

**School Presidents’ Forum**

**30th of March 2020, 5pm**

**MINUTES**

**List of Actions:**

**School Presidents:** If any School Presidents hear of modules which are only receiving lecture handouts/notes in the move to online teaching, please flag this up to the Deans.

**Dean of Arts:** Dean of Arts to ask that late coursework reminders are not sent to students as an Academic Alert, but rather as a ‘friendly nudge’.

**Dean of Arts:** Dean of Arts to follow up with Social Anthropology on timescales for dissertation feedback.

1. **Welcome & Introductions**
2. **Apologies**

* Eva (Graduate School)

1. **Minutes from previous meeting**

* Minutes were approved.

1. **Matters Arising**

* Clare (Proctor): The academic year will finish as planned. The University is listening to students on their concerns regarding June graduations and is trying to ensure that students missing graduation this June will get the graduation they deserve. A huge amount of work going on behind the scenes and this will be communicated to students as soon as possible going forward. School Presidents should act as the conduit for their Schools. Planning for the next academic year is also underway in case the coronavirus situation is not over by the end of the summer.
  1. **Coronavirus mitigation:**
* **IT support for staff (CC)**
* Charlotte: Regarding the delivery of remote teaching: a number of students have been contacted by their module coordinators to say that their teaching will be delivered via lecture notes only, which will be uploaded on Moodle and students can perform their own learning. Students have received emails from lecturers apologising on the low-tech nature of their teaching; many do not know how to use Zoom, Teams, Lecture Capture etc. A lot of students are extremely understanding and patient towards members of staff, however, some are disappointed. Standards of teaching have dropped, yet student still need to sit 10-credit 2-hour exams. Are staff here receiving the support to effectively teach online?
* Dean of Science: Online training exists for all members of staff. Laptops and microphones have also been distributed and assistance with Wi-Fi connectivity has been provided. It would be helpful if the staff who are having issues could be asked to contact IT services or the Deans for assistance. These issues should not be happening, and the Dean is very surprised that the staff are only providing Chemistry students with lecture notes.
* Dean of Arts: Staff were trained in the week before lockdown, through both physical and online training. All staff should now be trained, including staff who had not done online teaching before. The Dean recommends that Charlotte pass on the names of staff members who are having difficulties.

**ACTION: If any School Presidents hear of modules which are only receiving lecture handouts/notes in the move to online teaching, please flag this up to the Deans.**

