations:
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/taughtassessmentregulations.pdf>

2.5 Accessibility, inclusivity and widening participation

Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy

- 2.5.1 PPLS has a clear system in place for managing the implementation of the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy (AILP) and has a designated coordinator of adjustments. Students reported that lecture slides are provided in advance for some, but not all courses. In contrast, in some cases, for example in the Philosophy of Science course, material provided in advance of lectures is used to enhance the teaching on the day. This was considered by students to be excellent practice.
- 2.5.2 Views on lecture recording are mixed: some students appreciate being able to review lectures and fill any gaps in their understanding. Others feel that lecture recording discourages attendance and diminishes the quality of tutorials because those who have not attended the lecture cannot contribute fully to the tutorial. Greater interactivity within lectures (*e.g.* with use of Tophat or flipped classrooms) might offer approaches for improving lecture attendance.

Equality and diversity in the curriculum

- 2.5.3 Philosophy is **commended** for its engagement to date with issues around equality and diversity in the curriculum. As discussed under 2.3.1, it is already offering courses that cover a wide range of subjects, particularly in Year 4, and recent appointments will provide opportunities to bring further diversification. The Subject Area is encouraged to continue with its philosophy to integrate equality and diversity considerations in all future discussions around curricular development.

Widening participation

- 2.5.4 Philosophy is involved in some excellent outreach work, for example 'Philosophy in Prisons' and 'Philosophy in Schools'. It also participates in the Sutton Trust Summer School, which aims to provide a university experience to those students who would be the first in their families to attend university; offers several Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are seen as a gateway to Philosophy for those from non-traditional backgrounds; and as previously noted has worked with the Centre for Open Learning to help develop content for the Access Programme that is appropriate for those wishing to undertake a Philosophy degree. However, the numbers of Scottish and widening participation students recruited to Philosophy-owed programmes are relatively low. The review team spoke with very few Scottish students during its visit, and the Head of Subject Area noted that he observes increasing divergence between the Scottish and Rest of the UK (RUK) student populations.
- 2.5.5 In light of the Scottish Government's ambitious targets for widening participation, the review team **recommends** that the Subject Area discusses, with the University's Widening Participation

team in the first instance, ways in which it might move towards increasing the numbers of students recruited from Scotland and from widening participation backgrounds.

- 2.5.6 As discussed under 2.1.11, it is also **recommended** that the review of induction arrangements gives particular consideration to those entering through non-traditional routes and from widening participation backgrounds, and considers the potential benefits of offering pre-induction or transition bridging support.
- 2.5.7 The Head of Subject Area noted that Philosophy is provided with very little management information about its widening participation students. Whilst recognising that this is in line with University policy and Data Protection requirements, it makes it difficult for the Subject Area to properly evaluate the educational needs of and provide targeted support for such students who might benefit from it. It is **recommended** that Student Recruitment and Admissions considers the potential value of providing Subject Areas with additional management information about their widening participation students to allow support to be enhanced optimally.

2.6 Learning environment (physical and virtual)

Physical learning environment

- 2.6.1 As noted previously, PPLS is situated in the Dugald Stewart Building, with Philosophy occupying Floors 4 to 6. The building has a number of medium-sized classroom and small group teaching spaces for use by all 3 Subject Areas, and the School's Teaching and Student Support Offices are located on the ground floor of the building.
- 2.6.2 The review team heard on a number of occasions that the Dugald Stewart Building places significant constraints on the School and impacts negatively on community development and the student experience. The building is operating at or beyond capacity on account of the rapid increase in student numbers in recent years. Students note that the building lacks study and social space and that the library is too small. They perceive other University Schools and Subject Areas to be housed in superior accommodation. Staff report having to book space outside the building for Philosophy-specific social events, and note that students often view the Dugald Stewart Building as a 'scary office block'. It is **recommended** that Estates and Buildings takes this feedback into account in future estates developments.

Virtual learning environment

- 2.6.3 Students noted that there is significant variation across Blackboard Learn, the University's primary virtual learning environment, and that more standardisation would be beneficial. These concerns should be addressed through the University's current 'Learn Foundations' project.
- 2.6.4 It was also noted that the course-based nature of Learn prevents it from being an effective communication tool for students on joint degree programmes, who may not take the same, mandatory courses as those on single subject degree programmes. As discussed at 2.1.10, the Subject Area and College are encouraged to investigate the merits of using 'Piazza' as a communication tool for joint degree students, or to find an effective mechanism for ensuring that students on Joint Honours programmes receive all course-related information.

2.7 Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes

- 2.7.1 The School and Subject Area are committed to skills development. The PPLS Writing Centre is **commended** by the review team. As discussed under 2.1.14, it is **recommended** that the School considers extending the scope of the Writing Centre's provision to include support for first year students.

