

## Notes of Faculty of Natural Sciences Master's Student Staff Committee Meeting

**Date:** 04 Dec 2018, 12.30 – 14.00

**Venue:** Hamilton Boardroom, Silwood Park

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### Present

Samraat Pawar (SP)	Silwood Masters Coordinator (Chair)
Sammi Lai (SA)	MRes Ecosystems and Environmental Changes
Luke Vassor (LV)	MSc Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution
Rachel Bates (RB)	MRes Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution
Emma Mackintosh (EM)	MRes Tropical Forest Ecology
Emily Noone (EN)	MSc Ecology, Evolution and Conservation
Joe Palmer (JP)	MSc Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution
Deraj Wilson-Aggarwal (DWA)	Silwood Masters Student Rep
Jonathan Greenslade (JG)	MSc Ecology, Evolution and Conservation
Katie Bickerton (KB)	MRes Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution- <del>(CMEE)</del>
Joe Palmer (JP)	MSc Computational Methods in Ecology and Evolution- <del>(CMEE)</del>
Maisie Vollans (MV)	MRes Tropical Forest Ecology
Julia Schroeder (JS)	Senior Tutor (PG)
Emma McCoy (EMc)	Vice-Dean (Education) FoNS
Rebecca Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager

### Apologies:

Sarah Milligan	MSc Conservation Science
Lawrence Whittaker	Silwood Masters Student Rep
Tom McNally	MSc Taxonomy and Biodiversity
Hui Lee	MSc Taxonomy and Biodiversity
James Raymond	MSc Conservation Science
Ute Thiermann	GSU President - Chair
Cassy Flint	MSc Conservation Science
Hannah Jones	GSU Representative
Alejandro Luy	ICI Deputy President- Education
Niki Gounaris	Director of Postgraduate Studies, Life Sciences

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed members and apologies, as above, were noted.

### 2. Terms of Reference and Membership 2018/19

The above were noted.

SP noted that Guy Woodward would be taking over the role of Silwood Master's Coordinator shortly, and would attend the next SSC meeting planned for 07 May 2019.

### 3. Staff Student Committee Guidelines

The above were noted.

### 4. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 20 March 2018 were approved as an accurate record.

### 5. Review of Actions

The Action Tracker was reviewed and updated and the following were noted:

**Action 13.** This action was noted as complete, in that EMc had received a response from Peter Szpur of Estates. However, it was also noted that there were still no sign of any litter bins on the site, so this would need to be followed up again.

***ACTION: EMc to follow up with Peter Szpur of Estates regarding her previous enquiry regarding litter bins.***

**Action 12.** Was noted as complete

**Action 11.** It was noted that temperature control was still an issue. DWA agreed to raise this at the buildings related meetings that he attends.

***ACTION: DWA to raise the ongoing issue of temperature control at the buildings related meetings that he attends.***

**Actions 10 and 9.** Were noted as complete

**Action 8.** SP noted that the standard project budget had been set at £500. However, students could make a case for up to £1000. It was noted that this should be clearly explained in course handbooks going forward.

***ACTION: SP to ensure that information regarding project budgets, the amount available, and the requirements for requesting funds over and above the standard £500 be made available in ~~all the Silwood Masters course handbooks~~ Guidebook that is common to all courses at that Campus.***

**Actions 7, 6, 5, 4 and 3:** Were noted as complete

## 6. Reports from Student Representatives

### 6.1 Conservation Science

The ConSci Reps were not able to attend, but sent the following report:

#### ***General Silwood admin:***

- *Consensus amongst ConSci students was that there was a lack of support, especially for ConSci related issues.*
- *It was observed that admin staff seem to be stretched too thin: emails aren't getting answered, there isn't enough information on fieldtrips/exams etc. available ahead of time.*
- *ConSci would like to see more conservation relevant seminars on campus. Most of them are at ZSL or other places that we can't get to and the current lunchtime seminars are a little too niche. We also think that everyone at Silwood would benefit from some more broad and conservation focused seminars.*

#### ***Welfare:***

- *Need more access to/advertisement of information such as financial help that is available to students.*

- *Potentially there are info leaflets/posters at South Ken union which could be distributed? No clear point of reference or a “union hub” on Silwood.*
- *Not being able to get in contact with course directors and not having enough support is causing some anxiety amongst the ConSci cohort.*
- *It was also mentioned by several students (and agreed upon by the majority) that when we can’t access our course directors, it is hard to find someone at Silwood who is relevant enough to our topics/questions to refer to.*

**Off campus student concerns:**

- *Planning events and society meetings and small things (like movie nights and club meetings) in advance would be great. It is very difficult to attend and feel part of the Silwood community if club meetings/movie nights etc. are only advertised the day of.*
- *Staying at the visitor's lodge is too expensive for students, especially if it is the only option and students are not allowed to stay in the communal areas.*
- *It was suggested that students be allotted a certain amount of free nights each year (e.g. three or so) and can use them on a first come first serve basis. Then after that, a reduced rate for students and normal rate for staff.*

**Positives:**

- *Everyone is amazed and very appreciative of Theo; General consensus is that the library and staff at Silwood are incredibly helpful, valuable and responsive.*
- *ConSci students like that there is access to buildings whenever they want (EXCEPT access to Darwin room which seems to be locked frequently).*
- *Food refectory is great for campus food—ConSci students like the food options and the prices.*

RM agreed to speak to the ICU Advice Centre on the subject of signposting support for students and to see whether they might consider providing an occasional drop-in service at Silwood.

