

## Faculty of Natural Sciences Undergraduate Academic Student Staff Committee

Date: 11 November 2020

Time: 12.30 - 14.00

Location: via Teams

## MINUTES

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### Present:

Forename	Surname	Title
Yasmin	Andrew (YA)	Physics - Student Liaison Officer
Amelia	Barron	Chemistry - Student Experience Officer
Steve	Connolly (SC)	LS - Undergraduate Liaison Officer
Don	Craig (DC)	DUGS - Chemistry
David	Evans (DE)	DUGS - Maths
Inkeri	Hibbins (IH)	Maths - Undergraduate Liaison Officer
Kasia	Kmieckowiak (KK)	FoNS Administrative Assistant
Richard	Thompson (RT)	Vice-Dean (Education)
Rebecca	Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager
Hannah	Armstrong	Management Trainee
Carl	Paterson (CP)	DUGS - Physics
John	Seddon (JS)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Michaela	Flegrova (MF)	ICU Deputy President (Education)
Daniyar	Ghani (DG)	Chair, RCSU Vice President (Education)
Maria-Ileana	Borc	RCSU Vice President (Welfare & Wellbeing)
Yuqing	Wu (YW)	Physics Dep Rep
Isabelle	Zhang (IZ)	Biochemistry Dep Rep
Jeong	Yoon (JY)	Biology Dep Rep
Nicolas	Barykin Pankevich (NBP)	Maths Dep Rep
Andres	Martin Diaz (AMD)	Chemistry Dep Rep
Sean	Collins	Biological Sciences: Year One Academic Representative
Sachin	Yuvaraj Dinesh Babu	Biological Sciences: Year One Academic Representative
Rasmus	Hildebrandt	Biological Sciences: Year Two Academic Representative
Erica	Zhao	Biological Sciences: Year Two Academic Representative
Niamh	McAuley	Biological Sciences: Year Three Academic Representative
Olivia	Smith	Biological Sciences: Year Three Academic Representative
Carlos	Cardoso Correia Perello	Mathematics: Year One Academic Representative
Tony	Lin	Mathematics: Year One Academic Representative
Amir	Rahman	Mathematics: Year Two Academic Representative
Priscilla	Yip	Mathematics: Year Two Academic Representative
Shi Wei	Yuan	Physics: Year Two Academic Representative
Zhidong	Zuo	Physics: Year Two Academic Representative
Daniel	Jonsson	Physics: Year Three Academic Representative

Chaelin	Lee (ChL)	Biochemistry: Year One Academic Representative
Pia	Skok	Biochemistry: Year One Academic Representative
Jay	Chow	Biochemistry: Year Two Academic Representative
Tianyu	Wen	Biochemistry: Year Two Academic Representative
Zher Ooi	Ooi	Biochemistry: Year Three Academic Representative

**Apologies:**

Nazia	Hirjee	Faculty Operations Officer
Huw	Williams	DUGS – Life Sciences

**1. Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed all and apologies as above were accepted.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting held on 17th June.

DG explained that the purpose of Faculty SSC meetings is:

- To provide a forum to discuss academic and non-academic matters that are relevant to students in more than one Department within the Faculty (including e.g. welfare and accommodation) and for which a perspective broader than that possible in a Departmental Staff-Student Committee would be valuable.
- To share good practice across the Faculty's Departments.
- To allow Student Representatives to interact constructively with Faculty staff to explore ways to improve the Educational experience in the College.

**3. Matters arising from the minutes and Review of Action Tracker**

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

**4. Reports from Department Student Representatives**

**4.1 Chemistry**

Andres Martin Diaz, Chemistry Dep Rep, reported the following matters:

**Work in progress:**

- Peer-mentoring session had been organised for the first years on A Level Chemistry topics. A number of Y3 and Y4 students had volunteered and to date it had been successful.
- Feedback had been asked in year group chats and Padlet (Y1 only). In previous years, post-it notes had been used to provide feedback, but due to the pandemic, this had been replaced with [Padlet](#) software which works really well. There is a plan to use it across other years too, but currently Y2-Y4 are using emails to send feedback. IH had provided more information on [Combining asynchronous resources and interactivity](#) via this link.
- Good and bad lab report feedback had been collated from students to help train GTAs. Some results had been discussed with Head of Teaching and it had been agreed that GTAs should for example answer students questions during the sessions and not on case-by-case basis so all group can be engaged and benefit from that.
- Student Reps are working on making synchronous events more beneficial for students (i.e. workshops).

