



Undergraduate Academic Forum 2023-24

7th March 2024, 17:00-19:00
Senate Room

Student Attendance: Cam Brown (Director of Education), Hitanshi Badani (Arts and Divinity faculty President), Calum Naughton (Science and Medicine Faculty President), Emily Bannister (Academic Representation Intern), Jacob Carey (Employability Officer), Bahrathi Keeping (BAME Education Officer), Serena Mundy (School President of Art History), Harry Burrows (School President of Chemistry), Ben Vardy (School President of Computer Science), David Byrne (School President of Divinity), Gemma Laker (School President of Earth and Environmental Sciences), Aarushi Malhotra (School President of English), Sairaa Bains (School President of Film Studies), Sadie Hassman (School President of Geography and Sustainable Development), Olivia Benbow (School President of History), Daria Gusa (School President of International Relations), Ruchi Dadu (School President of Management), Krish Chudhary (School President of Maths and Statistics), Shreya Apsani (School President of medicine), Harry Brett-Butcher (School President of Modern Languages), James McNinch (School President of Music), Mariana Razina (School President of Philosophy), Chloe-Anna Hunt (School President of Psychology and Neuroscience), Anastasia Jeffcoat (Arabic and Persian Language Convenor), Kiera Martin (Chinese Language Convenor), Frederica Consiglio (Comparative Literature Language Convenor), Tom Rippon (French Language Convenor), Harriet White (German Language Convenor), Rohin Buch (Italian Language Convenor), Sydney Ash (Russian Language Convenor), Christy Forshaw (Spanish Language Convenor).

Online: Rebekah Bryson (School President of Biology).

Student Apologies: Finn Bender (School President of Social Anthropology), Anna Conti (School President of Physics), Michael Pagano (School President of Classics).

Staff Attendance: Chase Greenfield (Academic Representation Coordinator), Clare Peddie (Proctor), Frank Muller (AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching), Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience), Gosia Mitka (Associate Dean, Education- Arts and Divinity), Shiona Chillas (Associate Dean, Students- Arts and Divinity), Sharon Leahy (Associate Dean, Students- Science), Hilda McNae (Senior Librarian).

Chair: Cam Brown (Director of Education).

Minutes: Emily Bannister (Academic Representation Intern).

Welcome

Presenter: Director of Education

Time: 5 minutes

Thanks the school presidents and language convenors for their hard work this past year.
Thank you all for joining today.

Integrated Masters Placement Fees

Presenters: Science and Medicine FP

Time: 20 minutes

Overview (Science and Medicine FP): Fees still required to be paid by those undertaking years in industry when these students are unpaid workers in industry and do not use any physical university resources.

Proctor: experience as Director of Teaching for Biology so cannot understate amount of work behind the scenes to organise and run years in industry. This is still a credited year. Important to know that students are not neglected by the university in this year because the year is thoroughly the university's responsibility. Fees are based on university care for students during this year- still have access to entire university infrastructure.

Arts and Divinity FP: students felt unsupported when searching for placement because they find it themselves. Students cannot access physical infrastructure when on years in industry and there is no specialised student services support during this year.

Employability Officer: Could be useful to make students more aware of resources they still receive when on this year in industry.

Proctor: making students aware of resources is also true of study abroad.

Director of Student Experience: should this issue be considered in relation to study abroad?

French LC: when on year abroad only get charged half fees. Lack support from university. Only a few assessments (2000) words for 60 credit module. Didn't know that could contact student services. Fees feel like a lot of money when not receiving much in return.

Maths SP: module page describes 4th year placement away from St Andrews- having access to physical resources is useless when away from St Andrews.

Earth and Environmental Science SP: have to apply and fund yourself for year in industry. No real University resources so cannot understand why should have to pay full fees.

Chemistry SP: chemistry cohort feels removal and lack of support from university when on years in industry.

Employability Officer: Can University communicate more when students are away? Maybe still have to see/communicate with academic advisor when away?

Proctor: Global Office offers guidance to schools. Students are not abandoned. Staff have always visited place of industry/abroad (expensive).

Arts and Divinity FP: can we have access to a vague cost breakdown for these years away from St Andrews? More transparency needed.

Proctor: almost impossible to write down this cost. Need to bring those involved in running placements to discuss with Education Committee.

Maths SP: £30,000 fees for international student- they still have to pay full cost when abroad. For these students to receive lack of support when a finding year abroad and when on the year abroad seems like a waste of money.

Proctor: this is just the cost of education at St Andrews. It's a personal choice to go on these placement years. Costs aren't hidden as students know that fees are part of the degree they receive. Not necessary for staff to justify this cost. University very conscious when things go wrong when on years abroad for students and are quick to act. May look expensive but there is a huge infrastructure behind this.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: "I don't go to the library as much as my flatmate, can I have a lower fee". Whether you use resources or not this is up to you. Industry placement and years abroad are a choice.

