

## Wellbeing & Community Forum

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March 18:00-19:30

### Beacon Bar & Teams delivery

#### Minutes

Present in person: Holly McDonald (HMc), Jack McNealy (JMc, Chair), Alex Chun (AC), Ros Claase (AC), Sarah Browne (SB), Judith Shepherd (JS), Paul Cruickshank (PC), Elise Bateman (EB), Paulette Nhlapo (PN), Sarah Pay (PS), Bill Shackman (BS), Veronica, Eden Hodgkins (EH), Josh Rooke (JR), Omar Raza (OR), Bartosz Rogala (BR), Zahra Ali (ZA), Celina Chen (CC), Caitie Steele (CS), Joanna Barrow (JB), Zoe Bremner (ZB), seven students in person

Present online: One student

Meeting begins: 18:08

#### 1. Welcome & Introductions

AC asked for email addresses to send round papers for those who hadn't seen the paper.

JMc officially opened the meeting inviting introductions, and everyone went round the room to introduce themselves

#### 2. Network/Officer updates

AC updated around honorary degree revocation for a public figure. They've discussed the Supreme Court ruling and how that impacts the University estate with colleagues, as well as a review of EDI related modules. They are also working on projects around SafeZone. Microaggressions form to be released after elections.

CC: BAME working on forum for EDI reps, meetings with Student Services on recruitment, and BAME scholarships.

EH: Saints LGBT hosted Gayleidh, also working on Transfest, Queerfest, and Trans Pride, preparing for handover, referral for trans clothing drive, and giving out gender affirming products.

ZA: GotConsent have been working on IWD. Clothesline project on 1<sup>st</sup> April in Sallies Quad, getting donations for this.

JR: consultations on digital nexus and related to gendered spaces in the University estate. They have also been working on trips to theatre and V&A, exam packs and accessible May Dip, usual events. Collaboration with other unis, and have met with Student Services on other issues.

OR: working with BR on resource for students, and working on how students can share feedback.

VC: more social events for homesickness, buddy system and will host first event next week (hoping for student sign-ups). Collaborating with Careers Centre for international students wishing to stay and work in UK. Work with Uni to improve visa check process.

BR: 6 students on referral, increase in email contact on specific support requests/resources. Finalising toilet door posters and how to access resources (trial in Schools of Geography & SD, and Psychology & Neuro). Going back to primary school where pupils write a letter to themselves to open in 10 years.

### 3. Staff updates

SP: noted attendance in relation to Supreme Court ruling and changes to the estate. Have introduced a policy on accommodation, and want to gather feedback and concerns.

PN: likewise with SP. Would like to come to another meeting to discuss criteria for EDI Project Fund.

BS: sent round STAMSA's report outlining Islamophobia prevalence and impact in St Andrews. Working on Ramadan, and prayer spaces (including a space in College Gate and Observatory for multiple purposes).

RC: discussion at ESMG in relation to Disabled Students' Survey recommendations which were endorsed, and will establish a new group around digital accessibility (working with Union on membership). Also involved with prayer and wellbeing spaces. May Dip planning to begin soon, and recalled the accessible May Dip discussions previously. A SafeZone paper is progressing through University structures, identifying some operational gaps, and would like to see AC's paper.

SB: StAnd Together Coord posts are being advertised through Career Connect (deadline 8<sup>th</sup> April). Planning for Orientation for September is beginning, and wants feedback, and asked societies to include their activities within the Orientation app (by contacting SB at **SFB7@st-andrews.ac.uk**).

PC: asking for feedback on LoA after policy work, which will be progressed over summer and into next AY. Other policies will be reviewed in relation to support and Fitness to Study, and pausing of studies. Also reviewing University's policy

on Good Academic Practice, and asked for opinions on any of the policies mentioned via ([AssocDeanSci-Students@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:AssocDeanSci-Students@st-andrews.ac.uk)).

JS: working with PC on policy review and ensuring they go through relevant committees. Also liaising on student pregnancy policy, looking to have a draft in summer for approval in Sem 1.

