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Education Committee

St Andrews Students Association

**Meeting Date:** 27th February 2025 (17:00 – 19:00)

Large Rehearsal Room (Student Union Building)

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Meeting called by**: Education Committee

**Type of Meeting**: Undergraduate Academic Forum

**Chair**: Hitanshi Badani (*Director of Education*)

**Note Taker(s)**: Sharanya Gupta (*Academic Representation Intern*)

**ATTENDANCE**

**Attendees:**

Hitanshi Badani (*Director of Education*), Emily Bannister (*Arts and Divinity Faculty President*), Phoebe Rickards (*Science and Medicine Faculty President*), Fleur Stevenson (*Italian Convenor*), Georgia Chiswick (*Computer Science School President*), Ariane O’Rourke (*Economics and Finance School President*), Hugo Decitre (*Physics and Astronomy School President*), Kiera Martin (*Modern Languages School President*), Jeremy Limbert (*Classics School President*), Tom Rippon (*French Language Convenor*), Vic Chua (*Divinity School President*), Finn Bender (*Art History School President*), Olivia Griffin (*Philosophy School President*), Jimin Lim (*Medicine School President*), Sara Whiteman (*Geography and Sustainable Development School President*), Nick Townsend (*History School President*), Finn Salisbury (*Social Anthropology School President*), Stefanie Fotso (*Chinese Language Convenor*), Alicia Barnes (*Biology School President*), Oliver Righton (*Chemistry School President*),

**Apologies**: Clare Peddie (*Proctor*), Paul Cruickshank (*Associate Dean Students Science*), Emma Wisher (*Libraries*), Nicola Milton (*Head of Education Policy and Quality*), Josephine Grzeskowiak-Shipp (*Earth and Environmental Science School Presiden*t), Anisha Minocha (*English School President*), Millie Chew (*Film Studies School President*), Donald Campbell (*Mathematics School President*), Sebastien Chessé (*Management School President*), Erin Hugo (*Comparative Literature Language Convenor*), Paul Chester (*German Language Convenor*), Sydney Ash (*Russian Language Convenor*), Shona McCallum (*Arabian and Persian Language Convenor*), Tasha Currie (*Music School President*), Hayley Stone (*Psychology and Neuroscience School President*)

**Guests**:

Ros Claase (*Director of Student Experience*), Frank Müller (*AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching*), Shiona Chillas (*Associate Dean Students Arts and Divinity*), Sharon Leahy (*Associate Dean Education Science*), Lenia Kouneni (*Associate Dean Education Arts and Divinity*) Jim Campbell (*Career Centre*), Moira Sinclair (*Head of Timetabling Services*), Andrew Linz (*Biochemistry Integrated Masters Representative*), Amanda Cao (SRC Carers, Commuters, Mature, and Flexible Learners Officer), Jay Martin (SRC Disability Officer), Celina Chen (*BAME Education Rep*), Molly Reade (*DSN Education Rep*)

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**First Agenda Item:** **Follow up from UAF Action points** (20 minutes)

Timetable Release Timelines

* Overview:
  + **Director of Education:** School of Maths signposted us to how they release timetables early. Is there a possibility for provisional timetables for more certainty on what students’ schedule looks like
* Discussion
  + **Head of Timetabling Services**: There are two parts to this (a) how people get their personal timetables. Indicative timetables exist already and we’re looking to improve publicity regarding that and ‘how to’ guidance. Timetable timeline is a long process. For 25/26 we start next month. Timetables are released in mid-august (26th august this year) after consultations with the schools. However, these aren’t personalised, and we cannot provide personal student timetables until matriculation and advising have been completed. We are aware of what Maths provide; they advertise an idea of when their core classes will run but there is no guarantee that will be delivered. You can see indicative timetables early on using the publicly available database. Maybe we need to work on advertising that information and informing students how to use the database.
  + **Director of Education:** More can be done in publicising this. The interface is also not the most user-friendly so some kind of guidance on how to navigate it would be needed.
  + **Associate Dean Education Science**: How would that information best be amplified to you?
  + **International Relations School President**: Just a box that pops up on MySaint would be useful.
  + **Philosophy School President**: Advisors could be notified for them to signpost students.
  + **Arts/Divinity Faculty President**: Module catalogue pages don’t always have the updated information about class timings and location during pre-advising.
  + **Head of Timetabling Services:** We already have an issue with that because at that stage changes could be made to class location or time at any time.
  + **Associate Dean Education Science**: We’d have to mention that the timetables are provisional and issue advisory that it may not be the same as students’ personal timetables.
  + **Medicine School President**: I would also recommend sending an email out sometime late July/early August as there are medics who don’t use MySaint actively (esp before term time)
  + **Associate Dean Education Science:** We’ll ask the School of Medcine to do that in addition to the banner on MySaint and a short video.
  + **Jay**: Not knowing their schedules in advance is a big issue for neurodivergent students. It would be worth discussing this with the Disability Services as well.
  + **Director of Education**: Timetable from last year is different from provisional timetable. The wording can be confusing so making the words very clear is important.

