<u>**The University of Edinburgh**</u>

Internal Periodic Review 2019/20

Internal Periodic Review of Politics and International Relations (UG provision)

3 and 4 February 2020

Final report

Section A- Introduction

1. **Scope of the review**

Range of provision considered by the review: [see appendix 5]

2. **The Internal Periodic Review of Politics and International Relations 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 [see Appendix 2 for further details]**:**

  ➢ **Building a Politics and International Relations (PIR) community**
  ➢ **Curriculum**

- The Reflective Report and additional material provided in advance of the review

- The visit by the review team including consideration of further material [listed in Appendix *3]*

- The final report produced by the review team

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

3. **Membership of review team**

Convener	Dr Chris Mowat, School of Chemistry (CM)
External Member	Dr Kelly Kollman, University of Glasgow (KK)
External Member	Professor Anthony F Lang, University of St Andrews (AL)
Internal Member	Dr David Silkenat, School of History, Classics & Archaeology (DS)
Student Member	Richard Schindler, Edinburgh College of Art (RS)
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 700 students enrolled on the 7 programmes that are 'owned' by the Subject Area. In addition there are approximately 770 students on combined Honours degrees owned by other subjects. Our intake in 2019/20 was 190 students on PIR owned degrees. There are 64 members of staff.

<u>Physical location and summary of facilities</u>

The Subject Area is located in the Chrystal Macmillan Building, however they are also spread out across multiple institutional sites; George Square; Buccleuch Place; and St John's Land.

<u>Date of previous review</u>
The previous review took place on the 10 and 11 March 2014.

<u>Reflective Report</u>:

This report was written between September and December 2019 by:
Dr. Meryl Kenny, IPR Academic Lead and PIR Co-Director of Undergraduate Teaching (DUGT)

With input and assistance from (but not limited to):
Professor Luke March, Head of PIR
Sophie Moteau, PIR Subject Academic Support Officer
Dr. Claire Duncanson, outgoing Deputy Head of PIR
Professor Fiona Mackay, incoming Deputy Head of PIR
Dr. Alan Convery, PIR Co-DUGT
Dr. Stephen Hill, PIR Senior Teaching Fellow
Dr. Patrick Theiner, PIR Senior Teaching Fellow
Professor Linda McKie, Head of School of Social and Political Sciences (SPS)
Professor Richard Baxstrom, Deputy Head of School and SPS Director of Learning and Teaching
Dr. Lawrence Dritsas, SPS Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Taught Course Provision
Marie Craft, Head of Teaching and Student Services

The subject-specific remit items and some of the data supporting the report was discussed at the PIR Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC), attended by student representatives; PIR staff meetings; and the PIR Teaching Committee. A draft of the report was sent to PIR student programme representatives; the members of the PIR Teaching Committee; and the SPS Teaching Directorate

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 including 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 the commitment to revising, enhancing and diversifying the curriculum to meet student needs and preferences.

1.2 Politics and International Relations is the largest Subject Area within the School of Social and Political Science. The number of staff and students has increased significantly since the last review in 2014. Staff numbers have almost doubled and there are nearly 700 students enrolled on the seven programmes owned by the Subject Area.

One of the distinctive features of the Subject Area is the emphasis on qualitative and quantitative research methods in Years 2 and 3. In addition, the Subject Area have increased the number of speciality Honours courses available to students and reduced mandatory, core courses at the Honours level to increase student choice and to reduce student numbers in Honours modules. The review team **commends** the commitment to reducing student numbers in Honours courses which is recognised as an example **good practice**.

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.

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 largely 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

2.1.1 The Subject Area has undergone two major curriculum reforms since the last review in 2014. The first reform focussed on dispensing with the majority of 3rd year compulsory Honours courses with the exception of Research Design in Politics and International relations (RDPIR). The majority of Honours courses are now capped at 30 students or fewer and the offering of Honours options has increased. The Subject Area is **commended** for the changes to the curriculum which has resulted in reduced class sizes.

The second set of changes to be implemented from 2020/21 includes redesigned existing compulsory courses and the introduction of new compulsory courses at pre-honours to ensure a comprehensive foundation for all students in politics, international relations and political theory.
From 2021/22 a new set of pre-honours optional courses will be introduced.

As a result of these changes the Subject Area identified Curriculum as one of the subject specific remit items.

2.1.2 The PIR Teaching Committee meets regularly during each semester and provides an opportunity for reflection and to review and discuss learning and teaching priorities and policy.

In addition, Subject Area staff meet weekly during the semester for lunchtime seminar sessions which are divided between staff meetings; research presentations; and teaching-focused discussions.
Best practice on feedback is also shared and discussed at these forums. The weekly lunchtime sessions are seen as an example of community building amongst staff.