**Successful:**

- All year reps had been given access to mailing lists and they had introduced themselves.
- Lecturers had been contacted to enable subtitles on their pre-recorded lectures on Panopto.

- Dep Reps had swiftly summarised issues discussed at the last departmental SSC and had sent them to the students.

**NSS Action Plans:**

- Lab feedback and deadlines with the department had been discussed.
- Students had asked for input on good and bad feedback to help train GTAs.

**Other business:**

- Working from home and virtual teaching - there had been no major issues raised but some lectures like running late.
- There were problems with Panopto but this was solved.
- All Chemistry Student Reps had been elected except one Y3 Academic Rep and both Y4 Reps

***ACTION 1: AMD to provide DG and KK with any new names of year reps.***

#### **4.2 Life Sciences – Biochemistry**

Isabelle Zhang, Biochemistry Dep Rep, reported the following matters:

**Work in Progress:**

- Y3 end of module survey results will be reviewed and implemented soon.
- Y3 curriculum review is ongoing.
- There had been a discussion and follow-up of remaining NSS feedback.

**Successful:**

- First Departmental SSC meeting had been very productive.
- DoLS Virtual Common Room enables fostering sense of community during remote working and it is used for events and as a social platform for inter-year group.

**Unsuccessful / Cancelled:**

NSS feedback on double blind marking - students are not satisfied with the feedback they receive. There is too much administrative work involved and the second marker is not an expert in the subject.

**NSS Action Plans:**

- Personal tutorial system – Academic Dep Reps work with Wellbeing Reps across departments to find ways to encourage better relationships between tutors and tutees and generally to improve the personal tutoring.
- Assessment feedback – it had been proposed to create portfolio of feedback for students, which can be then discussed at the personal tutorial sessions. This should help to identify any inconsistent trends in the feedback and the Personal Tutor can help their tutees with that.
- Assessment feedback – it had been proposed that module convenors would create a report after exams and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of answers. This should help in providing more constructive feedback. IZ added that some convenors provide exam reports some do not. SC commented that this is the College policy and convenors need to be more engaged. SC will follow this up at the department.

**Summary of issues discussed at the last Departmental SSC:**

- Year Rep and staff introductions had been made.
- NSS report on assessment feedback and personal tutorial system had been reviewed.

#### **4.3 Life Sciences - Biological Sciences**

Jeong Yoon, Biological Sciences Dep Rep, reported the following matters:

**Work in progress**

- Meet the Reps event had been organised on 9<sup>th</sup> November in virtual common room.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Year:
  - End-of-module survey had been distributed. The feedback had been communicated to the department in order for any changes to be reflected in the second module.
  - Curriculum review – there had been not much progress on that due to departmental workload caused by Covid-19.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Year
  - Quality of Panopto recordings – department had distributed technical help for lecturers to improve the quality of Panopto recordings. This had been now resolved. However, students had been asked to report any issues with the quality of lecture recordings and Dep Reps will raise it with the department.
  - Past papers will be distributed at the end of a module.
  - There is general frustration with Team-Based Learning which will be discussed.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Year
  - There are plans to introduce an informal study group.
  - There is a need for clearer communication of deadlines.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Year reps had been provided with mailing list access.

**Unsuccessful:**

- NSS Academic Feedback – double blind marking system had been rejected. Department had argued that the efficacy of this system would be low compared to the redirected teaching resources. In addition, the second marker would not have the same level of expertise and knowledge in a particular coursework.

