



Promoting higher quality

**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**

Subject Review Report

October 2000 Q25/2001

University of Nottingham

Classics and Ancient History

Reviewing the Quality of Education

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997. It has responsibility for assessing the quality of higher education (HE) in England and Northern Ireland from 1 October 1997 under the terms of a contract with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The purposes of subject review are: to ensure that the public funding provided is supporting education of an acceptable quality, to provide public information on that education through the publication of reports such as this one, and to provide information and insights to encourage improvements in education.

The main features of the subject review method are:

Review against Aims and Objectives

The HE sector in England and Northern Ireland is diverse. The HEFCE funds education in over 140 institutions of HE and 75 further education (FE) colleges. These institutions vary greatly in size, subject provision, history and statement of purpose. Each has autonomy to determine its institutional mission, and its specific aims and objectives at subject level.

Subject review is carried out in relation to the subject aims and objectives set by each provider. It measures the extent to which each subject provider is successful in achieving its aims and objectives.

Readers should be cautious in making comparisons of subject providers solely on the basis of subject review outcomes. Comparisons between providers with substantively different aims and objectives would have little validity.

Review of the Student Learning Experience and Student Achievement

Subject review examines the wide range of influences that shape the learning experiences and achievements of students. It covers the full breadth of teaching and learning activities, including: direct observation of classroom/seminar/workshop/ laboratory situations, the methods of reviewing students' work, students' work and achievements, the curriculum, staff and staff development, the application of resources (library, information technology, equipment), and student support and guidance. This range of activities is captured within a core set of six aspects of provision, each of which is graded on a four-point scale (1 to 4), in ascending order of merit.

The aspects of provision are:

- Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Student Progression and Achievement
- Student Support and Guidance
- Learning Resources
- Quality Management and Enhancement.

Peer Review

Reviewers are academic and professional peers in the subject. Most are members of the academic staff of UK HE institutions. Others are drawn from industry, commerce, private practice and the professions.

Combination of Internal and External Processes

The review method has two main processes:

- Preparation by the subject provider of a self-assessment in the subject, based on the provider's own aims and objectives, and set out in the structure provided by the core set of aspects of provision.
- A three-day review visit carried out by a team of reviewers. The review team grades each of the aspects of provision to make a graded profile of the provision, and derives from that profile an overall judgement. Provided that each aspect is graded 2 or better, the quality of the education is approved.

Published Reports

In addition to individual review reports, the QAA will publish subject overview reports at the conclusion of reviews in a subject. The subject overview reports are distributed widely to schools and FE colleges, public libraries and careers services. Both the review reports and the subject overview reports are available in hard copy and are also on the world-wide web (see back cover for details).

Introduction

1. This Report presents the findings of a review in October 2000 of the quality of education in classics and ancient history provided by the University of Nottingham.
2. The University of Nottingham was established in 1881 as a University College, and gained its full University charter in 1948. The main buildings of the University are situated in a parkland campus about three miles from the city centre. A further 30-acre campus is located ten miles from the main campus at Sutton Bonington. This was formerly the Midlands Agriculture and Dairy College, which became part of the University College in 1947. An additional campus has recently been opened within half a mile of the main campus on an inner urban site. The University has 17,250 full-time and 6,450 part-time students reading for undergraduate degrees, including 4,364 postgraduate students. The University operates a semester system, in which most undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are modular.
3. The provision forming the basis of this review is taught within the Department of Classics, which is part of the School of Humanities within the Faculty of Arts. In 2000-01 there were 181 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, including 6.5 FTE taught postgraduate students in the Department of Classics, taught by nine academic staff.
4. The following provision forms the basis of the review:
 - BA Ancient History Single Honours or Major with Minor Subject
 - BA Classical Civilization Single Honours or Major with Minor Subject
 - BA Latin Single Honours or Major with Minor Subject
 - BA Classics Joint Honours
 - BA Ancient History and Latin Joint Honours
 - BA Ancient History and Archaeology or History Joint Honours
 - BA Classical Civilisation and Archaeology or English, French, German, Philosophy, or Theology Joint Honours
 - BA Latin and Archaeology or English, French, or German Joint Honours
 - MA Classical Studies
 - MA Greek Archaeology and History
 - MA Greek Drama
 - MA Roman History
 - MA History of Slavery
 - MA Late Antique and Early Medieval History.
5. The statistical data in this Introduction are provided by the institution itself. The aims and objectives are presented overleaf. These also are provided by the institution.

