

# Student Opinion on Academic Council (SOAC) Advisory Group

## Friday 20 September at 5pm in the Committee Room

### Minutes

#### Present:

- Ondrej Hajda, Education Officer (Convenor & Chair)
- Chloe Hill, President
- Teddy Woodhouse, Director of Representation
- Scott Schorr, Postgraduate President
- Sophie Kelly, Arts/Divinity Senate Rep
- Ben Anderson, Member for Widening Access

#### In attendance:

- Iain Cupples, Education Advocate

#### Agenda:

##### 1 Adoption of Agenda

##### 2 Apologies for Absence

##### 3 Starring Other Items in the Academic Council (AC) Agenda

Mr Woodhouse asked for starring item #2 on the AC agenda concerning the Membership of the AC, and argued that as a sabbatical officer responsible for the area education, he should be a member of the AC. Ms Hill supported this view and agreed to propose that the Director of Representation became one of the Student Members of the AC. Possible membership of the Director of Representation in the Senate Business Committee was also discussed, in which the Director of Representation and the Association President could swap places.

**Action point: Ms Hill will ask for starring of item #2 on the AC agenda and propose that the Director of Representation becomes a member of the AC.**

Ms Hill asked for starring item #6 on the AC agenda concerning the Senate Business Committee Minutes from 10/9/2013 and pointed out that correction is needed in point 8 of the Minutes.

**Action point: Ms Hill will ask for starring item #6 on the AC agenda and provide clarification on student involvement in the 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Finale.**

##### 4 Considering Academic Council Discussion Items

Mr Hajda emphasized that the Proctor wanted to see some strong student input in this section.

##### 4.1 Ways to improve discussion and dialogue at Academic Council

Mr Hajda noted that one of the reasons for establishing SOAC was to promote student participation at the AC.

Ms Hill mentioned that AC sees the minutes referred to it from other bodies, but does not solve things. Ms Hill expressed that one of the possible ways around was

to have AC talk about substantial subjects like when Patrick O'Hare (Association President 2011-2012) tried to bring up RUK fees for discussion.

Mr Hajda asked how the agenda for AC is set. Ms Hill responded that the agenda for the AC is set by the Senate Business Committee that would meet on November 19th, February 25th and May 20<sup>th</sup> in this academic year.

Mr Woodhouse added that Students' Oral Report (modelled on the Principal's Report) could promote discussion within the AC. Mr Woodhouse also suggested the AC takes Student-Written Submission for annual consideration. Mr Cupples proposed that both ideas were presented in front of the AC. Ms Hill replied that Student-Written Submission might be rejected by the University on the grounds of accuracy.

**Action point: *Be active at the AC!* Student Members will present the idea of Students' Oral Report and Student-Written Submission to the AC, and ask to have these included in regular AC agenda.**

#### **4.2 The desirability of continuing to provide resit examinations and deferred assessments**

Ms Hill explained that a lot of universities do not do resits and that St Andrews is one of the few that do. Ms Hill added that rules on resits are not standardized on the University level and vary between Schools which creates difficulties when it comes to the right to resit and Honours progression. Mr Cupples remarked that students started to turn in blank papers and the University capped the top grade from resits at 7.0 to challenge this practise.

Ms Hill noted that the Proctor had been trying to standardize these procedures but faced resistance from individual Schools. Mr Cupples stated that in the past the University pulled the whole project if the Schools could not agree on the issue.

Ms Hill expressed that she would not be surprised if the University agreed on not doing resits. Ms Kelly and Mr Anderson enquired what the consequences would be. Ms Hill answered that students would have to retake the module. Mr Cupples remarked that the University discourages student to take the same module twice as this is seen as an unfair advantage. Ms Hill said that the right to resit results in the lowest drop-out rate for the University.

Mr Cupples asserted that the University would still have to offer some kind of deferred assessment if students were properly ill. Ms Hill anticipated that the AC will talk about what defines deferred assessments as they vary School to School. Mr Anderson gave an example that deferred assessment in first year Film Studies was in the form of using the same question for deferred assessment as in the exam itself. Mr Cupples noted that most Schools would offer an essay in place of deferred assessment.

Ms Hill recommended the Senate Reps talked to School Presidents about these issues. Mr Hajda expressed that it is not important to present a unanimous voice from School Presidents. Ms Hill suggested the Senate Reps broke down the issue and gave an explanation from each side.

Mr Hajda asked what the procedure is for postgraduate students. Mr Schorr

replied that this is also done on School by School basis. Mr Schorr added that a number of students would send in complaints about progression into the dissertation stage of a PGT course.

Ms Hill opined that resits need to exist and need to be standardized, especially for a right to resit to let students into Honours progression.

**Action point: Ms Kelly and Mr DaBell will gather feedback from School Presidents on their views on resit examinations and deferred assessment at the School Presidents' Meeting happening on Monday 23 September 2013 at 6pm in the Committee Room.**

#### **4.3 What are the three main threats to the maintenance of academic standards over the next 10 years?**

Ms Hill anticipated that one of the major concerns to academics would be public funding. Ms Hill asserted that this would be a particularly important discussion topic because REF results were meant to be out the following week and they determine how much research funding the University receives.

Mr Woodhouse claimed that one of the main threats is the overemphasis of research over learning and teaching, or of vice versa. Mr Hajda illustrated this point with the Library Review from the previous year in which the over-emphasis on Special Collections was criticised and it was recommended that a better balance was sought between research Library resources and resources for learning & teaching.

Mr Woodhouse added that another major threat would be if the University continued to grow against technological standards (e.g. by not providing enough laptop-friendly study spaces). Mr Hajda expressed that this is a wider problem and that the University would need to adapt to modern habits

Mr Schorr opined that the University ought to do more about advancing technological skills within curriculum for both staff and students, especially the knowledge of HTML. Ms Hill was fond of this idea but suggested instead that, as a geographer, all students should learn GIS. Mr Schorr replied that GIS is different.

Mr Cupples noted that the discussion item focuses more on threats, not quality enhancements, and indicated that academics would want to talk about academic misconduct instead.

Ms Hill expressed her curiosity if MOOCs would come up in the discussion because the Principal seemed to like them. Ms Kelly enquired how they assessment for MOOCs functioned. Ms Hill replied that some do not assess and some assess for an exam fee. Mr Schorr enquired about an equal demand across subjects. Ms Hill answered that universities usually test only their most popular subjects. Mr Hajda noted that there still are many problems with MOOCs, especially concerning the high dropout rate.

Mr Cupples imagined that academics would also talk about rising competition and universities in developing countries.

Ms Hill expressed that another thing to come up could be social media and the

ability of students to capture their lecturers instantly on Facebook/Twitter.

**Action point: Ms Hill will raise a point about the need for balance between research and learning & teaching as suggested by Mr Woodhouse.**

## **5 Any Other Competent Business**

### **5.1 SWOT**

Mr Woodhouse circulated a SWOT exercise and asked SOAC members to hand it back to him on Tuesday 24 September at the next SRC meeting.

**Action point: All members will fill in the SWOT exercise and return it to Mr Woodhouse by the next SRC meeting.**

### **5.2 Next SOAC Meeting**

Mr Hajda announced that the next SOAC meeting would happen on Monday 2 December 2013.

**Action point: Mr Hajda will re-book the Committee Room for Monday 2 December 2013.**

### **5.3 Next Education Committee Meeting**

Mr Hajda announced that the next Education Committee meeting would happen on Friday 27 September at 5pm in the Committee Room.

**Action point: Mr Hajda will send out a doodle poll to all Education Committee Members (including two new Faculty Presidents) to determine regular meeting times.**