Module Handbooks

* Overview:
  + **Director of Education**: Do we have any follow up on the standardisation of module handbooks?
* Discussion:
  + **Director of Student Experience:** Nothing concrete has been done so far. However, we’ve talked about how this might be part of wider work i.e. the website and structuring guides. The current handbooks aren’t the most accessible so there’s a lot of work to be taken up there.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching:** By all means, drop me an email and let us know which module handbook is specifically in shambles and we’ll speak directly to the coordinator.

**Second Agenda Item:** **Biology and Chemistry Placement Programmes** (30 minutes)

Contextualisation, Survey Design, and Reduced Fees Benchmarking

* Overview:
  + **Chemistry School President:** [background from doc] We’re bringing this up in the context of accessibility, especially given the rising cost of living crisis. Placements are a very valuable route back into a company and it seems unfair to tell students that those who can’t afford it can’t participate.
  + **Biology School President:** We carried out surveys amongst students on placements and those who didn’t do a placement. Overwhelming majority of students felt that the fee was a major issue. 66% said that it negatively impacted their mental health, and many had to pursue additional jobs to sustain themselves. In Biology, the placement is mandatory for the 5-year program. If one doesn’t pursue the placement, then they switch down to 4. Out of the 16% students who went did the placement, only 20% were actually paid during this placement. Other, equally important, lab-based roles are typically unpaid. Students are paying to pursue a work placement.
  + **Chemistry School President:** When the scheme was set up, the fee was lower. However, the compensation companies pay has not kept up with the university’s fee. There are grants but they only apply to those outside the UK. We looked at other universities with this program and the majority discount their students’ fee. We wanted to discuss what possibility we could be looking at to make placements accessible for STEM students.
* Discussion:
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching:** [data from Global Office] 28 students on placement in the UK with different fee regime. 1 is fully funded, 3 are in receipt of scholarships. The 3 who applied for funding got it. This funding covers the gap between the loan and tuition being levied. These placements offer credits in return and our fee structure is based on credits. We can improve marketing around the funding initiatives. It would be tricky telling the university to reconsider its fee because we’re barely breaking even. I see the wider point of how this is making students nervous.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: Scottish students being funded by SAAS still consider the placement fee a boundary. Most Biology placements are unpaid which makes it difficult to pursue them without the university’s support. Considering the university’s competitors, they all offer placements with credits, but they still reduce students’ fee from 15-75%. Some students have their fee returned. With this benchmark, universities are supporting their students to pursue placements why can’t St Andrews do that and have more students go on these placements.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching:** I completely see this issue; I could take it to the principal’s office and see what they say.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: That’s a good starting point. Could this be brought to the principal’s notice? We can see if this would be possible with an audit.
  + **Director of Education:** I’m sure there is a way this affects the university’s employability policy. Any kind of reduction is worth something.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: We would have to agree on a specific proposal, and we’ll have to see if it’ll make a difference
  + **Chemistry School President**: Scottish students currently only pay during placement year. So, a small percentage would also make a big difference.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: That is a much lower demographic compared to what other students have to pay.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: Is this something we can put forward and have a proper look at?
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: If you can agree on a sensible proposal, I can have that accosted by finance and I can put that to PO.
  + **Director of Student Experience**: Please also work with the employability and global office so we don’t lose sight of this. We get a sense that many aren’t aware about the available funding, and we can look into providing more clarity about finding monetary support. There are several pockets of money for engagement in such activities.
  + **Biochemistry Placement Year Rep**: I wanted to circle back to the cost issue. For the number of people who are on the biology placement program, the university is losing tuition fee from students who drop down to the 4-year program. It’s worth looking into how much business the university is losing because of students dropping out of the program.
  + **Director of Education**: Who would be the right person to bring into this?
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: Either me or the proctor. The idea is for you to come up with a figure that makes a difference and we can then put that forward. I’m waiting to hear back from Sam about more details as all students were invited to apply but only 3 did and they all got it.
  + **Chemistry School President**: The number of placement year students is different each year.
  + **Biology School President**: Amongst those currently in third year, I know a lot of people who’ve dropped down from the Integrated Master’s program.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: Can you give us the data on how many 5th years we’re losing?
  + **Chemistry School President**: We’ll get in touch with registry for this.

