

Imperial College London

Faculty of Natural Sciences Undergraduate Academic Student Staff Committee

Date: 17 March 2021

Time: 13.00 - 14.30

Location: via Teams

MINUTES

Present:

Forename	Surname	Title
Yasmin	Andrew (YA)	Physics - Student Liaison Officer
Amelia	Barron (AB)	Chemistry - Student Experience Officer
Nicolas	Barykin Pankevich (NBP)	Maths Dep Rep
Maria-Ileana	Borc (MIB)	RCSU Vice President (Welfare & Wellbeing)
Carlos	Cardoso Correia Perello (CCCP)	Mathematics: Year One Academic Representative
Sean	Collins	Biological Sciences: Year One Academic Representative
Steve	Connolly (SC)	LS - Undergraduate Liaison Officer
David	Evans (DE)	DUGS - Maths
Stefano	Fiocca (SF)	Physics: Year One Academic Representative
Michaela	Flegrova (MF)	ICU Deputy President (Education)
Daniyar	Ghani (DG)	Chair, RCSU Vice President (Education)
Inkeri	Hibbins (IH)	Maths - Undergraduate Liaison Officer
Nazia	Hirjee (NH)	FOO
Kasia	Kmieckowiak (KK)	FoNS Administrative Assistant
Chaelin	Lee	Biochemistry: Year One Academic Representative
Tony	Lin (TL)	Mathematics: Year One Academic Representative
Andres	Martin Diaz (AMD)	Chemistry Dep Rep
Rebecca	Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager
Carl	Paterson (CP)	DUGS - Physics
Amir	Rahman	Mathematics: Year Two Academic Representative
John	Seddon (JS)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Richard	Thompson (RT)	Vice-Dean (Education)
Tianyu	Wen (TW)	Biochemistry: Year Two Academic Representative
Huw	Williams (HW)	DUGS - LS
Yuqing	Wu	Physics Dep Rep
Priscilla	Yip	Mathematics: Year Two Academic Representative
Jeong	Yoon (JY)	Biology Dep Rep
Sachin	Yuvaraj Dinesh Babu	Biological Sciences: Year One Academic Representative
Isabelle	Zhang (IZ)	Biochemistry Dep Rep

Apologies:

Donald	Craig	DUGS - Chemistry
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1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all and apologies as above were accepted.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2021

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting held on 11th November.

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

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and AMD (Chemistry Dep Rep) reported the key matters.

4.2 Life Sciences – Biochemistry

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and IZ (Biochemistry Dep Rep) reported the key matters. Additional comments were made regarding the following matters:

- The Equality, diversity and inclusion committee had been meeting and one of the actions had been to add discussions specifically around EDI as an agenda item to the departmental SSCs.
- The plans for teaching, particularly lab-based activities in the summer term had been discussed at the Departmental SSC as many students had not had any labs for 12 months.
- DG asked AMD to comment on the lab arrangements in the Department of Chemistry. AMD explained that projects were normally meant to be conducted during 5 weeks in the autumn term and 10 weeks in the spring term. However, due to restrictions, students had been asked to work in a cohort model consequently reducing lab work by 50%. Therefore, the staff arranged lab sessions for an extra week during Easter, allowing students to continue their lab work through the summer term. DG suggested that the same arrangements could be made in DoLS. RT noted that extending the summer term could potentially put constraints on timetabling. RT also queried the lack of lab work in the last 12 months. IZ explained that it depends on the year of study and a module. Some final years had been able to attend the labs three times in the autumn term. Y1 and Y2 students had raised concerns about not gaining all of the essential lab skills. HW reported that:
 - DoLS lab sessions in Y1 and Y2 during the autumn term had been run as much as it had been possible.
 - In final years, the labs in the autumn term had been offered where they would have been normally offered, except the computational modules that do not require labs.
 - In the summer term, Y1 and Y2 are completely lab based and the plan is to run them as the full practical modules with some modifications.
 - With regards to final years, students are integrated into research labs.
 - All the arrangements depend on whether social distancing is still in place during the summer term. The final decision will be passed to students and staff as well as the Faculty Safety Team.