The Aims and Objectives for Classics and Ancient History

Aims

The Department aims to:

- produce graduates well trained in different facets of the discipline through BA courses in Ancient History, Classical Civilization, Classics and Latin that combine both breadth and depth of study;
- produce graduates with skills relevant to future employment or postgraduate courses inside and outside the discipline;
- offer taught postgraduate courses that develop subject-specific and transferable skills relevant to employment, vocational qualifications or research;
- foster the learning and personal development of students within a supportive environment;
- recruit students on the basis of ability, without regard to individual background or circumstances.

Objectives

On successful completion of their course students should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of topics focused primarily on different aspects of the Greco-Roman world - languages, literature, culture and/or history - according to the degree course pursued;
- show a basic reading knowledge of Greek or Latin and mastery of associated linguistic skills, if they have followed a beginners language programme to its conclusion;
- evaluate both primary evidence and secondary literature critically;
- apply analytical skills, including the ability to argue logically and critically;
- take responsibility for their own learning and development, and organise individual time and effort effectively;
- initiate independent thought and enquiry;
- use oral and written communication skills and basic word-processing skills proficiently;
- recall information and use it effectively under pressure;

Students on successful completion of the courses specified should also be able to:

BA courses in Ancient History

- show familiarity with different types of source material for Greek and Roman history and the problems which it presents;
- understand and apply techniques of historical analysis and interpretation;
- demonstrate specialist knowledge and understanding of one or more topics within the discipline through special options and/or independent work;

BA courses in Classical Civilization

- understand and apply techniques of literary analysis and interpretation;
- show knowledge and understanding of problems in social and/or cultural history where relevant modules have been taken;
- demonstrate specialist knowledge and understanding of one or more topics within the discipline through special options and/or independent work;

BA courses in Classics and Latin

- read Latin texts proficiently and demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the language;
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts through study in depth and detail in the original language;
- apply techniques of literary analysis and interpretation to classical texts in the original language;
- (*Classics Joint Honours*) show either a basic reading knowledge and understanding of Greek or (for entrants with A-level Greek) a proficient reading capacity in, and knowledge of, Greek;

Taught MA Courses

- initiate, plan and complete a major independent project;
- show familiarity with, and apply, research skills.

Summary of the Review

6. The graded profile in paragraph 7 indicates the extent to which the student learning experience and achievement demonstrate that the aims and objectives set by the subject provider are being met. The tests and the criteria applied by the reviewers are these:

Aspects of provision

1. Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment
3. Student Progression and Achievement
4. Student Support and Guidance
5. Learning Resources
6. Quality Management and Enhancement.

Tests to be applied

To what extent do the student learning experience and student achievement, within this aspect of provision, contribute to meeting the objectives set by the subject provider?

Do the objectives set, and the level of attainment of those objectives, allow the aims set by the subject provider to be met?

Scale points

1

The aims and/or objectives set by the subject provider are not met; there are major shortcomings that must be rectified.

2

This aspect makes an acceptable contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives, but significant improvement could be made.

The aims set by the subject provider are broadly met.

3

This aspect makes a substantial contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives; however, there is scope for improvement.

The aims set by the subject provider are substantially met.

4

This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives.

The aims set by the subject provider are met.

