



Education Forum
St Andrews Students Association

Meeting date: Thursday 16th October 2025 (17:30-19:00)
Large Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Meeting called by: President of Education and Education Council

Type of Meeting: Education Forum

Chair: President of Education Faculty Presidents

Note Taker(s): Nick Townsend

ATTENDANCE

Attendees: Faculty Presidents, President of Education, Nick Townsend (ARI), Amy McLaughlin (Academic Representation Coordinator), Postgraduate Academic Intern, PGR President, PGT President, PresOpps, Ciara Rooney, Gregg Clark, Claire Hutton, Chloe Beechinor Collins, Evie Cullen, Toby Berryman, Hannah Straw, Charles Deregnaucourt, Rebeca Ravara, Pedro Silva, Ayra Ahmad, Sayda Bir, Ellie Shaw, Abi Collins, Andrew Edgington, Lyon Playfair, Truman Cunningham, Emma Southgate, Kat Raffan, Devina Naraindas as Sainani, Ingrid Yeung, Clara Curtis, Alexander Wiseman, Joie Matsuda, Omar Raza, Jay Martin.

Online: None.

Apologies: N/A.

Absences: N/A.

Guests: N/A

AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Introduction** (President of Education)

PresED (Overview):

- Welcome to the first Education Forum and thank you to everyone for coming
- Establishment of ground rules, reminder to ensure remarks are appropriate and polite.
- Introduction of Education Council

2. School Community- 25 minutes

- **Private and state school balance** (School President of Art History)
 - *Overview: a discussion addressing the private and state school balance in schools.*
 - *Discussion: what school wide or union initiatives could support students experiencing imposter syndrome (with lenses looking from private school and state school perspectives)?*

School President of Art History: (Overview)

- Would like to discuss potential solutions to elitism in schools, especially where events and attitudes from staff are more accessible/familiar to privately educated students (e.g. wine receptions).
- Art history has an elitist reputation, and this was raised among staff who were quite surprised this the school had this reputation
- Current solutions: Raised and discussed with The 93% Club, change/rebranding of events
- Any suggestions on what other schools have done would be very welcome:

Discussion:

- Academic Representation Intern:
 - History welcome students with a garden party which happens immediately after the Freshers Welcome lecture. This has been a good way to immediately introduce staff and students and to reduce the potential barriers between students
- School President of Music:
 - Make events more familiar to all students. Such as a BBQ, rather than a Garden Party
- PGR President:
 - Host events where nobody knows anything and therefore everyone is on an even playing field
 - The great equaliser is that everyone is here to learn
 - For example, host a reading group with a book that nobody knows
- School President of Psychology
 - We have a problem with specific vocabulary which has not been covered in some education systems, which means its use excludes some students without staff potentially realising it
 - An attitude of not presuming knowledge would be helpful.
- PGR President

- Some universities create a glossary of terms, which might be useful here
- Unknown (missed by minute taker):
 - The removal of alcohol from Freshers events would also be useful since lots of students, especially Scottish students, are 17.

- **Support for students with disabilities**

- *Overview: a discussion sharing good practice on student led support initiatives.*
 - *Discussion: what advice do different student groups have on creating wellbeing rooms/ decompression spaces and running student-led neurodiversity groups?*

School President of Physics: (Overview)

- Physics has recently seen the introduction of a well-being room
- Looking for tips/suggestions on how they are currently used in their school, so that physics can also make good use of the space

Discussion:

- School President of Medicine:
 - Medicine uses it for several different purposes, primarily as a first aid room
 - It is located of view/in a corner which is productive
 - Staff trust that people use the room productively, and it is used respectfully
 - First Aid takes priority in the room, but it serves its dual purpose very well
- Disability Officer for SRC:
 - There are lots that schools can do to make best use of the room, namely, dim lighting, fidget spinners or things to touch and booking options
 - Publicity-wise its always good to let people know about the space and how they should use it
 - We do have disability officers who would like to hear about this
- PresED:
 - There is guidance from my predecessor that I shall share with EduExec

- **Student-staff ratios** (School President of International Relations)

- *Overview: a discussion addressing the increased undergraduate cohort and the effect this is having on all students.*
 - *Discussion: are students feeling the effect of increased student numbers in their classes? Are PGRs feeling the effect of increased student numbers on their teaching workload? Would you like anything to change?*

PresED: (Overview)

- Sub-honours classes are increasing in size across the university
- It would be good to know if students are feeling the effects of this? and if so, what are there concerns?
- Also, are PGRs affected by this, as teachers/staff?