The Subject Area is **commended** for its approach to enhancing learning and teaching.

2.1.3 The students who met with the review team welcomed changes to the curriculum, in particular, they commented on the variety of courses offered and the interdisciplinarity of Honours courses. The Honours students were positive about the smaller class sizes and commented on the impact this is having on building community amongst the cohort. Students expressed appreciation of the provision of extended reading lists.

Students were also appreciative of the Pre-Honours course structure which is question and issues based. **This is recognised as an example of good practice and is commended by the review team.**

Furthermore, students were very positive about the courses that specifically relate to a lecturers' particular area of research. They reported the noticeable enthusiasm demonstrated during these classes and felt this created good student-staff engagement and this is **commended** by the review team as an example of community building. In addition, the review team **commends** the commitment to research led teaching which is recognised in much of the sector as an **example of good practice** in curriculum development and innovation.

2.1.4 The review team recognised the work being undertaken by the Subject Area on developing and enhancing the curriculum.
Some of the students acknowledged that although changes had been made to the curriculum, they were keen that perspectives from Indigenous intellectuals, as well as a number of countries such as, but not limited to, Africa, Latin America, Asia, are considered to enable continued improvements to be made in this area.
The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area continue to diversify their curriculum and build on the good work that has been done to decolonise and expand course offerings and course reading lists.

2.1.5 Students expressed interest in receiving course feedback from previous students to assist with course choices. This was particularly highlighted by Honours students who suggested a one page summary to include information on course content, general student feedback and assessment methods.
Students suggested that a Course Choice Options session for 3rd & 4th years could be introduced similar to the 1st & 2nd year Courses Fair. In addition, this could be run as a community building event between staff and students e.g. hiring a space outside of the School, providing catering, and staff presentations on courses.
The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area consider seeking opportunities such as this for community building.

2.1.6 There were some comments noted on the Fundamentals course with some students reporting that they struggled to understand aspects of the courses' relevance whilst others felt that some of the content was repetitive. Alternatively, some students reported that due to the low numbers of students attending, they felt it was a good opportunity to discuss questions in more detail with lecturers.

Students suggested that the format of the Fundamental sessions could be more interactive rather than lecture style.
The review team **recommends** the Subject Area reviews the format and content of the fundamentals course.

2.1.7 The Subject Area offer a number of joint degrees and are also the second named subject on wide range of joint degrees with other subjects (see Appendix 5)

This can create a number of issues around communication and community building for students on these programmes. Some students 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. For example, some courses for Joint Honours students are not compulsory however it is not always communicated why this is the case so students feel excluded from these courses.

The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science and the School are currently undertaking a review of Joint Honours degrees to consider numbers, including their 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.

<u>2.2 Assessment and Feedback</u>

2.2.1 The majority of the PIR undergraduate courses are assessed through either essays and/or exam.
The School and Subject Area use the ELMA system for marking and moderation. However some staff reported challenges with this system around inefficiencies at handling high volumes of submissions and moderation processes for large courses.

A number of students expressed mixed experiences around feedback. Some noted a lack of clarity with feedback and difficulties in trying to ascertain ways in which to improve. In addition, some students reported that marks were given without any feedback to suggest where improvements could be made for the next piece of coursework. Furthermore, a number of students expressed dissatisfaction with the timeliness of receiving feedback. Staff commented that this links to various issues with the ELMA system and the extension policy.
Guidance on what makes a good essay was reported as something students would find useful. Students also reported uncertainty around who to speak to about feedback on coursework. Students also highlighted a lack of understanding around anonymous marking.
In addition, confusion was noted by Pre-Honours students around how to access exam results.

It would appear that the procedures and software used to enrol students in courses appear burdensome. It is hoped that the current Programme and Course Information Management Project (PCIM) will streamline processes for student course enrolment.

The review team **recommends** the School review its assessment and feedback procedures and consider ways to streamline these procedures to ensure timely return of materials to students and to reduce the administrative burden associated with assessment. Such changes might include:

-using more efficient online software so that staff can directly access and mark course assessments once these have been submitted by the students. Alternative mechanisms such as Turnitin or systems developed by other Schools such as Physics and Astronomy could be considered.

-a review of the moderation processes used for course work in the School with a view of making these processes less burdensome. For Honours modules marked by a single member of staff the School could consider returning course work before moderation to ensure timely feedback.

2.2.2 The University's coursework extension policy creates an additional challenge for the Subject Area in terms of providing timely and effective feedback.

The Subject Area has seen a noticeable increase in the number of students submitting essays late, in some of the PIR Honours courses this has been as high as 30-40%. The review team **recommends** that the coursework extension policy is reviewed to consider and reflect on the negative impact the process is having on feedback timelines and staff workload/ time management across the board.