7. The grades awarded as a result of the review are:

Aspects of provision	Grade
Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation	4
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	4
Student Progression and Achievement	4
Student Support and Guidance	4
Learning Resources	4
Quality Management and Enhancement	4

8. The quality of education in classics and ancient history at the University of Nottingham is **approved**.

The Quality of Education

Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation

9. The Department offers a wide range of BA and masters courses responsive to students' diverse interests and linguistic attainments. Staff operate an effective system of curriculum review, which has produced recent changes to improve the coherence of degree schemes, and which subjects all schemes to continuous scrutiny for improvement.

10. Curriculum design works effectively to provide a broad introductory syllabus in year one, and to allow the students to pursue more specialised interests in subsequent years. Undergraduates appreciate the flexibility of the modular system, and staff plan the modules to be offered in years two and three to ensure that required degree-specific modules are balanced by free choice of modules from an interesting range of topics.

11. The Department's objective of producing graduates well trained in different facets of the discipline is very effectively met. Courses are designed to introduce a range of approaches and sources, and assessment is appropriately varied. The requirement for students to complete individual projects and dissertations fosters their creativity. Postgraduate taught courses are well designed, and allow students considerable flexibility to study specialist courses and to follow personal research interests with the help of staff specialists in the field. The postgraduate courses offer appropriate flexibility, although this is not clearly reflected in written information.

12. The aim of teaching subject-specific skills is effectively met in undergraduate degree schemes: the teaching of classical languages is embedded in the curriculum, and the requirement that all single honours students should learn at least some Latin or Greek is admirable. Language content is very well designed and enables student to acquire language skills progressively. There is a range of entry points to cater for complete beginners or post GCE A-Level students; a commendable feature of the provision. Postgraduate students develop a range of analytical and research skills and most study or use ancient languages. But the study of languages is not compulsory, and this may disadvantage some students who subsequently choose to undertake further research in the subject.

13. Another core objective is for students to acquire skills transferable to future employment: computer use, written and oral communication, time-management, and the capacity to work independently or in groups,

are skills that are progressively developed through the curriculum. Students appreciate the opportunity to acquire such skills, as well as the more traditional abilities of constructing an argument and analysing ideas.

14. Currency and innovation in the curriculum are clear strengths: curriculum changes are informed by recent developments in research and new approaches to curriculum design in the subject. The Department is receptive to changes in the approach to study of the ancient world, and has expanded its course provision in social history; there are also plans to develop the area of art history. There are some very interesting interdisciplinary masters schemes, notably those in the History of Slavery, and Late Antique and Early Medieval History.

15. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation:
Grade 4.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

16. The Department shows a strong commitment to fostering learning and has developed a well thought out and well co-ordinated strategy for teaching, learning and assessment. This enables students to develop progressively knowledge and skills identified in course objectives.

17. The reviewers observed 11 teaching sessions, covering all levels, including lectures, seminars and student presentations. All sessions were effective and achieved clearly specified learning objectives. Material was interesting and presented at an appropriate level. A friendly style of teaching encouraged students to respond to questions and engage in discussion.

18. A particularly strong feature, much valued by students, are the well-structured language courses. Small, well-taught classes both enable and inspire students to develop a reading knowledge of classical texts. Group-teaching is supplemented in beginners Greek by computer-assisted learning.

19. Teaching and assessment styles develop appropriately over the undergraduate programme. Assessment is well matched to learning objectives, and assessment criteria are clear to students. First-year non-language modules are predominantly lecture and seminar based with tightly defined coursework and examination tasks. A very effective innovation has been the introduction of team presentations to increase student preparation for and engagement in seminars. From the first meeting the student teams are encouraged to take full responsibility for presenting and

leading discussions on a series of topics. This enhances subject learning and personal skills. In addition, the Department plans to explore ways of expanding its existing computer-based learning. Students are required to word-process coursework, and are encouraged to use other information technology skills, where appropriate, from the first year onwards, for example, in the module Introduction to the Roman World.

20. A range of second and third-year modules offers a variety of subjects and forms of assessment. The introduction of a second-year individual study has produced innovative and very imaginative individual work on various topics and in various media, including creative writing, drama, video presentations and practical projects. The third-year and postgraduate modules emphasise and support individual learning. Current and former students report positively on the opportunities for informal contact between staff and students, and the supportive research community.