Vice President of International Relations: (Overview)

- IR especially has seen an increase which is being felt by students across the department
- Classes have increased in size from 12 to 15
- This changes the dynamics of the class as outspoken characters take a lot of the space
- I have met with the DOT and some solution has been found in the encouragement of smaller group work and discussions
- If anyone else has experienced this or potential solutions they would be extremely useful

Discussion:

- School President of Philosophy:
 - We have had concerns over why philosophy tutorials at sub-honours start tutorials in week 3
- PGR President:
 - PGR do a lot of the teaching at the university
 - The casual budgets have been cut and therefore there are less PGRs teaching
 - This means that staff are teaching more and bigger groups
 - It changes the materials and strategies necessary to teach
- School President of Psychology:
 - Concern over feedback being on time
 - With the increase in workload for 1st year, honours students have struggled to get feedback on time
 - There have been concerns from both staff and students
 - Feedback turnaround can be about 4 months
- French Convenor:
 - French and Spanish is capped at 9 and there are 5 classes
 - Currently all classes are over capacity in terms of what the numbers should be
- School President of Modern Language:
 - Second concern with class size capacity
- Comparative Literature:
 - The department is heavily reliant on postgraduates for undergrad teaching
 - There are not enough teaching staff for those students. It is an increasingly difficult situation

Raise of hands for those whose schools have felt the implications of this – majority.

Raise of hands for those who have noticed the stress this has on study spaces – majority.

3. Study Abroad and Industry Placements- 25 minutes

- **Fee discrepancies** (Russian Language Convenor)
 - *Overview: Students in the Russian department who choose to take a year abroad are expected to pay fees to the University of St Andrews and to RLUS (the language school)- this is inconsistent with other opportunities at our university, and with similar opportunities offered by other institutions. This is before any additional costs (eg. Accommodation).*
 - *Discussion: do others feel the inaccessibility of these opportunities? Are there any other examples of fee discrepancies?*

Russian Convenor: (Overview)

- Currently, you can take a semester abroad or an integrated year abroad. Due to current circumstances, all Russian students abroad study.
- Russian students are expected to pay fees to the university plus +£5000 to another foreign institution
- This is not true of any other language or any other university
- There is funding available, but it is inappropriate to use this as a reasoning to maintain the status quo – it will not cover everything
- Another problem is the implication of these costs. Not everyone can afford to go on the year abroad. Yet, going abroad will significantly increase your language skills. This therefore creates a “pay to win” environment
- This was brought to the global office forgot this at some point, but it has been lost along the way

Discussion:

- School President of Biology:
 - We experience similar problems
 - The School expect you to pay tuition fees while you work
- School President of Modern Languages:
 - For WEA there is no support to find a work placement even though it is sold to you as though you have support when you apply
 - People often get dropped or left behind when they go looking for support
 - The only resource for finding the jobs you can get is Career Connect
 - There is no support for how to make a CV or cover letter in Russian/Spanish/French etc and in some countries, they are totally different
 - The main problem from the school's perspective is they worry they have to take liability if they recommend something
 - If they want to have this as a pathway then we should help them to find a good placement
 - This is not a complaint against the teaching staff, who are doing a great job under lots of strain. They just do not have the resources to solve the problem.
- Comparative Literature Convenor:
 - British council only applies to UK students

- Nobody tells you how to find those jobs without the help of the British council if you are an international student
- They are not telling foreign students that the system that they have is not suitable for international students
- Russian Convenor:
 - Russian is now offering work abroad as a placement
 - They do not have any guidance however
 - You are not allowed to teach English
 - Problematically, you are a signing a contract with a company that you do not know if they are still operating within Russia or are working under sanctions
- French Convenor:
 - There is an America equivalent of British council but there is no support from the university
- School President of Art History:
 - If you are charging people for access for a year abroad on a language degree, you can pay to win
 - You have created a situation where people are entering something they do not know
 - If you cant afford it, you have to change your degree
- Russian Convenor:
 - 6 Russian students had to change their study abroad due to its financial requirements which are not advertised
- PresED:
 - We are building a case to bring this to UAF and we would like your support
 - Support given by vote
- School President of Medicine:
 - It would be much better if they declared when you apply what is expected of you financially
- German Convenor:
 - The lack of transparency leads to further problems
 - People who have connections in these countries can get good jobs
 - People who don't are stuck and struggle there
- **Support for inbound and outbound students** (Arts and Divinity Faculty President)
 - *Overview: a discussion into the support offered to students studying abroad.*
 - *Discussion: what additional support would students like?*

Discussion:

- School President of Modern Languages:
 - The British Council (at least in the case of Spain) do not tell you that they don't pay you until Christmas

