



## **Disability & Academic Support Reps Forum**

**16 November 2022, 6.30pm**

### **Microsoft Teams**

*Attendance:* Kelly Syristatidi, Toni Andres, Chase Greenfield, Evelyn Hoon, Fiona Whelan, Jane Yarnell, Jiayi Liu, Laura Bullen, Mathilda Gatsby, May Norwood, River Stilwell

*Chair:* Jane Yarnell

*Minutes:* Toni Andres

1. Welcome and Introduction
  - Jane outlines the agenda
  - General etiquette: raise your virtual hand and either speak or write a message in the chat
  - Jane offers that students can follow up via email to Jane (jey2@st-andrews.ac.uk) or the DSN (disabledstunet@st-andrews.ac.uk)
2. About the Role of the Disability & Academic Support Rep
  - Jane reminds everyone that role holders are representatives, not advocates for specific issues. The role aims at providing general feedback about systems in place which may sometimes be difficult, as students often approach Reps with specific issues and pieces of information. Jane reminds everyone that Reps are not case workers.
  - When in interaction with staff:
    - o Jane reminds Reps that they are to be treated with respect by members of staff. Jane encourages Reps to reach out to the Disabled Students Network (DSN) if they ever are treated differently.

- The role is quite recently established hence some staff may not be familiar with the position. Jane offers to back up on support if staff may need more information.

### 3. Open discussion of issues

- Evelyn Hoon (Rep for Social Anthropology) raises issues:
  - Staff in the School of Social Anthropology have specifically requested information that they have not been receiving from the university. The department does not have information as to where to direct students, what counts as a disability and do not seem to be aware of how to handle issues that are arising. Particularly the handling of extensions proves difficult: some students are struggling to be granted extensions because the department started looking into students' track record of getting extension.
  - Evelyn has a meeting with the School President soon about how to communicate resources better and asks for further input.
  - Jane asks Fiona for information on where to direct students.
    - Fiona explains that Students Services has set up a Links Scheme which encompasses three meetings each School has with a disability advisor and a wellbeing advisor about any issues that are arising in the School. This has only been implemented this semester.
    - Fiona promises to reach out to the Department of Social Anthropology and will take over from here.
  - Jane adds that extensions have been an ongoing problem, more broadly speaking, and hence this is being addressed at the moment.
  - Evelyn adds that staff said that they require more support from estates to ensure that classes can be recorded (training sessions for Panopto and resources support). Most classes are not being recorded at the moment.
    - Fiona will get in touch with the Technology Enhancement and Learning Team (from CEED) to facilitate technical support.
- Kelly Syristatidi (Rep for Medicine)
  - The School of Medicine has specific Student Services. No technical issues have come up so far.
  - Kelly has created a survey for the School's SSCC about students' experiences with support. Experiences have been positive so far. Jane asks if this could be passed on and Kelly agrees.

- Kelly reminds Reps that there are resources for students and that this information can easily be forwarded to students who are seeking support.
- Kelly relates an instance of an issue in the School: Kelly is diabetic and lost the blood sugar counter before an exam. Kelly asked for a blood sugar counter immediately before the exam that but was not given one. Kelly asks for advice on how to engage with this issue.
  - Jane summarises that this is a piece of general feedback. The central question is: What should a School/Department do when someone is sitting their exam and is having difficulties accessing their medical equipment?
  - Jane answers that there are policies in place that should have been applied in that moment. What should have happened is that the DoT should have been contacted and Kelly should not have been made to sit the exam until having access to medical equipment. Jane promises to share information about this with DoTs.
  - Jane suggests that Kelly could work on raising awareness and educating about situations like this.
- River Stilwell (Rep for English)
  - The Disability Officer at the School of English encouraged River to bring up audiobooks to be put on Talis.
  - River would like to bring up this idea for potential university-wide changes and asks for advice on how to raise awareness about this.
  - Jane answers that there is an Accessible Technology Advisor (Ros Walker: [rjw25@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:rjw25@st-andrews.ac.uk)) for individual cases. If River would like to work on this more widely, Jane offers help.
  - Fiona adds that individual appointments are very much encouraged. Fiona emphasises that a university-wide change would fall under the responsibility of CEED, the library and Students Services. Fiona offers to make an appointment to have a chat about accessibility of reading lists more widely. Jane adds that the DSN will gladly offer support.
- Mae Norwood (Rep for Biology)
  - Mae expresses that the School of Biology has similar problems with technical issues concerning recordings and uploadings; links are not being posted and staff seem unaware.
  - Mae is working with the Disability Coordinator in the School of Biology on creating a leaflet with resources. Mae suggests creating a similar leaflet for staff and asks if other Reps are interested in collaborating on this.