- 2.7.2 The Subject Area's Philosophy Skills Workshops also develop important skills, and the review team strongly supports the School's proposal to fully embed these within the curriculum to ensure that the material is accessed by all students.
- 2.7.3 The key skill developed over the course of a Philosophy degree should be the ability to think independently and critically. The final year students interviewed were confident that their programme had provided them many opportunities to become independent, critical thinkers and are such were confident about their future careers.
- 2.7.4 The review team spent some time discussing the skills that can be acquired through group work. It was noted that use of small group work by the Subject Area is currently limited, but that this is not unusual in Philosophy teaching. The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area continues to seek out meaningful opportunities to embed group work and other transferable skills within the curriculum, and ensures that these are visible to and recognised by students. Fuller discussion with the Careers consultant on how such graduate skills might be better linked with opportunities for career development are also encouraged.
- 2.7.5 The review team **commends** the work of PPLS's Careers Consultant, which has raised the profile of career development and employability within the School. It was noted that support is at present more tailored to those wishing to enter the UK job market. The School and the Careers Service may wish to consider ways in which can enhance support for those hoping to enter the international job market, particularly in light of the fact that the rebalancing of the curriculum mentioned under 1.3 will involve recruiting a higher proportion of international students.

2.8 Supporting and developing staff

- 2.8.1 The review team met with a range of staff during the visit and was impressed by a number of aspects of the staff support and development being provided by the Subject Area.

Postgraduate Tutors and Tutor Coordinator

- 2.8.2 The Subject Area is **commended** for ensuring that Postgraduate Tutors are remunerated for all aspects of the Tutor role, including attending lectures for the course on which they tutor and responding to emails from tutees.
- 2.8.3 The Tutor Coordinator role and the current post-holder are **commended**. The Coordinator is responsible for the recruitment, allocation, training and observation of Philosophy's Postgraduate Tutors, and has developed a bespoke training programme and bank of Philosophy-specific resources for tutors to use. This is bringing greater consistency to the Tutor role, particularly in the areas of marking and feedback. The Tutor Coordinator is also working towards putting in a place an equitable system to give the Subject Area's postgraduate research students lecturing experience.
- 2.8.4 Postgraduate Tutors are observed in their teaching by Head Tutors, who may be Teaching Fellows or members of the permanent academic staff. Whilst there is some variation in quality, Tutors generally find this observation to be beneficial, particularly in cases where they receive both written and verbal feedback. The review team **recommends** that Teaching Fellows who serve as Head Tutors are allocated time to provide in-person feedback to the Tutors they observe.
- 2.8.5 Philosophy provides Postgraduate Tutors with their personal feedback from Course Evaluation Questionnaires. The Subject Area may wish to consider allowing Tutors to see suitably anonymised feedback for the whole course to provide additional context.

- 2.8.6 The Postgraduate Tutors reported having a very active Tutor Representative, who gathers their feedback and liaises with the Tutor Coordinator on their behalf. The review team **commends** this activity.

Teaching Fellows

- 2.8.7 The Undergraduate Teaching Director provides excellent training and support for the Subject Area's Teaching Fellows. However, concern was raised during the review about the limitations of teaching-only contracts for those wishing to pursue academic careers. The workload of Teaching Fellows was also discussed, it being noted that this limits time for research activity and for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The School should be aware of the impact of this issue, although it is noted that the recent and planned recruitment of more members of academic staff on open-ended contracts will remove or significantly reduce the need for teaching-only contracts.

CPD to enhance learning and teaching

- 2.8.8 Philosophy's academic staff are encouraged to participate in relevant Institute for Academic (IAD) training courses. Peer observation of teaching is also promoted.
- 2.8.9 There does appear to be a lack of clarity within the Subject Area about those members of teaching staff who are Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) or are currently working towards this through IAD's accredited pathways. It is **recommended** that Philosophy develops a more high profile, consistent and strategic approach to encouraging staff members to work towards HEA Fellowship.

Administrative and Support Staff

- 2.8.10 The current Teaching and Student Support Office staff are highly valued, and the Subject Area is keen to retain them. However, opportunities for career development within PPLS are limited. A University-level task group is in the process of reviewing CPD for student support and frontline staff, but its work will not address issues around career progression. The review team would encourage the School and Subject Area to consider ways in which administrative and support staff might be given additional responsibilities, therefore providing opportunities for their posts to be re-graded.

3. Assurance and Enhancement of provision

3.1 Setting and maintaining academic standards

- 3.1.1 The Subject Area operates within the University 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. External Examiners express satisfaction with academic procedures, assessment and the classification of degrees.