Conclusion

Director of Education: will set up smaller group to discuss with global office. Krish, Calum, Rebeka, Gemma interested in being involved in this group.

Closing the Feedback Loop

Presenter: Chinese LC

Time: 20 minutes

Overview (Chinese LC): comments often disappear quickly after they have been brought to the attention of staff. How can we trace the feedback that is happening, or changes being made in the school? Students need to know that feedback is being heard.

a. MEQs

International Relations SP: often MEQs are negative individual responses; however is there a policy where students could view general feedback- IR Director of Teaching was unsure if they were allowed to share feedback.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: MEQ data is problematic, highly personal and in some cases racist and sexist. Junior, female, disabled or minority staff seem to be targeted with negative feedback- university deals with this data on a need to know basis. Often when staff receives MEQ feedback they reply to individual student who left the feedback (this happens in History).

International Relations SP: is it possible to share a more general overview with students- as opposed to individual responses?

Modern Languages SP: 'You ask we've done' initiative could be introduced for more staff transparency- even if on module handbook or an email at the beginning of the next semester. Could help reputations of modules- if changes are made to modules, and these changes are published, this could override a negative reputation. Need to let cohort who has just finished module know of the changes they have contributed to.

Proctor: incredibly helpful feedback from Mod Lang SP. Staff will discuss this.

Associate Dean, Students- Science: DoTs should already be making SPs aware of changes. MEQs seem to occur too late in the semester for changes to be made for current cohort- staff should reach out to students in week 3 for feedback that could be implemented for that cohort- will bring this up at DoT lunch. Students should speak to DoTs and incoming school presidents to discuss the continuation of the feedback loop.

BAME Education Officer: helpful for a policy across schools for students to give feedback throughout semester.

Employability Officer: if students are giving feedback staff need to be taking it. Staff need to be made aware of importance of acting on feedback.

Director of Education: has been personally working on increasing MEQ feedback.

Associate Dean, Students- Arts and Divinity: difficult to take onboard feedback of only a few students because this lacks seriousness.

Associate Dean, Education- Arts and Divinity: we are placing too much emphasis on MEQs as feedback loop- there are other channels to use. Current initiative encouraging DoTs to act upon feedback could be visualised by SPs in stories- happy for take time with students to move this forward.

BAME Education Officer: feedback page is still live for students to report when they feel underrepresented or overlooked in education. SPs please publicise this- will send this link to Director of Education.

b. Exam Feedback

International Relations SP: there is great inconsistency between feedback given for assessments and feedback given for exams. Why is this the case?

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: feedback is a school decision. History used to print these out in big boxes (often not picked up).

International Relations SP: feedback for exams is very limited- does not provide any information. School of economics have sessions for students to meet with assessor.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: if Economics has this so could IR. Not achievable for staff to give page of feedback for every student. Students can go to office hours- "find time, talk to them and get the feedback".

Mod Lang SP: problem with usage on student side.

c. URLTs

International Relations SP: much of student negative feedback was lost in report- only one or two issues brought up.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: apologises that feedback was not included in report.

Conclusion:

Director of Education: SPs will reach out to DoTs.

SPs interested in engaging with MEQs will work with Gosia- Director of Education will collate.

Grades

Presenter: Arts/Div FP

Time: 20 minutes

a. Conversions from Study Abroad

Arts and Divinity FP: there isn't a consistent review process for grade conversions- current process seems reactive. Could we have a more frequent process that students could be involved in? Currently in exchange with Global Office to discuss.

Italian LC: 2017 was last time grade conversions were reviewed in Italy- was merely reactionary response. Frustration on personal behalf that there is lack of awareness that assessments are in another language so should be considered in leniency of conversations.

Associate Dean, Education- Arts and Divinity: personally involved in this process and knows that there is a huge amount of work that goes into looking at grade conversions. There is a special staff meeting to consider this with careful processes. University goes to the effort of looking at individual students if they do not fit with the average. University looking at revising and reflecting upon policies. There is not a 'one size fits all' policy.

Arts and Divinity FP: to what extent can students be involved in this process?

Shiona: students can reach out to study abroad coordinator (in St Andrews and university abroad) about their grades.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: what exactly is the problem?

Arts/Div FP: marks abroad are not equivalent to marks in St Andrews- students unsure of how their grades will translate.

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: there is very detailed guidance on this from the university. Complex on student-student case as any student could appeal any bad grade even if the work deserved this grade. A lot of this process depends on foreign professors willingness to aid the appeals process. Study abroad students actually tend to do better on their year abroad than when in St Andrews.

