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Education Committee

St Andrews Students Association

**Meeting Date:** 27th March 2025 (18:00 – 19:00)

Large Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Meeting called by**: Education Executive Committee

**Type of Meeting**: Education Committee

**Chair**: Faculty Presidents

**Note Taker(s)**: Sharanya Gupta

**ATTENDANCE**

**Attendees:**

Emily, Hitanshi, Amy, Sharanya, Fleur, Sara, Jeremy, Sebastien, Erin, Georgia, Ariane, Nick, Tasha, Donald, Paul, Sydney, Tom, Kiera, Josephine, Cole, Millie, Olivia, Hugo, Alicia, Oliver, Anisha

**Online**:

**Apologies**:

**Absences**:

**Guests**:

Evgeniya Pakhomova

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**Welcome note**

* Phoebe is ill
* Introducing Amy – new academic rep coordinator
* **Academic Rep Co-ord**: I’m the new Chase and this is my first EduCom

**First Agenda Item:** **Teaching Award Research** (Evgeniya)

* Overview:
  + **Evgeniya (online)**: Goal for this presentation is sharing what this research is, talk you through some of our main findings, and how you can use this report in your roles. We want this to be a tool you can use.
  + **What is this report?** It’s a qualitative analysis of the nominations submitted for Teaching awards. Amongst the categories, we saw some patterns with respect to what students are highlighting in their staff. We did it for the 2021/22 academic year as well. It feeds into the cycles of teaching enhancement. At Stage 6, we go around the university and see how people might find these findings useful. We publish a report each year. In our last report, we identified 4 main themes (a) materials and activities: different approaches to education facilitated by different teachers and style of the lecture in terms of how they explain things; (b) care: one-on-one relationship between the students and their lecturers and the extent to which students feel they are being cared for; (c) student development: how a teacher impacted a student’s future trajectory; (d) students as partners in learning: students like democratic atmospheres where teachers don’t position themselves as though they are above students.
  + These categories might seem very broad but for every theme, we have a list of practical steps and particular points of reflection that individual teachers can refer to in their practice. It’s not straightforward advice, it’s just something students comment upon often.
  + **Eg. Materials and Activities:** Steps include reflecting on how space is created for additional explanation, how important it is for students to be able to ask their teachers for additional content for challenging concepts. What are the feedback procedures in your school? Do your teachers follow it? Are students intimidated by faculty? Can you implement Q&A for modules with complex content? We want to inspire students and teachers to think about how this is working in their schools and if there is anything they can do to enhance teaching.
  + **Final remarks:** I highly encourage you to look at this report; it’s published on the website for the teaching award nominations. The main takeaway is that the teaching award findings can help you identify what students think excellent teaching looks like which can give a broader perspective across schools instead of just your own. You can use this to promote research-based changes in your school. For instance, if a course isn’t well implemented and you want to pursue change, you can use this report to inform your arguments with your faculty. You can email me for any questions if you don’t have any right now.