* **S-coding clarifications (VR and MW)**
* Morganne: The normal S-coding policy does not permit Masters students to S-code their dissertations. Under the new circumstances, is this still true?
* Dean of Science: At present, summer dissertations are not going to be S-coded, because whatever is set at the start of those dissertations will be pre-mitigated. Normal S-coding would be applied in the case of personal difficulties, but the new S-coding system would not apply.
* Dean of Arts: Some Masters dissertations are completed in Semester 2 and we would assume these dissertations are impacted by the current circumstances. However, summer dissertations will not be S-coded. S-coding works differently for PGT and Undergraduate degrees.
* Valeria: Does a module need to be passed to be S-coded? If so, are there any requirements regarding exams (e.g. do need to pass the exam to have a module S-coded)? On your final transcript, will the grade be displayed or just the S-code?
* Dean of Arts: All modules can be S-coded, whether you pass or fail. However, S-coding just removes the grade from the degree classifier; it does not bring back credits. Students still need to get the necessary credits for their degree. If you fail a module, you don’t get the credits for it, but you can S-code it. If you resit the failed module, your grade is not capped at 7. If you fail the resit, you are allowed a further resit and that grade will be capped at 7. Grades are shown alongside S-codes on degree transcripts.
* **Replacement of exams with coursework (SB)**
* Seamus: The School of Computer Science elected to cancel exams and are therefore mandated to replace them with coursework. Students appreciate staff efforts, but why has the Proctor’s office mandated that examinations should be replaced with coursework for Computer Science? Given that the climate of the COVID-19 situation can change so rapidly, how can we assure students can be assessed fairly?
* Dean of Science: The Proctor’s Office have asked all Schools to look carefully at the course assessment and try to enhance it in such a way that it makes sense to an award-giving body (the University) that a student has completed all the work required to receive the award. The Scottish Funding Council requires the University to do this. To disregard all remaining assessment would do a great disservice to all students who want to improve their grades this semester.
* Seamus: Does the University have contingency plans if the pandemic worsens?
* Dean of Science: The Proctor’s Office don’t know what all the assessments look like yet. It is also very difficult to know how the pandemic will affect staffing levels.
* Katie: Students have asked why the new deadlines for coursework lie significantly before the exam period.
* Dean of Science: Coursework is not part of the examination period, so it must be completed before the examination period. However, Schools can extend deadlines where appropriate. Students should speak to their Directors of Teaching.
* Dean of Arts: Schools were given a number of options with regards to exam adjustments: i) run exam papers remotely; ii) adjust exam papers so they work better remotely; iii) have no exams at all and an additional piece of coursework instead. In that case, staff should allow one week for this to be completed; iv) Sub-Honours exams can be cancelled if staff are able sufficiently to tell the difference between weaker and stronger students. Schools have been given significant flexibility with regards to the weighting of exams. Additionally, all modules are reviewed by the Associate Deans and are not approved until the grade distributions are checked. If grade distributions vary greatly from the trend in previous years, this will be investigated. Academic staff are very aware of the implications of the current situation. The reporting deadline for academic staff has also been shifted.
* Valeria: A module in Economics is supposed to have an exam during the exam period. The coursework which now will replace this has to be completed two weeks before the scheduled exam.
* Dean of Arts: If the essay was brought in to replace the exam, then the essay should take place within the exam diet. Valeria should email the Dean of Arts or the module coordinator about any issue here.
* Valeria: There are a few modules with similar situations, so Valeria will speak to the Director of Teaching.
* Nathan: No modules in Medicine have been updated on adjustment to assessments. Students are a bit anxious; when will they find out?
* Dean of Science: All exam arrangements will be approved centrally at the same time. The methods of teaching were the first thing to be approved. The Proctor’s Office intends to let Schools know about approvals as soon as possible.
* Dean of Arts: There is some discussion at present on how to release exam papers fairly, taking different time-zones into consideration. Students should hear about exam arrangements by Thursday.
* Nathan: Medicine has a lot of exams and an OSCE. There are concerns as to how these will work.
* The Dean of Science confirmed that OSCEs will not be taking place and that an appropriate alternative will be created and scheduled.
* Elisa: What about students with disabilities who may have problems typing or finishing on time?
* Dean of Arts: Students can write the answers to their exam, photograph these, and use software to submit them. If a student with a disability or special learning need has arrangements such as extra time, these will be accounted for. Certain very specific adjustments, such as a scribe, cannot be provided off-campus. However, if a specific student is concerned, they can get in touch with the Deans and they will follow up to ensure that whatever arrangement is put in place replicates what the University can usually offer.
* Lot: Some students may be faster than others at typing. Is there any consideration for this for students who are worried that they may not be able to type fast enough to finish their exam essays?
* Dean of Science: I don’t think this would be a problem, as most students will have a lot of practice using a keyboard.
* Dean of Arts: Some students can handwrite much faster, which is the method used in ordinary exams. The large-scale handwriting of exams cannot be allowed, because the exams will be uploaded to TurnItIn.
* Dean of Science: If students can write a good amount and are producing good work within the time, this will be sufficient. Writing more doesn’t necessarily correlate to a better mark.
* Dean of Arts: Longer exams (e.g. 2-5 hour exams) will always come with a word-limit.
* **Responses to future unprecedented emergencies (SR)**
* Sophia: This is more of a discussion point for everyone, as concerns have been brought to me by both School Presidents and students. As Charlotte said, students are very understanding and appreciative of the staff at all levels of the University. However, students who have reached out to me think it would be good to know: i) if there will be a group who will use how this situation was handled (positively and negatively) to contingency plan for similar situations in the future, particularly around communication; ii) what the University’s strategy is for communicating with students, particularly across and within Schools. Students are aware the situation is extremely difficult but some are very anxious and would like to hear from staff.
* Dean of Arts: All students should have received a brief from Module Coordinators which explains how their module will be delivered and information on assessment. If there is inconsistency, this means some staff have been good at communicating while others may not have been. If School Presidents become aware of modules where this has not happened, they should inform the Deans. The Deans have sent out an email to ask academic staff to be flexible with extensions and less rigid with Academic Alerts. A group which looks at future learnings will be established.
* Morganne and Sophia: Students greatly appreciate all that has been done and would like to thank staff. Most students would appreciate hearing smaller bits of information more frequently than wait until the complete picture is apparent. For example, the School of Biology explained to students that they didn’t know the answers to certain questions, which has been helpful in mitigating students’ anxiety.
* Deans: This feedback has been very helpful and lessons will be learnt from this process; however, nobody was properly prepared for this and the University does not want to send out conflicting messages which may confuse students. The University is asking staff to write down what they think went well and what didn’t go as well throughout the process, so that learnings can be identified. We will perhaps look to apply the model of distributing smaller bits of information more frequently instead of waiting to send out a complete picture.
  1. **Academic Alerts (LK)**
* Irregular application across Schools
* The Presidents raised concerns about varying levels of formality and regularity in Schools’ use of Academic Alerts.
* Dean of Arts: It would be good if we could find a more comparable system for Academic Alerts across Schools. St Andrews is quite a ‘federal’ University, so Schools have different ways of applying Academic Alerts. The Dean will follow up on the issue of lateness reminders not being sent through as an Academic Alert, but rather as a friendly nudge.

