



# Undergraduate Academic Forum 2022-23

9<sup>th</sup> February, 6.30pm  
Large Rehearsal Room, Student's Association Building

## Attendance:

Toni Andres – Academic Representation Intern, Carol Ballinger – School President for Physics & Astronomy, Tom Bender – School President for Classics, Kirsty Bentley – School President for Chemistry, Robbie Carnegie – School President for Medicine, Ros Claase – Director of Student Experience, Federica Consiglio – Language Convenor for Comparative Literature, Maggie Crookston – School President for Management, Iain Cupples – Student Advocate (Education), Rosa Fricker – School President for History, Zoe Gemmell – School President Maths & Statistics, Chase Greenfield – Academic Representation Coordinator, Sam Gorman – Director of Student Development and Activities, Emma Hearn – School President for Psychology & Neuroscience, Patricia Helpap – School President for Earth & Environmental Sciences, Madeleine Houghton – Language Convenor for German, Martyna Kemeklyte – Faculty President Science & Medicine, Laurence Lamonde-Mercier – School President for Divinity, Francesca Lavelle – Faculty President for Arts & Divinity, Holly MacDonald – Wellbeing and Equality Coordinator, Anne Moorhouse – School President for Art History, Catherine Mullner – School President for English, Frank Müller – AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching, Quinn Duganne Murphy – Language Convenor for French, Gerald Prescott – Associate Dean Education (Science), Juan Pablo Rodríguez – President of the Students' Association, Dan Ross – School President for Modern Languages, Noah Schott – Director of Education, Claire Shortt – School President for the Music Centre, Anna Smith – School President for Philosophy, Iona Alison Thorburn – School President for Film Studies, Ava True – School President for Biology, Robbie Wallace – School President for Computer Science

**Chair:** Noah Schott

**Minutes:** Toni Andres

## Welcome and Introductions to Staff Members in Attendance & Meeting Expectations

- Noah Schott (Director of Education) welcomes everyone. Members of staff introduce themselves.
- Francesca Lavelle (Faculty President for Arts & Divinity) reminds everyone that the Undergraduate Academic Forum is a collaborative and productive space that prioritises feedback. Francesca Lavelle emphasises that, while feedback often stems from negative experiences, many things are going well.

## Update from Policy & Quality Team

- Statement with responses to issues raised at Semester 1's Undergraduate Academic Forum (1<sup>st</sup> December 2022) issued by the Policy & Quality Team is read out loud.
- No follow-up questions or comments are raised.