**Second Agenda Item:** **Extensions Policy** (Music and Chemistry SP)

* Overview:
  + **Music SP**: There is a need for a middle ground policy for extensions and leave of absence, like there is a missing empathetic plan B.
  + **Chem SP:** The current policy states that if you suffer from bereavement, you get 10 days for an extension. After the 10th day, you’re asked to take a leave of absence, which isn’t exactly practical, and this is where there is a gap in university support.
  + **Music SP:** When I was suffering from bereavement, I had to be on campus a day after my mother’s funeral. There should be flexibility for hybrid learning which isn’t allowed by the policy. I couldn’t get access to most of university policy but we’re trying to draft something if this were to go up to UAF. If anyone has any ideas, we could build it into this.
  + **Chem SP:** My DoT is of the opinion that policy is policy. There is a gap, and at least in my school they are standardizing extensions with increasing strictness.
  + **DoEd:** How are they doing that?
  + **Chem SP:** For some 60-credit modules, the school’s granting extensions based on how much you’ve done. It’s still in draft but it looks ridiculous. At the start of term, a student was involved in a car accident. There was a deadline at 9am on Monday week 1 but he wasn’t given an extension because the associate dean said you can’t give a blanket extension because they believe that more people would take advantage than would benefit. I disagree, some more nuanced care can be given in situations like this.
  + **Art/Div FP:** This is definitely a UAF thing.
* Discussion:
  + **Hist SP:** In exceptional circumstances, there needs to be someone not attached to the school who can overlook this. I wonder if there is someone at college gate that can communicate what the right policy for instances like this would be.
  + **Arts/Div FP:** Do the 10 days include the passing away of parents?
  + **Music SP:** Technically yes, I got 14 because I went to the Dean.
  + **Chem SP:** I mean you shouldn’t have to go to the Dean for such things.
  + **Philosophy SP:** Do we know why there isn’t currently a plan b solution?
  + **Music SP:** After 2 weeks, the school thinks it’s a wellbeing issue and there is a deadline for taking a leave of absence. There could be more support on the academic front. I managed to talk to Edinburgh support, and they create a timetable to support the student which goes to the Director of Wellbeing.
  + **Philosophy SP:** Maybe if there are wellbeing conditions for 10 days and different ones for leave of absence, which one would a student have to be affected by to have a support system set up?
  + **Music SP:** The support that students support gives to ADHD students is the same as those affected with bereavement. There needs to be a system to be like “no, they want to stay and get things done but this is what they need from you.”
  + **German LC:** Last semester, I needed multiple extension which passed the 10 day deadline which I wasn’t aware of.
  + **Music SP:** School of English was receptive, and the staff were like we could give you more extensions. School of Psychology went by-the-book and didn’t yield. There needs to be some standardization across schools
  + **DoEd:** If you’re receiving student services support, if you have a registered disability with an advisor and something related to your disability came up, your advisor could circumvent and grant that to you. Has anyone had an experience where they were able to use student services support to deal with schools? Because of UKVI policy around international students, the two weeks is for the university to show evidence that a student is engaging after which you receive an academic alert. I’m not too informed about their guidance for bereavement.
  + **Music SP:** what about the type of engagement? Do they require physical presence, or do they allow for flexible engagement?
  + **DoEd:** For international students, they have to be physically present because UKVI is worried about students doing distance learning degrees which isn’t happening but that’s their concern.
  + **Music SP:** It’s not there is no support, there is just a disconnect between the types of support.
  + **Chem SP:** Schools do circumvent, they sometimes toe the line with that so it’s good to give them leeway to be empathetic towards students. With what happened at the beginning of the year in our school, there is now a whole cohort that thinks faculty said, “tough, deal with it.”
  + **IR SP:** I would love to see an element of human interaction built into this. Someone won’t deny bereavement support in a one-on-one conversation but it’s not the student’s job to jump through these loopholes.
  + **DoEd:** Do you have a rule that, “after x amount days you have to reach out to your director of wellbeing”? Is that standard practice?
  + **G&SD SP:** In our school, the wellbeing director reaches out to you.
  + **Econ SP:** In our school, all extensions are dealt by the Director of Wellbeing not the module coordinators.
  + **DoEd:** Does everyone know who their Director of Wellbeing is? \**Mixed response*\*

**Third Agenda Item:** **Legacies of Empire report** (DoEd)

* Discussion:
  1. Have y’all read it? What are your thoughts? *\*SPs laugh\**
  2. What was funny about it?
  + **ML SP:** It’s an important topic, but the report felt very “grasping” in a look-at-what-we’ve-done way. None of my tutorials, even in history, address this. So, it’s funny of them to send out an email to students when there is no other support that goes behind this statement.
  + **DoEd:** My favourite expression was ’involuntary and un-consensual trade’ \**side-eye*\* We have university court where the report and student reception of it will be discussed. Potentially, something forward looking needs to come out of it. There aren’t necessarily any learnings from this report like ethical financial practices which is something I want to push for.
  + **English SP:** It feels very jargon heavy like something done to do it. Even acknowledging the intricate ways in which teaching is affected from this colonial legacy would be beneficial. Having that on a ground level and scale where it’s more transparent how these legacies impact students today.