21. External examiners agree that all aspects of assessment are carried out with scrupulous rigour, and that the process of examining is carried out in an exemplary way. The reviewers observed that marking is fair and properly represents the quality of the work produced.

22. In the past, some of the feedback given to students on their assessed work has been of variable quality. It was frequently expressed as if for an examiner's report, with a tendency to highlight faults and omissions. New procedures and a new style of feedback form now encourage comment on constructive and developmental issues, as well as pointing out errors and weaknesses. The reviewers are confident that the revised approach to feedback will redress the difficulties. In all other respects, the assessment process is exemplary.

23. The review team observed individual examples of excellent practice and of channels of dissemination to colleagues, new staff and postgraduate teachers, by which best practice can be integrated into the daily work of the Department.

24. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment:
Grade 4.

Student Progression and Achievement

25. The quality of students recruited is high; virtually all arrive with GCE A-Levels, and in 1999 the average points score was 23.95. A slight lowering of the average was noted in 2000, and the Department is monitoring the situation closely. The female/male ratio in 2000 was

1.41:1. There is a small but steady demand for postgraduate courses, with two applications for each place. There were 12 postgraduate students recruited to postgraduate courses in 2000.

26. Almost 99 per cent of students on undergraduate courses have GCE A-Level qualifications, although the Department welcomes applications from students with other qualifications. Approximately 38 per cent are recruited without a GCE A-Level in a classical subject. The Department has monitored the progress of such students, and found that, as a group, their achievement matches that of students with classical GCE A-Levels. A few mature and overseas students are admitted each year.

27. In line with University policy, the Department aims to recruit students purely on the basis of ability. It fulfils this aim by founding its judgements on all the information on the UCAS form, including actual and predicted examination results, school references, and other information given by the candidate. The main consideration is the ability of the candidate to complete the course successfully.

28. The progression and completion rates are extremely high. In the past five years only four undergraduates have been required to withdraw following academic failure. No students on taught postgraduate courses have failed during that period. Transfer to other courses in the University is concentrated in the first year, but is almost matched by transfers into the Department. There are a small number of withdrawals for non-academic reasons (25 in the last five years).

29. The proportion of First and Upper Second class degrees awarded has been steadily increasing, and in 2000 exceeded 80 per cent. External examiners speak extremely highly of the quality of students' work, and their judgement was confirmed by the samples of work scrutinised by the reviewers. These revealed high levels of subject-specific, analytical and transferable skills. The excellent degree results achieved are fully justified, and the Department might like to consider why, in the light of the quality of student intake and achievement, a higher proportion of First class degrees is not awarded.

30. Graduates are generally successful in progressing to employment and further study. The University's first-destination statistics for 1999 record, in the case of BA graduates, 57 per cent in employment and 31 per cent undertaking further study. The 1998 statistics for masters graduates show 11 per cent in employment, 34 per cent studying for research degrees, and a further 22 per cent undertaking further studies. The Department has recently undertaken its own survey of graduate employment, which reveals a wide variety of careers undertaken by graduates. Respondents reported on the

value of skills in communication, work management, and problem analysis which they acquired during their degree programme. This view was confirmed by the graduates in a meeting with reviewers.

31. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Student Progression and Achievement:
Grade 4.

Student Support and Guidance

32. The Department provides a highly supportive environment for its students. A coherent strategy for support and guidance, as well as a range of initiatives, serve to support the aim of fostering learning and personal development within a supportive environment. Current and former students confirm the friendly and open culture, and the contribution this had made to enhancing their educational experience.