**Third Agenda Item:** **Classroom Technologies** (25 minutes)

Motion passed by SRC on Lecture Capture and Audit of Auto-generated Captions

* Overview:
  + **SRC Disability Officer**: We’ve had a lot of student feedback about current issues with lecture capture. We want to have a conversation with what’s doing around here. Tech isn’t great - it’s too quite, too loud, or just not working. Captioning is another big one for disabled and international students. 75-80% captions are accurate which is a lot of words you’re missing in a lecture. We request that the university undertake an audit of lecture quality and captioning, school by school, to ascertain (a) which schools are being impacted the most and (b) how many lectures are being recorded per school. This could supplement IT’s building-by-building update but that’s a slow process.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: I brought it up during the previous UAF including the issue with optional staff training. I’d like to push for mandatory trainings. I understand if staff has done it before; a refresher never hurt anyone. I understand that staff can be difficult to work with, however, there are quite a lot of tech failures.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: If a member of staff refuses to cooperate, it’s against the university’s requirements so you must report them to us. There is an opt out option for unusual individual cases where staff shares politically sensitive content which could negatively impact their work. If there is an indication that they don’t want to record lectures, they should be reported. From the faculty’s perspective, lecture attendance is as low as 20%. While no research establishes a causal link between attendance and lecture capture availability, the belief that one exists is widespread.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: The technology issues aren’t great for those who can’t go to class; not necessarily those who don’t want to go.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: I would like to hear from (a) students/lectures whose lecture recordings are good. This can be used to set an example to the schools who aren’t doing it right and (b) lectures where recordings are persistently not right. I understand that students may have to miss lectures but capture policy is not to replace lectures but to supplement attendance.
  + **Director of Education**: The capture content policy could be more explicit and the fact that lecture capture is used by students with access needs.
  + **SRC CCMFL Officer**: We want to work with the university to increase resources for staff. We’re saying this is an accessibility issue because students who are marginalized have a harder time getting a good education due to circumstances that are out of their control. That’s why we would like to work with staff so that they understand it’s usually not just a choice for students to not show up.
  + **Director of Education**: There is also no literature that supports a correlation between attendance and lecture recordings and this could be included in the policy.
  + **SRC Disability Officer**: It’s ableism to suggest that students are using their health to not come to class. I’m not suggesting that this is what’s happening here, however, it is incorrect to make assumptions about students’ personal circumstances.
  + **Director of Student Experience**: We would like to help our colleagues understand the changing demographics of our students, so they aren’t making assumptions of the students. How do we constructively build that awareness? We will also address the broken links in the policy.
  + **Medicine School President**: Perhaps the focus needs to change by making lectures more interactive with Q&As so that students want to attend lectures and those who can’t receive the necessary support.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President**: Students who choose not to attend class because they don’t want to, also won’t engage with the recordings. That’s their fault and students who face issues in engaging with their classes shouldn’t have to suffer because of that.
  + **International Relations School President**: There needs to be a mindset shift. Lecture capture is there as a safety net, and it should be seen as that. A lot of it comes down to human error and more training/ support on that will be very helpful.
  + **Associate Dean Students Arts and Divinity**: one of the ways to help colleagues up their game is for every student to being it up directly with their lecturers so that lecturers have to give a lecture experience.
  + **SRC Disability Officer**: We’re looking to build trust between students and staff. Directed feedback puts students under extra stress. The MEQs have a question about online parts of the module but nothing specific about lecture capture. There is too much onus on students when it’s not their fault.
  + **Director of Education**: SRC endorsed lecture capture in 2017 i.e. before covid. The demand for this was there much before the supply started. There will be students who require this for their education.
  + **International Relations School President:** Students emailing their lecturers is a reactive approach rather than proactive. Lecturers are often doing their best and a shift in best practices will reduce the one offs.
  + **Science/Medicine Faculty President:** I raised this issue because Medicine wanted class reps to fix the tech issue (technology rep). Some members of staff are trying to push this onto students. If we can do this audit, then we can improve the system where lecturers won’t ask students to fix the technology as it’s not their responsibility to fix things they are paying for. We could bring a better system that benefits both students and staff. It will never be perfect, but it be better.
  + **Associate Dean Education Science**: You don’t need to convince us why lecture capture is important; we are with you on that. The audit won’t happen next week so if you want a quick solution you need to tell us who the big offenders are. Offenders don’t care what the policy says so they won’t go for training. We will do an audit, but that’ll take weeks. So, if you want to help the current cohort, you need to bring immediate issues to our notice.
  + **Associate Dean Education Arts and Divinity**: I’ve used lecture capture since 2017, and it didn’t affect how many students attended my lecture. I know how to use tech, and even I have failed. If there are repeat offenders, we will look into it. What I find hard to wrap my head around is captioning. As an international staff member, Panopto doesn’t like my pronunciation. If I’m to go through my captioning, it will take 4 hours. Even if I’m willing to do it, no one else will.
  + **Jay**: The concept of hiring interns for this was floated earlier when the university was financially stronger.
  + **Director of Education**: There are AI tools for captioning which can be a better alternative. I will speak to you all at EduCom and find a way to flag venues and modules that are subject to tech failures.

