



School Presidents Forum

St Andrews Students' Association

Meeting date: 15/10/2020 (6pm) via MS Teams

Present: Amy Gallacher (Chair, Director of Education), Joseph Horsnell (Arts/Div Faculty President), Chloe Fielding (Sci/Med Faculty President)

Geraint Morgan (History), Callum Irvine (English), Abi Whitefield (PG Convenor), Lucy Matthews (Modern Languages), Belinda Hawes (Earth Sciences), Orrin McAleer (Medicine), Ursula Goldsmith (Music), Brynne Stewart (Biology), Elinor Layne (Social Anthropology), Sarah Johnston (Physics), Camiel Leake (Chemistry), Murray Whyte (Maths), Teo Yarkova (Film), Hannah Koegler (Art History), Lowell So (Divinity), Rachel Neighbour (Philosophy), Lindsay Nielsen (Psychology & Neuroscience), Kushal Talsania (Graduate School), Imaan Kotadia (Geography & SD), Jeanne Adam (Management), Ryan Gibb (Computer Science), Sanjana Ramaswamy (Economics), Erik Crnkovich (Classics), George Watts (International Relations)

Clare Peddie (The Proctor), Frank Muller (Dean for Arts/Div), John Issberner (Acting Dean for Sci/Med)

In attendance: Iona Baillie

MINUTES

1. Introduction (5 mins)

Amy introduced SPF and gave thanks to the Deans and Proctor for spending time with School Presidents.

Everyone went around and introduced themselves briefly.

2. Update on Dual Mode Delivery Plans for Semester One (5 mins, Proctor)

The Proctor: Summer was one of intense activity in preparation for DMD teaching in 2020-21. The idea behind DMD is to develop a system which is resilient to changes in Covid situation or government guidelines.

- Plan for in-person teaching is to classes of less than 35 (ScotGov guidance)
- Choice to phase in this programme fully by Week 7

- Examinations diet – all exams (including resits in August) will be online
- Studying remotely will be an option for semester 2 (with the exception of Medicine where in-person is necessary)

Covid situation in St Andrews is looking good – down to low numbers and isolation has been good. Public health are extremely pleased with St Andrews – sets us apart from other institutions.

Study spaces – there will be ‘find my space’ app to identify spaces across the campus; booking system implemented in the library. Extreme pressure of the estate for study spaces.

Frank Muller: FindSpace should be operational from tonight or tomorrow

The Proctor: We don’t want to wait until the end of semester to fix things – the role of SP is really important for improving things as we move along.

Sarah Johnston: Are there plans to open dept libraries as study spaces?

The Proctor: We are working hard to do this because there are other ScotGov guidelines here. You have to allow 72 hours between book use, which presents a problem for opening up these spaces.

Frank Muller: Confident they’ve found a way to open JF Allen this semester, but handling books will not be allowed. No news on King James yet.

3. Dual Mode Delivery (30 mins)
 1. Blended lectures

Amy Gallacher: this refers to the hybridisation of lectures for students – does this work in your School?

Lucy Matthews: ModLangs – people are struggling with DMD; human interaction of in-person lessons is good but people online are not getting the same level of language tuition. DMD not really working; suggestion that there could be School-specific policies

- **Frank Muller:** Schools free to disaggregate cohorts (separate in-person and online); blended approach can also take place (1 week online, next few weeks in-person). There is no diktat from Deans/Proctor. We don’t want students who want in-person teaching to be in a situation where they don’t get that. Head of German has disaggregated.
- **Jon Issberner:** Disaggregation happening in the Sciences already. Staff will be happy to change practices to help students

Callum Irvine: English – if you have a class which opts to stay online, would this be possible if there is no diktat?

- **Jon Issberner:** Issue with stronger students persuading other students to continue online; cautious of this
- **Callum Irvine:** it would be possible to do this anonymously. Is it up to staff to decide if things could just be taught remotely?

- **Jon Issberner:** Classes assessed some time ago (grading system for in-person necessity); we need to be aware of staff intentions and an approval process because St Andrews has promised in-person teaching (not fair to erode this promise). Reclassification in Semester 2 has just taken place.

Geraint Morgan: concern about moving between teaching types as being disruptive; voiced more general concerns on behalf of his students about DMD

- **Frank Muller:** students have a right to opt for online teaching; strong majority of those surveyed would like at least a degree of in-person teaching (honouring our commitment to those people). This situation is new for everyone and we should give this a bit of time to settle in. Different parts of the uni have different staff attitudes to in-person teaching, so we need to ensure an even spread for students across the uni.

Sarah Johnston: choice is you get taught in-person well or taught online poorly – this is the choice students are making (risking health for a better learning experience). Asking students to rate their modules in terms of how necessary it is to be in-person.

Callum Irvine: Online learning well-received in English; hybrid learning is where we lose out. Expression of interest in in-person teaching in the survey; of the people who had in-person teaching, a significant proportion came from Science-based schools so questions the utility of the survey for the Arts

Abi Whitefield: Agrees with Callum. Another survey now that people have experienced in-person teaching? Students concerned with the welfare of staff (staff not being given the choice if they are anxious about teaching in-person)

- **The Proctor:** Hearing diversity of opinions. Hybrid learning in some subjects is not working very well at the moment – we need to understand this more deeply. If the situation is not working, staff are able to split the class. St Andrews has a commitment to provide in-person teaching. Looking after students' mental health is important – having social engagement in-person is really impactful. We are walking a balance. We are listening to your concerns. There are logistical issues with flip-flopping between online and in-person.

Amy Gallacher: Summarising the MS Teams Chat - we need direct feedback on where hybrid teaching is and isn't working (ACTION for all SPs and PG Convenor). Flexibility on needs of students.