**Fourth Agenda Item:** **Effectiveness of SSCCs** (Psych SP)

* Overview:
  + I had my SSCC last week. We’ve tried 2 approaches (a) split SSCCs where subhonours and hons happen separately but at the same time but that wasn’t doing it. (b) We did school role feedback then had breakout time with each year group. I don’t know if it’s because my school’s broken or if I’m doing it wrong.
* Discussion:
  1. Is there anything that works particularly well in your school?
  2. How do you strategize with your reps?
  + **Phys SP:** We used to just do individual module feedback, which wasn’t very conducive. What worked was that we included broader questions in the survey and then we had data to inform our arguments. For instance, lecture notes - lecturers argue that in the Soviet Union there weren’t lecture notes – we assign 2-3 reps on each topic to prepare a presentation with data. Our staff is quite nice, but this was fairly effective.
  + **Philosophy SP:** In our SLCC, it’s just class reps, me, DoT, couple of other staff members and we give them the general feedback. Then, class reps meet with module coordinators one-on-one to discuss specific feedback. Then I circle back to lecturers to see what changes they’ve implemented. There is accountability for reps to get that meeting done in the same week as SSCC to close the loop but it’s helpful because professors don’t have to sit and listen to what’s happening in other modules.
  + **Russian LC:** I did the feedback really early on and then had a strict close date. I had my reps draft agenda points before the SLCC was scheduled, I would go over them and see which topics would be over 10 mins and then reps would speak to module coordinators separately. Every agenda point, we do a positive and negative point and that really changed staff reception.
  + **ML SP:** Having our DoT present really helped. Professors would just not listen to feedback, but the teachers seem to behave better and receive feedback more gently with the DoT present.
  + **Hist SP:** I play divide and rule in the department. I’ll speak to the DoT to see how they feel about the topics, then I let it brew within the school. At SLCC it plays out in front of me, and I can guide it. Using SSCC as a standalone event doesn’t work, but pestering staff members before and after helps more. I’m frustrated by the fact that there is no requirement for students and staff to show up to the SSCC meeting. My DoT and I are quite tired of people not showing up for important meetings I organize.
  + **DoEd**: There is academic rep policy which I will be working on it, but it does already mandate that at the very least DoT, wellbeing events and module coordinators be at the SSCC, so you can escalate the policy next time. There are many things for which you need to rely on the goodwill of staff, but SSCC is not one of them.
  + **Econ SP**: Nothing in our SLCC is module specific. I get feedback ahead of time, they are very aggressive towards me, we do have valid feedback, and they aren’t crazy asks but there is not much I can do and there is not much support I can get because my DoT is on that side as well. They should have some level of accountability to their school presidents.
  + **DoEd**: We run AAMs (Annual Academic Monitoring) where all schools answer 6 questions each year. One of the questions we’ve added is, “What are your processes of gathering and implementing student feedback?” We can involve student reps more. You might not know this when you start as a SP. We will see if outgoing SPs can have an input into this.
  + **Comp Sc SP**: SSCC is more general, we discuss complaints and deal with it. I do tell my staff to kindly shut up. I conduct it like it’s my thing and I make sure they shut up and listen to me.
  + **G&SD SP**: During my SSCC, staff says the survey isn’t representative enough, my DoT will talk over me, and everyone talks to my DoT instead of me.
  + **DoEd**: The module feedback stuff is a sector wide issue where we typically avg 7-10% response rates that are module specific. Ask them what the response rates are for MEQs. If you invalidate any feedback by saying that it’s not representative that’s not okay because no feedback is also feedback. It’s not fair for them to treat your surveys as any less. According to the academic rep policy, the SP is the chair and you are responsible to mediate and moderate the meeting. You can have conversations, but it should be in your control.
  + **Bio SP:** We have 4 DoTs and it’s really good cause after the SSCC, they will chat what their action points are. We do have one DoT who doesn’t attend any and another one has stepped down. However, because they are a team, they don’t tend to speak over you. I find the chat right after quite helpful.
  + **Chem SP:** I try to scale student-staff balance and keep it to practical changes that can be implemented within the semester. There is definitely a burden on student reps to provide a solution kind of how it’s like at UAF. In terms of the response rates, I promised my reps chocolate if they get a good rate, and they doubled it. We also deliberately create more action points because staff is likely to attend out of obligation and not do anything after.
  + **Psych SP**: Do you run subhons and hons on the same day?
  + **Chem SP**: We run them on different days, and we only cover mandatory modules because there are too many optional ones.
  + **IR SP**: I try to keep it to as few people as possible. For instance, our employability rep hasn’t been invited in 3 years, unless there is a specific issue. We also conduct them in-person as staff tends to be nicer to your face. Make sure your reps meet with their year level module coordinators.

**Fifth Agenda Item:** **Elections** (DoEd)

* Overview:
  + **DoEd:** All these reflections are great but it’s not good for timing because our term in our roles is short. You all will be in your roles till the end of June so if you can informally handover to your successors, please do that. Ask them to shadow you since we often lose continuity in terms of projects and priorities. We do invite them to EduCom.
  + **Arts/Div FP:** We all received the email about the amount of school president vacancies. Please motivate people to run, and run for Arts and Div FP.

**Sixth Agenda Item:** **Teaching awards** (DoEd)

* Overview:
  + **DoEd:** Those who have volunteered, you’ll hear from Amy (Academic Rep Co-ord) and Daniel (PG ARI)
  + **Arts/Div FP:** Please RSVP to One Union Awards.
  + **Maths SP:** We’re going to conduct exit interviews with project supervisors and the entire 4th year cohort.
  + **Comp Sc SP**: We already do exit interviews where graduating students just go chat with the DoT.
  + **DoEd:** There is a bar tab downstairs so get your lanyard for access.

**Observers**

**Resources Requested**