**NSS Action Plans:**

- Academic Feedback – Examination summary report recommendation had been accepted, and the implementation would be further discussed by the department. The current plan is that 1st and 2nd year tutors had been asked to generate exam reports highlighting overall strengths and weaknesses of student answers and general comments following an examination.
- Inconsistency of support from Personal Tutors:
  - Staff training sessions had not been identified as a possible solution, due to Faculty-level training being provided already. RM noted that the Faculty Personal Tutor Training sessions are compulsory for all Personal Tutors and they run once a year before the start of academic year. There are separate sessions for each department who provide individual input. These sessions had been well attended. The training focuses on the following aspects: practical information about the expectations on Personal Tutors; where to find information within and outside the department; who to contact when there is a concern about tutees; when to involve other support services; how to support students in these difficult times; and how to support students who may not be physically based on campus. RM offered to share the slides from the sessions run in September 2020.
  - Department had been positive about financially supporting informal chat sessions with Personal Tutors. SC reported that there is also the EDU training for new Personal Tutors and he will encourage staff to complete that. He added that it would be useful to receive more input from students regarding any issues related to personal tutoring. It had been observed that UG students seem to be cautious with raising such issues but they should clearly state what expectations they have from Personal Tutors. On the other hand, some students have expectations that cannot be met, like mental health support which cannot be provided by Personal Tutors as they do not have appropriate expertise. There is a small minority of students who do not receive a good experience, but the Student Reps should raise that.

- Student Wellbeing – Wellbeing Slide proposal had been accepted by the department. It is added as part of the lecture slides and on Blackboard to improve awareness of the departmental and the College wellbeing services and their access.
- Scheduling of exams/workload – recommendations will be assessed in the Curriculum Review.
- There is lack of careers session, but no further discussion is planned.

#### **Summary of issues discussed at the last Departmental SSC**

- The first meeting had been mostly a welcome SSC where all the reps had had a chance to meet the staff members and introduce themselves.
- The main discussion had been related to the NSS results.

#### **4.4 Mathematics**

Nicolas Barykin Pankevich, the Mathematics Dep Rep reported the following matters:

##### **Work in progress**

- The department is in the process of creating MAT resources for students who do not follow the British national curriculum. Schools abroad had been contacted in order to obtain the international curricula.
- New problem class structure is currently being tested in Y2 module.
- The department is appointing more equality, diversity and inclusion reps like LGBTQ+ Rep.
- Panopto viewing parties are being arranged to help students build a bigger sense of community.
- The department is providing more guidance to students on where should they be in terms of content (e.g. Lectures having a tag saying “watch me by the 12th of November”).

##### **Successful:**

- Most of the Student Reps roles had been filled thanks to various election related events such as Q&A sessions for those interested in applying and online candidate speeches to replace lecture shoutouts.
- Surveys and focus groups had been carried out among Y2 students focusing on their wellbeing as well as the quality of the support provided.

##### **NSS Action Plans:**

- Student reps had an initial meeting with Student Liaison Officers and a meeting with the HoD.
- Some Action plans had been discussed in the Departmental SSC meeting where it was considered what solutions would be most effective and feasible.

#### **Summary of issues discussed at the last Departmental SSC**

General feedback had been collated among students on remote learning and suggestions on how it can be improved. The main issues raised were stress and loneliness, financial constraints, etc.).

#### **4.5 Physics**

Yuqing Wu, the Mathematics Dep Rep reported the following matters:

##### **Work in progress:**

Student Reps are aiming to create social events for students, especially those isolated during the coronavirus pandemic such as Mums and Dads event. Y1 Reps proposed a great idea of arranging coffee mornings for year groups or students sharing their traditions, having tours around London or picnics once the lockdown is finished.

**Successful:**

- Ongoing discussions include updating the lab assessment system, improvements to the personal tutor system, improvements to lab feedback.
- Year-specific issues had been resolved, such as Panopto not uploading on time, lecture format problems, and experimental equipment.
- There had been conducted a Y2 survey on lecture formats.

**Unsuccessful:**

- Unsuccessful proposals include double marking lab reports and implementing annual reviews on personal tutors.
- Some attempts to ask the department to improve/increase a system already in place had been unsuccessful. These include extra surveys on teaching format, alumni talks, responses to SOLE feedback, and providing past papers.

**NSS Action Plans:**

- Student Reps had met with the Student Liaison Officer, Senior Tutor, and DUGS to discuss NSS results. There had been also a brief discussion on Action Plans during the Teaching Committee Meeting.
- Suggestions proposed by the representatives had included departmental support and regular reviews of Personal Tutors, increased support for student wellbeing, more consistent lab report marking, careers support and increased responsiveness to student feedback.

