

School of Modern Languages: Strategic Plan (2020-2025)

Introduction

The School of Modern Languages (SoML) is one of the largest and most diverse schools of Modern Languages in the UK and has been consistently ranked in the top 5 Schools of its kind across a range of national league tables. We are committed to research-led teaching and an approach to language study in which the acquisition of linguistic competence and the study of culture go hand in hand. Colleagues in SoML are actively engaged in research and teaching activities spanning all six of the University's strategic priority areas; and we regard our twin goals of language acquisition and cultural understanding as intimately bound up with the University's strategic vision for both Global St Andrews and Diverse St Andrews.

SoML boasts a wide range of approaches to the study of language and culture; but underpinning everything we do is a commitment to the study of multilingual humanities that embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, and does so in a way that is designed to promote the intellectual curiosity and endeavour of all our students, regardless of educational background. While a key aspect of our mission is to shape graduates who will go on to enjoy successful careers in post-university employment, it is inherent in our approach that cultural understanding and the ability to communicate in other languages are key skills that are not only empowering in their own right, but essential in promoting a society in which equality and diversity are taken seriously as key drivers of progress.

Research Strategy

What makes SoML stand out from many other schools of modern languages in the UK is the sheer depth and breadth of our research activity which spans not only some eight distinct language areas, but also a range of cultural-historical epochs from the Middle Ages to the Present-Day. This expertise is complemented by the School's research activity in Comparative Literature which, almost uniquely in the UK, operates under the auspices of SoML rather than English. As Modern Languages has evolved as a discipline, our researchers have increasingly embraced new critical concepts, and methodologies; and this has been supplemented through a number of recent appointments (including, as envisaged in our previous Strategy Document (2019/20), the creation of a new Department of Chinese Studies). In addition, the recent appointment of additional Associate Lecturers in Arabic and Persian has made it possible to implement a rota of regular research leave for E+R colleagues in that department.

Our research strategy is driven by three underlying objectives:

- maintaining and deepening our existing excellent coverage of a broad range of research fields
- fostering interdisciplinarity and collaborative research (both within and outwith our School and the institution)
- extending the reach and impact of our research and engaging the broader public.

By pursuing these three key objectives our overall aim is to improve our performance in future cycles of the REF and to ensure our research makes significant contributions to society. We are committed to promoting an inclusive, nurturing and collegial research environment in which all colleagues can thrive, and which we believe is fundamental to realising this goal.

To achieve our aspiration to be **a globally world-leading centre of research across the breadth of research in modern languages** we will continue to:

- Grow capacity in the nine research areas we have identified as particular strengths of our School (comparative studies; creativity and performance; gender and sexuality studies; history, politics and society; medical humanities and cultures of science; medieval and early modern studies; memory studies; postcolonial and transnational studies; translation studies and linguistics). We will do this through targeted recruitment alongside increasing numbers of postdoctoral fellows, PGR students and grant applications in these areas.

- Build on our recent recruitment of a founding Chair of Chinese Studies (G9) by recruiting additional outstanding researchers with strong track records in publication, income generation and impact.
- Build on our implementation of a regularised programme of sabbatical leave in Arabic and Persian by exploring the potential to recruit a senior scholar (G8 or G9) with the capacity to provide high-level research leadership
- Grow the postdoctoral community in SoML by proactively encouraging fellowship applications across all our departments, and by increasing the number of large grant applications with postdocs attached.

Key performance indicators of success in these areas will include an increase in the overall number of postdocs in SoML over the next five years and improved scores for both Outputs and Environment in REF.

In order to **promote interdisciplinarity and collaborative research** we will:

- Devise and implement an incentivisation scheme for the development of large collaborative research grants.
- Complete the review of our existing research institutes and centres to ensure that they optimise opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative research across and beyond our School.
- Continue to use the School Research Seminar series as a forum for developing cross-disciplinary discussions and initiatives that go beyond the remit of individual departmental research activity days.
- Seek to build on our recently identified interdisciplinary research areas through a proactive engagement with other Schools in terms of collaborative research projects.

Key performance indicators of success in these areas will include an increase in the number of applications for large grants (£500k+) over the next five years and an improved Environment score in REF.

In order to **extend the reach and impact of our research** we will:

- Identify and support possible new impact case studies from the beginning of the next REF cycle.
- Continue to use our Byre World programme as a testbed for impact and engagement events and support this with dedicated funds from our operational budget.
- Seek to ensure that all research-active colleagues on E+R contracts in SoML participate in some form of impact and engagement activities through agreed goals for individual institutional study leave.

Key performance indicators of success in these areas will be an improved Impact score in REF.