Although students welcomed the extension system and found it helpful, it was noted that there did not appear to be any follow up to check for underlying issues if a student is continuously applying for an extension. Comments were also noted where students are applying for an extension due to mental health reasons, there didn't appear to be a referral to any support service.
In addition, when using the coursework extension process, students noted that they weren't informed as to when to expect feedback.

2.2.3 Staff offer Guidance and Feedback hours to students, the School have named them as such to encourage students to appreciate the different mechanisms of receiving feedback.
Students were very appreciative of the opportunity to speak with staff however some noted that due to their popularity it was not always possible to speak with staff during the allocated hours. In addition, due to space constraints, a number of staff are in shared offices which can make confidential discussions challenging. It is **suggested** that individual offices for staff engaged in teaching would be best practice. In addition, it is **suggested** that it should be made clearer to students that they can speak with the relevant course organiser.

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 welcome the review.

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. This is reinforced through the inclusion of student support as part of the Community subject specific remit item.

2.3.2 Pastoral and academic support is primarily provided via Personal Tutors and Student Support Officers (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 are 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 using a Red, Amber, Green system. It was noted during discussions that the PIR SASOs' workload is generally in the red zone and therefore working to capacity for the majority of the time.

The Subject Area is supported by two SSOs, one dedicated to International Relations and the other has shared responsibility for both Politics and Social Policy students.

The Student Support Officers and the Subject Area Support Officer are very highly thought of by the Personal Tutors and students and are **commended** for the excellent support they provide to staff and students.

2.3.3 The Student Support Officers are situated in a shared open-plan office on the ground floor of the Chrystal Macmillan Building.
The SSOs noted that the shared office approach has enabled them to have more 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. The review team **commends** the School for providing a mechanism to allow students to book appointments and rooms confidentially.

However, despite the efforts to make the SSO office more visible and easier to find, these changes have received mixed feedback from students. Many felt that the location of the office did not create a sense of privacy. In addition, some were not aware of the different mechanisms in place to allow meetings to be arranged discreetly. Many of the students 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. Concerns were also noted on the location of the SSO office and that consideration could be given to a PIR hub to create a sense of belonging for students

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.

2.3.4 In this Subject Area, SSOs take primary responsibility for the pastoral aspect of student support and many students reported that they are actively encouraged by academic staff to contact the SSOs in the first instance for any queries. This approach is different from the other Subject Areas in the School and it was reported that a higher number of PIR students contact the SSO than any of the other Subject Areas. Coupled with the large number of PIR students, this has put a strain on the ability of the 1.5 FTE SSOs currently in place to cope with numbers.

It was noted that it is beneficial to have subject specific SSOs to build relationships with students and to develop understanding and knowledge of the Subject Area.
However staff noted that SSOs are often dealing with complex issues and often go above and beyond which has an impact on their workload.

Comments were also noted on the location of the SSO office and that consideration should be given to a PIR hub to create a sense of belonging for students.

2.3.5 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 **strongly recommends** that the School considers additional resources for Student Support in terms of office space and placement and additional Student Support Officer staffing resources as well as additional staffing resource to support the PIR SASO.

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.

The group of Personal Tutors that met with the review team were committed to supporting the student body both academically and/or pastorally.

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

2.3.6 PIR students are also supported by PIRPALS (PIR Peer Assisted Learning Scheme) which has been in place since 2013/14. The sessions are aimed at first year students. The scheme is run by honours students and training is provided for the leader role by the Students' Association. The sessions focus on study skills, exam preparations and essay writing taken from their own perspectives as students.
The leaders also liaise with course organisers around session content and how this can support teaching. They also engage with course organisers to provide feedback from students as a way of enhancing course content. In addition, they are looking to run some pastoral sessions on mental health.
The leaders noted issues around access to the Learn pages of the courses they were supporting and that it would be helpful to have access to view course content.

The PIRPALS leader role is voluntary and it was reported that in some Schools these are paid positions funded by the School.
Attendance at sessions is mixed; essay and exam sessions tend to be well attended. Student leaders highlighted some challenges around promoting the sessions, however noted that students tend to more receptive when sessions are promoted during class.

Some of the student leaders suggested that additional funding would be welcomed and could be used in a number of ways to make events more appealing to students e.g. providing catering for sessions.

PIRPALS is viewed very positively in the Subject Area and won the Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA) award for Best Peer Learning Scheme in 2017/18.

The students that met with the review team were positive about the scheme and felt that it provided opportunities for student support and community building.

The review team **commends** the PIRPALS scheme, the commitment of the student leaders and their approach to enhancing the curriculum 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 and support could be provided, e.g. provision of space. In addition, access to relevant Learn pages to be granted to the leaders.