33. There is an efficient and welcoming admission and induction procedure for undergraduates and postgraduates; the Department's student handbooks are exemplary in their usefulness, comprehensibility and warm tone. Academic, pastoral and welfare support, course advice and career guidance are provided primarily by the student's personal tutor. All single and joint honours students are allocated a personal tutor, who remains the same for the duration of the course. Continuity of support and the strengthening of initial links between student and tutor are all ensured. Problems with this relationship, though infrequent, are likewise provided for. Students and staff report that close departmental relationships allow for informal support and guidance from any member of staff. Masters students have similar arrangements and a supportive network of peers, researchers and staff.

34. The central and multifaceted role played by the personal tutor is supported by a network of module convenors and by the senior tutor, who is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the undergraduate system. The effectiveness of personal tutor support is enhanced by an excellent system of recently introduced personal progress records for all undergraduate and postgraduate students. These records provide a formal record of students' meetings with their personal tutor and of their achievements and progress. They inform the discussion of students' progress and support their development throughout their course.

35. The departmental secretary is an important source of timely information and support for students. She provides an effective additional link between students and staff, both of whom value her contribution.

36. There is easy and well-publicised access to central pastoral, welfare, study support and careers services. Liaison between departmental and central services generally works well, and provides an effective network of support. Increased emphasis on career guidance has resulted in well-directed special events being held in the Department. However, the Department's statement on disability is currently narrow, and focuses mainly on dyslexia. The University's disability policy, which is to be introduced this session, should help to broaden the interpretation of disability.

37. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Student Support and Guidance:
Grade 4.

Learning Resources

38. The Classics Department provides a high-quality learning environment for students. There is a clear overall strategy for learning resources, which is responsive to student needs. This has led, for example, to the recent upgrading of computing facilities within the Department and similarly, pressures on learning resources resulting from rising student intake have been foreseen and planned for.

39. Library provision for classics is conveniently located in the nearby Hallward Library and is of good quality. It is broadly based and complemented by holdings in cognate disciplines. Excellent systems are in place, including a fund for the purchase of multiple copies of key texts and a short loan scheme. Both are responsive to student needs. Liaison between the Department and library is clear and effective. A humanities subject librarian has responsibility for the classics area. A transparent and effective purchasing system incorporates requests from postgraduate and undergraduate students. The library accommodation is substantial and well designed for student use. There are clear procedures for the allocation of study areas, which postgraduate students are able to book in advance.

40. Computing facilities have recently been improved. They include a University computing resource area with 18 personal computers located within the Department, although not yet with 24-hour access. Students can also use additional open access computers in nearby buildings, available for 24-hours daily. Across the campus, the University provides a ratio of one open access personal computer to seven students. An effective booking system exists, but in practice the Department facilities mean that this is rarely needed. Computer training is offered for postgraduates and

undergraduates through the Information Services Directorate, and instruction in the use of web-based resources is incorporated in the Department's postgraduate programme.

41. Departmental accommodation is excellent: it is mainly centralised, with staff offices and teaching rooms on two floors. There are common rooms for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as for staff, contributing to the positive and friendly atmosphere. Teaching rooms are mostly modern and well equipped. The University provides ample social and recreational facilities on the campus site.

42. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Learning Resources:
Grade 4.

Quality Management and Enhancement

43. The Department's quality management procedures operate within the context of the University's quality strategy, which is set out in the comprehensive and clear quality manual, accessible on the web, and regularly updated. Primary responsibility for quality management lies with the School, but in the case of the School of Humanities, owing to the diverse nature of the subject areas, the implementation of policy is delegated to the Department. A university system of quality audits covers all departments in a five-year cycle. The Department of Classics was audited in March 2000. The audit report was largely supportive and the Department has responded constructively to suggestions for improvement.

44. Within the Department, the quality of programmes is regularly monitored by a comprehensive system of internal reviews. This includes regular evaluation of modules by students, using a questionnaire produced by the School after extensive consultation, and by module convenors and moderators. Students are also invited to evaluate their programmes at the end of their course, and a further questionnaire is sent to them 15 months after graduation. The results of monitoring are subjected to intensive analysis and wide discussion within the Department, involving both staff and students. The scrutiny of information is conducted in a spirit of critical self-evaluation, and drives a continuing process of improvement and enhancement. The Department uses a limited range of statistical information in its monitoring. It may wish to consider extending the range of its monitoring, as more data become available with the projected development of university information systems.