Teaching and Learning Strategy

While we are determined to hold our strong position in national league tables, we also recognise that NSS scores are notoriously volatile and not always a reliable guide to teaching efficacy. The creation of new Department of Chinese Studies has provided us with an opportunity to re-think from first principles what a language degree in the increasingly digitalised world of the 2020s should look like. We will use the next University Review of Teaching and Learning to re-assess our current practices and to explore ways of increasing the number of students progressing from sub-honours to honours across all languages. Recent experience has highlighted the potential of a more proactive engagement with technology enhanced learning, and we will be reflecting on this experience and on how an appropriate package of structured training might be developed in order to integrate this more effectively into our standard practices (including our use of the Multi-Media Centre). In conjunction with University-led initiatives to develop shared multi-media facilities we will update our own Multi Media Centre to ensure that it is capable of supporting digitally-enhanced language learning across all our languages at the highest levels.

Our teaching and learning strategy is driven by five underlying objectives:

- Maintaining our unique breadth and depth of research-led teaching, and ensuring that our curriculum is inclusive, diverse and flexible.
- Proactively addressing the challenge of declining numbers of students taking languages and the diminishing provision of language teaching at secondary level, especially in non-fee-paying schools.
- Developing and consolidating new and existing collaborations with international partners to ensure that, even after Brexit, all students have the opportunity to study abroad
- Finding ways (including TEL) of delivering our teaching more efficiently, reducing the burden of assessment, and promoting undergraduate research.
- Maintaining the balance between high-level language competency and in-depth cultural understanding that enhances the employability of our graduates

By pursuing these five inter-locking objectives our overall aim is to ensure that all our graduates –regardless of their educational or social background and whether they have the opportunity at school to learn a language – enjoy the benefit from research-led teaching of the highest quality, and have the opportunity to maximise their intellectual potential and their capacity to pursue a wide range of professional careers. In this way we also aim to maintain our current excellent standing in national league tables.

In order to achieve these objectives we will:

- Continue to make strategic appointments that not only maintain our existing breadth of coverage in teaching, but also open up new areas of interdisciplinary and transnational teaching that are targeted at School-wide cohorts.
- Review our curriculum to ensure that it appeals to students from a wide range of different educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (including those under-represented in the School, e.g. BAME students)
- Analyse our student intake (both internally and externally) on an annual basis to ensure that it bears comparison with the highest standards of Widening Participation.
- Use the upcoming URLT to consider the effectiveness of existing Sub-Honours programmes (especially in terms of motivating students to progress to Honours)
- Construct a business case for the introduction of *ab initio* / intermediate teaching in those languages where it does not already exist in order to fulfil our commitment to making the study of languages to degree level open to all regardless of educational background.
- Improve provision for intermediate level study in order to recognise the differing needs of incoming students and support progression through their degree.
- Build on the establishment of strategic partnerships such as the University of Bonn and Karlova University with the aim of all departments in SoML having an identifiable strategic partner.
- Compare contact hours in language-teaching at other HEIs to ensure that what we are offering our students is commensurate with that offered by our competitors (while recognising that a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to different languages/language-learners is unlikely to be appropriate).
- Analyse staff-student ratios across SoML as a whole whenever a post falls vacant (while recognising that departmental SSRs are only one factor in driving appointments).
- Build on our current experience of TEL in order to identify areas of best practice in the delivery of both teaching and assessment (while recognising that the primary role of TEL is to enhance and extend our basic provision of face-to-face teaching).
- Explore ways of using TEL to improve the research skills and digital literacy of our graduates (thereby boosting their employability).

Key performance indicators of success in all the above areas will include:

- Maintaining our top 5 position within national league tables.
- An increase in the number of students taking up language study at Sub-Honours and a higher overall rate of retention into honours.

- An increase in the overall number of FTEs studying abroad.
- An increase in engagement with schools to promote language learning.

Postgraduate Strategy (PGR and PGT)

Attracting PGR and PGT students remains one of the most challenging aspects of our provision. One consequence of the loss of Erasmus funding post-Brexit is that, albeit reluctantly, we have decided to disengage with the very successful Mundus/Crossways PGT programme. Our internationalisation strategy will explore ways in which we can build on existing partnerships such as Bonn and add new partners in order to develop a high-quality network of HEIs. If we are to establish multi-national PGT programmes equivalent to those formerly delivered via the Mundus/Crossways scheme, this will require a considerable investment of resource given the prevailing fees regime across the European market. While colleagues already contribute to interdisciplinary programmes (e.g. the M.Litt in Mediaeval Studies), the introduction of Chinese Studies offers exciting new possibilities for recruitment at both PGR and PGT level. The range of research interests in SoML and our Institute for Cultural Identity and Memory Studies means that we are well placed to offer new, cutting-edge interdisciplinary Masters programmes.