## Class Sizes

- Madeleine Houghton (Language Convenor for German) points out that student Reps from many Schools in Humanities related frustration about class sizes which forced many classes to relocate to bigger classrooms. In the School of Modern Languages specifically, students are experiencing issues with language acquisition due to large class sizes. Reps expressed a sense that not enough attention is being paid to pronunciation and accent, while the number of contact hours in Honours is described as insufficient.
  - o Dan Ross (School President for Modern Languages) emphasises that student Reps across the Department for Modern Languages describe insufficient numbers of contact hours.
  - o Frank Müller (AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching) responds to both particular issues (feedback specifically in classes and teaching styles) and logistics (class sizes) and offers to follow up on both. Frank recommends getting in touch with the School first and offers to help facilitating discussions. Frank Müller raises that during last year's URLT for the School of Modern Languages this was not raised and emphasises the importance of constant feedback mechanisms.
- Martyna Kemeklyte (Faculty President Science & Medicine) sheds light on experiences with class sizes within the Faculty of Science & Medicine. Martyna Kemeklyte expresses that the last years have seen an increase in sizes of tutorials. Both students and staff have reported that this has had a negative impact on their experiences. Martyna emphasises that the environment of bigger classes does not foster communication and students consequently related that they felt embarrassed to speak up. In Sub-honours specifically, students do not feel encouraged to stay on top of their assigned readings.
- Robbie Wallace (School President for Computer Science) relates that modules in the School for Computer Sciences that used to be compulsory have had to be made optional since the numbers of students in those modules exceed capacities for computer labs. In higher years, students are forced to do group dissertations because there is not enough staff for students. Robbie expresses concerns that students from cohorts that are currently in their sub-Honours have a worse experience than current cohorts in Honours had in their first years.
- Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) emphasises that external factors (i.e., exams during covid) led to the current size of the student body. Gerald Prescott asks for specific school experiences and offers support.
  - o Robbie Wallace (School President for Computer Science) clarifies that no student was forced into any module but rather the change to optional lectures aimed at accommodating interest.
  - o Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) relates that there have been conversations about capping modules and expresses hesitation towards capping in order to keep education accessible. Gerald Prescott emphasises that there will be a new space in the North Haugh building in the future.
  - o Frank Müller (AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching) explains that within 2,5 years, the student body exploded to 10,000 students which confronted the University with unexpected challenges. This was due to admissions following exams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Noah Schott (Director of Education) points out that the prospective development of the North Haugh will address the issues raised in the future and emphasises that the experience of current cohorts needs to be addressed. Noah Schott emphasises that student Reps are understanding of this and are looking to work together as to what to do for current cohorts.
- Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) asks Patricia to share talks about developments in the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences.
  - Patricia (School President for Earth & Environmental Sciences) shares that after one of the School's computational classes was restructured, some students had to be relocated to a space that did not have a tutor. Patricia then got in touch with Gerald Prescott who helped resolving this issue by equipping classrooms with more laptops. Patricia emphasises that the one-on-one conversation was very helpful and faster than addressing this on a large-scale basis would have made possible. Patricia emphasises that this approach helped understand both sides and was followed by a follow-up meeting.
  - Noah Schott (Director of Education) asks Gerald Prescott for capacities for this approach.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) emphasises that among Directors of Teaching and other members of staff this would be possible. Gerald Prescott emphasises strategic environments.
- Claire Shortt (School President for the Music Centre) emphasises that these points have been brought up to Directors of Teaching which is the reason this is being raised at the Undergraduate Academic Forum.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) expresses that it takes a team of people to tackle these kinds of issues and emphasises networks.
- Zoe Gemmell (School President for Maths & Statistics) asks whether it would be helpful to gather all Science Schools to coordinate.
  - Frank Müller (AVP Dean of Learning and Teaching) asks for specific module codes that were too large for rooms. Zoe Gemmell (School President for Maths & Statistics), Anna Smith (School President for Philosophy) and Laurence Lamonde-Mercier (School President for Divinity) share module codes of modules that were too large for allocated teaching spaces. Frank Müller commits to following up on this.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) explains that timetabling is done roughly 4 months before a module is run. Since rooms are allocated based on predictions, there is always a level of flexibility required.
  - Zoe Gemmell (School President for Maths & Statistics) asks if capping would be worth considering if lecture theatres cannot accommodate class sizes.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) responds that this remains an ongoing conversation.

## Extension Policies

- Rosa Fricker (School President for History) advocates for a university-wide standardisation of extension policies. Rosa Fricker points out that one of the issues is that information in the request for an extension is discretionary and that this information will often be shared with the tutor who is the person to grant or reject the request. Extensions are therefore granted inconsistently. Rosa shares that due to recent changes in extension policies within the School of History, students now apply to the Director of Wellbeing, not the individual coordinator which marks a successful shift.
- Francesca Lavelle (Faculty President for Arts & Divinity) adds that there is a great difference in the Faculties of Science & Medicine and Arts & Divinity. If a

standardised programme is being conceived of now, it is worth separating the two faculties at this point of the discussion in order to accommodate for specificities.

- Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) outlines a new, more standardised policy for extension requests which is based on ongoing conversations and feedback from last semester's Undergraduate Academic Forum. The new system will be accessible through an online form across Schools which removes the decision-making process from individual people. This new system will ask students to declare any other extensions that they have requested or have ongoing in various modules so that support can be catered towards students. The new policy will not be prescriptive and therefore allows students to have flexibility (i.e., number of days, individual circumstances) and aims at increasing communication across modules. This policy will be put into place in September 2023.
- Kirsty Bentley (School President for Chemistry) raises that the School of Chemistry has already successfully implemented a policy very similar to this one. Kirsty asks: Will this new system replace current systems in place or be an add-on?
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) responds that the new policy aims at centralising that which some schools are already progressing towards. It is not yet certain whether the implementation of the new policy will be insisted on as a replacement for existing policies.
- Francesca Lavelle (Faculty President for Arts & Divinity) raises that current extension policies were compiled in a document by the Education Committee which further points at striking differences between and within Schools which is reflected in students' experiences. Francesca Lavelle agrees with Gerald Prescott on the need for accommodating specific situations.
  - Chase Greenfield (Academic Representation Coordinator) asks: is there a way for students to be involved in the building and consultation state of this new policy for feedback as soon as possible?
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) responds that a feedback loop that takes experiences of students and Directors of Teaching into account is key to the implementation of the new policy.
- Frank Müller (AVP Dean Learning and Teaching) emphasises that extensions due to unforeseen circumstances and extensions for deadlines that are scheduled for students in a way that does not work for their specific needs need to be distinguished from each other respectively. The latter needs to be addressed in a different way. Frank Müller emphasises that this new policy will enhance consistency and points out that consistency comes at a price. Frank Müller predicts that the new system will be less generous, yet consistent.

## Student Support from the University

- Federica Consiglio (Language Convenor for Comparative Literature) raises feedback from study abroad students who expressed a need for more support from Student Services. Due to geographical isolation, language barriers and new environments students felt overwhelmed and isolated which impacted their mental wellbeing. Student Reps related that study abroad students only received emails from student services towards the end of the semester. Student Reps related that the general impression is that Student Services are there but only responsive after a few contacts. Federica Consiglio suggests clearer signposting of resources, the implementation of student groups to tackle isolation and loneliness and emails from Student Services at the beginning of students' time abroad.

- Frank Müller (AVP Dean Learning and Teaching) asks for half a dozen concrete examples in order to identify ways of supporting study abroad students. Frank Müller offers to help facilitating this.
- Noah Schott (Director of Education) adds that study abroad students do not receive emails from their School Presidents and the Sabbatical Officers which further adds to the sense of isolation from their St Andrews environment.
  - Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience) commits to raising the email issues with IT colleagues. Noah Schott (Director of Education) responds that this might be a complicated issue to tackle. Ros Claase commits to following up on this after the meeting to take this further. Ros Claase also addresses Federica Consiglio's point and offers to follow up on this separately. Ros Claase emphasises that peer networks are already available and offers to expand this to study abroad networks.
- Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) points out that the logistics of study abroad programmes and training are being expanded on now. Gerald Prescott invites students to share feedback.
- Chase Greenfield (Academic Representation Coordinator) elaborates on the issue of the messaging portals. Chase Greenfield points out that students' eligibility to receive emails is tied to modules at St Andrews which is the reason why study abroad students do not receive emails.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) responds that there are plans for modules to be part of the system before students leave which would catch this particular issue.
- Zoe Gemmell (School President for Maths & Statistics) raises that 2<sup>nd</sup> semester advising closed around the dates of the results being published so that advising deadlines had to be readjusted. Students expressed great concern surrounding follow-on modules in cases where students did not know yet whether they had passed or failed the previous modules.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)): asks for 5-6 concrete examples and offers support in facilitating discussions.
  - Noah Schott (Director of Education) raises that this was brought up at the last LTC meeting and emphasises that students express great levels stress surrounding this issue.
- Claire Shortt (School President for the Music Centre) raises that student Reps have expressed concerns during the process of advising. Student Reps relayed that modules from certain Schools are prioritised and others are advised against which led students to believe that some advisors let their biases get in the way of solid unbiased academic advising. Claire Shortt asks for different training for advisors.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) asks for concrete examples.
  - Claire Shortt (School President for the Music Centre) responds that it is difficult to get exact numbers and examples since those students who were discouraged from taking modules then are not part of the constituency of those Representatives that would raise these issues.
  - Francesca Lavelle (Faculty President for Arts & Divinity) points out that some advisors do not have the resources and knowledge of advising students into specific modules. Francesca Lavelle points out the importance of training. Noah Schott (Director of Education) adds that students have brought up in the past experiences of not being advised into their modules of choice.
  - Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) commits to taking this further and following up.
  - Claire Shortt (School President for the Music Centre) emphasises that similar to extension policies personal circumstances may contribute to advisors' recommendations.

