



PGT Postgraduate Executive Forum Minutes

9th November 2017, 1pm

Students' Association Committee Room

Present:

Member

Position

Lorna Milne	Proctor
Andy Murphy	Provost
Douglas Philp	Dean of Science
Martin Campbell	Pro-Dean PGT
Zachary Davis	Director of Education
Fanny Empacher	PG Academic Convenor
Alexander Griffiths	Academic Policy Officer (Taught Degrees)
Monique MacKenzie	Deputy Director of Graduate School
Cameron Rice	PG Society Secretary

Julia Madore	Art History
Mikhail Barabanov	Biology
Arnold Haidu	Computer Science
Rebeca Dimitrov	Divinity
Toby Boocock	Earth & Environmental Sciences
Mehdi Chajadine	Economics & Finance
Lauren Bellatti	English
Luveshni Odayer	Geography & SD
Sophia Silverman	History
Laura Bolder	IR
George Kontaxis	Management
Jake Haycocks	Mathematics & Statistics
Aliya Ali	Medicine
Manuel Haeussermann	Modern Languages
Kim Kopec	Philosophy
Daniel Hannaway	Physics & Astronomy
Neil Hampshire	Social Anthropology
Lisa Maria Frending	Psychology & Neuroscience

1. Apologies:

Coco Smith	Classics
Willa Grefe	Film Studies
Parawee Khluensanan	ELT
No PGT representative	Chemistry

2. Introductions:

All attendees introduce themselves to the room.

3. Orientation:

There are differences in the orientation experiences for Taught PG students in different academic schools of the University. This topic will be broken down into three sections: a. Advising Process, b. Pre-Arrival Information and c. Orientation Week.

a. Advising Process:

IR students have not had any advising yet. This was promised to happen in November.

Medicine would like to receive advising information ahead of the start of the semester as students were unaware of this process until Orientation Week. Additionally, students are not allocated an advisor because no choice in modules is available.

Management has no formal advising process and module choices were advertised through the use of a course handbook. Students were not able to choose/change modules after the end of Week One.

Computer Science had up until the end of Week Zero to attend lectures and finalise their module choices. Course information was unclear, particularly regarding pre-requisites for some modules. A number of modules where a choice was available ran at the same time so students did not have the chance to experience both.

Psychology & Neuroscience would be useful to have a concise overview of the modules available and their pre-requisites.

Social Anthropology chose their modules in advance at pre-advising, however they were not informed until pre-advising if modules had been cancelled due to insufficient demand. Students then had to make new module choices on the spot.

Proctor: There may be a misunderstanding in the use of the term 'advising'. In St Andrews, the term means formally choosing a legal pattern of modules and registering for them. In the US, advising takes place with a personal advisor who can offer advice and a discussion on which modules are best suited.

Divinity and Biology students received good course information in advance of arriving in St Andrews. Upon commencing studies, students had the option to change and re-enrol in different modules.

Earth Sciences received limited paper information before arrival in St Andrews. For the MSc Geochemistry course, there are only 14 students on the course which meant it was easy for the formal advising meeting to take place in week 0. In this meeting students met with the course coordinator to discuss module choices.

English students received module handbooks one month in advance and attended one group meeting to register students all together. There are no choices in first semester English modules, but the optional second semester modules were chosen at this meeting as well.

PGR Exec preparatory meetings hosted by the Academic Convenor highlighted that there are limited to no reading lists available to students before studies commence.

Response and Actions:

Proctor: The points and issues raised seem reasonable. The undergraduate community raised similar issues a few years ago and significant changes were made in response. There are no reasons why this shouldn't be the same for the PG community.

All schools should have more information available for taught PG students before advising appointments happen.

Provost: To gather as much information on this topic as possible, all students and class reps are encouraged to email the Provost (@provost) with any further details.

PG Convenor and Class Reps: To gather a list of advising processes in each School.

b. Pre-Arrival Information:

The Orientation app was very useful and appreciated by a large number of PG students. It acted as a centralised location to deliver essential orientation information in a concise manner.

Housing was an issue, particularly DRA.

Sustainable Development: For students arriving on a Tier 4 visa it is important to get proof of accommodation as soon as possible so that the application process can begin. Offering accommodation late into August makes it difficult for a Tier 4 visa to be granted in enough time for the student to Arrive in St Andrews at the required point, particularly when entering from countries with slow admin departments.

Physics: A number of PG students were getting lost in the building as no introductory tours of the building were offered.

The Director of Education adds that building tours are organised for new Undergraduates in the school of Physics. Postgraduates should be able to join these tours too.

The signage throughout the town of university buildings and other venues could be improved.

c. Orientation Week:

The School of Economics and Finance hosted Maths and Statistics refresher classes for new entrants. This was very helpful for students as it helped to bring everyone up to the same level required for upcoming modules.

There was limited welcome information for Chemistry. CAPOD courses provided information.

Management had a mentoring scheme was very useful for providing information prior to arrival in St Andrews. Computer Scientists were offered a similar mentoring scheme upon arrival.