4.3 Life Sciences - Biological Sciences

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and JY (Biological Sciences Dep Rep) reported the key matters. Additional comments were made regarding EDI. RM confirmed that the Faculty will be providing EDI related training to student and staff. Currently, various types of courses are being investigated and it is hoped to roll this out for all students from academic year 2021/22. The training will cover aspects such as active bystander, bullying and harassment, sexual consent etc. There are a number of external providers which are being looked at. The HR Team is also planning to provide similar training for staff.

4.4 Mathematics

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and NBP (the Mathematics Dep Rep) reported the key matters. Additional comments were made regarding:

- Involving students in the Maths teaching staff recruitment process - this initiative had been created as part of the Department of Mathematics NSS action plan. A number of students had expressed that staff seem distant from students and do not provide adequate pastoral support. DG agreed this is a very good idea and encouraged other departments to introduce the same process.
- Collecting information about topics to be included in the entrance exam which are problematic for foreign students in order to create appropriate resources to aid preparation (as MAT is designed around A-levels). This survey had been sent to students who applied to the Department of Mathematics this year.

4.5 Physics

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and YW, the Mathematics Dep Rep, reported the key matters. Additional comments were made regarding the TRA questions:

- YW reported that the issue of increased exam difficulty had been discussed with the department. Staff had confirmed that it was not the intention to make the open book TRAs more difficult than previous years' exams.
- CP added that the questions had been altered to match the open book format, therefore students can expect more problem-based questions rather than factual recall questions. It is expected that the distribution of marks will remain the same.
- RT added that there is no intention to make exams more difficult, but the balance between the recall questions and problem solving questions must shift hence this is different to what some students may be accustomed to, and might be perceived as more challenging.
- MF commented that it is very important to provide students with practice questions and to ensure that these are similar to those used in the TRAs. Some students had expressed that the practice questions had been testing different skills during January TRAs and had a different style.
- SF, Physics Student Rep, added that students had felt the questions at the January TRAs had been much more difficult.

5. Standing Items

5.1 Curriculum Review (CR)

DG asked the student reps and staff to provide comments on the CR process in their departments:

The following comments were made:

- **Chemistry:**

AB reported that the implementation of CR is going well. The new modules which had been put in place, are being reviewed. As part of the transition process, all of the revision or study skills are being mapped to identify any repetitions or gaps and to ensure that all the goals had been implemented successfully.

AMD added that the staff had ensured that students' feedback had been considered throughout the CR process.

- **Biochemistry:**

SC, DoLS UG Liaison Officer, reported that:

- Y1 – had one iteration of CR which had gone well.
- Y2 – the first iteration will take place this summer term which is all coursework based.

- **Biological Sciences:**

JY reported that:

- Y2 – the convener had sent a feedback survey on the new curriculum which had been well promoted. The results will be made available in the following week.

- Y1 – possibly a similar survey will be sent soon to Y1 students.
 - Y3 – there are ongoing discussions regarding CR which will commence in the summer.
- **Mathematics:**
 - NBP reported that the CR implementation goes well in the Department of Mathematics. There had been some problems with elective modules in Y2, but this should be resolved soon.
 - DE added that staff would try to collect comments from students about the CR implementation. With regards to Y2, more electives had been introduced and this is the first year when students could choose electives. Some of them had chosen all four electives in the spring term which had been overwhelming. There had been some issues identified around balancing the elective choices.
 - IH added that a number of i-Explore modules had been concentrated in spring term, when most of Y2 students would choose their optional modules. She had raised this issue with i-Explore team and asked if they could provide more options in autumn term (particularly the STEM modules) to spread the optional modules evenly between the two terms.
 - **Physics:**

CP reported that:

 - The CR implementation is progressing well.
 - The pandemic forced the department to work at a greater pace on development of mixed mode learning.
 - The following activities are still ongoing: pedagogy transformation (looking at differential gaps in attainment between different demographic groups), redeveloping pedagogy (active learning such as developing demonstrations in the class had been put on hold due to pandemic).