- Frank Müller (AVP Dean Learning and Teaching) recommends approaching the Associate Deans Students about this in any case of this happening.
  - Madeleine Houghtoun (Language Convenor for German) points out that first-year students would not know this.
- Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience) emphasises the importance of understanding how students themselves understand the process and awareness for resources. Ros Claase emphasises that education about advising processes is key which spotlights resources on guides.
  - Noah Schott (Director of Education) emphasises that students have raised concerns about going over their advisors' advice.
- Patricia Helpap (School President for Earth & Environmental Sciences) points out that study spaces remain an issue among students. While the library is unavailable after lunch time, some libraries across the University now have ID swipe access for students in the respective Schools. Patricia Helpap points out that Open Timetabling offers the option of individual time slots but points out that for students who seek longer study slots (i.e., students who work on their dissertations) are limited in their options. Patricia Helpap acknowledges that developments are being done and asks what can be done for current cohorts at the moment.
  - Frank Müller (AVP Dean Learning and Teaching) emphasises that 400 library spaces are going to be ready by March/April 2023.
  - Noah Schott (Director of Education) emphasises that the issue is that information about study spaces is in lots of different spaces which makes it difficult to communicate this. Noah Schott also emphasises that different students have needs for different work patterns which the variety of study spaces should accommodate for.
  - Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience) offers to follow up on the issue of a variety of study spaces after the meeting.

## Academic Calendar/Semester Dates

- Patricia Helpap (School President for Earth & Environmental Sciences) raises that particularly after the Winter Break the new format of the Academic Calendar shows its disadvantages. Members of staff have raised that they had barely any time off between marking and preparing and related that they were already overworked at the beginning of semester. Students in their final year have pointed out that they do not have enough time with supervisors and for research due to the shortened semester.
- Maggie Crookston (School President for Management) points out that due to the shortened semester, the pay allocation for the St Andrews Research Internship Scheme was eschewed.
- Catherine Mullner (School President for English) raises that most 4<sup>th</sup>-year students did not receive exam or coursework feedback prior to the start of the new semester. Feedback forms have shown that 20% of 4<sup>th</sup>-year students (25 out of 114) in the School of English did not receive feedback in time. On account of this, students felt anxious at the beginning of the new semester.
  - Emma Hearn (School President for Psychology & Neuroscience) relays that the first-year cohort in the School for Psychology & Neuroscience reported frequent delayed feedback. Emma Hearn shares the module code of the module affected with Frank Müller who commits to following up on this.
- Maggie Crookston (School President for Management) raises that numbers of students who contact Student Services due to increased stress are rising which puts Student Services under greater strain. Due to increasingly longer waiting periods, students feel discouraged from reaching out for help.
  - Robbie Wallace (School President for Computer Sciences) emphasises that the lack of time off is detrimental to overall student wellbeing. Robbie Wallace

points out that many students expressed that they preferred the old Academic Calendar.

- Gerald Prescott (Associate Dean Education (Science)) responds that there will be a review of the Academic Calendar and emphasises that there is no easy solution.

## Open floor and Thanks

- Noah Schott (Director of Education) thanks everyone.
- Zoe Gemmell (School President for Maths & Statistics) asks who should be contacted about study spaces. Ros Claase (Director of Student Experience) offers to be contacted and thanks everyone.