

**School Presidents’ Forum**

**18th of November 2019, 5pm**

**Students’ Association Small Rehearsal Room**

**Agenda**

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Apologies

* Dr Graham Kirkby (one of the two Deans of Science), Valeria (Economics and Finance)

1. Minutes from previous meeting

* Introduction of Interdisciplinary/Faculty Magazines. This item was discussed at the last Education Committee. This was further discussed by Amy, Sophia, and Dennis, who will bring this issue back to Education Committee in the new semester to gather evidence of how exiting School Faculty Journals are organised and lead, with the possibility of setting up a Committee of students to lead this project.
* Meeting with the Director of the Careers Centre. A group of School Presidents met with the Director and Associate Director of the Careers Centre to discuss the creation of a routinised annual calendar of events for each School President to organise in collaboration with the Careers Centre, in order to improve support for the SPs. The tailoring of Careers advising appointments was also discussed. This was a productive meeting and a follow-up is scheduled for next semester, with the routinised annual calendar being piloted initially in International Relations. Additionally, the meeting has led to the creation of a School Presidents Advisory Panel for the Careers Centre.
* Creation of a list of academic staff who have completed mental health toolkit training. Amy met with the Director of Student Services, who was concerned that publicising staff on this list or creating such a list would put pressure on all of staff members to always respond to students who have mental health/wellbeing issues. Students should go to Student Services, ideally, as they are best trained for dealing with mental health and wellbeing.
* MEQs – Dean of Arts followed up regarding the time brackets available for highly credited modules (especially Biology and Medicine). This is a work in progress; Dean of Arts will follow up with the School Presidents again.