***ACTION: RM to speak to the ICU Advice Centre on the subject of signposting support for students and to see whether they might consider providing an occasional drop-in service at Silwood.***

It was noted that the Faculty Education Committee had recently approved a proposal to suspend the MSc ConSci for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. The suspension has become necessary because one of the two co-directors of the course, as well as undertaking a major role in its teaching, is planning to leave the department by the end of the current academic year. SP noted that the Department would be working on providing support for current students, and it was suggested that perhaps a 3<sup>rd</sup> named contact for the course could be found.

## **6.2 Ecology, Evolution and Conservation**

The EEC reps noted that they were provided with good support from staff.

They raised a specific issue with a link to submit coursework not being made available in good time, but noted that this had been resolved.

They also raised an issue with access to lecture slides. These slides had been made available to SK based students, but there had been a delay in making them available to Silwood students. The matter had been resolved, but the Reps were keen that this did not happen again. It was

agreed that clear communication was needed between the SK and Silwood based postgraduate administrators and staff delivering courses.

The Reps noted that the recent field trip to Lundy had been well received and were keen that this was retained in future years. They noted that it had encouraged team building and communication across the cohort.

The Reps noted issues with the modules on QGIS and Genomics. SP noted that ~~there had been issues with the platforms on which these modules were taught and acknowledged that were challenges associated with the fact that students came onto the modules with varying levels of prior experience~~ these modules need to be taught so that they are computer-platform independent. He will follow up with the module organizers for next year.

The Reps also stated that they were unsure about how they would be examined and would be keen to have sight of previous years' exam questions and model answers. JS agreed to look into this. EMc noted that clear information on methods of assessment linked to learning outcomes should be made available in advance to students.

***ACTION: JS to look into providing previous years' exam questions and model answers to students.***

### 6.3 Ecosystems and Environmental Change

SL noted that any issues with the course had been raised at department level meetings.

She noted that specific concerns regarding the loss of one week of content around science communication, to be offered at SK. It was noted that the plan was for this to be covered in the spring term, however, SP agreed to discuss with the Course Director, Colin Prentice.

***ACTION: SP to discuss the issues around the missed science communication week with the Course Director, Colin Prentice.***

Energy, Water and Plants- the student rep noted that there had been some concern that students did not have the level of understanding of chemistry that this course required, the students were also not clear on the requirements for the (non-assessed) presentation associated with this course.

***ACTION: SP to discuss the issues around the Energy, Water and Plants course (specifically prior-chemistry knowledge and the requirements for the presentation) with the Course Director, Colin Prentice.***

### 6.4 CMEE

GIS- more in Python/ R.

Genomics- The reps noted that they had raised concerns about the relevancy of this module and also felt that they did not have clear information on learning outcomes and assessment. This had been feedback to the Course Director and information had been made available via Blackboard.

Particular issues were also noted with the software used for the above, which had caused student laptops to crash repeatedly during installation, which took place during the module. Ideally, the software should be made available to install prior to the module commencing.

The reps noted that the 'High Performance Computing' week had been very popular and students had appreciated the individual attention they'd received from the module convener. They also noted that the current 'Biological Data Structures and C' week was going well so far.

**6.5 Tropical Forest Ecology**

The TFE Reps noted that any issues they had experienced had been raised with their Course Director.

Energy, Water and Plants- the reps noted similar concerns to those raised by the EEC rep with this module. They also noted that they had not completed the non-assessed presentation due to other demands on their time, such as the completion of their project proposals, which took precedence.

They also raised issues with the installation of the GIS software, as outlined in 6.4 above.

Finally, the TFE Reps requested more information about the projects to be made available to students earlier, specifically information on budgets, any potential hidden costs, and health and safety policy. The reps stated that students felt they did not have full information and this caused a certain amount of anxiety and stress.

**7. Chair's business**

There were no matters to discuss.

**8. Any other business**

JS noted that the Counselling Service had confirmed that a counsellor would be available at Silwood every Thursday from the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

**9. Dates of Future Meetings:**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Room</b>
Silwood SSC	Tues 07 May 2019	12.30-14.00	Hamilton Boardroom