**ACTION: Dean of Arts to ask that late coursework reminders are not sent to students as an Academic Alert, but rather as a ‘friendly nudge’.**

* 1. **Café spaces and pricing (NT)**
* Morganne and Nathan have been working on the issues of pricing and lack of space in the North Haugh cafes. Over 800 students responded to a survey they sent out on this issue. If students go to the medical café between 1-2pm, there are no places to sit. Students are concerned that the University is expanding beyond its infrastructural capacity and that there will be not enough space to allow students to eat their lunch.
* Morganne: There are wider issues with teaching space in the North Haugh, which staff, particularly in Chemistry, are unhappy about. A working group with RBS representatives has been set up, but this has not been able to provide solutions. The group was verbally promised that a 20% discount on café prices would be discussed with the Principal’s Office but no updates on this have been received. Students would like to open some tutorial rooms in Medicine to allow students to eat in these at lunchtime.
* Dean of Science: Suggests that Rhona Frood from Estates may be the person to contact and that students might use seminar stools around the Medicine Building in the meantime, as there is no embargo on eating there.
* Nathan: School and University policy does not permit students to eat in the seminar rooms, however, those attending events are able to do so. Why should this policy apply to students but not to event guests?
* Dean of Arts: There is not enough space in the North Haugh generally. The long-term solution for this is to build on the North Haugh and there are plans for this in the future. In the short-term, we must look to find space in the North Haugh which is user-friendly. If the issue would be temporarily mitigated by setting aside 1-2 seminar rooms which could be used for eating and cleaned afterwards, the Presidents could bring this proposal to the attention of the Principal and the Proctor.
* Morganne: The Presidents will continue to work with Amy and Jamie to tackle this problem and speak to the Proctor when students are using these facilities again.
  1. **Resit exam fees (SB)**
* Seamus has been approached by students with concerns that accessibility “stops at the door” for students from poorer backgrounds. Exam fees and qualified entry fees can have a big impact on students, and some students in Computer Science have dropped out because they could not afford resists. Could these fees be abolished?
* Deans: Conversations around the August resit diet and how these costs can be avoided have been in progress for a while; a satisfactory solution has not been found yet. The resit itself is costly, as well as coming to St Andrews to sit the exam, and there are also issues with carbon footprint. Discussions are ongoing and the Deans advise any students in need to access the Student Hardship Fund to assist in covering the cost of resit exam fees.
  1. **MEQ timeline (DG)**
* One of Dennis’ Physics lecturers noted that tutors and lecturers receive MEQ results before they mark exams. This may lead to some unconscious bias when marking exams. How is this being considered and how could this be adjusted?
* Dean of Arts: This issue was raised by the School of Physics six months ago. An alteration has been made so that MEQ results will not be sent to staff until module grades have been uploaded. So, this issue has been resolved.

1. **AOCB**

* Katie: Dissertations in Social Anthropology were submitted on 27th of January and the due date for feedback on MMS is 9th of June. When approached, the Exams Coordinator said that it would be difficult to return them ahead of this deadline. Other Schools return dissertations more quickly. Is there any way dissertations could be returned more quickly?
* Sophia: In International Relations, dissertations are returned within three weeks.
* The Dean of Arts will investigate this in Social Anthropology and ask for the turnaround to be much quicker.

**ACTION: Dean of Arts to follow up with Social Anthropology on timescales for dissertation feedback.**

* Valeria: Many students need to fill in MEQs before exams, which is problematic as students cannot feed back on the exam aspect of modules.
* Dean of Arts: If the MEQ deadline is late in the semester, the participation rates are very low.
* Valeria: The MEQ timeline issue comes up often in Economics, as there are frequently issues with taught content in exams.
* Dean of Science: The SSCC is the proper forum for issues with taught content in exams, as this is quite a specific issue.
* Amy (DoEd): If exam concerns arise at the end of Semester 1, these should be raised at SSCCs in Semester 2. If exam concerns arise at the end of Semester 2, when there are no remaining SSCCs in that academic year, Class Representatives should forward these concerns to the School President, who can ensure that this issue is forwarded to the incoming School President and Class Representatives.