

SCHOOL OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY

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# **SCHOOL PRESIDENT REPORT**

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January 26, 2018

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## 0.1 Platform and Goals

The main goals for this year centre about wellbeing, careers, and community.

**Wellbeing** - To provide as much support as possible to students who are struggling due to stress or other issues, through events (working with societies), relevant staff training, and clear signposting on who can be contacted for help and advice.

**Careers** – To provide advice and support on careers matters within the School, regarding internships and beyond. This is through both student and staff organised careers events, work with the Careers Rep, and cooperation with the Careers Centre.

**Community** – The Physics department fosters a unique community. The goal is to nurture this, encouraging communication between year groups so that students can benefit from the experience of their peers. Events encouraging interaction of students with staff are also important within the community.

## 0.2 June

### 0.2.1 Handover

A handover meeting took place, with the Physics Director of Teaching, Dr Bruce Sinclair, and the exiting School President, John Weaver. The above goals were discussed, as well as the duties that the SP annually carries out within the School. It was agreed that the SP and the DoT will strive to work together as much as possible, to the mutual benefit of students and staff.

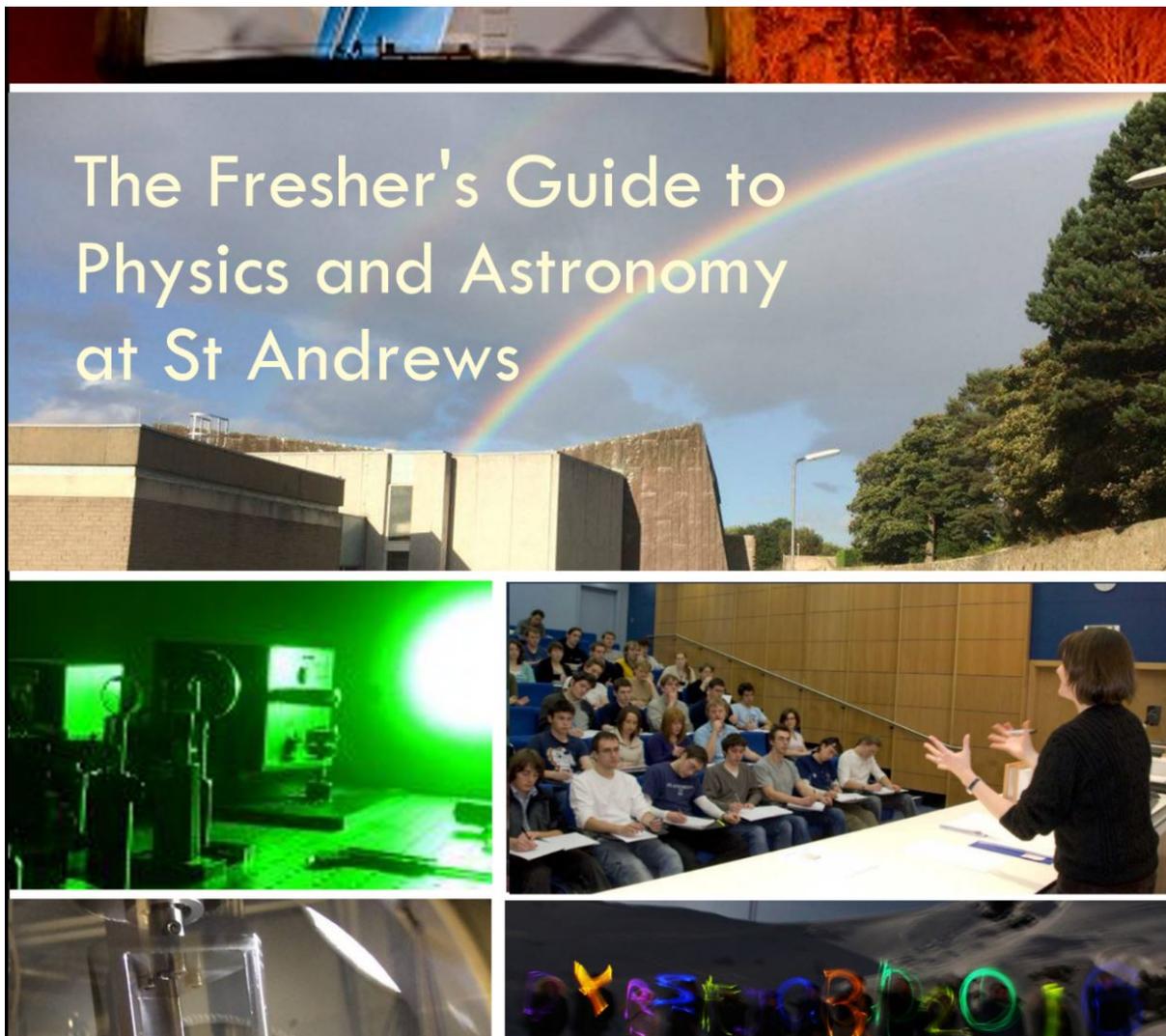
### 0.2.2 Equality and Diversity Committee

Before leaving for the Summer, I was able to attend my first meeting of the Physics Equality and Diversity Committee. Among other things, the new comments box was brought up. This was to be mounted in the Physics Foyer, and checked regularly by the SP.