EB: Elections nominations are open and asked officers to share the word and put names forward to run.

#### **4. Leave of Absence policy (PC & JS)**

PC and JS are looking at LoA policy and are seeking further student feedback and sharing of concerns, including on University provision for those on LoA.

AC asked PC to clarify what each of the policies are. PC responded that Support to Study Policy is a 2-stage process (1: identifying support needs and actioning those, 2: invoked when University feels it can no longer manage needs). Stage 2 often feels punitive to students, though University intends it to be supportive. A possible way forward is to separate S1 and S2 so that students can enter S2 without having had to have experienced S1 (in cases of high risk). Could involve mandatory LoA or studies being ended.

Emergency suspension is for cases of significant risk that require more immediate response. This is quite rare as is S2 of support to study.

Complicated piece of work with clear EDI implications (e.g. in relation to health and disability), so consultation matters. AC said that it is also a different experience for international students vs home.

EH: from LGBT+ perspective, staying in St Andrews isn't financially viable over LoA, and students may go home to unwelcoming/unsafe environments which has health implications and for their studies. Difficulty with not being able to engage with elements of the Union and sports club, which can impact isolation.

PC acknowledges the individual intersections that lead to students going on LoA, and that they don't want to assume they know everything.

Student online: Students feel the system was confusing, unexplained, and not well-understood by members of the University. Taking a semester out can lead students to feel out of sync with the rest of modules and University. Students felt process was designed to exclude them so that they were less able to be a member of the University including academically. This has led other people not to take LoA even when it may have supported them.

JMc spoke from their accommodation officer standpoint, saying that students find LoA stressful when dealing with not having accommodation in/around St Andrews too. SP will reach out to PC on implications from an accommodation standpoint.

AC mentioned that some students on LoA didn't appreciate they needed to leave Halls, and didn't understand the visa would be revoked.

JS appreciates that students won't know about LoA till it happens to them. Work is being undertaken so information can be better shared and help students make best decisions and prepare. SB said there is some work on this from Student Services and in conjunction with students when it was first drafted.

CS said that students on LoA don't have enough information about the available Union offerings. LoA can be beneficial, but not for everyone and studies can be an important to support them. Greater clarity on policy needed, and on awareness of other academic options e.g. General Degree.

BR: reintegration is an issue, navigating the return to studies and societies and letting people know they're returning from LoA. They suggested making it accessible to find out about LoA, maybe through social media. When meeting with School Wellbeing Officers, they mentioned feeling that they could be better informed about the process as an option academically.

JR: also mentioned reintegration and ongoing support when on LoA. They flagged the need for greater clarity on resource and support while on LoA.

AC mentioned the difference in access rules for Union societies and the Sports Centre, the financial implications for students depending on domicile, and accommodation implications when having to leave Halls.

## **5. Changes to the estate following the Supreme Court ruling (PN & SP)**

SP: RBS have been asked to update accommodation allocation policy in relation to this, and to ensure legislative compliance. Guidance has not yet been released, but legal position is there. Accommodation is now, where relevant, based on sex (as defined at birth) rather than gender. Students will be asked to confirm their sex at birth when applying for accommodation. Mixed accommodation may not be available when applying late. RBS are able to offer single and mixed accommodation in each residence. There is now more mixed accommodation following this, and most students request mixed accommodation anyway. Concerned students can reach out to Accommodation directly and put things in place to support them, and broad policy doesn't account for nuance. Will do best to support individual needs.

PN – another document shared is around gender neutral lavatories, with a view to increasing the number of facilities. Policy for trans staff and students have changes in relation to bathroom, changing room, and accommodation

accessibility. University is committed to providing gender neutral facilities. A phrase in this policy has been altered to remove a section about using facilities aligned to gender.

Moving from gender neutral to “universal” as terminology, or “universal and accessible” as needed.