45. A further review of sections of the curriculum takes place annually and full degree programmes are reviewed every five years. As well as staff and students, external examiners are involved in these reviews. The Department produces detailed responses to the reports of external examiners, and it is evident that it takes their comments very seriously. Consideration of the reports has recently been strengthened at school and university level with a view to making the process more robust, and ensuring that issues beyond the Department's competence are addressed.

46. A commendable feature of the Department's quality management procedures is the inclusion of a wide range of staff, students and graduates in the process. Formal consultation with students is through the undergraduate and postgraduate staff-student consultative committees, but they are also included in focus groups on particular issues. Students speak warmly of the responsiveness of the Department to student opinion. The students are helped to be effective in committee by a valuable new training initiative, provided by the Centre for Teaching Enhancement in partnership with the Students' Union.

47. Staff are supported by a two-yearly appraisal (annual in the case of probationary staff), and the Department operates an exemplary system of peer observation of teaching. Both processes are confidential to the staff involved. However, there is provision, by agreement, for using them to identify wider staff development needs, and to inform the Department's regular decision-making processes. New staff are allocated departmental mentors who are responsible for guiding them and developing their skills and, following some problems with the marking criteria of temporary lecturers, the Department has decided to include these staff in the mentoring system. Similar support is given to postgraduates involved in teaching. Newly appointed lecturers attend the University's Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice programme which is accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association. Regrettably, university policy does not allow postgraduates involved in teaching to register for the programme, but another, non-accredited, programme is available to them. The departmental staff development policy ensures that staff attend Department, School, and University training events, as well as national activities.

48. The self-assessment was well structured and presented, reflecting the emphasis placed by the Department on critical self-evaluation.

49. This aspect makes a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives. The aims set by the subject provider are met.

Quality Management and Enhancement:
Grade 4.

Conclusions

50. The quality of education in classics and ancient history at the University of Nottingham is approved. All aspects make a full contribution to the attainment of the stated objectives and the aims set by the subject provider are met. The reviewers come to this conclusion based upon the review visit, together with an analysis of the self-assessment and additional data provided.

51. The positive features of the education in classics and ancient history in relation to the aspects of provision include the following:

- a. Undergraduate and postgraduate curricula are well matched to aims and objectives, with opportunities for the progressive acquisition of subject-specific and transferable key skills (paragraphs 11 to 13).
- b. Curricula are up to date and innovative; they are subject to regular development and are informed by staff research and new approaches to curricular design (paragraph 14).
- c. Teaching is consistently effective and includes well-structured and effectively taught language courses (paragraphs 17; 18).
- d. Assessment is varied, well designed and rigorously applied (paragraphs 20; 21).
- e. There is a high ratio of applicants to places on undergraduate courses and successful recruitment of high-quality students, maintained through a period of rapid expansion (paragraphs 25; 26).
- f. Good progression and completion rates are achieved in undergraduate and postgraduate courses and there are high levels of achievement covering all intended learning outcomes (paragraph 28).
- g. The Department has an exemplary record of fostering the learning and personal development of students within a supportive learning environment. Departmental student handbooks are excellent in tone and content (paragraphs 32; 33).
- h. Recently introduced personal progress records provide staff with a formal record of student achievement and progress, and encourage individual students to reflect on their own academic and personal development (paragraph 34).
- i. There are excellent and easily accessible library resources, with effective liaison between departmental and library staff (paragraph 39).
- j. The provision of undergraduate, postgraduate and staff common rooms contributes to the friendly and collaborative ethos of the Department (paragraph 41).
- k. There are coherent, comprehensive and well-structured quality management systems at department, school and university levels (paragraph 43).
- l. There is an effective departmental programme of monitoring and review which leads to real improvements in quality and is informed by a spirit of genuine self-evaluation (paragraph 44).