Academic Convenor: Student mentoring schemes appear to work well for informing incoming postgraduates about St Andrews life. Would it be advantageous to open up the Academic Family scheme more to Postgraduates and publicise it more prior to arrival at the university?

One reason why the academic family scheme is less popular amongst Postgraduates is that many spend only one year in St Andrews and hence need to be adopted by a 3rd year Undergraduate student.

The Director of Education adds that the academic family tradition is a very internally organised scheme within the general student community but some successful 'adoption' events were organised by the Wellbeing Committee this year. Increasing publicity of academic families is something that could be more publicised in a welcome pack.

Physics students would have liked training in understanding the many different online platforms the University uses for data sharing, such as My Saint, Moodle, MMS, email and lecturer websites.

Medicine representative adds their school uses another separate system.

Some students had previous experience in the use of a centralised online data store, Blackboard.

Proctor: The University is currently looking at investing in a Single Sign on System Portal, so it is encouraging to hear that this is something desired by the student community.

4. Independent Learning Week:

This is only the second year that the Independent Learning Week (ILW) has appeared in the University calendar in its current format.

Biology: Independent week is a very good idea. It allows you to catch up on classwork and gives you time to do extra reading.

Some academic schools had deadlines set either right before, or right after the ILW and so this week was used solely to write these assignments. Therefore, the break from lectures didn't allow students to explore their subject topic in more detail or catch up on previous classwork.

School of IR: Terrorism and Political Violence module had a deadline set during ILW.

The Proctor states that deadlines should not be set during the ILW and an email had been sent out to all schools to clarify this. The week was designed to keep up the pace of the semester but not act as a holiday, or as a time where extra work is due.

5. Feedback Timeline:

PGT Executive Forum preparatory meetings highlighted that the time between coursework submission and written feedback is inconsistent and in some instances received later than subsequent coursework deadlines.

Computer Science: First written deadline was only two weeks before the second. No feedback was received before the second piece of coursework, which was of a similar nature to the first, was due. Students in the schools of Physics, Management and Medicine experienced a similar issue.

Response and Actions:

Proctor: Each academic school should publish a reasonable timeline for feedback and should also adhere to it. Class reps should raise this issue with their heads of school if this is a prominent issue in their department.

Academic Policy Officer: The University [Feedback Policy](#) states that “feedback should, whenever possible, be delivered in time for students to benefit from it in their next assignment. Schools must however clearly indicate to students and staff the turnaround time for the return of coursework with feedback.”

Director of Teaching: The timeline for feedback that lecturers provide depends strongly on the size of the class and the nature of the task that needs to be marked.

Lecturers may also need to be made aware that MMS will return feedback to students, by default, 21 days after it has been uploaded. Lecturers are able to change this setting.

Deputy Director of Graduate School: In instances where large numbers of scripts need to be marked, class feedback could be delivered to students to inform them during the marking period. This should be in addition to the written feedback received.

6. Lecture Capture:

The Lecture Capture technology is being piloted in the University and is currently without full governance or regulations. Some members of academic staff are trialing the technology and offering feedback.

The University expects to adopt the technology and Lecture Capture Rules and Regulations will be discussed more formally at the next Learning and Teaching committee meeting in a few weeks' time.

Initially, the system will be very much opt-in, as some topics can contain potentially very sensitive material.

All University lecture theatres are set up to capture lecture slides and audio. Students who have used captured lectures tend to review them for 36 minutes, so they are not using entirely as a substitute for lecture attendance.

Medicine: Lecture capture is a very good tool, however some senior lectures don't know how to use it. As the faculty features a high number of guest lecturers, a student has been trained in how to use Lecture Capture so that they can assist visiting academics when needed.

Biology: Not all modules can be attended due to course constraints, however, it would be nice to have access to the Lecture Capture of other modules even if just for an interest point of view.

Response and Actions:

Proctor: When Lecture Capture is rolled out into the University, it is likely that only students on that specific module will be able to access the lectures. This is to prevent a lecturer's material becoming too readily available on the internet. The idea of opening captured lectures to all those on the same course could be explored.

Academic Convenor: It is now possible in some Schools to audit modules, at the discretion of the lecturer. This option of auditing could be extended to the Lecture Capture technology.

Many PGTs are studying in English for the first time. This technology can be very beneficial in helping them extend their knowledge of their subject and of the English language.

7. AOCB:

Medicine: Some students in the School of Medicine are aware of the St Leonards Graduate School but are unsure what its function is.

Management: The recent Student Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC) meeting discussed a problem with facilities in the school (Gateway Building, North Haugh). Although this is a study area for students, there is nowhere to get water and the cafeteria based there recently closed. The only facility on offer is a vending machine for coffee and students must go to the Medical Building for other refreshments.

Some students do not have access to a computer in their school. This is partly due to previous students campaigning for their removal.

The Postgraduate coordinator for the Charities Campaign is eager to get all PG students involved in charitable work within their school. She will be in contact with PG reps via email this semester to discuss fundraising possibilities.

Meeting adjourned.