A student from trans rights group raised several questions:

- Amount of scope for change on the proposals, or is there a plan for consultation. PN responded they are here to listen at this stage.
- Do staff have an idea of the increase in gender neutral facilities? PN responded this is in the paper.
- Removing “corresponding to their gender” phrase, they asked if there had been discussions around what happens if people use toilets aligned to gender. PN said there are no resources to police this.
- In terms of those applying to accommodation late, has it been considered that trans people aren't forced into single sex that does not align with their gender. SP agreed that this wouldn't be the case.
- Also mentioned that trans people can change their biological sex, but asked if we could alter some language (not necessarily in the policy but in verbal discussion).

AC asked what would happen if someone had gender surgery, would they be given rooms aligned to their trans status/biological sex. SP and JMc responded that legally it seems to be based on sex at birth. AC feels it's best to plan, but implement when guidance is released (albeit we can't do this with accommodation form). SP said Equalities Commission have singled out some institutions not acting in line with legal position, regardless of the lack of guidance. AC questioned this, and SP responded that legal advice did not support this approach.

EH mentioned that new students have had some concerns around accommodation form and may not be aware they can reach out for support/information, and asked if information could be sent out for who they can approach. SP said already getting enquiries and can direct. EH asked if consultation could include different academic years and different Halls. SP responded they would take broad consultation across staff and students.

PN will need to plan consultation with students more widely. EH reaching out to people on mailing list to work out how they can share feedback. PN feels this would be helpful, and said that the DSN's response was clear also.

Student online: important to discuss what this means to students, and the “grey area” arises as Supreme Court ruling interacts with existing legislation. Students they've spoken with have expressed a great deal of fear, and they feel that University won't prioritise the needs of students. They want honesty from the University about what they're doing and the impact it has on student wellbeing. Still unsure as the guidance is not yet out. Would like a frank discussion, including around what intersex people

should do, as sex assigned at birth is not an accurate account of biological reality. SP responded, suggesting that an intersex person would likely be designated under their sex assigned at birth in relation to this policy..

AC said that the ruling calls for the potential to exclude trans people from spaces, including those with a GRC where there is a “legitimate aim” in terms of impact on cisgender women.

Student in person asked who makes decisions about Union facilities. AC responded COO. They asked what conversations there have been in the Union. AC replied that unless there is a conduct issue in the bathrooms, it won't be looked at. The student suggested that in terms of University buildings, some spaces naming such as “urinals only” or “stalls only” instead of referring to gender. PN feels most practical way forward is gender neutral/universal. SP said that according to building standards regulations, these need to be fully enclosed to be named in a certain way.

It was stated that legally, the University is under no obligation to provide single sex facilities. A student noted that changing labelling on doors will be easier than a change to the fixtures of the facilities themselves. Would like to know cost estimates for what would make these structural changes to make gender neutral spaces feasible vs unfeasible.

PN said that there are some groups of staff/students who want single sex spaces, and there is a great deal of uncertainty around EHRC guidance and what this will stipulate.

BR: students find that there is high uncertainty across the world politically, and how we will manage and respond to such uncertainty as an institution. PN feels this is captured also in other feedback from DSN.

BS said that in times of uncertainty we can lead, show courage, demonstrate our values and make them a reality.

AC suggested that the University could make a statement in support of trans students.

SP asked if students would like RBS to look at introducing LGBTQ+ friendly accommodation. This has been looked at in the past but never progressed due to concerns around only being able to offer it in 1 or 2 locations, potential isolation of students and safety risks. It could be offered as an option similar to alcohol-free and quiet preferred and students would be able to select this option. Please let RBS know through SP ([spm17@](mailto:spm17@st-andrews.ac.uk)) or JMc ([SRCaccommodation@](mailto:SRCaccommodation@st-andrews.ac.uk)) if this is something to be considered.

CS said this could open up issues if different individuals within the LGBTQ+ community have issues with other groups within the community. AC also suggested it may pose a safety risk and present a target for hate crime.

**6. AOB**

**a. Grant-It funding requests (AC)**

AC briefly summarised the two requests. No opposition was raised against either, and both were granted.

Meeting adjourned: 19:27