

**DATE:** Wednesday 10 November 2021

**TIME:** 12:30 – 14:00

**LOCATION:** SALC 10, Sherfield Building

## MINUTES

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### 1. Welcome and Apologies

#### Present:

Nicolas	Barykin Pankevich (NBP)	RCSU Vice President – Education, Chair
Richard	Thompson (RT)	Vice-Dean (Education), Co-Chair
John	Seddon (JS)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Rebecca	Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager, FoNS
Matt	Horsfield (MH)	Education Support Coordinator (Secretary), FoNS
Don	Craig (DC)	Director of UG Studies, Chemistry
Chris	Hallsworth (CH)	Director of UG Studies, Mathematics
Huw	Williams (HW)	Director of UG Studies, Life Sciences
Amelia	Barron (AB)	Student Experience Officer, Chemistry
Inkeri	Hibbins (IH)	Undergraduate Liaison Officer, Mathematics
Steve	Connolly (SC)	Undergraduate Liaison Officer, Life Sciences
Krzysztof	Oliwa (OK)	Department Academic Rep, Chemistry
Priscilla	Yip (PY)	Department Academic Rep, Mathematics
Stefano	Fiocca (SF)	Department Academic Rep, Physics
Tianyu	Wen (TW)	Department Academic Rep (Biochemistry), Life Sciences
Erica	Zhao (EZ)	Department Academic Rep (Biological Sciences), Life Sciences

#### In Attendance:

Crystal	Vincent (CV)	Faculty EDI Coordinator, FoNS
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#### Apologies:

Daniel	Lo	ICU Deputy President - Education
Carl	Paterson (CP)	Director of UG Studies, Physics
Yasmin	Andrew (YA)	Student Liaison Officer, Physics
Aparna	Pillai	RCSU President
Tianyu	Wen	RCSU Vice President - Welfare

## 2. Faculty of Natural Sciences Student Staff Committee - Terms of Reference and Membership 2021/22

The committee noted the terms of reference and membership for 2021/22.

## 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting held on 16 June 2021.

## 4. Matters arising from the minutes and review of action tracker

The action tracker was reviewed, and actions were marked as complete.

## 5. Reports from Department Student Representatives:

### 5.1 Chemistry

No detailed report document was received. OK presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- The student reps were working together in the Department to organise social events following feedback from last year. They were planning an event for 'Doughnut Fridays' and more social events at the White City campus for the 4<sup>th</sup> year students.
- There had been feedback from students that it would be very helpful if Blackboard could show the deadlines for assessments on their module sites. The Undergraduate Education Manager had contacted the FoNS EdTech Lab to get this resolved.
- OK reported that many students were feeling anxious about in person exams as they haven't had to do an exam on campus for over 18 months. DC confirmed that the Department were looking into organising a practice exam on campus for students to help them adjust to physical exams on campus from April 2022. DC noted the Department were also discussing the future format of exams and if they will introduce open book exams.
- RM confirmed there is a central exams working group which would look at the logistics of organising the summer exams and ensuring students would be in a safe working environment for their exams.
- OK noted there has been a noticed improvement in communication in the Department and students are pleased with the amount of information they receive from the Department.
- There had been a reported issue with accessing the Blackboard App via Apple, but this has now been resolved with an update.
- OK noted that no major items were raised at the Student Experience Committee, but discussions were ongoing with exam feedback and how to improve this.
- There was lots of positive feedback from students who are enjoying the mixed mode of learning and teaching and were enjoying being back on campus.
- DC explained the Department had reported an issue with the ICU by-election as a student had put their name forward but did not appear in the election online.

**Action 1: DC to email RM with details about this case and RM will raise this with the ICU.**

### 5.2 Life Sciences – Biochemistry

No detailed report document was received. TW presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- Both TW and EZ had received their training yesterday from the ICU and were now looking at organising a whole Department SSC with all the course reps. The Department is still looking for a 3<sup>rd</sup> year course rep.
- Both Department reps are working together to manage the new common room which has just opened to final year students. TW confirmed that they were planning to open

the common room to all students in the new year. There were plans to use the common room to hold social events with other Departmental societies.

- There hasn't been enough time to go through the NSS action plans yet with HW, but TW explained she would like to work on the timeframe for assessment feedback.
- TW noted that at the Department SSC it was reported there had been a few IT issues reported with lecture recordings, but this had been resolved now by ICT. The course reps had conducted a survey with students and there were mixed results with roughly half of the students who preferred online lectures.
- TW explained that 3<sup>rd</sup> year students would like to have a revision week in February to help balance out time between coursework and exams. HW confirmed that this can be discussed at the next Department SSC but there is a careful balance between deadlines in the spring term.
- TW reported that all students were enjoying the in-person lab sessions and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students liked the option to come in for in person lectures.

### 5.3 Life Sciences – Biological Sciences

No detailed report document was received. EZ presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- EZ explained that she works closely with TW in the Department so many of the points raised by TW also apply to the Biological Sciences pathway.
- EZ is working on guidelines for the new common room and thinking about how it can be decorated.
- Students had reported there have not been many events organised by the Biology Society and students were keen to organise some social events. HW confirmed that he had not heard from the society recently and that the Biochemistry Society had organised several events this year so far.