Our Postgraduate (PGR/PGT) strategy is driven by four underlying objectives:

- Increasing the volume of high-quality applications to both internal and external funding schemes at PGR level
- Improving our PG web-presence and how we advertise the availability of SoML funding and supervision for potential PGR/PGT applicants
- Converting a greater number of existing PGT students to PGR students
- Developing a clearer understanding of PGT demand in our discipline in the next decade and developing new programmes, where appropriate, in conjunction with the Graduate School

In order to achieve these objectives, we will:

- Commit, where possible, to providing at least one (new) SoML scholarship p.a. and combining this with other funding schemes (Handsel, CSC scholarships, Co-Tutelles with our strategic partners) to attract the very best applicants (especially those likely to be successful in follow-on applications to external bodies such as SGSAAH etc.)
- Improve our advertising and management of the SGSAAH funding scheme, and provide stronger support for applicants to that scheme.
- In line with our objectives for increasing large grant applications, ensure that PGR students are costed into applications wherever funding schemes allow.
- Continue to develop our recently-upgraded School-wide research pages.
- Continue to review our PGT provision and to consider (in conjunction with the Graduate School) which new initiatives have the most potential to attract students in greater numbers.
- Require all new proposals for programmes/delivery mechanisms (e.g. distance/on-line learning etc.) to be accompanied by a detailed business plan based on robust market-research

The key performance indicators of success in the above areas will be:

- An increased volume in the numbers of PGR and PGT applications
- Increased PGR/PGT activity
- Increased PGR/PGT income

People Strategy: Diverse St Andrews

Whether in our teaching, research or administration, all of us strive to embrace and implement our School's core values – trust, transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and fairness – in order to facilitate and promote an atmosphere of teamwork, community and collegiality in which all have an equal opportunity to excel. All

colleagues make an important and distinctive contribution to the success of SoML. We are committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment in which excellence in teaching, research and administration does not come at the cost of student and staff well-being. Our aim is to ensure that SoML offers a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment for all staff and students including those from the LGBTQ+ community and under-represented social groups. This applies not only to our curriculum and research agendas, but also to our estate and the two sites out of which we are likely to be operating for the duration of this strategic plan (both of which currently have restricted accessibility). In accordance with our zero-tolerance policy in respect of bullying and similar unacceptable behaviours, we will continue to deploy the full range of the University's disciplinary procedures where needed.

Our People Strategy is underpinned by seven key objectives

- Ensuring that our curriculum, in both scope and delivery, is genuinely inclusive with a view to increasing the proportion of under-represented social groups in our School's UG and PG populations
- Using equitable and transparent norms for teaching and administrative allocations to ensure that the different contractual circumstances of academic staff are recognised appropriately.
- Ensuring that all recruitment processes are carried out in an inclusive manner and attuned to unconscious bias.
- Ensuring a reasonable balance of gender, experience and contract-type on all our key advisory committees.
- Promoting leadership and career development among academic and PS staff at all levels and contract types.
- Minimising the use of bank worker contracts and fixed-term appointments.
- Improving staff/student well-being.

In order to achieve these objectives, we will:

- Engage in close consultation during the planning, design and construction phases of any new building work.
- Continue to monitor our Athena Swan Action Points following our recent submission in November 2020
- Continue to schedule all key committee meetings in core hours (with appropriate PST support allocated).
- Monitor School committees to ensure a reasonable balance of gender, experience and contract-type, as well as the embedding of the student voice into our decision-making processes.
- Continue to advertise School roles openly so as to create opportunities for all colleagues to gain experience of service and leadership, thereby supporting career progression.
- Improve our induction procedures for new colleagues and make EDI training standard for all colleagues.
- Diversify the body of colleagues involved in AR&D reviews and develop a more structured and inclusive system of mentoring.
- Engage with the University's recently announced review of workload norms and seek to develop a new workload allocation for SoML that better captures the full range of colleagues' activities and offers a clear and transparent distribution across all three areas – research, teaching and administration – weighted according to contract type.
- Ensure that appropriate portfolio management responsibilities are shared between the PS team and academic role holders.
- Explore ways of offering the most suitable kinds of support (including flexible working where appropriate) to ensure smooth transitions into and out of periods of sickness/parental/carers leave.
- Wherever possible restrict the use of fixed-term EF contracts for the replacement of colleagues on secondments and/or research leave, thereby minimising the use of casualised 'hourly-paid' contracts.

- Engage with the University's Mental Health strategy to promote positive health and well-being in the School.

Key performance indicators will include (a) Athena Swan Bronze award, (b) student and staff surveys, (c) external examiner reports; (d) URLT report, (e) successful promotions on the part of both E+R and EF colleagues, (f) a reduction in the spend of the casual teaching budget, and (g) reduction in days lost to sickness.