2.3.7 Students can participate in either a year abroad exchange arrangement monitored by Edinburgh Global or through a PIR subject- specific agreement, monitored by the Junior Year Abroad coordinator.
Some students reported that the availability and provision of support whilst on the year abroad was variable on occasions.
It is **suggested** that the Subject Area and School review guidance and support arrangements for students whilst abroad and during follow up sessions with students on their return from the year abroad.

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 theme of Community is very broad and during discussions with students it became evident that it means different things to different people. Some students felt a connection to the Subject Area and School through societies and schemes such as the Edinburgh

Political Union (EPU) and PIRPALS whereas others found community in their classes or through sports groups.

On the whole, students described a positive sense of community. Staff and students highlighted a number of examples which contributed to community building and these are **commended** by the review team:

- Transatlantic Seminar Series which is run by the Subject Area.

- PIR Distinguished Scholar Lecture Series (This is recognised as an **example of good practice)**

- School Choir which was established to break down barriers between Subject Areas and meets on a weekly basis.

- Annual 4th year Dissertation retreat. The retreat has been funded through the Student Partnership Agreement. Staff and student reflections have been disseminated via the Subject Area blog and the Teaching Matters blog.

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

- Communication mechanisms:
The review team notes that the School are in the process of reviewing communication mechanisms and are 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.

- Using the calendar function to populate events and promote engagement (similar to the same way exams are automatically populated to the calendar)

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

- The reflective report notes PIR Families as a network to socialise with students from all years across PIR. During discussions, it wasn't clear whether this support mechanism is still in operation. Consideration to be given to reinstate this practice or promote the network to students if still in place.

2.4.3 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.

2.4.4 A Student User group exists within the School and it is **suggested** that the School engages with this valuable resource, if not already doing so, during the various consultations and reviews that are being undertaken. In addition, the School should liaise with the group during review of communication mechanisms and promotion of events.

2.5 Accessibility, Inclusivity and Widening Participation

2.5.1 The Politics and International Relations Programmes comply with university policy on mainstreaming adjustments.

Some students reported instances where lectures are not being recorded. Whilst the review team acknowledges the pedagogical rationale for this approach, it **recommends** that the School and Subject Area consider their approach to lecture recording for equality and diversity reasons.

2.5.2 The Subject Area have engaged in a number of initiatives to mainstream Equality and Diversity across the curriculum such as the PIR/SPS Distinguished Scholar Series which has invited a number of feminist and critical race scholars to speak at prominent events. [see section 2.4].

2.5.3 Since 2018, the Subject Area has employed a dedicated Widening Participation (WP) Officer to strengthen and coordinate efforts in this area.

The Subject Area participates in the University's annual Sutton Trust Summer School and has organised two information sessions on 'Studying Politics' for local high School pupils.

However the Subject Area recognises that they could do more in this area, especially around sustained engagement with local high Schools.
The review team **commends** the existing initiatives to support activity in this area and the current consultations to explore further links.

The School is keen to set up a working group on 'Support to Succeed' focussing on WP students. It was noted that there can often be a disconnect between School and Subject Area initiatives e.g. the Teaching Organisation were unaware of the PIR WP Officer.
It is **recommended** that the School and Subject Area review communication channels to enable collaboration in areas that are School wide issues to ensure that practice and enhancements are consistent.

Some students noted that although study abroad opportunities are promoted as being open to all students, it wasn't always clear how and where to access funding to support a year abroad. Some students noted that funding is often provided retrospectively. It was highlighted that students from a WP background may find these funding issues a barrier to participation.
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.

2.6 Development of Employability and Graduate Attributes

2.6.1 The Subject Area runs a programme of study skills training aimed at developing employability and graduate attributes.

The Subject Area works closely with the School's Career consultant to develop resources, run workshops and tutorials on skills development. In addition, as part of the Fundamentals 2 tutorials, a programme of alumni working in the most popular employment sectors are invited to speak to students to introduce them to potential careers options.

The review team **commends** the Subject Area and the Careers Service on the provision of tutorials on graduate attributes and career preparations.

2.7 Supporting and developing staff

2.7.1 The review team were impressed with the structures and systems to support and develop staff.

In particular, there is a well thought out induction process for new staff which involves a gradual transition with reduced teaching and administrative responsibilities in their first year, where possible. New staff are also encouraged to present at the Wednesday lunchtime seminar sessions in their first semester and submit a course proposal in their first year.

It was **suggested** that a 'Meet the Teaching Office team' session could be included as part of the induction process for new members of academic staff. This could be used to inform staff of relevant processes and to improve working practices between academic and administrative staff.

2.7.2 Academic and professional development is supported by the annual review process and through the assignment of a mentor for all staff. At some institutions, such reviews can become judgments on past performance and/or negative interactions. The review team's discussions with staff indicated a much more positive disposition to the annual review process.