- **Abi Whitefield:** question about staff welfare reinforced
- **Frank Muller:** everything we are doing is assessed as safe for staff and students; in-person teaching is carefully controlled. Even if someone with Covid was in a room, control measures mean that they should not spread it to anyone else in the class. Particular vulnerabilities are assessed. Apart from this, university is here to provide a professional service to students as teachers and researchers.
- **Jon Issberner:** staff members are able to be excused from in-person teaching. The University has a tension between promises made and putting everything online.

Sarah Johnston: staff in high-risk zones still allowed to travel to St Andrews?

- **The Proctor:** yes, ScotGov says this continues to be fine

Lindsay Nielsen: 100% online in Psychology and labs in-person for NS. Concerns for first-years who cannot attend in-person teaching and who cannot socialise properly in Halls. What are your plans to protect their mental health?

- **Jon Issberner:** Recognition that there are difficulties with in-person teaching in such large cohorts. Rotation of students through practical elements of the course; lost some members of staff which has made this more difficult. Focus on later years because essential skills need to be taught to Honours students.

Hannah Koegler: March (less cases) there was no discourse around providing in-person teaching; October (more cases) you have obligation to provide in-person teaching

- **Frank Muller:** Government lockdown meant we were banned from in-person teaching in March, not now
- **The Proctor:** suggestion that Hannah's dates were incorrect for her more specific question about communications around the time of lockdown. When lockdown came in, we weren't allowed to deliver any in-person teaching.

2. Impact of Face Masks on Oral Communication (**Lucy**)
3. Returning to In-Person Teaching – Staff/Student Anxiety (**Callum**)
4. **Mandatory Cameras on in Online Classes (Camiel)**

Camiel Leake: enforcement of cameras being on in online classes in Chemistry, is worried about the privacy element of this policy.

- **Jon Issberner:** advice from diversity group which might address this; each individual tutorial group should agree the ground rules (inclusion) under this guidance.
- **Frank Muller:** questions about consensus for modules opting to go online = forcing other students to go online?
- **Geraint Morgan:** it is possible for people to come to a consensus about opting to go online (response to JI); essentially the same as all other ground rules?
- **George Watts:** logical inconsistency in argument beyond wanting to put people in classrooms
- **Elinor Layne:** discouraging to feel like opting to be online doesn't work across the board; not letting students negotiating to go online together is negative
- **Jon Issberner:** inclusivity group goals conflated with teaching structure; open to discussions about classifications of teaching structure. University understand in-person teaching to be in-demand; understands SP concerns. What gets taught in-person versus online is being reviewed as we speak. Looking to resolve this, SPs could communicate with staff to adapt teaching to ways everyone accepts. We cannot make huge changes mid-semester. What SPs are asking for is actually on its way. Providing different in-person experiences for different pedagogies.
- **Callum Irvine:** taking individual concerns into account; conflating the two makes logical sense
- **Jon Issberner:** mechanism through which we can make change is not through conflating those things. Students can already make individual choices. For the here and now, we will have to try and make it work

- **Frank Muller:** uni is not trying to force people into in-person teaching but has a great concern about those who want in-person teaching (uni's promise). Data given to uni most recently indicated that 2/3rds of students wanted some form of in-person teaching. If we find a mechanism to get consensus on online learning but this is problematic and we can't force minorities to accept majority view. Please believe the uni when they say they are doing their best; it is the most complicated and intractable problem that anyone can remember.

5. Student Support and Wellbeing (**Sarah**)

Sarah Johnston: Mental health support needs to look different this year compared to previous years. There are anxieties about going to class. Same resources being used, but they don't work in the same way they used to. What measures are going to be put into place for this?

- **The Proctor:** Thanks Sarah for raising this. Points out the Can-Do Marquee initiative for extra-curricular activities in a safe way. Definitely on the Uni's radar
- **Sarah Johnston:** concerned about support regarding education, not extra-curricular; students missing out on educational engagements due to mental health issues. Are staff hearing about support for students?
- **The Proctor:** huge amount of information on the website via Student Services, lots of work ongoing in terms of supporting students; most schools have wellbeing officers to support students as well. We have jacked up a huge amount in this area.
- **Amy Gallacher:** suggestion that we should deal with this offline
- **Frank Muller:** provide suggestions rather than these questions? Students know their experiences, so encourage them to come up with concrete suggestions to help the University respond.
- **Sarah Johnston (in chat):** No immediate counsellor support is available
- **Amy Gallacher:** conversation offline about this issue
- **George Watts:** if Scottish law is a sufficient reason for people to come from high-risk but not for other things? Why can the Uni not allow students to do things where it fits their agenda?
- **The Proctor:** guidance about education is very particular – things under the education banner are freer than under ScotGov guidance more generally. Household rules are separate guidance. Legal advice on a daily basis to interpret ScotGov guidelines. Excess of ScotGov guidance was to enforce face-coverings in teaching rooms in advance. Requests from Principal's Office about student behaviour at the weekends were in response to localised outbreaks and protect student population.
- **George Watts:** will send a follow-up tomorrow
- **Callum Irvine:** tutorial going on, someone dialled in who had Covid and the class had to watch them struggle with the illness. Increased anxieties among students as we go into Winter. Is the Uni taking this into account?
- **The Proctor:** Uni has done extensive risk assessment on ventilation. There is absolutely no evidence of in-person teaching transmission. This is happening in accommodation in St Andrews. Uni is comfortable there's no transmission of Covid in buildings
- **Jon Issberner:** mask efficacy does not decline with time. Someone suffering with Covid would not be in-person anyway.

4. AOCB

Meeting adjourned at 19:34.