Programme and course approval

- 3.1.2 Programme and course approval is undertaken at School-level by the School Undergraduate Studies Committee and Board of Studies. Prior to being taken to this School-level meeting, all Philosophy-specific curriculum changes are approved at the Subject Area's Department Meetings, to which all Philosophy teaching staff are invited. However, not all staff involved in the teaching of Philosophy's degree programmes are members of the Board of Studies as prescribed the University's [Board of Studies Terms of Reference](#), section 5. The School may wish to review the

membership of its Board of Studies and to consider the benefits to its staff of experiencing and understanding the role of the Board in course and programme development.

Annual monitoring, review and reporting

- 3.1.3 The Subject Area's policy of asking each Course Organiser to discuss their course annually with a colleague, and to send a report of the conversation to Philosophy's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officer, is considered by the review team to be good practice. The review team suggest that there may be additional benefits to be gained from routinely sharing these reflections with the course team.
- 3.1.4 The Subject Area holds an annual teaching review meeting which all teaching staff are expected to attend. The meeting is used to discuss teaching good practice and innovative approaches to teaching.

Boards of Examiners and Special Circumstances

- 3.1.5 When discussing joint degree programmes, it was noted that the spread in the timings of the Boards of Examiners meetings for the various Philosophy-owed degree programmes can result in the same External Examiners needing to come to Edinburgh more than once during the exam period. Similarly, the necessarily short turn-around times and lack of alignment of special circumstances meetings and exam boards for joint degree creates difficulties for Philosophy's Teaching Office staff. It is **recommended** that the work being undertaken at College-level on joint degrees considers whether it might be possible to better align the Special Circumstances and Boards of Examiners meetings for the degrees owned by each of the Subject Areas.

3.2 Key themes and actions taken

- 3.2.1 External Examiners reports have raised concerns about the format of the exam for the Year 1 course, 'Greats: Plato to the Enlightenment'. It is noted that the Subject Area plans to address these concerns through broader changes to the pre-honours curriculum once the new permanent academic staff members discussed under 1.4 have been recruited.
- 3.2.2 Concerns around lack of consistency of Postgraduate Tutors' marking have been addressed by introducing the Tutor Coordinator role.
- 3.2.3 External Examiners reports also raise concerns about lack of opportunity for students to receive formative feedback on some courses. While some steps have been taken to address this, the review team noted that there is further scope for the Subject Area here, as discussed under 2.4.4.

Section C – Review conclusions

Confidence statement

The review team found that Philosophy 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 School's decision to stabilise student numbers at this stage.	1.3
2.	The team commends the dedication of the Subject Area's Personal Tutors, the Senior Tutor, and staff working within the Student Support and Teaching Offices.	2.1.2
3.	The recently introduced approach to Personal Tutor group meetings, whereby students on a single or small cluster of degree programmes are invited to lunch with the relevant Personal Tutor each semester, is commended .	2.1.3
4.	The Subject Area's Undergraduate Teaching Director is highly commended for the outstanding student support he provides in a variety of contexts.	2.1.7
5.	The review team commends work that is being done at both Subject Area and College levels to address issues around support for students on joint degree programmes.	2.1.8
6.	Commendable support is offered to students who undertake a year abroad.	2.1.13
7.	The writing support provided through the PPLS Writing Centre is commended .	2.1.14
8.	The work Philosophy is doing to develop community is commended .	2.1.19
9.	The Philosophy Society is commended .	2.1.21
10.	Philosophy is highly commended for seeking out, listening and responding to the student voice.	2.2.1
11.	The range and research-led nature of the fourth year courses offered by the Subject Area are commended .	2.3.1
12.	The review team commends the curricular changes that have been made at both honours and pre-honours levels.	2.3.3
13.	Philosophy is commended for its engagement to date with issues around equality and diversity in the curriculum.	2.5.3
14.	The review team commends the work of the PPLS Careers Consultant.	2.7.5
15.	The Subject Area is commended for ensuring that Postgraduate Tutors are remunerated for all aspects of the Tutor role.	2.8.2
16.	The Tutor Coordinator role and the current post-holder are commended .	2.8.3
17.	The work of the Tutor Representative is commended .	2.8.6