The high numbers of annual reviews to be carried out does create an intense workload for the senior members of staff despite this being a shared task. There is also a challenge to carry out the annual reviews in a time frame to feed into the planning process. The Subject Area recognises that more could be done to feed the information gathered from annual reviews into teaching planning.
There is a clear development focus to the reviews and staff viewed the process as very positive and constructive and felt it contributed to high staff morale.

The review team **commends** the Subject Area for their approach to the annual review process.

2.7.3 New staff are encouraged to participate in the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) or the Edinburgh Teaching Award (EdTA). The Subject Area noted that engagement in these activities was low and would be keen for more colleagues to participate, it was highlighted that participation is compulsory in some institutions.

Peer observation of teaching also takes place, for new staff this occurs once a year for the first three years and thereafter, once every three years.

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; pay, 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. In addition, the review team **recommends** that the conclusions from the internal periodic review feed into the School review.

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.

Teaching staff are keen that tutors understand and acknowledge how the tutoring role contributes to their own development. At the same time, staff recognised that aspects of the training programme could be improved to support the tutors in their role.

2.7.5 The review team met with a small number of tutors, who appreciated the opportunity to teach, to make tutorials more useful and meaningful and to enhance the overall student experience.
At the same time, students highlighted different tutorial experiences; some students commented that tutors are very engaged and happy to provide feedback whereas others reported that there didn't appear to be a consistent approach in the format of tutorials e.g. some operated like a question and answer session others more of an in-depth discussion.

2.7.6 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.

2.7.7 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, staff 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 for course organisers; tutors are not paid for 'guidance and feedback' hours or to respond to student email enquiries 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.

2.7.8 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.
It was noted that training outlined in the reflective report did not accurately reflect experience. Although the tutors welcomed the sessions, they felt it was not adequate in terms of content and number of sessions to prepare them for the role.

The School /Subject Area promotes participation in the EdTA however the tutors reported long waiting lists to attend the course and in addition, they felt no incentive to do the course as there is no increase to pay rate once they receive the award.
Some of the tutors noted that they felt the administrative skills they have developed in the role are not formally recognised.

The tutors noted that the politics specific training is good however it was suggested that a specific session at least once per semester to discuss reflections and issues would be useful. Some tutors commented that the training sessions ended up being a place where people raised complaints rather than training on relevant issues.

2.7.9 It was felt there were no formal structures in place to report issues, grievance, concerns or suggestions. There were instances noted where some course organisers, often those new to the role, were not sure how to deal with issues that tutors were raising.

2.7.10 The reflective report notes the tutor teaching observations take place once during the academic year. This involves the course organiser attending one tutorial group per tutor and giving constructive feedback through a standardised form, which is shared and discussed with the tutor.

Although course organisers found this a useful exercise, it was highlighted that they are effectively taking on a line management role and would benefit from training especially around more specific HR matters to enable them to support the tutors more effectively.

In addition, discrepancies were noted around the observations process in that the feedback was not always written up and that it did not contribute to training and development.

The tutors reported that they would welcome an annual review.

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

The tutors commented that although some community existed with students, this was often difficult to maintain and develop due to the limitations of contracted working hours.

There were discussions around the allocation to tutorial groups and that the method used does not appear to have a bearing on tutor experience or on the courses that the tutor has requested to teach.

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

The tutors felt that student numbers has increased in tutorials but this is not reflected in time allocated or indeed in payment. Tutors were unclear whether student numbers on tutorials were capped.

The number of hours allocated to tutors for marking was noted by the external members of the review team as particularly low in relation to comparator institutions.

2.7.12 The review team **recommends** that the School consider the following measures to improve the working conditions and support offered to Tutors:

- 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 and answer student emails. 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

2.7.13 The current Student Support Officers, Subject Academic Support Officer and Teaching Office staff are highly valued and the Subject Area are keen to retain them. The review team **commends** their commitment and the excellent support that they provide to both students and staff.

However, opportunities for career development can be limited. The review team **suggests** that the School and Subject Area consider development opportunities for these roles to safeguard retention and continuity. It is hoped that as part of the university review that these skilled roles are rewarded appropriately.

2.8 Learning environment (physical and virtual)

2.8.1 The Subject Area is spread out across multiple institutional sites which presents challenges for communication and community-building. The lack of space is also a major challenge for the School; seven of the Subject Areas are located across the 12 locations of SPS.

The School and Subject Area is committed to enhancing the student experience and this is reinforced through the inclusion of community and the learning environment as one of the 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 and 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 College.

2.8.2 The majority of students that met with the review team reported they did not always feel a sense of belonging and the lack of dedicated space is a serious hindrance in fostering community.

