School of Earth and Environmental Sciences

School President Report

Semester 1 2020/21

Belinda Hawes

**Introduction**

This report is to let you know what I’ve been up to this semester. It is important that there is transparency within the university so that we can all work together better and keep each other accountable. As I’m sure has been the case for many of you, this year has not turned out exactly how I was expecting it to. Many of the things I planned to do as school president have not been possible due to the restrictions, but I have been pushing forward to improve the student experience and acting on all the feedback you have given me.

**COVID-19**

This semester was challenging for many reasons, most of which were related to coronavirus. In Earth Science most of our students were able to return to St Andrews and so a number of classes and fieldtrips were able to happen in person. As president I have been given so much feedback of how important and enjoyable face to face learning has been and I will continue to push for in person teaching wherever possible. However looking forward to semester 2 it seems like most of the semester will have to be online, although I am still holding out hope for some end of year fieldtrips. COVID has also had a massive impact on the well being of the student population, to try and help with this we have set up the mentoring scheme within the school and had multiple in person events in the Can Do Marquee. COVID continues to be a challenge and I am trying to think of creative ways for our school to feel connected and supported through second semester.

**Elections and Class Representatives**

At the start of term the class rep elections happened, not only were all the positions filled but some of them had multiple candidates! The team of class reps have been fantastic through first semester at keeping me in the loop with how everyone is doing and relaying any problems that come up. We have been having weekly teams meetings to make sure that information is able to be communicated effectively. At the end of first semester we had our SSCC meeting with the Director of Teaching, we discussed how online learning had been going as well as highlighting some things that could be improved for next semester. Generally the feeling was that, under the circumstances, the semester had gone pretty well.

**Education committee and School Presidents’ Forum**

Every week all the School Presidents meet together, this is a great chance to work together on issues that are common to multiple schools. This semester a lot of the conversation has been round online learning and making sure that the students have the best possible experience. It also allows us to work together to plan events. The science presidents collaborated on the Pride in STEM week this semester and next semester we will be working on DiverSTEM careers week. The School Presidents’ Forum occurs twice a semester and is a chance for the presidents to discuss issues with the Deans and the Proctor. This semester we pressed the importance of closing the feedback loop along with discussing various aspects of online learning.

**Careers**

With the help of the class reps we did surveys on what careers events the students would like. This helped us to plan events throughout the semester including a talk from a recent St Andrews graduate and a session on applying for masters and writing personal statements. I have been working closely with the careers centre link and we have some exciting ideas that we are looking into for next semester. I am also hoping to run more recent graduate talks to help people get ideas about what you can do with an Earth Science degree from St Andrews. We will also be involved with the DiverSTEM careers week later in semester.

**Mentoring Scheme**

This semester the Earth Science mentoring scheme has finally been set up. This is something that my predecessors had been working towards and so I was delighted that we were able to launch it. There are 3 tiers in the scheme; post docs mentoring PhDs, PhDs mentoring final year undergrads, and honours students mentoring 1st years. A small team including myself paired student based on shared research interests and hobbies. We hope that this scheme will foster relationships between different years and help the mentees to get advice from someone a little bit further ahead.

**Wellbeing**

To help improve wellbeing in the school we held a number of events in the Can Do Marquee. These were generally for a specific year group to be able to catch up, get to know each other, and discuss their course. The students who attended these really enjoyed them and if it becomes possible I will run more this semester. I also updated the schools wellbeing posters and emailed them out to students. To make sure people feel included I have been sending weekly emails with information about what’s happening in the school that week. This has not happened for the last few years in our school and, while in normal times, I agree that it clogs up the inbox, while everything is online I think it has been useful in making sure people don’t miss out on things.

I have been working closely with GeolSoc this semester and they have run a number of online socials which have been popular, along with a film screening in the marquee. The committee has been doing a great job of getting people engaged and particularly getting staff and students mixing. I know that they are planning more fun things for next semester.

**Semester 2**

Looking forward there are some events I would like to run. “It’s Your Geological Life” normally happens once a semester but I decided not to run it this semester since the atmosphere in the room is such an important part of the event and I felt this could not be emulated online. I hope that I might be able to organise one for the end of second semester assuming the restrictions are relaxed. Part of my manifesto was ensuring a smooth transition to the Bute building, due to COVID this will not be happening until summer 2021 at the earliest and so will now be a task for the next president.

I am hoping to establish some sort of virtual coffee afternoon to allow students who are struggling or lonely to have a chat (hopefully also getting some staff on board so that they can support the students better). I am also planning on running a number of careers talks and also an internship showcase where senior students can share their internship experiences with younger students.

I am hoping to be more involved in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee this coming semester. As a school I believe we could be working harder to promote EDI issues, although the creation of the anti-racism reading group in semester 1 was a very positive step.

Finally, I will also continue to work closely with the class reps and DoT to ensure that any problems are resolved quickly. I am also always trying to ensure there is clear communication from staff to students, especially in a semester where there is so much uncertainty and things can change so quickly.