## **Undergraduate Academic Forum**

## (21st November 2024)

BACKGROUND

### **Curriculum Development**

#### Reviewing Workload and Credit Weightage

15 minutes

* Multiple schools have raised examples of modules with equivalent credit weightage despite disproportionately different time and workload commitments for said modules.
* Much of this also boils down to assessment weightage – striking a balance between overassessment (where too much assessment is dispersed through the year) or underassessment (where limited pieces of assessment like exams bear too much weight in the final module grade).
* This also is a factor in lecture attendance and module engagement due to an attitudinal shift towards completing assessments and coursework.
* How can we work better to ensure that student experience and feedback is being used to review module workload and credit weightage?
* What are current monitoring processes for:
  + Level and volume of assessment in modules
  + Number of teaching and independent learning hours advertised for modules
  + Credit-weightage ascribed to modules
* What mechanisms can have more student involvement.
* Moreover, how can student consultation be better incorporated at early stages of curriculum approval and development?

#### Strategic Input

10 minutes

* \*This agenda item may be postponed based on time constraints\*
* Given that the lack of student involvement in the curriculum approvals process has been raised in reflection as part of the current Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review Process, it might be useful to begin exploring how student representation can be better integrated at the early stages of curriculum planning, design, and approval.
* At school level, how can student input better shape the strategic direction of modules? How is student demand assessed?

### **Student Support**

#### Transitional Support

10 minutes

* Representatives have found particular challenges with transitional support. Both from sub-honors to honors and first to second year.
* This also includes the change in level of contact hours between years and the increased academic pressure and revised expectations.
* Is there a possibility of adding a section on transitions to the student handbook that spells out what to expect in all these instances?
* Overall, the advice and support section of the handbook is quite basic and signposts to larger policy documents rather than articulating them in an accessible way. Can we frequently revise and update this page and systematically seek out student input in doing so?
* For reference: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/education/handbook/>

Technological Failures in the Classroom

10 minutes

* Technology in classes (i.e. Projectors, Panopto, computers, microphones) have been failing and disrupting most classes.
* Updates on how this is being resolved.
* Encouraging staff to use training provided by IT services all year round: using the IT services emergency line and reporting issues.

#### Provisional Timetables

10 minutes

* Students do not receive their timetables (including weekly class timings and locations) until Week 0/1.
* Part-time working students are disproportionately affected by this. An ability to plan work commitments around scheduled learning and teaching timings is important to ensuring that they are able to balance between paid work and schoolwork.
* Given that venues may vary based on class sizes and therefore advising, students do not need to know the location, only time and date.
* How can we ensure that students have better notice on what their semester’s schedules and commitments are likely to be?
* This will also help students (especially those in joint degrees) make early preferences for module choices.
* In bold, it can be emphasised that these are provisional.
* Current good practice with Maths: <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/mathematics-statistics/students/taught-modules/timetables/>

### **Standardization of Learning and Teaching Provisions**

#### Module Handbooks

10 minutes

* Students found an extremely variable level of information available to them in module handbooks.
* There currently does not seem to be a policy or universal guidance that covers basic requirements of all module handbooks.
* The following have been identified as must haves by the Education Committee:
  + Tutor(s) contact info.
  + Required attendance expectations
  + Marking criteria
  + Learning objectives, transferable skills/graduate attributes
  + Required readings
  + Extensions and self-certification procedure
  + Coursework and competencies
  + AI guidance and good academic practice
  + Referencing style
  + Weekly lecture themes
* More so, we would like certain requirements necessary for accessibility purposes:
  + Format (always provide a word or screen-reader friendly alternative)
  + An English alternative (for Modern Languages)
* How can we work to ensure this is standardised across all taught modules?

#### Exam and Assessment Information

15 minutes

* In Section 2 of the mid-semester feedback surveys, the consistently highest percentage of ‘No’ answers fell in:
  + The marking criteria for all assessments provided
  + The arrangement for assessment and feedback explained
* Some themes emerging from the qualitative data:
  + “I don’t know what a pass mark is”, Sub-Honours, Social Anthropology
  + “I find that we don’t have enough information about assessment procedures and that the grading criteria is very vague”, Honours, Biology
* There seems to be a general lack of clarity on basic coursework procedures (like uploads, pass/fail marks, GAP), marking criteria, and guidance or support around attempting various types of coursework.
* For examinations, student support for moving back to in-person examinations is lacking.
  + Staff need to modify their assessments and marking criteria to consider online open book to in person closed book examinations. With the current information available to students, it appears that except for the medium in which assessments are conducted, not much has changed in terms of marking criteria, format, or contents.
  + At the start of each module, there should be better transparency on examination information included. This allows students to engage with the contents of the module throughout, in a way that is constructive to their examination.

#### Extensions Policy

15 minutes

* In order to clearly understand the variability of procedures in applying for an extension, EduCom gathered the following as multiple different procedures followed by schools at sub-honours and honours level.
* Procedures:
  + School-wide extensions forms
  + Completion of Extension Request Form (a word document) emailed to module coordinator
  + Write an email to
    - Tutor
    - Module Coordinator
    - School Office
    - Academic Coordinator (Music)
    - Deputy DoT
  + Submit a special circumstance form along with an independent verification of said circumstances
  + Self-certification and MS form
  + Notification of Problems Form
  + Email the Sub Honours Administrator/Module Co-ordinator and attach a completed "request for extension" word document
  + Some schools display this clearly in module handbooks. Others have them on the school website.
* Policy:
  + Some must have evidence from professionals to support the reasoning of the request. Others do not ask for evidence as default – may ask for it at a later stage.
  + Must be 2 days/ 24 hours before deadline
  + Typical grant may be 1-3 days or 7 days
  + Over 2 weeks could be approved by:
    - Module Coordinator
    - Lecturer
    - Wellbeing Officer
    - Faculty Dean
  + Extenuating circumstances as defined by university policy
* It seems apparent that if you are a sub-honours student new to the current systems and/or if you are requesting extensions in multiple schools, you could end up needing to seek out wholly different procedures to request an extension; and you might end up with vastly different outcomes.
* How could we better support the student experience in terms of policy and procedure for requesting and receiving extensions?

### **Representative Support**

#### Demographic Data, NSS, MEQs and Tartan Rugs

10 minutes

* As part of the Student Partnership Agreement, strategic data-sharing was identified as a key priority – especially for academic representatives that might enter their role with little contextual knowledge.
* How can we build an information-sharing practice that better provides academic representatives insights into:
  + School-level demographics and cohort sizes (Number of students, broken down by key demographic indicators)
  + NSS results and analyses
  + Access to MEQ responses (importantly, while the new system is being worked upon, how can representatives use insights gathered from the current MEQ provisions?)
  + Tartan rugs generated from MEQ responses
* There is no systematised way that this has been done (some Presidents have sporadically received this information from their DoTs). Having this basic level of information will undeniably better inform their work. How can we grant them access to it?

### **AOCB**

#### Library Early Closure

#### Semester 2 UAF Dates

* February 27th
* April 17th