However there have been some recent developments in the learning environment that have had an impact on building community. A café space on the ground floor of the main School building, which students welcome as a blended social/academic space, although it can be very busy at certain times during the day e.g. lunchtime. In addition, the concept of the commercial café space may discourage students to study/gather there if they do not wish to make a purchase.

Students also highlighted the reception/exhibition area which has created some additional study space albeit in an open plan environment.

2.8.3 Nevertheless, space remains a key issue for both students and staff.
Students and staff regularly have to travel around the University campus for teaching often with a short transition time between classes. This has an impact on student –staff interaction as well as accessibility and gendered health and dignity implications.

The students who met with the review team commented that although the School are vocal about their commitment to enhancing the student experience, they felt a disconnect in their actual experience; students also expressed their concerns around the quality of teaching space. For example, the study room in the basement was not considered fit for purpose; 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.

Some of the teaching rooms were highlighted as poor quality, e.g. too small for the size of classes, windowless, airless and uncomfortable seating. In addition, in one of the rooms, it was reported that students with an adjustment schedule would be unable to use an appropriate chair.

There appeared to be some confusion around building access hours for undergraduate students, with some students noting they had understood the building was no longer accessible after 6pm or at the weekend. Some students noted that having a more

accessible building in the past had created a 'hub' environment enabling students to work on assignments and dissertations close to deadlines and creating a sense of community.

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 recognising the urgent need to review and address 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.

Assurance and Enhancement of provision

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

3.1.1 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.

3.1.2 The reflective report notes that External Examiners are overall very positive about the quality of teaching and assessment in the Subject Area.
In addition, the diversity and innovation of assessments is often commented on positively on by external examiners.

3.1.3 The Parliamentary Studies Honours course is taught in conjunction with the Houses of Parliament and the Scottish Parliament. The course has was re-accredited for a further five years from 2019/20 by the House of Commons.

3.1.4 New proposals and changes to existing curricula go through a robust process of consultation engaging staff and students within the Subject Area before going to the Boards of Studies. The School Learning and Teaching Directorate have positively cited the PIR Teaching Committee and the work it does to review proposals before the Board of Studies as exemplary within the School.

Section C – Review conclusions

<u>Confidence statement</u>

The review team found that Politics and International Relations 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 including the review of governance structures and the review of the Postgraduate tutor role.	1.1
2	The review team **commends** the Subject Area for the importance given to building community and the commitment to revising, enhancing and diversifying the curriculum to meet student needs and preferences.	1.1
3	The Subject Area is **commended** for its approach to enhancing learning and teaching.	2.1.2
4	The review team **commends** the commitment to reducing student numbers in Honours courses which is recognised as an example **good practice**. The Subject Area is **commended** for the changes to the curriculum which has resulted in reduced class sizes	1.2 2.1.1
5	Students were appreciative of the pre-honours course structure which is question and issues based. **This is recognised as an example of good practice and is commended by the review team.**	2.1.3
6	Students were very positive about the courses that specifically relate to a lecturers' particular area of research. They reported the noticeable enthusiasm demonstrated during these classes and felt this created good student-staff engagement and this is **commended** by the review team as an example of community building.	2.1.3
7	The review team **commends** the commitment to research led teaching which is recognised in much of the sector as an **example of good practice** in curriculum development and innovation.	2.1.3
8	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
9	The Student Support Officers and the Subject Area Support Officer are very highly thought of by the Personal Tutors and students and are **commended** for the excellent support they provide to staff and students.	2.3.2
10	To further support students and enable good working practices, the Teaching Office are keen to introduce monthly meetings with the Senior PT to flag students that may be causing concern and the review team **commends** this approach.	2.3.5

11	The review team **commends** the PIRPALS scheme, the commitment of the student leaders and their approach to enhancing the curriculum and the contribution to community building.	2.3.6
12	Staff and students highlighted a number of examples which contributed to community building and these are **commended** by the review team: - Transatlantic Seminar Series which is run by the Subject Area. - PIR Distinguished Scholar Lecture Series (**This is recognised as an example of good practice)** - School Choir which was established to break down barriers between Subject Areas and meets on a weekly basis. - Annual 4th year Dissertation retreat.	2.4.1
13	The review team **commends** the existing initiatives to support widening participation activity and the current consultations to explore further links.	2.5.3
14	The review team **commends** the Subject Area and the Careers Service on the provision of tutorials on graduate attributes and career preparations.	2.6.1
15	The review team **commends** the Subject Area for their approach to the annual review process.	2.7.2
16	The current Student Support Officers, Subject Academic Support Officer and Teaching Office staff are highly valued and the Subject Area are keen to retain them. The review team **commends** their commitment and the excellent support that they provide to both students and staff.	2.7.13
17	The review team **commends** the School for recognising the urgent need to review and address growth and space options	2.8.4