## 0.3 July, August

### 0.3.1 Freshers Guidebook

Much of the summer was spent creating a Fresher's Guide to Physics and Astronomy. This is a booklet which gives useful information and advice about the Department from a student perspective, including pages on degree paths and entry points, advice on managing the Physics workload, information on further engagement opportunities and societies, and SSC involvement. Some departmental freshers events and a handy map were also included. This booklet was developed in collaboration with PhySoc, and printed in time for Freshers Week courtesy of the Department.



### **0.3.2 Other**

Other summer business included the planning of Freshers events, which are described later, and work with the DoT on information needing to be sent out to returning students. New this year, and in my view particularly important, was a full list of Junior Honours deadlines for the semester. The first semester of JH is notoriously packed with deadlines, and the hope was that a complete listing would help students to better manage their time, as well as to see that every effort has been made to ensure that these deadlines are maximally spread out through the semester.

## **0.4 September**

### **0.4.1 Orientation Week**

As usual, the Physics department organised a variety of events to welcome entrant students to the School. These kicked off with a drop in session on Monday morning, at which staff and returning students, including myself and the PhySoc and AstroSoc presidents, were present to meet with students. These events are always useful; we answered questions ranging from 'What are the topics of research in the department' to 'What is advising and how do I sign up for it', and the students had a chance to start getting comfortable in the department and socialise with other Physics entrants.

Monday afternoon offered a session on entry point decision making. We arranged for about ten students, of a variety of degree points and entry points, to speak to students in Physics Theatre B. A brief overview of the technicalities was given by Bruce, after which the entrants had a chance to speak with returning students and ask questions.

Our biggest event of the week was Tuesday's Welcome Afternoon. After an introduction by the DoT and a short welcome from myself, we proceeded to the annual quiz, during which students are rotated into different teams so that they have the opportunity to meet their fellow entrants as well as senior students. There was then a reception with snacks, drinks and a welcome from the Head of School, Prof. Graham Turnbull. After this, the entrants were taken by senior students on tours of the research labs, where the researchers themselves gave brief introductions. This is a new component to the day, carried on from last year. We find that providing research lab tours to entrants, rather than waiting until second year as it was done before, helps to integrate the students into the physics community, and makes them

more excited to be here.

Thursday brought the JH welcome party. This had a different structure this year than it has had in previous years, a change which I discussed with the JH advisor as a rep last year, and over the summer. The students rotated through various rooms in physics, each based on their own individual schedule so that they ended up in a different team every 10 minutes. In these teams, they were to solve a 'fun' physics problem, along the lines of 'how long would it take to completely defrost a mammoth', with help from the staff member or senior student supervising the room. There were snacks and drinks provided, so that students could grab a glass of wine or some orange juice on the way to their next challenge. This event was very well received; students had fun with the challenges and chatted with people in their year who they had not yet gotten the chance to know. One point that I would raise for future improvement of the event would be to gather the students at the end so that they can simply chat and enjoy the refreshments. I feel that this would really solidify the social aspect of the event.

The School held some other welcome events, including those for Gateway and masters students, but I was not directly involved in the planning of those.

We also supported and promoted the Freshers events held by the physics-related societies, including two PhySoc breakfasts, held in the Physics Concourse, and an AstroSoc BBQ with a rocket launch courtesy of the St Andrews Engineering Group.

#### **0.4.2 Class Rep Elections**

As usual in Physics, rep elections were carried out via paper ballot, meaning that the nomination and election process was a bit different than it is for other Schools. Students were sent emails with information on what it means to be a class rep and how to go about running for the position; they were to send me their name and year group, the position which they were running for, and a short statement on why they would be suitable for the job. They also had the option of attaching a photo to be displayed alongside their statement in election week. During elections, candidates were asked to give a short statement to their class, and voting was then done via a paper ballot. Successful candidates were congratulated via an email, and unsuccessful candidates were thanked for their involvement and encouraged to run again in the future and meanwhile get involved with the department in other ways, such as through the societies or school ambassador activities.

Once reps were elected, I held a lunchtime social for them with Domino's pizza for all. There, I outlined what we would be doing in the coming weeks, and 'expansion pack' reps were elected. We did not elect a minutes rep, since I was happy for the School's secretary to take minutes in Student Staff Council, as she has kindly done in the past. We have added a new expansion position this year, one of 'rep for students with disabilities'.

### **0.4.3 Academic Monitoring Consultation**

On the 25th of September, I attended the Academic Monitoring Meeting along with the Head of School and Director of Teaching. There was robust discussion based on comments from external examiners and MEQ responses. The meeting served to address any issues, as well as identify good practices within the School to be shared with other departments.