- We asked the university to see if they could provide help through Saints Abroad. They said it is not possible because this is part of your degree. Because it was not an extra thing, you could not apply for it
- School President of Art History:
 - Members of the art history department did get funding up front
 - This is not consistent across all schools and it would be good if it was

PresED: (Overview)

- The university is changing its industry policy and we have some input on that
- Are there any extra supports that students would like to see when on a study abroad?
- Comparative Literature Convenor:
 - It would be really helpful if there could be more Visa application assistance and information
- Italian Convenor:
 - Registering yourself with the host university is very hard and difficult to know what to do
 - There is poor communication between universities, and help and guidance with integration into the new/visiting university would be extremely helpful
- Spanish Convenor:
 - Eco's the recommendations of both Italian and Comp Lit
 - The university provides no support once you go abroad
- School President of Modern Language:
 - There is no counselling and no mental health support
 - Some crisis intervention is available, but it is rare that things get so bad
 - They can reach out to teachers if needed, but they are understaffed
 - This is primarily a signposting issue; you need to know where to get support!
 - Your main support network is your host university, and students should be better aware of those support networks
 - If you are on a year abroad placement, they cannot help you. You are basically left on your own in terms of support
- Russian Convenor:
 - Seconded the well-being point made by Mod Language President
 - There are also problems with host mums and moving out. The host family system used is not sufficiently safe for students who feel a need to move out of the house. The individual who runs the program is also one of the host mums. There is insufficient confidentiality and proper procedure in place to ensure issues can be handled well

PresED: (Overview)

- Any there any potential solutions that we could provide or suggest?

Discussion:

- Russian Convenor:
 - A mentoring program would be good to pass on informal advice between year groups
- FP Ariane:
 - Signposting ahead of time and signpost the foreign student services
- Comparative Literature Convenor:
 - Due to data privacy rules, you are not allowed to be told who went before by the university
 - So you have to rely on word of mouth to find out the things you might want to know
- French Convenor:
 - The French department asked if they could share information about people who went on the previous year abroad
 - It was a good system which enabled advice to pass advice easily
 - They asked specifically if, in the future, people would be willing to share their email
- School President of Modern Languages:
 - We (Mod Lang + Convenors) hosted a study abroad drop-in this week. There were a lot of visa questions. It went down well and was very helpful. However, there is only so much student advice can do

4. School-To-School Discrepancies- 25 minutes

- **Resources**
 - *Overview: there are noticeable inconsistencies in resources, opportunities and contact hours between the different language departments.*
 - *Discussion: do other students notice disparities between schools/ departments? What would improve your student experience?*

PresED: (Overview)

- There are vast discrepancies in contact hours and work requirements between schools. We would like to hear students' opinions on this, so we can take it forward, depending on the scale of the problem

Spanish Convenor: (Overview)

- There are discrepancies in contact hours among the languages
- French gets a lot more resources than any other department in the modern languages
- It would be good to see how we can improve this situation, and also better understand how much of a problem this is, university wide

Discussion:

- Russian Convenor:
 - There are 2 native speakers of Russian in the department. They teach from 9-5 all week (near enough).
 - Meanwhile, French have 2 language assistants, plus the academics in the departments. This gives it a ratio of 200-15 student staff. Meanwhile, there are 127-5 in Russian.
 - Last year, the 4th-year Russian students were left without a Russian teacher due to sickness
- Spanish Convenor:
 - Taking languages together is very common, so students see the discrepancy first-hand

PresED: (Overview)

- Does this happen at a wider school level?

Discussion:

- School President of Computer Science:
 - There are a lot of issues in CompSci.
 - The credit-to-work ratio is a problem. All modules at honours are 15 credits, 4 modules a semester. You are expected to do 3 pieces of coursework per module. Plus a 3h exam at the end of the semester. So it's a lot of work per semester which seems unreasonable
 - It feels like the credits do not add up to the hours they put in.
 - Labs are open 24h a day and they are well used
 - Computer science does not have small group tutorials at honours – a tutorial every 2 weeks is with an entire lecture hall. There is no tutorial system, and it is not compulsory. We would like to bring this up
- School President of Social Anthropology:
 - I am a joint honours student with IR. I was in IR with 5 people in a tutorial, while anthropology has around 25 people

PresED:

- Show of hands for SPs to come to away days to discuss and standardise teaching modules and their credit weighting. Majority.