**Fourth Agenda Item:** **Self-certifications** (25 minutes)

Overview of PAFS, Practices pertaining to and future policies reliant on Self-Certifications

* Overview:
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: Recent change in self-certification administration (Schools of Philosophy, Social Anthropology, and Film Studies) where it was decided that they won’t accept or reject self-certs. The announcement that read as “absences will no longer be accepted” upset a lot of students. This should’ve been carefully communicated carefully. Academic alerts depend on how many compulsory classes were missed but that sanction has nothing to do with whether a self-cert was accepted or not. Schools saying they won’t do this anymore has misled students to believe that if they submit self-certs, there is no consequence to attendance when there in fact is. Self-cert approval doesn’t mean you can miss unlimited classes, and rejection doesn’t mean that you’re kicked off the module.
  + **Arts/Divinity Faculty President**: Is this a trial for other schools?
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: I didn’t know about this. The schools decided to stop something they thought was useless. Philosophy had 6000 self-certs to approve. Question is – is that worth doing if the process doesn’t even link to academic alerts.
  + **Director of Education**: (a) what does this mean for self-certs, specifically are they depending on self certs for other policies, and (b) will the whole concept of self certs be reviewed?
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: Point of the self-cert is so we know you’re still engaged. It helps us monitor engagement and wellbeing.
  + **Medicine School President**: I’ve never heard of self-certs being disapproved; the issue is students submit them and don’t know what to do when they get a strong response. The school flags that when you submit 3 self-certs, you’re called in for a meeting. Maybe flagging the number of self-certs you can submit for a module will prevent that.
  + **Associate Dean Education Arts and Divinity**: Each school has a policy of how many compulsory classes in terms of attendance you’re allowed to miss.
  + **Medicine School President:** That’s what we currently do but can we raise awareness about that? We currently flag it in several lectures.
  + **Philosophy School President:** I spoke to the DoT yesterday to see if we’ve received any feedback about this. I think all the confusion has been outside of Philosophy. We asked students on MEQs about the self-cert change and most students understand what’s going on.
  + **Jay**: This decision sets a bad precedent of going behind important faculty members in the school to make decisions. Disability services and EDI didn’t know about this. It’s a worrying precedent: any decision a school makes without checking in with disability and EDI devalues the work we do.
  + **Art History School President**: Self-certs are awful, and no one likes, however, the message was poorly presented.
  + **Social Anthropology School President**: I agree that the email caused a lot of stress, esp. to disabled students. There were several follow ups with the DoT to clarify that this isn’t a punishment. However, if your message requires 3-4 clarifications, a broader conversation needs to be had on the workload on admin staff and issues around extensions. In one of our modules, they’re trying a new policy where everyone has a week-long extension on any one assignment - no questions asked. When the wellbeing officer was on break, the DoT had to go over so many requests.
  + **Director of Student Experience**: We would’ve also loved to know this was happening - something clearly went wrong behind the scenes. There should be guidance on what schools should do when undergoing such changes so that staff knows how to work with other stakeholders.
  + **Modern Languages School President**: Currently, if you self-certify, you get an email from the disability team to check in with you. The new system does not keep track of this.
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: That is still in place.
  + **Philosophy School President**: What are the next steps?
  + **AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching**: We don’t think it’s a bad idea if everyone did this. What we’ve learnt is that consulting everyone beforehand is important.
  + **Jay**: DSN is releasing a statement on Instagram to clarify what is happening.

**Fifth Agenda Item:** **AOCB** (5 minutes)

Teaching Awards and One Union Awards

* **Director of Education**: Award season at the union with Teaching Awards and One Union Awards. We want to everyone to know about this, so please take some posters from me. OUA recognizes staff and students. Everyone can elect volunteers and staff. Is there any way we could market it to staff?

Issues of Disabilities and Access in surveys and SSCCs

* **Director of Education**: [for school presidents] Disability reps are struggling to address their issues at SSCC meeting because they are kept at the end so please intersperse different groups within your meetings

Arts and Divinity Academic Journal

* **Arts/Divinity Faculty President:** The arts and divinity faculty journal is live again so if anyone wants to help approve submissions (Art History School President volunteered)