Recommendations for enhancement/Areas for further development

Priority	Recommendation	Section in report	Responsibility of
1	The review team **recommends** that the School consider the following measures to improve the working conditions and support offered to Tutors: - 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	2.7.12	School

	enable tutors and students to discuss questions after tutorials and answer student emails. 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 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.	2.7.6	
	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 the conclusions from the internal periodic review feed into the School review	2.7.4	
2	The review team **recommends** the School review their assessment and feedback procedures and consider ways to streamline these procedures to ensure timely return of materials to students and to reduce the administrative burden associated with assessment. Such changes might include: -using more efficient online software so that staff can directly access and mark course assessments once these have been submitted by the students. Alternative mechanisms such as Turnitin or systems developed by other Schools such as Physics and Astronomy could be considered. -a review of the moderation processes used for course work in the School with a view of making these processes less burdensome. For Honours modules marked by a single member of staff the School could consider returning course work before moderation to ensure timely feedback.	2.2.1	School
3	Students suggested a number of ideas to improve community building and enhance communications. The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area and School consider these suggestions.	2.4.2	School and Subject Area

	The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area consider seeking opportunities such as the Course Choice Options sessions for community building.	2.1.5	School
	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	School
4	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.	2.3.5	School and Subject Area
5	The review team **strongly recommends** that the School considers additional resources for Student Support in terms of office space and placement and additional Student Support Officer staffing resources as well as additional staffing resource to support the PIR SASO	2.3.5	Head of School and Director of Professional Services
6	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.	2.8.4	Timetabling Unit
	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	University Estates' Space Management Group
7	Whilst the review team acknowledges the pedagogical rationale for this approach, it **recommends** that the School and Subject Area consider their approach to lecture recording for equality and diversity reasons.	2.5.1	School and Subject Area
8	It is **recommended** that the School and Subject Area review communication channels to enable collaboration in areas that are School wide issues to ensure that practice and enhancements are consistent.	2.5.3	School and Subject Area
9	The review team **recommends** that the Subject Area continue to diversify their curriculum and build on the good work that has been done to	2.1.4	Subject Area

	decolonise and expand course offerings and course reading lists.		
10	The review team **recommends** the Subject Area reviews the format and content of the fundamentals course.	2.1.6	Subject Area
11	The review team **recommends** that the coursework extension policy is reviewed to consider and reflect on the negative impact the process is having on feedback timelines and staff workload/ time management across the board.	2.2.2	Service Excellence Project (Extensions and Special Circumstances project board)
12	The review team **recommends** that the School consider ways in which additional financial assistance and support could be provided, e.g. provision of space. In addition, access to relevant Learn pages to be granted to the leaders.	2.3.6	Head of School

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 the Subject Area confirm building access arrangements with the students.	2.8.3
2	The review team **suggests** that the School and Subject Area consider development opportunities for these roles to safeguard retention and continuity. It is hoped that as part of the university review that these skilled roles are rewarded appropriately.	2.7.13
3	It was **suggested** that a 'Meet the Teaching Office team' session could be included as part of the induction process for new members of academic staff. This could be used to inform staff of relevant processes and to improve working practices between academic and administrative staff.	2.7.1
4	It is **suggested** that individual offices for staff engaged in teaching would be best practice. In addition, it is **suggested** that it should be made clearer to students that they can speak with the relevant course organiser.	2.2.3
5	It is **suggested** that the Subject Area and School review guidance and support arrangements for students whilst abroad and during follow up sessions with students on their return from the year abroad	2.3.7
6	A Student User group exists within the School and it is **suggested** that the School engages with this valuable resource, if not already doing so, during the various consultations and reviews that are being undertaken. In addition, the School should liaise with the group during review of communication mechanisms and promotion of events.	2.4.4

Appendices

<u>Appendix 1 – University remit</u>

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)

1. BUILDING A PIR COMMUNITY

One of the key issues raised by Politics and International Relations (PIR) students through feedback mechanisms (which include student evaluations, the PIR Student-Staff Liaison Committee, and the NSS) is the question of how best to foster a sense of academic community and support our students. At the time of our 2014 Teaching Programme Review (TPR), we had 36 members of PIR staff. In the five years since this review, we have almost doubled to 64 academic staff, a growth which represents significant investment, but also presents difficulties. Given our size in terms of both staff and student numbers (and our split sites city centre campus location), building community presents particular challenges.

Our approach to these challenges has been based on evidence that students want and benefit from more time with staff in the classroom and in supervision. We have also sought to stress to students the benefits of being part of a large, research-active Subject Area (including a wide range of course options taught by expert staff, for example).