BAME Education Officer: University should communicate better with students about how their study abroad grade will translate to St Andrews- when on own study abroad assessments were graded out of 30 thus was unsure with how this would translate to St Andrew's 20 system.

Associate Dean, Students- Arts and Divinity: will be proving pre-departure information to students so will be more transparent about grade conversions.

b. Transparency about Grade Curving and Disruptions

Arts and Divinity FP: would be useful if students could see how they perform compared to their classmates.

Proctor: when DoT for biology releasing grades of all students was as simple as ticking a box. Students should ask/remind module coordinator to tick this box. This is an incredibly valuable piece of information for students to know. BUT cannot standardise this across ALL modules because some modules too small (would make this too personal as would basically know grades of fellow classmates).

Associate Dean, Students- Science: will speak to MMS team. But SPs could discuss with DoTs too.

Computer Science SP: module coordinators need to be made aware that they can give overview of class performance- without giving individuals.

Science and Medicine FP: grades for exams don't appear on MMS so students have to figure out grade themselves.

Associate Dean, Students- Science: it should be possible for these exam results to be viewed.

Proctor: University policy that every module handbook should contain clear assessment policy.

Associate Dean, Students- Arts and Divinity: staff have to account for the amount of first-class grades they are giving.

Associate Dean, Education- Arts and Divinity: quality of education is constantly being checked and reviewed.

c. Transparency about S-coding

Arts/Div SP: is there a university wide policy?

Associate Dean, Students- Science: There is clear university policy in the student handbook. 'S-P coding' during COVID. If something happened around time of exam can apply to staff for 'S-coding'/retrospective S-coding'. S-coding only available to honours students and limited to 60 credits of work.

Associate Dean, Students- Arts and Divinity: there are a lot of other university support networks available.

Lecture Capture

Presenter: Maths SP

Time: 20 minutes

Overview (Maths SP): over winter break DoT sent email about trialling new recording system in 'Physics A'. Feedback that Panopto has blurred imagery- unreadable whiteboard writing. Can the university consider any alternates to Panopto?

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: a long standing Panopto issue has been sorted.

Director of Student Experience: could SPs this issue be taken straight to technology?

AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching: 20% students watch recordings a day for average of 40 mins. 20,000 individual views of Panopto by students from November 2023. New hardware will be trialled in North Haugh and other University spaces. University does not collect data on Panopto watching an individual level and only looks at wider cohort. Panopto provides automatic subtitles, but Windows 11 can also be used for captioning. Students need to make staff aware of specific room issues because then staff will make a fix- also go to IT help desk. Lecturers cannot take video off whilst module is still live ('Captured Content' policy)- if any student is struggling with this issue contact DoT.

Libraries and Study Spaces

Presenter: International Relations SP

Time: 20 minutes

Director of Education: Butts Wynd is now a 24-hour study and community space. There is increased demand at EduCom for more study space areas- a working group has been set up to review study spaces at a student and staff level. Reflecting student's needs is top priority.

Director of Student Experience: current project will look at new and old feedback of student study spaces. Will be looking at ways students use estates.

International Relations SP: students have access to some journals but in comparison to other universities lacking subscriptions. Has collated list of 10+ publications that students are wanting- this would aid with assessments relating to current events. Acknowledges the enormous cost- could there be one physical copy in library for student use?

Difficult for students to use confusing library online resource- requires very specific wording to access resources. Could it be possible to review the search engine as its currently difficult to make broad searches.

Senior Librarian: copyright would not restrict printed texts. If there is an issue with specific books email morebooks@ Acquiring journals difficult, but can still update staff on what students need. Currently looking at replacing library search engine and will be acknowledging extensive student feedback. Each subject has a main contact to the library.

Proctor: is there still a student library resource group?

Director of Education: currently looking at bringing this back.

Academic Representation Coordinator: open forum once a semester for students to give feedback- last in November receiving lots of feedback.

History SP: library has incredible collection of books. For 4th years looking into journalism would be more useful to access more journals.

Senior Librarian: looking into more resources currently with 'Overdrive' forum.

Employability Officer: there will be more information released soon.

International Relations SP: could there be a new initiative explaining university's current resources to students?

Senior Librarian: it is worth looking at subject guide to aid with subject specific resources.

AOCB

Presenter: Director of Education

Time: 5 minutes

Director of Student Experience: launching an internal review of how university will communicate with students. Will be opportunities for student voices and encourages SP involvement.

Director of Education: Thank you all for coming to this productive meeting.
Reminder of Principle's attendance at Education Committee next week.

Meeting adjourned.