1. Matters Arising
   1. Forthcoming strike action (AB)

* Amy (Director of Education): Discussion in Education Committee regarding strikes and how it will impact students. Brought it to School Presidents’ Forum to discuss this further.
* School President of Classics (Joel): Some assessments are not happening due to the strikes (such as unseen tests in Latin and Greek). Some people are concerned about not knowing whether these tests will happen and/or if they are revising for something which will not occur
* Proctor: Assessments due in the week of the strike action will depend on the person leading the assessment taking action. The Proctor asked Joel to ask the lecturer whether the assessments will run or not
* If assessments do not happen, then this will be discounted from overall module grade or some amendment will be made to accommodate the affected students
* Dean of Arts: Staff who are on strike do not need to let the University know until they take this action. He suggests that students ask their lecturers and/or tutors whether they are striking or not (whilst keeping the above factor in mind)
* School President of Management (Lauren): Concerns regarding dissertation supervisors, as management dissertations are one semester long. Students are worried that they will not have a supervisor in the final weeks of their dissertation
* Proctor: Encourages students to ask their individual supervisors
* School President of Geography & Sustainable Development (Rhiannon): Last time there were strikes, students missed important field work training which impacted their grades in the future (in their next academic year)
* Proctor: University will do their very best to make sure all students possess the skills they need to move forward
* Dean of Arts: 10-day strike period from W11-first half of W12 is currently planned, and then a longer period of action short of a strike. The latter should concern things that staff typically do on top of what they already are doing (this should not impact any teaching duties)
* Dean of Arts: If you are a student who is very disadvantaged due to strike action, please come forward (write to the Deans and/or the Proctor) and the University will try their best to be fair and handle things adequately
* Paloma (ASC): There will be a dedicated strike help desk in the ASC, which students can access. They can go directly to the ASC, call the ASC (on the web – ‘Industrial Action: Student FAQs’) or email the ASC. Paloma can then pass on the most accurate information and guidance to the worried students
* ACTION: Paloma will have first hand information, due to several meetings she is attending with the Proctor and the Deans, so that students will be regularly and wholly updated. The hope is to create a School link per School for Paloma, so students can receive School-specific strike information. **Amy has shared all communications about the Strike Helpdesk with School Presidents, who have disseminated this to their respective cohort.**
  1. Academic Alerts (CC)
* School President of Chemistry (Charlotte): Policy on academic alerts has changed recently. Two major concerns surfaced from the students: i) If a student has forgotten to submit an assessment and an academic alert is issued after Friday 1pm, the student won’t receive the alert until Monday 8am. Thus, the late penalty will be higher than it would have been if they had received the alert on Friday afternoon or over the weekend; and ii) if an academic alert is issued after Friday 1pm and the student submits the assessment over the weekend, they will still receive the alert on Monday and the matching point deduction
* Proctor: i) All academic alerts may induce in students a certain amount of stress and/or anxiety. The University has less mental health support in place for students over the weekend, hence the delay until Monday 8am (at the request of Student Services). Could still have a look at this; and ii) will look into this logistical problem to see if there is any way to manage this
* Dean of Arts: Academic Alerts are often seen as more dramatic than they are, so if students receive one on Friday afternoon and sit on this over the weekend, panicking, this is concerning. This is the reason for the delay. The Dean of Arts asked whether MMS sends a reminder when something is late and the School Presidents confirmed this does not exist.
* It is suggested that such a reminder could be put in place.
* School President of Biology (Morganne): Academic Alerts are not the worst thing that could happen; perhaps remind students of this?
* School President of History (Maddie): Language of academic alerts are still very severe; students tend to see this as the end of the world/think they are in real trouble
* **ACTION for DoEd:** **Speak in Education Committee about means to improve the language surrounding Academic Alerts**
* **Update: The Dean of Arts has asked one of the Policy Officers to liaise with the MMS team to see if an automated prompt can be generated to remind students of assignment deadlines (before Academic Alerts are sent out)**
* Charlotte: Also, confusion on the staff side of things regarding Academic Alerts. Some communication to address the concerns surrounding Academic Alerts at large would be helpful
* School President of Physics (Amy): Perhaps less about the actual Alert and more about the actual penalty should be communicated. Students don’t want the points deducted/the extra loss of time
* There is no reminder in place at present the day before coursework submission
* Proctor: Plan for MySaint to have a panel with your impending deadlines
* School President of Medicine (Nathan): Medicine’s version of MySaint has this system in place
* Amy (DoEd): Some students have expressed concern in the anxiety such deadline reminders may induce
* School President of Film Studies (Elisa): Mistake in Handbook/something was changed (unsure), so a lot of people submitted their assignments late because they did not know they were late. The Director of Teaching said to always check MMS, as that is the most accurate deadline. This was raised in their last SSCC. Elisa asks what happens if students don’t catch this, if the deadline changes very shortly before the (new) submission date?
* Amy (DoEd): Seems like an issue for the particular module coordinator
* School President of Earth and Environmental Sciences (Lot): MMS, MySaint, Moodle are three sources of information which could be conflicting. Seems like it would cause even more confusion than clarity to have them in all these areas
* Proctor: Due to TEL changes, there is now only one source of information; no difference between MMS and Moodle anymore