**Summary of issues discussed at the last Departmental SSC**

- There had been very little discussed due to the remote state of learning.
- The next SSC to be on 13<sup>th</sup> November.

**5. Standing Items**

There were no further comments made on the following subjects:

**5.1** Curriculum Review

**5.2** Feedback on Assessment

**5.3** NSS Action Plans

**6. Feedback on multi-mode teaching so far (lectures, labs, tutorials, learning resources and any other comments) – for discussion**

The following comments were made by each department:

**Chemistry:**

Andres Martin Diaz reported that:

- All lectures had been pre-recorded on Panopto (10-15min long). At the end there is a small quiz. This format had been incredibly well received by students.
- The lab activities are delivered in person and students really like that. The online labs are well structured, but are lacking the social aspect. This is being addressed by creating the team lab meetings.

DC reported that:

- There had been some glitches reported in Y1 and Y2 but these had been rectified.
- Arranging the labs in a remote setting (such as the organic synthesis lab) had been very challenging, but considering the circumstances, they are working well. In response to that, AMD said that the 'Chemical Kitchen' lab for Y1 had been incredibly well received. It is essentially a remote synthesis lab that students can do from home. DC added that the department had also organised the Introduction to Synthesis as a remote lab (Lab-in-a-Box) for all Y1 students in term 1.

- There are 32 participants in some of the Chemistry workshops which is challenging. However, using MS Teams and breakout rooms makes it easier to coordinate by the tutors.
- The department had also set up a mechanism to deal with students who need to self-isolate at short notice so they can be swiftly slotted to the remote sessions.

### **Life Sciences – Biological Sciences**

Jeong Yoon reported the following matters:

- Some students have stated that they prefer online lectures.
- Ideally, students would like contact hours in some modules so there are more lab based activities, as currently some modules do not have any labs.

### **Life Sciences – Biochemistry**

- Isabelle Zhang (Biochemistry Dep Rep) reported that the delivery and quality of the multi-mode teaching largely depends on the module conveners and at present is not uniform across all modules.
- Chaelin Lee (Y1 Student Rep) reported that the online lab session had not been well received as students could not hear the tutor. Therefore, students requested to have these lab sessions in person in Spring term. This suggestion had been raised in the Departmental SSC meeting, but no definite answer had been received yet. In response to that, RT said that timetabling in the DoLS had been particularly challenging due to the high number of students admitted this year so it would be really difficult to add any extra sessions next term. However, he suggested raising this issue directly with the Department.

### **Mathematics**

DE (DUGS, Maths) reported the following matters:

- Y2 students had suggested that signposting by lecturers on what should be done when in terms of programme content would be appreciated.
- The department runs Q&A sessions via MS Teams so hopefully this is useful too.

### **Physics**

Yuqing Wu (Physics Dep Rep) reported the following matters:

- The style of multi-mode teaching varies between lectures.
- The major concern is that there is not enough interaction between students. For example students do not switch their cameras on or do not ask questions during sessions which makes it very difficult to have any interaction.
- In general, students benefit much more from attending in-person sessions than those who study remotely.

Yasmin Andrews, (Physics SLO) reported that the comments about loneliness had been mainly raised in Y2 as students feel more isolated. Remote teaching and learning should be reviewed from the isolation point of view and adjustments should be made if possible.

Inkeri Hibbins (Maths SLO) added that in order to address the loneliness issue, Maths lecturers in Y3 and Y4 had been encouraged to use 'Piazza', a learning management system which allows students to ask questions in a forum-type format.

## **7. Chair's business**

There were no issues discussed.

## **8. Minutes of Departmental Student Staff Committee Meetings**

The committee noted the following minutes of Departmental Student Staff Committee Meetings:

- 8.1 **Physics** – SSC meeting Minutes June 2020
- 8.2 **Chemistry** - UG Student Experience Committee - 4th Nov 2020
- 8.3 **Mathematics** - Departmental SSC Meeting – 4th Nov 2020

## 9. Any other business

- **Staff representation at Faculty SSCs**

On behalf of some departments, RT raised the matter of staff representation at Faculty SSCs. Currently, DUGS are required to attend the SSC. SLOs also attend but are not formal members of the committee. However, some departments have questioned whether it was necessary to have the DUGS from the departments present at these meetings. They argue that since there are Faculty level issues that come up at the Faculty SSCs, it is not necessary to obtain responses from individual departments because any local issues in departments will already have been dealt with in the departmental SSCs.

