

School President Report  
School of Modern Languages  
Semester 1 – 2017/18 Academic Year

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## 1. Introduction for Staff and Students

This report intends to summarise what the SoML conveners, class representatives and I have been working on so far this year. Semester one was a busy semester in the School of Modern Languages, with a busy second semester beginning soon. I have thoroughly enjoyed my role as School President thus far, and look forward to the upcoming months. Although one of the biggest schools, I am delighted to contribute to the sense of community we have in Modern Languages.

This report will be included in my handover to the next School President, aiming to ensure a smooth transition into the next academic year.

Many thanks for reading and for your interest in what we do!

Caitlin Macdonald  
*School of Modern Languages President, 2017-18*

21<sup>st</sup> January 2018

## 2. Elections

We had a successful election period in the School of Modern Languages, with most class representative positions being contested. Some positions remain unfilled, with a particular gap in postgraduate representation. I encourage the next School President to push for a greater number of postgraduate students to get involved as class representatives.

We will be pushing for strong engagement with the upcoming elections and I look forward to meeting the next School President and conveners when the time comes.

## 3. Student Staff Consultative Committee

The SSCC meetings are held once a semester, and they are held in order for students to present feedback to staff. The class representatives gather feedback for individual modules, and present this to the attending staff members.

The semester one meetings went well, with really positive feedback and constructive suggestions. As has previously been the case, it proves difficult to gather totally representative feedback without 100% engagement with surveys created by the class representatives. Last year, paper questionnaires were used in some departments for gathering feedback. This year, most methods for obtaining feedback were online, which seems to be more successful.

I attended the Spanish and Russian meetings, and found them to be well structured and productive. Feedback was well received by staff and efforts have been made to make changes where possible in response to suggestions from students. I aim to attend the other departments' meetings this semester.

## 4. Community

I made an effort to organise more social events within the school last semester. In addition to the conveners strengthening ties with language related societies, we held a number of events last semester.

In Freshers' week, we had a welcome morning for new and returning staff and students. This was extremely well attended and provided an excellent opportunity to introduce myself and meet many incoming students. Older year groups were able to answer questions about studying languages and I believe it created a great precedent for the semester ahead. This was our first step to ensuring a closer-knit school community.

The conveners have organised different events during the semester (some detailed later in report). They have been working to strengthen relations with the external societies and organise collaborative events.

To round off the semester, we organised the *School of Modern Languages Christmas Soirée*. This was held at the end of the final teaching week and was extremely well attended by all year groups. In future, it would be great to continue this event as it fit in nicely to celebrate the end of classes and do something fun and sociable before exams.

## 5. Postgraduate Studies Event

We organised a talk in week 9 with the Director of Postgraduate Studies in the SoML. This event was relatively well attended and gave students some ideas about postgraduate studies both at the University of St Andrews, and other universities also. The School is committed to providing support to students as they consider their options post-graduation. Careers events are something to be worked on in the SoML, and we look forward to fulfilling this in second semester.

## 6. Communication

Each year group within every department in the SoML has a facebook group. Some of these are better utilised than others, but generally these provide a good way of both reaching out to students and giving them a space to ask questions and communicate with classmates. They are used to advertise different events which may interest students of modern languages, and also proved useful in gathering feedback for the SSCC meetings.

I have aimed to send just one email per week. These are (normally!) relatively short and concise. Engagement with these is good, with students responding where appropriate.

## 7. The Interpreter

*The Interpreter* is the online publication for language students and enthusiasts of The University of St Andrews. Established in 2012, the magazine features articles written by both native speakers and language learners in over seven languages including French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, English, German, Russian and Arabic. The aim is to allow students to exercise and receive feedback on their foreign language writing skills whilst sharing their cultural experiences, travel adventures and political opinions, and to bridge the gap between the language learners and native speakers of foreign languages within the student community.

The magazine was close to shutting down, with no committee left to run it. However, one email was sent and over 30 people responded to register interest in getting involved with the publication. This was a better than expected response, but is exciting in terms of moving forward with the magazine. Myself and one of the conveners will be organising meetings at the beginning of semester to establish a committee and ensure that the magazine is revived.

## 8. School Presidents Forum

This meets twice a semester, and is a space for School Presidents to address key issues with the Proctor and the Deans. The main topics discussed in these meetings in semester 1 were: NSS surveys, Lecture Capture, careers links and the Learning and Teaching Space Review currently underway.

## 9. Education Committee

The Education Committee meet once a week, and consists of the School Presidents and the Director of Education. We have discussed an array of topics including the aforementioned in the SPF meetings. In addition to those, we have discussed methods of gathering feedback, social events and MEQs, among others. These meetings have been a great way of exchanging ideas with other SPs, and getting advice when needed.

## 10. Teaching Committee

Teaching Committee meets three times a semester. In this meeting, I update the Heads of Department and we discuss all issues related to teaching in the School of Modern Languages. These meetings have provided excellent insight and allowed me a space to present issues and ideas to members of staff.

## 11. Updates from the conveners

### Arabic and Persian

First semester was quite a rich semester for the Arabic and Persian department in terms of culture related activities. Dr Maryam Ghorbankarimi was screening films every Wednesday afternoon, alternating between Arabic-language and Persian-language films, which were followed by an informal discussion. Alongside the film screenings, students had the opportunity to go along to weekly Calligraphy classes lead by Dr Parmis Mozafari. Besides department-run activities, students could also get involved with what the Middle Eastern Society and Persian Culture Society had to offer, the most successful of which were M.E. Society's Shisha Night and Persian Culture Society's fundraiser for the November earthquake which hit the Iran/Iraq border.