**Action 2: HW to contact RM about the lack of engagement from the Biology Society.**

### 5.4 Mathematics

No detailed report document was received. PY presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- There were a few vacant course rep positions in the Department and were waiting to hear back from the results of the by-election. PY was also keen to recruit module reps for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year modules.
- PY was working with the Departmental wellbeing rep to organise some social events alongside the Maths Society. PY noted that the Maths Society were also looking at organising events with other Departmental societies such as Chemical Engineering.
- Students were enjoying the mix mode of teaching so far and CH noted that attendance had remained quite high. Students were enjoying the in-person sessions on campus to supplement the online activities.
- PY explained to the committee that the common room had just re-opened, and she was working with the Department to ensure this space was used by students.
- PY explained that under the NSS action plans, she wanted to look at the course schedule to ensure coursework deadlines were not bunched up. Renovations had also been carried out in the Department over the last 18 months and PY was keen for this to continue.
- CH explained that he had met with the Departmental reps and there was a discussion about the overlap between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year modules due to the curriculum review. CH was also keen to get feedback from the course reps about the summer exams and the potential for open book exams. For the upcoming mid-term tests, fewer videos would be released to allow students more time to prepare for their tests.

- ‘Check in’ sessions had been organised for students, by the Department, who had been isolating at home or struggling with mixed mode teaching to support them with their learning. CH was looking at SOLE and how this was used in the Department previously and how it might be improved. Year reps were also looking at a survey to be sent out to gather data on the use of recorded lectures and how useful they were.

## 5.5 Physics

No detailed report document was received. SF presented a verbal report of the key matters arising in the Department.

- Students were happy that more classes were now in person and this was having a positive impact on their mental health and keeping on top of their work. The students had also organised several events with the Physics society which had been well attended.
- Under the NSS actions plans, SF was keen to improve the feedback students got from lab reports. Students also felt that there needed to be more female representation in the teaching staff in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year modules. RT explained that the feedback policy is being reviewed in the Department to ensure students still got feedback even if one member of staff in the module team was ill. Also, the Department were always keen to encourage applications from female candidates for academic positions and this was ongoing.
- There were mixed opinions on the multi-mode delivery of teaching as some students preferred online classes and other students would prefer more classes on campus. The committee noted that the students had different reasons for their preferences and many students preferred to be on campus to meet their peers and support their mental health. RT explained to SF that there were some mixed messages going around the Department and all recorded lectures would still be available for students to catch up with online even if more lectures were taught on campus.
- RT queried with SF if students preferred on campus lectures as attendance had been decreasing. SF explained that students were not attending lectures on campus as the lecture content had not been updated and were not engaging.
- No students had stood in the recent by-election, but roles were being covered by the course reps until replacements are elected.
- There were ongoing discussions about the exam format for this year as many students felt the exams last year were too hard. SF explained that many students in the Department were keen for exams to be closed book. The committee discussed the use of open/closed book exams and RT explained to SF that the difficulty of the exams last year shouldn’t be related to the format of the exam. The Department were reviewing the content of the exam questions to ensure that students don’t find the exams as hard this academic year. But the format of the exams, i.e. closed or open book exam, should be based on what is suitable for the learning outcomes of the module. It was agreed by the committee that each Department would have their own strategy for the exam format in the summer exam period. CH noted that the Maths Department were looking at the idea that students could take in two sides of notes into their exam, but this was still being discussed.

## 6. Standing Items

### 6.1 Curriculum Review (CR)

- NBP invited the DUGs to give a brief overview of curriculum review for this year.
- DC explained to the committee that this was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of curriculum review and the last year of the old curriculum for 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Some of the modules in 3<sup>rd</sup> year were similar to the

pre curriculum review modules so students shouldn't see that much difference. The Department had eased restrictions on the number of topics students can pick in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

- HW shared similar thoughts to DC as the new 3<sup>rd</sup> year modules were quite similar to the previous level 6 modules. HW noted that the modules are slightly different to what they had planned due to the impact of Covid-19. The Department were also planning to hold one exam board this summer for both streams (Biology and Biochemistry) for the first time.
- CH explained he had received positive feedback from students about the new module 'Introduction to University Mathematics' at level 4. There was some overlap this year between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year modules as some students might have done a module at a previous level if they were on the old curriculum. This was being managed by the module leaders to ensure students all had access to the same learning materials and experience. Students also were enjoying the large selection of optional modules.
- RT noted that the biggest change for Physics this year was the module ECTS values for the new modules at level 6 (year 3). But this would be the only year affected so the new level 7 modules would be active from October 2022.

## 6.2 Feedback on Assessment

- Nothing to be raised, discussed in earlier action points.
- SF noted that the feedback loop system was working well in the Department.

## 6.3 NSS Action Plans

- Nothing to be raised, discussed in earlier action points.

## 7. Chair's business

- NBP was pleased to hear student feedback was being considered by the Departments and Faculty when organising the exams for May 2022 on campus.

## 8. Minutes of Departmental Student Staff Committee Meetings (to note)

No minutes noted.

## 9. Any other business

- RM reminded the committee that the Faculty had recruited two wellbeing advisers and the wellbeing service has been launched at the start of term. The advisers would be available for 1.1 sessions with students and Department training sessions.
- RM also introduced the committee to CV who is the new Faculty EDI Coordinator and would be working with the Departments on their student facing EDI activities.
- RT informed the committee that a recent vote had taken place at the College for strike action. No details have been confirmed yet but once known the College would inform all students and staff. RT explained the impact might not be felt in all Departments as not all staff are registered to the union, but the Faculty would look to minimise the impact as much as possible.

## 10. Dates of Future Meetings

Committee	Date	Time	Teams/ Room Details	Paper Deadline
FoNS - UG Academic Student Staff Committee	16/03/2022	13:00 - 14.30	SALC 10, Sheffield	09/03/2022
FoNS - UG Academic Student Staff Committee	15/06/2022	12:30 - 14:00	SALC 10, Sheffield	08/06/2022