Recommendations for enhancement/Areas for further development

Prioritised recommendations for Philosophy

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility
1	<u>Curriculum</u> The review team recommends that the Subject Area builds on the success of its recent curricular changes by reviewing the Year 1 curriculum.	2.3.5	Philosophy
2	<u>Assessment and feedback</u> i. The review team recommends that the Subject Area continues looking carefully at the variety, appropriateness and timing of the assessments it uses.	2.4.3	Philosophy
	ii. The review team recommends that Philosophy reviews its approach to formative feedback and ensures that all courses adhere to Regulation 15 of the Taught Assessment Regulations.	2.4.4	Philosophy
3	<u>Widening participation</u> i. It is recommended that the Subject Area discusses ways in which it might move towards increasing the numbers of students it recruits from Scotland and from widening participation backgrounds	2.5.5	Philosophy
	ii. It is recommended that the review of induction arrangements pays particular attention to students entering the University through non-traditional routes, from widening participation backgrounds, and with additional support needs.	2.1.11 & 2.5.6	Philosophy with PLS Head of Student Support and Enhancement
4	<u>Staff development</u> i. The review team recommends that Teaching Fellows who serve as Head Tutors are allocated time to provide in-person feedback for the Tutors they observe.	2.8.4	Philosophy
	ii. It is recommended that Philosophy develops a more high-profile, consistent and strategic approach to encouraging staff members to work towards HEA Fellowship.	2.8.9	Philosophy
5	<u>Student partnerships</u> The review team recommends that Philosophy considers ways in which it can strengthen and develop its student partnerships.	2.2.3	Philosophy
6	<u>Skills development</u> The review team recommends that the Subject Area continues to seek out meaningful opportunities to embed group work and other transferable skills within the curriculum, and ensures that these are visible to and recognised by students.	2.7.4	Philosophy
7	<u>Academic support</u> i. It is recommended that the Subject Area considers whether the dissertation course should be embedded within the credit-bearing curriculum going forwards.	2.1.16	Philosophy
	ii. It is recommended that Philosophy reminds students of the resources that are available to support them in	2.1.17	

	their learning at relevant points during their programmes.		
8	<u>Development of community</u> The review team recommends that undergraduate students are made more aware that they are welcome to attend Philosophy's research seminars.	2.1.22	Philosophy

Recommendations for other areas of the University

No	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility
9	It is recommended that the School considers extending the scope of the PPLS Writing Centre's provision to include support for first year students.	2.1.14 & 2.7.1	PPLS
10	It is recommended that Student Recruitment and Admissions considers the potential value of providing Subject Areas with additional management information about widening participation students to allow support to be enhanced optimally.	2.5.7	Student Recruitment and Admissions (SRA)
11	It is recommended that Estates and Buildings takes the Subject Area's feedback on the Dugald Stewart Building into account in future estates developments.	2.6.2	Estates and Buildings
12	It is recommended that the work being undertaken at College-level on joint degrees considers whether it might be possible to better align the Special Circumstances and Boards of Examiners meetings for the degrees owned by each of the Subject Areas.	3.1.5	CAHSS

Student support

In addition, Philosophy's feedback on the Personal Tutor system will be passed to the working group that is undertaking the University's review of the student support ecosystem (section 2.1.5).

Provision Considered During the Review

Programme	Programme Code
Philosophy	UTPHILY
Philosophy and Economics	UTPHIEC
Philosophy and English Language	UTPHIEL
Philosophy and English Literature	UTPHIET
Philosophy and Scottish Literature	UTMAHPHISL
Philosophy and Mathematics	UTPHIMA
Philosophy and Politics	UTPHIPO
Philosophy and Psychology	UTPHIPS
Philosophy and Linguistics	UTPHILI
Philosophy and Greek	UTPHIGR

University Remit for Internal Review

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)

Subject Specific Remit for the Review

- i. **Joint Degrees** – Philosophy finds communication both with students on joint degree programmes and partner School and Subject Areas a challenge. Although some work has been done in this area, Philosophy would benefit from receiving input on ways in which it might bring about further improvements.
(Joint degrees are also a College priority for academic year 2018/19, and it will be important to adopt a joined-up approach to discussions. The College, partner Schools and Subject Areas, and students on joint degree programmes will provide input during the Review visit.)
- ii. **Community** – this item was proposed by Philosophy’s students, and is a strong priority for the University at the current time. An ongoing challenge faced by the Subject Area is fostering a community of peers in which all students feel integrated and represented. The Review Team is invited to comment on Philosophy’s strategies for achieving this goal.
- iii. **Curriculum** – this will include considerations around sustainability, resourcing and embedding employability within the curriculum. Philosophy has recently reformed its curriculum, as outlined in the Reflective Report, and would appreciate receiving the Review Team’s feedback on the changes.

Material in addition to the Reflective Report provided in advance of the review

- School Quality Assurance Reports (2015/16 – 2017/18)
- Philosophy Subject Quality Assurance Reports (Single and Joint Honours)
- External Examiners' Reports and Responses (2015/16 – 2017/18)
- School organizational chart
- Details of Philosophy's current academic staff
- Programme Handbooks
- Programme Specifications
- Relevant statistical information
- National Student Survey (NSS) results and reflections 2017/18
- Student Staff Liaison Committee meeting minutes (Nov 2017 to Nov 2018)