## **0.5 October**

### **0.5.1 Student Staff Council**

The year's first Student Staff Council was held on the 16th of October. It is standard practice in Physics to ask reps to discuss any issues with the relevant staff members, so that they can report back to the council with a solution or compromise. This continues to work well and ensures that meetings progress in a timely manner. There was lively discussion on the topic of student wellbeing and promotion of efficient study techniques.

### **0.5.2 Careers**

**The Physics and Astronomy Internships Panel** was held on the 19th of October. I asked five students who had done internships during the summer to prepare a 5 minute presentation, briefly explaining where they went, what they did and how they applied. The event was timed so that there was ample time for questions. The panel was well attended, mostly by the target audience of 2nd and 3rd years.



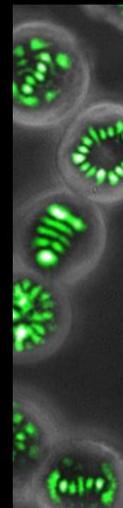
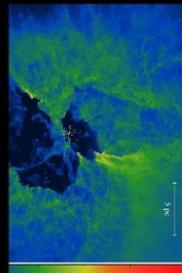
Another event was held in collaboration with the department's SPIE branch, on the 3rd of October. This was the **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Event**, aiming to allow for exploration of the research being carried out in the School. This was held as a poster session in the concourse, at which PhD students presented their recent work and chatted with undergraduates about life in academia. Refreshments were kindly provided by the School. The attendance for this event was not as high as we had hoped, but those who did come along had some valuable discussions. I was also very pleased with the number of postgraduates who attended and presented a poster.

## PandA's Undergraduate & Postgraduate event

Physics Foyer,  
Tuesday October 3rd, 1400 - 1600

**Get a taste of research at St Andrews.**

<http://spiestudent.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/ug-pg-event-2017/>



### **0.5.3 Mid Semester Survey**

As is usual in Physics, I organised and ran a mid semester survey, covering all modules running in the department in Semester 1. The questions posed to the students were changed slightly this year, to avoid introducing bias or personal components into evaluations. I worked on this with various members of the department, and the questionnaires were first circulated to staff to ensure that everyone was in agreement on the phrasing of the questions. It was unfortunate that the survey was circulated directly after the SSC and not before, as this meant that reps were put in the position of trying to get some feedback to bring to the SSC while at the same time attempting not to over-survey their cohort. However, the survey would not truly be 'mid semester' if it was conducted any earlier – there would not be enough time for students to get into the modules before evaluating them.

Once the surveys were complete, the results were processed by the reps. To avoid the situation where the SP ends up doing all of the processing with the help of just a couple of reps, I found it very useful to send out a Doodle poll asking about specific times in ILW during which reps were free. Based on the results of this poll, I booked out a room in physics for an entire morning, and reps were invited (and bribed with doughnuts) to come along and do the processing for their cohort. This meant I was able to have all of the results reviewed and collated within a week, and promptly returned to staff.

## **0.6 November**

### **0.6.1 Student Staff Council**

The second SSC took place on the xth of November. The meeting was very productive, with lots of discussion generated by the MSS results. Again, reps were asked to discuss these with their heads of year, and to bring up any particular issues to module coordinators prior to the meeting, so that the SSC could proceed in a timely, solution-centric manner.

### **0.6.2 Careers**

The Physics Careers Fayre took place on the 7th of November. This was organised mainly by Dr Andrea Di Falco. The event started with a series of presentations by various employers, many of them alumni, in different areas of industry and research. The second part of the afternoon followed a standard 'careers fayre' setup in the foyer, with tables set up and oppor-

tunity for students to chat with the speakers. Refreshment was kindly provided by the School.

The turnout for this event was disappointing. It was widely advertised, including several emails, posters and a Facebook event, but attendance was low. Many students have said that they were too busy to attend, or were not given enough notice. While email advertisement was done well in advance, perhaps other approaches, such as posters or Facebook events, can be implemented earlier in the future to garner students' attention. On the positive side, those who did attend found the event immensely useful. Both students and visitors stated that they had some compelling conversation, with one student saying that they had a much more solid idea of career possibilities with a physics degree after this event than ever before.

## 0.7 December

December was a month in which everybody was mainly concerned with revision. Keeping with the goal of supporting student wellbeing, especially in this stressful time, the School held a support training session for the staff, run by CAPOD. A wellbeing event was also held by PhySoc, who encouraged students to take a break from revision and decorate a gingerbread man with them in the concourse. The results were impressive; particularly memorable was a remarkably realistic gingerbread Jupiter.

## 0.8 January

The main task for January was the planning of the department's annual Burns Supper and Ceilidh, which is due to take place on the 17th of February. Thanks to support from the department and the discretionary fund, I have been able to keep the price of tickets unchanged from previous years, keeping the event as affordable as possible.