- Jane responds that staff not knowing what to do appears to be a general issue (i.e. lecture capture). Jane asks Fiona to also offer technical support to the School of Biology.
  - Fiona adds that lecture capture has been having some teething problems because there has been different use for it now than during the height of the pandemic. Fiona promises to feed this back to the CEED team.
- Jane adds that the DSN is putting together a guide for disabled students as well which will be further discussed later in the meeting.
- Mathilda Gatsby (Rep for Art History)
  - The SSCC meeting took place at the beginning of November.
  - Mathilda is putting together a survey about semester experiences so far.
  - Main issues that have come up are:
    - Making sure that students know what falls under disability to ask for support.
    - At the SSCC meeting technical issues came up such as making sure that the mic is on in lectures. There have been cases in various classes where lecturers do not turn their mics on so students with hearing issues and/or neurodivergences do not catch everything that is being said.
    - ADHD awareness has also come up a few times. There has been a demand for more sensitivity from tutors and understanding that ADHD is a disability.
    - Some students had issues accessing material on reading lists.
  - Jane summarises action points:
    - Staff training theme and reading lists accessibility theme.
    - Jane emphasises that there is a module for staff about inclusive practice that is currently being developed. It helps to see where points of friction are. This is going to be an optional moodle course. How to make resources accessible will be included.
    - There is an ongoing complication that those tutoring are mostly PhD students who may not have the capacities for further training
      - Fiona adds that the issue is that Moodle does not allow for restricting access to certain demographics

so the course will be uploaded and made available to all on moodle.

- Fiona also emphasises that ADHD will be included explicitly in the course
- Jane asks if Reps are interested in publicity graphics about resources. All Reps express positive responses. Graphics will be shared on Teams channel. Jane asks what other support Reps would find helpful
  - Evelyn asks for a text version for email circulation which Jane promises to make available.
- Jane thanks everyone and promises to get back to everyone on action points and asks that Reps reach out to Jane if Jane has not gotten back to them within 3 weeks.
- Evelyn asks Fiona what to relate back to the School of Anthropology (following up from earlier point).
  - Fiona answers that Evelyn should emphasise that the point has been raised in the forum and that Michelle from Student Services will be in touch.
- May brings up another issue that came up
  - One staff member was making comments on how students would not deserve to know content of lectures if they did not show up to lectures.
    - May has raised this with the Disability Officer who promised to talk with this member of staff.
    - May asks for general advice on how to engage with these kinds of disparaging comments on students with access needs.
    - Jane summarises that this appears to be a specific issue with a specific staff member. Jane emphasises that the right roadway is to take it to the DoT or Exam & Welfare Officer in School or to Fiona from Students Services.
    - Fiona adds that it can be difficult sometimes to bring this kind of issue up within a School and promises support for these issues. Fiona is also aware of these issues in the School of Biology and is in touch with them about this. Fiona recommends the Report and Support Tool for anonymised feedback. Fiona's contact details are: [few5@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:few5@st-andrews.ac.uk)
    - Jane adds that Reps are welcome to get in touch with Jane as well.

- Chase expresses appreciation for bringing this up. Chase adds that this can be brought up to the Head of School who can then address it with the member of staff.
- Evelyn adds that similar comments have been made in the SSCC in the School of Social Anthropology particularly about the recording policy. Evelyn asks if the reasoning behind recording policy has been communicated to members of staff.
- Jane answers yes, that has been communicated but emphasises that this will further be stressed.

#### 4. How to Gather Feedback

- Jane emphasises using various channels to distribute feedback surveys.
- Jane recommends using different options for asking questions (i.e. numerical questions or longer text-type questions).
- Jane recommends a mix of long and short question and also emphasises to include a text box at the end for general comments.
- Jane recommends Microsoft Forms and Google Forms (however, Google Forms does not seem to work nicely with university emails).
- Jane recommends distributing surveys through
  - weekly School President emails
  - Social media graphics
  - Group chats on social media
  - Physical space (comment box) in School
- Mathilda recommends using Teams tutorial groups
  - Jane adds that it depends on how each School operates and emphasises awareness for School's specific modes of communication.
  - Chase adds that Reps should make sure to get permission from a member of staff if groups are staff-owned.
- Jane offers support for creating social media graphics.
- DSN also sends out weekly emails. Jane offers to share survey through various DSN channels.

#### 5. Disabled students guide

- If anyone is interested, please reach out to Jane, the DSN is always looking for more input from students.
- If Reps' Schools are interested in using this, Reps are encouraged to reach out to the DSN so it can be distributed to the School specifically.
- This will be shared in the teams chat with all Reps.

6. Last concerns

- Laura Bullen (Education Rep from DSN) asks whether Reps are interested in working with the DSN more broadly on creating a disabled students meetup in Schools for further encouraging support networks in Schools? Everyone present expresses interest.
- Mathilda asks where volunteering hours are logged? Jane answers that this will be shared in the teams chat.
- Jane thanks everyone.