  1. Update on Vertically Integrated Projects (MW)
* Morganne (Biology): Has anything changed in the last two weeks regarding these projects and how does the crediting work?
* Over two semesters, 40 credits seemed reasonable (Biology’s Director of Teaching); will all VIPs be weighted the same?
* Proctor: Different weighting because all degrees have a different structure. There will be a mechanism in place to allow students to fit this in with their degree programme
* Joe (IR): Problem with IR as Honours modules are 30 credits each. If IR were to take part, they would force students to over-credit as there is no way to integrate other credited modules into IR’s structure. What is the flexibility of the programme?
* Proctor: Small-credit versions may be available but there might be some Schools who will find this structure harm to accommodate
* Joe: Seems to disadvantage the Schools who cannot accommodate it
* Nathan (Medicine): May discourage people who do not want to over-credit and/or have complications
* Dean of Arts: There are two ways in which Schools can engage with this: i) VIP modules written into the pathways for the programme; and ii) Particularly Arts Schools who don’t do this yet can rely on the ‘dip across’ method, which could accommodate
* Joe: There is an insistence that IR students do four taught modules, due to the degree programme
* Dean of Arts: This depends on the Faculty; the stricter the curricular structure is (e.g. Psychology and Physics), the tougher it is to accommodate. If IR were to insist that you have to take four 40 credit modules at Junior Honours, this seems rather rigid
* Joe: Research or VIP as an extracurricular? Students really want internships and/or research experience in IR and this is uncommon at present
* Amy (Physics): Someone explained the modules, the equipment requirements, which building you need, etc. to the students. If you take this module, you have to take something else out (as Physics is so rigid). There are concerns among staff and students regarding how this would work, especially regarding resources and structure
* Proctor: Light touch approach for now from the University; 5-6 projects running next year and not every School will engage with exactly the same amount of rigor. More work has to be done; VIPs are a big step for St Andrews, but it matches the University’s strategy and would help students enhance their employability. The University does not want to outstrip resources to deliver the project
* Proctor and Dean of Arts: The students decide whether they want to partake in VIPs, upon academic staff members’ decisions to lead a (multiple) VIP(s). These VIPs will be publicised online, too. Dean of Arts would really like this to be multidisciplinary (e.g. Physics and Biology crossover)
* Dean of Arts: Need to start small, so that more students can be accommodated eventually and the system is fair
* Morganne: Schools can’t forbid students to take part in VIPs. Also, could it not depend on how much commitment you’d like to take on? Some of the projects are huge
* Nathan: How would one find any extra time if one is studying medicine?
* Callum (English): Hard logistically in terms of advising for the School of English due to the module requirements which must be filled (e.g. renaissance and medieval are mandatory modules)
* Lot (Earth Science): What about external crediting?
* Proctor: Depends on which School you are in. You could probably pick accredited or non-accredited versions. The Proctor would like students to be in control of what they take, overall. The system will be very School-specific with regards to accreditation
* Dean of Arts: The idea is that you will not be doing ‘less’ IR, English, Biology, Chemistry or Physics, but rather doing this in a different form
* Amy (Physics): If you are a physicist taking a biology VIP, how will you tick all the boxes in terms of your development as a physicist? Also, concerns regarding staff and student workloads
* Morganne: If the curriculum is written for such cases, then surely something can be done to allow all of this to be factored in
* Proctor: The University is looking for enthusiastic academics who really want to lead VIPs; no intention of forcing academics to lead them or forcing students to partake in one. The University is starting with those who want to lead one right now. In time, other academics may also feel more drawn to VIPs by seeing VIPs’ successes.  
  1. Student representation on School Teaching Committees (CC)
* Charlotte: All the Teaching Committee meetings in Chemistry take part during the summer holidays, so Charlotte cannot make it. Moreover, the Committee recently scheduled their meeting for the day Charlotte has an exam and the Committee knew this in advance. School Presidents are, policy-wise, supposed to be invited to these meetings. Charlotte emailed the Dean of Science, who got in touch with Charlotte’s Director of Teaching, which sorted the issue out. However, could a form of communication be put in place in all Schools to make sure this collaboration is being honoured?
* Proctor: Is this an isolated experience?
* Film Studies, Music, Biology, Management, Geography and Sustainable Development do not sit on their Schools’ Teaching Committees
* **Update: The Dean of Arts has written an email to all DoTs to remind them to invite Presidents to Teaching Committee meetings and schedule them when Presidents are available.** 
  1. Progress of the academic calendar proposal (AG)
* Amy (DoEd): Emailed us the most recent model of the academic year calendar proposal and is keen to have SPs’ feedback.
* Proctor: There are numerous groups working on this, including a Steering Committee. Essentially the current proposal brings the start of the academic year as close to the 4th of September (when Registry can process everyone’s school results) as possible, which means that the examination diet will finish as far away from Christmas as possible
* Regarding Semester Two, students need their exam grades before Semester Two, as this could impact our module choices
* As Sem 1 should be earlier, we could start Sem 2 a week earlier.
* St Andrews is unique in terms of its Spring Break. This is an equality and diversity issue in the calendar at present does not properly accommodate staff with young family who would like to celebrate Easter and/or spend Spring Break and other school holidays with their families. The proposal changes this, but it does reduce the amount of teaching students get in Sem 2 to Sem 1 (10 weeks instead of 11 weeks). This gives us an Independent Learning Week in Sem 2, too. There is a lot of debate on this. Science Schools are concerned regarding the amount of content they must deliver in a shortened amount of time, while other staff would like time off to spend time with their families