### Comparative Literature

Alongside gathering student feedback for SSCC meetings with the class reps, I have been in close contact with the staff convener, Dr Colette Lawson, with ideas and plans for Comparative Literature. This semester, we were able to negotiate a change to the deadline structure of certain modules, which had been subject to unhelpful regulations standardised by the school. Alongside staff members, we hope to get this changed permanently in future.

Regarding this coming semester, a new staff convener will take over from Dr Lawson. I aim to meet with them to continue with ideas discussed before, such as the possibility of starting a Comparative Literature society, as well as increasing the subject's presence on social media.

### French

It has been a pleasure being French Convener so far this year. I was Junior Honours Class Rep in 2016-17, which helped me chair the SSCC meetings with confidence as well as providing me with a good understanding of the issues discussed last year and the plans put in place to try and solve them. Witnessing the subsequent progress has been very encouraging. I have also

been encouraged by this year's cohort of Class Reps. They are dedicated, reliable and imaginative, gathering feedback with enthusiasm and presenting it clearly and objectively both at our group meetings and at the SSCC. In addition to the feedback gathered by the Class Reps, I was also asked by Gavin Bowd, Head of Department, to gather additional student feedback on the French degree at St Andrews, which would be discussed at a departmental curriculum form. Students were very responsive when asked for their thoughts, and I have been informed that, as a result of the feedback given, there are now two working groups looking at the French language programme as well as the sub-honours literature and history courses.

### German

It was a successful first semester of the academic year 2017/18 for the German Department. All class representative rolls were filled and elected students worked hard in preparing for the Student Staff Consultative Committee meeting that took place during Week 5. Honours level modules included studies on language and ideology in the former GDR and West Germany, women in German letters, east German cinema and Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* while Sub-honours concentrated on building a good grounding in language, literature and linguistics. There was plenty of positive feedback for lectures and seminars at both Honours and Sub-honours level with students engaging with the content of their course and praising the high standards of teaching in the department. Discussion points included having more time for oral classes, smaller group sizes, both of which have been accommodated in the Semester 2 timetable. With the mandate of enhancing employability prospects, the German Convener has created a jobs database along with some online resources and tips for applying to jobs in Germany as well as German-speaking roles in the UK. A careers event is planned for Semester 2 and among others we are aiming to host Consul General Jens-Peter Voss from the German Consulate in Edinburgh to speak about his experience and to give his views on career prospects in the current economic and political climate. Semester 1 concluded with a Christmas event for all Modern Languages students and staff, with a Modern Languages Ball to be held in Semester 2.

### Italian

Semester 1 has been a productive one for the Italian department, highlighted by the success of week 5's SSCC meeting.

In week 7, the final year students enjoyed a guest seminar on translation.

The semester was brought to a close with a department Christmas dinner at Zizzi's for staff, postgraduate students and senior honours students. It was a lovely evening and provided an excellent opportunity for the meeting of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

This was continued at the talk and Q&A with the Italian minister for culture organised by Dr Riccobono at the end of the semester, which provided not only an interesting discussion on Italy's current cultural relations with the UK, but also the chance for undergraduate students to hear about the fields of study of each postgraduate student – a useful opportunity for those considering furthering their studies in Italian.

Next semester, the department hopes to establish stronger ties with the Italian Society in order to enable more accessible extra-curricular events, and personally as convener I hope to organise more Italian-specific career-based events.

## Russian

Semester 1 has been really productive. Within the Russian department, we have organised many events which have brought students from different year groups closer together. We have also been running 'Russian over coffee' which was suggested by the Russian Reps. The SSCC also ran very smoothly and received a lot of positive feedback. Next semester, the department hopes to establish stronger ties with the Russian Society. We have spoken about collaborating in organising various events such as a Russian Ball. The team of Russian Reps would also like to continue organising events for across all year groups so that there is a stronger community in the Russian Department. In semester 2 some of the honours students are also working closely to organise a play. We also have various talks coming up at the Byre Theatre.

## Spanish

Spanish has had a relatively smooth semester. Concerns regarding sub-honours modules and content modules at honours level were addressed during the SSCC meeting held in Week 5. That being said, there is still concern that the workload given to students for the 15 credit modules is simply too much and not fair when compared to other 'Arts' departments. Outside of the classroom, students are pleased with Charla being held in the evenings by the Hispanic Society, and reception to the Christmas Soiree was extremely positive.

## 12. Moving Forward

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first semester as School President and am looking forward to the coming months. It has been a truly rewarding and enlightening experience so far, and I am excited for elections and to meet the new team!

Semester 2 looks to be a busy and exciting semester in the SoML. We have our ball coming up in March, along with a careers event in week 4.

I aim to engage more with the class representatives more this semester, rather than relying on the conveners to relay information to them. I also hope to provide as much support as possible to graduating students as we all prepare to enter the real world!

I hope that this report will help future School Presidents and give some insight into the role. I am completely open to ideas and suggestions, and am always delighted to receive emails at [modlangpresident@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:modlangpresident@st-andrews.ac.uk).

Thank you!

Caitlin Macdonald  
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