- **Extensions** (Science and Medicine Faculty President)
 - *Overview there are noticeable inconsistencies in how schools approach extensions.*
 - *Discussion: are students noticing these disparities? Would you like to see any change?*

FP Ariane: (Overview)

- There are noticeable differences between schools in the process and outcome of extensions. Are students noticing this? Would you like to see changes?
- The university did standardise this a few years ago, so decisions are meant to go through the schools administrator

Discussion:

- Spanish Convenor:
 - There are some schools where people are much more likely to get extensions
 - There appears to be a disparity in leniency
- PGR President:
 - The policy was for everything to go through the school office rather than through individual tutors
 - It also included a list of reasonable reasons
 - It took the decision away of teaching staff to avoid bias
- School President of Medicine:
 - We have something similar to that
 - Length of extension: standard extension is 1 week. If you want more you need approval from DOT/module coordinator.
- School President of Physics:
 - Everything is done through DOT
- **Dissertation support** (Postgraduate Taught President)
 - *Overview: PGTs feel that they receive little transparency and guidance of the dissertation process.*
 - *Dissertations: are these sentiments echoed by all students? What dissertation guidance would you want to receive?*

PGT president: (Overview)

- Postgraduates don't feel like they get enough transparency about dissertations and what progress needs to be made at points in the year
- Would you like more guidance or transparency on dissertations?

Discussion:

- School President of Art History:
 - From an undergrad perspective, dissertations are so not centralised, and this creates further confusion and anxiety because friends will be further down the process much earlier, depending on the school that you are in
- School President of Medicine:
 - Medicine recognises the issue, but they also say you are not meant to know how to write your dissertation, as you have never done it before. You learn on the job, and they do reassure you that the staff know that this is your first experience of dissertations
- PGR President:

- At undergrad, it was not clear at all, as a masters student it was pretty well organised
- French Convenor:
 - It has been very transparent. We have a week-by-week breakdown of where you should be in the process. You do not have to follow it, but you can
 - You get your dissertation supervisor at the end of the 3rd year
 - You have a mandatory skills session
- School President of Computer Science:
 - Computer Science does a good job of supporting us
 - Most students have things confirmed by week 1 of 4th year
 - Because of that, people have things figured out by then, ready to go in their fourth year
 - We have weekly dissertation supervisor meetings, which are required and very helpful
- School President of Music:
 - We organise this the year beforehand, which makes things easier
 - It is really helpful to have checkpoints throughout the year!
- **Dissertation standardisation** (President of Education)
 - *Overview: there are noticeable inconsistencies between credit weightage and word counts across schools.*
 - *Dissertations: do students feel that dissertation word counts should be standardised according to credits? What would you believe is a reasonable word count to credit weightage proposal (dissertation specific)?*

PresED: (Overview)

- The university is not prioritising the dissertation as something to standardise. However, there are significant discrepancies
- Art History: 6k, 30 credits. History: 12k 30 credits

Discussion:

- School President of Art History:
 - We are particularly lucky in Art History
 - Divinity has a system that bends people into a full-year dissertation due to the work count/credit weighting
 - There is a lot of variety in how the process starts
 - You can easily end up in a situation where you know nothing, and yet friends in other subjects are well into the process
 - This creates nervousness and anxiety
 - The schools are not aware of how much other schools are doing
- School President of Music:
 - Advocate against standardisation

- In science/earth science (their other subject), we do lots of field work, which is highly time-consuming but does not add to the word count in the same way it might in other subjects
- It is 8,000 words, but there is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes
- We should not standardise word count, as it does not reflect the work done
- School President of Physics:
 - I agree that we should not standardise the word count for the sciences
- School President of Medicine:
 - Suggests we should also consider if we should standardise the timescale for these dissertations
 - In medicine, there is a 7-week dissertation over the summer for 10,000 words, worth 40 credits
- Comparative Literature Convenor:
 - There should be a discrepancy in languages. A lot of the task is completing the work in a foreign language – it would be a mistake to require a language student to write the same word count as a non-language student
- School President of Psychology:
 - We have 6000 words for 60 credits, or 5000 words for 30 credits
 - It does not work to standardise by word count, as it does not reflect the work done
- School President of Computer Science:
 - I agree with the idea, but we need to be careful on how it is implemented
 - The word count in CS is suggested to be 15,000, even though you really need to go above/at that in order to achieve a good mark
- PGR President:
 - Credits are normally decided by the time taken, we should consider this
 - Do you have a limit on supervision hours?
 - For some, you have 5 hours for the semester. In psychology, you get 22 for the year. In Art History it is pretty much unlimited
- PresED:
 - Thank you for your contributions
 - In conclusion, this will be more complicated than first anticipated

5. Any Other Competent Business- 15 minutes

- PGR President: (Overview)
 - Do you think you should be the representatives of online cohorts as the university expands its education options to online courses?
 - Or should we make a special position for them?
- Agreement to create a unique position

6. Meeting Adjourned