* The consultative group would like to look at policies regarding ILW to accommodate Schools which have medical placements, fieldwork, and anything which is not necessarily timetabled as ‘lectures’ and/or ‘tutorials’. They will also be looking at what Honours and Sub-Honours students need, particularly during ILW.
* Amy (DoEd): Wants to hear honest feedback from SPs, particularly regarding issues in Sem 2 (e.g. change to 10 teaching weeks, a new ILW, one week of holiday – how does it work for students?)
* Amy (Physics): Spoke to her Director of Teaching and her Class Reps; the students are happy with the layout of Sem 2 as it is now (all years of the reps consulted) and did not feel it was sensible to lose a teaching week, as students of physics already struggle with the number of hours of teaching right now. Would raise workload and stress of staff and students within the School.
* Nathan: Medicine has an exam in W6 for most semesters, so the new proposal would mean just two weeks of revision with no break for medicine students. In addition, 10 weeks of learning and about 15 hours of contact per week not accounting for placements would render students absolutely exhausted
* Lot (Earth Science): i) Both semesters should entail the same amount of work as they are credited the same, despite different lengths; and ii) field trips happen in the two weeks of break during Sem 2 for Earth Sciences – it would be very problematic if this were removed
* Morganne (Biology): Could some Schools teach in this week but not others?
* Proctor: Possible, but only at Honours level, as at Sub-Honours some students take three different subjects. Could build into that week for Honours the fieldtrips, the Burn trips (e.g. Physics), and teaching for students. This may impact what’s delivered in ILW during Sem 1, though
* Amy (DoEd): There is concern that making that ILW into a possible week of teaching means we’re left with 11 teaching weeks with one week off, but this week would then become a catch-up week of working. Then, this would be 12 weeks of heavy work
* Morganne: Sem 1 has no holiday at all, though
* Lot: Sem 2 still has two revision weeks in the proposal which is an imbalance with Sem 1 (which only has one). Could we change the credits of the semesters?
* School of Modern Languages (Olle): Second Semester is much less stressful for most students because of the extra week off; students get longer to prepare as a lot of what they do is independent, especially at Honours. Sem 1 is seen as very stressful.
* Joel: Same for Classics
* Film: Every Honours module has a final research project, discussed on the last day of class and it’s due during the first week of revision. This is not ideal, but a lot of people in Film do Joint Honours. So, it wouldn’t be fair to ask for an extra week of class, as students don’t have exams
* Joe (IR): The proposal limits opportunities for internships in January, as there would be essentially no time to do those
* Proctor: Students in the survey wanted to finish Sem 2 earlier so that they can take up internships in the summer
* Joe: Losing more contact hours in IR when there are so little already would be very poorly received
* Callum (English): A few people were worried regarding Sem 1 starting so early, as people may have to cancel internships in the summer/won’t get internships because of timing clashes
* Nathan: Worries regarding graduation week and exams happening at the same time
* Amy (DoED): One idea would be that there is one ILW and one week of holiday. For those Schools with content issues, there is the option for teaching in that one week
* Morganne: Things in Sem 2 should not change for students
* Amy (Physics): Agrees with Morganne
* Amy (DoEd): What is the bigger priority – 11 teaching weeks (and 1 week of holiday) model or 10 teaching weeks (and 2 week holiday) model?
* Lot (ES) (for reasons of fieldwork worries, particularly with sub-honours) and Charlotte are for the latter, everyone else is for the former. If nothing has to change, everyone at present felt they did not want to change Sem 2’s structure (minus those who left early, namely Angela and Lauren, who were not present during this show of hands)
* Proctor: No proposal to lose the two weeks of revision in Sem 2. Asks if SP can send this document to the class reps and get student feedback on this
* ACTION: (School Presidents) All School Presidents to collect feedback from students. The Proctor needs the feedback by the end of Week 11. **Update: School Presidents sent feedback to Amy and this has informed the paper on the Academic Year which will be submitted to Academic Council**
  1. Technology and Software Accessibility for Commuter Students (SR)
* Sophia (Arts/Divinity Faculty President):The Lifers Sub-committee representing commuter students (particularly in Maths (issue resolved) and Geography) – general find that students who cannot stay late to use University computers, due to caring responsibilities and/or transport limitations at night, cannot access the particular software and technologies needed to work on assignments and so forth
* Therefore, many commuter students face accessibility issues with certain software and technology
* The rep was wondering if we could look into this issue, as she thinks it has been overlooked, given that commuter students are in the minority (student-body wise)
* Dean of Arts: This could also apply to Management and Economics – databases are sold to the Uni for a number of workspace stations. Unfortunately this can’t be made universal at an affordable price
* Lot (ES): Regarding VPN, at least for Geography, the programmes that they use are accessible if they have VPN. Students don’t get access to VPN unless there are special circumstances, so that these can then be accessed from home. There are some programmes which don’t do this, due to price and restrictions
* Proctor: Commuter students do have commuter student status, which may help solve this problem
* Dennis (Sci/Med Faculty President): There is remote-access in Astrophysics so that students who need it can access software at home
* **ACTION: Proctor will take this forward to find out if there is a solution. School Presidents to email Proctor about any specific instances regarding particular programmes. Sophia to forward the Proctor the email from the Lifers Commuter Student Rep.**

1. AOCB
   1. School policy on emergency circumstances (SB)

**ACTION: This item will be discussed at the next meeting as Seamus was not present.**