We would particularly welcome the review team's feedback on the following:

- Is our system of teaching governance, administrative support, and student support effective (particularly given our growth in staff and student numbers)?
- What is working well (and what could work better) in terms of student and staff efforts to build community?
- How can we best support our postgraduate tutors?
- Given our large numbers, how can we best prioritise efforts at building community amongst students (at pre-Honours and Honours levels) and improve student-student interaction and support; as well as building community amongst academic staff, in terms of our 'PIR identity'?

2. CURRICULUM

Since our last review in 2014, we have gone through two major curriculum reforms. The first, implemented from 2017/18 dispensed with the majority of our third year compulsory Honours courses, with the exception of *Research Design in Politics and International Relations (RDPIR)*. This decision was based on discussion in our teaching committee, staff away days, student feedback, and research on comparator institutions. Our intent in implementing these reforms was to improve the quality of our intellectual contact with students at Honours level, particularly as staff and student feedback have pointed to this contact as a key area of importance. We have also now capped the majority of our PIR Honours courses at 30 students or fewer, and have offered more Honours options overall (running approx. 10 more in 2019/20 than in the previous year).

Our second set of curriculum reforms, which will be implemented from 2020/2021, focuses on redesigning existing compulsory courses and introducing new ones at the pre-Honours level to ensure a comprehensive foundation for all students across the primary subfields of politics,

International Relations (IR) and political theory. We adopted these changes after a comparative review of other Scottish and UK university PIR offerings; and staff and student consultation. New optional courses will also be introduced at pre-Honours level from 2021/2022 (in political theory and international political economy), complementing existing optional offerings (in gender and British politics), and offering additional choice to students. This will also allow those students who wish to specialize earlier in their degree to do so, with new introductory courses at pre-Honours levels providing important foundations for more advanced-level options at Honours level.

We would particularly welcome the review team's feedback on the following:

- What are we doing well (and what could we do better) within our degree programmes in terms of coherence, building blocks and progression at pre-Honours and Honours level?
- Is our curriculum appropriately diverse and inclusive?
- What are we doing well (and what could we do better) in terms of supporting students and developing graduate attributes and employability?

Appendix 3: Additional information considered by review team

Prior to the review visit:

Reflective report

Re-accreditation for Application to Parliamentary Studies & Re-accreditation for Approval to Parliamentary Studies

School Quality Assurance Reports

External Examiners Summary reports

School organisation chart

Professional Services Organisation Chart

Current subject area staff information

Programme Handbooks

Programme specification information

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 Reports

List of programmes and courses included in the review

Previous report & response

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement

School Personal Tutor Statement

Academic Standards comments

Student Voice arrangements (link to webpage)

Student Representation arrangements (link to webpage)

Quality Assurance arrangements (link to webpage)

During the review visit

- Update on Tutoring Review
- School Space options paper
- Tutor experience notes

Appendix 4: Number of students

| | 2015/6 | 2016/7 | 2017/8 | 2018/9 | 2019/0 |
	FT	FT	FT	FT	FT
MA (Hons) in International Relations	78	89	99	85	86
MA (Hons) in International Relations and International Law			20	30	28
MA (Hons) in International Relations and Law	16	6			
MA (Hons) in International Relations with Quantitative Methods		6	7	2	5
MA (Hons) in Politics	53	48	52	57	60
MA (Hons) in Politics and Economic and Social History	14	11	7	6	
MA (Hons) in Politics with Quantitative Methods	1	6	1	3	1
TOTAL	**162**	**166**	**186**	**183**	**180**

Appendix 5: List of Programmes

• MA (Hons) Politics
• MA (Hons) International Relations
• MA (Hons) International Relations and Law (*currently being phased out, replaced by MA International Relations and International Law*)
• MA (Hons) International Relations and International Law
• MA (Hons) International Relations with Quantitative Methods
• MA (Hons) Politics with Quantitative Methods
• MA (Hons) Politics and Economic and Social History (*currently being phased out*)

In addition, the subject area are second-named on a wide range of joint degrees with other subjects:
• MA (Hons) Arabic and Politics
• MA (Hons) Economics and Politics
• MA (Hons) French and Politics
• MA (Hons) Geography and Politics
• MA (Hons) German and Politics
• MA (Hons) History and Politics
• MA (Hons) Italian and Politics
• LLB Law and International Relations
• LLB Law and Politics
• MA (Hons) Philosophy and Politics
• MA (Hons) Russian Studies and Politics
• MA (Hons) Scandinavian Studies and Politics
• MA (Hons) Social Anthropology and Politics
• MA (Hons) Social Policy and Politics
• MA (Hons) Sociology and Politics
• MA (Hons) Spanish and Politics
• MA (Hons) Sustainable Development (*This degree has a PIR main subject pathway*)