CP (DUGS, Physics) noted his view that committees need to be kept small to be effective. Overlarge meetings result in members not contributing or even not attending.

DG commented that from the students' point of view, it is important that senior academic/departmental staff members attend these meetings, as it should be in their best interests to ensure that issues are solved. The SLOs can feed back any issues as well, but DUGS might have the best overview of the matters in their department.

Isabelle Zhang and Michaela Flegrova agreed that it is important to have a senior academic staff member, but not necessarily the DUGS.

RM commented that the SSC meetings should be attended by certain key people who are reasonably senior members. She added that it is not only Faculty-level issues that are discussed, departmental issues are often raised where reps felt that they had not been responded to effectively and needed to be escalated, or when they might apply across departments.

RT commented that it is important that there are senior members present at this meeting so they can comment and raise issues in their departments. If it is not DUGS then an equivalent staff member should attend these meetings.

DE (DUGS, Maths) commented that it is important to avoid duplication- often the same issues are discussed in the Dep SSC and the Faculty SSC meetings. He felt that it would be useful to have a DUGS in attendance, but it is not necessary and that the Maths SLO would be a suitable alternative. Some staff members are also hugely involved in examinations in June and will not be able to attend the last UG Academic SSC meeting. He added that there should be a better procedure to escalate issues than a 90-min meeting.

RM and RT will pass the comments back to the Heads of Department, Dean and FOO. It will be also identified who should attend these meetings instead of DUGS.

***ACTION 2: RM and RT to pass the comments on staff representation at Faculty SSCs to HoDS, Dean and FOO.***



- **Double blind marking**

RT reported that it is the College’s policy to have one person marking the exam papers and the second person to moderate the marks to keep the quality control. This is a better solution than having two independent markers.

**Post-meeting notes:**

Huw Williams (DUGS, DoLS) sent the following comments:

1. *Production of module/exam reports:*

*This has not been a policy in DoLS, but it was agreed at our last Teaching Committee that Year 1 and Year 2 convenors will be asked to do this with immediate effect.*

2. *Double blind marking (DBM):*

*We are not prepared to introduce this and I am happy to provide detailed reasons why if that would be helpful. The reasons have been explained to DoLS reps at the last dept SSC.*

3. *PT training:*

*Some of our staff would strongly recommend the excellent Personal Tutor training course run by the EDU. I am not certain what their capacity is and whether making it more widely available to faculty staff would be feasible.*

4. *Practical class experiences for remote students:*

*I understand that poor practical class experience of some remote students was raised. Staff have worked hard to provide a meaningful experience for remote students, but it is not the real thing. We have run many of our labs with remote students buddying with an in-lab student with whom they are in video contact via an iPad; this has worked better for some practicals than others, and we are learning from our experience and tweaking aspects. We are very open to specific practical suggestions for improvement from our students in the light of this term’s experience to date. We had a debriefing meetings with academic staff on multimode teaching earlier this week, where we shared good practice ahead of the second half of term and it is hoped that staff and students will benefit from this.*

*Most labs are closely integrated with the lecture components of their modules and we are unlikely to run labs in full again for returning students. We will keep open the option of running practical skills sessions later in the year, either independent of or linked to our summer term teaching, which is practically and coursework focused for Y1 and Y2, assuming we are all back on campus by May. There is nothing to be gained from scheduling these now given the ongoing uncertainty.*

5. *DUGS attendance at faculty SSC: I gather this was raised, presumably prompted by my absence. In the past when I have not been able to attend then one of our senior tutor’s has attended and reported back, and this has worked fine, and Steve did a fine job this time. I hope that this is acceptable, especially in current circumstances.*

**10. Dates of Future Meetings:**

Committee	Date	Time	Call for Papers	Paper Deadline
UG Academic Student Staff Committee	Weds 17/03/2021	12.30- 14.00	03/03/2021	10/03/2021
UG Academic Student Staff Committee	Weds 16/06/2021	12.30- 14.00	02/06/2021	09/06/2021