5.2 Feedback on Assessment

YW, Physics Dep Rep, said that students in her year experienced small delays with receiving lab reports. In addition, feedback on some elements of the Quantum Physics module had been delayed by several weeks. CP reported that there had been delays with marking due to severe illness of one of the two markers.

5.3 NSS Action Plans

The following key matters had been reported as part of the NSS Action Plans:

- **Chemistry** – AMD reported that the lab report feedback had been improved after the conversation with the Department and the lab leader.
- **Biochemistry** – IZ reported that the action related to the assessment feedback should be in progress now. It related to module convenors who would be creating a report after exams, discussing strengths and weaknesses of answers.
- **Biological Sciences** – YJ reported that the progress on improving the consistency of Personal Tutor support will be discussed further with the Student Wellbeing Dep Rep and the Student Liaison Officer.
- **Mathematics** – NBP reported that most of the NSS Action Plan items had been noted in the report document. IH clarified the point about the collaborative Master's projects which had been approved at the Departmental Teaching Committee. The department had been investigating whether 2-3 students could work on the same topic together, but it will be still an independent project for each of them. DE added that further information on this idea will be circulated to project coordinators. Also, staff will decide whether they want to implement it.
- **Physics** – YW reported that discussions had been made on improving the lab work, as this is the main component of person to person interaction for Physics students.

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

The following comments were made:

- TL (Y1 Maths Student Rep) queried whether direct channels could be made available between students and lecturers to pass feedback anonymously and if minutes of Departmental SSC meetings could be shared with staff in the department. IH clarified that Student Year Reps should feedback any issues directly to relevant staff members. IH also circulates any feedback received to specific staff members. She added that the Departmental SSC minutes are available on the Maths Blackboard Central, which can be accessed by both staff and students.
- CCCP asked if at least some parts of multi-mode learning will be retained in the next academic year. In response to that, RT said that this is being discussed at the College level and across departments. Since a large amount of online teaching material had been prepared over the past year, it is very likely it will be reused in the next academic year, where appropriate. However, it is planned to increase the amount of face to face teaching, as long as government restrictions allow. Teaching of large groups of students in Lecture Theatres may not continue, but this can be conducted online and be replaced with in-person activities arranged in small groups. The aim is to provide an improved teaching and learning experience, using lessons learnt over the past year. However, the College also needs to prepare for the possibility of a fourth wave of the pandemic, in which case in-person teaching may need to be replaced with online.

7. Chair's business

DG asked the committee to comment on the preparation of students for the open book TRAs and the support received from the departments:

- **Chemistry** – AB, Chemistry SEO, reported the following:
 - All students had had one trial for TRA's and this academic year a trial run had been available for those who had not have one before e.g. year 1 students.
 - Practice folders had been available on Blackboard all the time for students to practice uploading answers (still available now to practice with).
 - Key reminders had been sent out two to three times dependent on year group prior to the exam including key links and information.
 - First years had had two drop-in sessions with the Exams Officer to ask anything.
 - First years had received an 'Introduction to Exams' booklet before the January exam.
 - All modules have at least one past paper for students to use and this had been just changed to a minimum of three past papers to be in place before the start of term 3.
 - All year groups have a one to one personal tutorial in February to discuss their exam technique or coursework feedback from the January exam. They are also offered this in the Summer, but uptake is low as this is during the break.
 - Years 1 – 3 have a one to one personal tutorial in November to discuss revision skills and preparation for January exams.
 - Students had asked for additional specific revision strategies to be included in the personal tutorial topics that are emailed the day before tutorials, for tutors to discuss for the remainder of this academic year and future years.
 - DSA one to one study efficiency sessions to students had been regularly promoted.
 - Study skills had been discussed in Year Group Meetings for Year 1 – 3.
 - Year 1 have a lecture on how learning happens and active learning opportunities in the first term.
 - As part of work on transitions the department is mapping where and how study / revision skills are introduced to identify where improvements can be made and to ensure they are embedded into the curriculum.
- **Life Sciences – Biological Sciences & Biochemistry**
JY reported the following matters:

- Exam practice sessions had been provided in the last summer term when the first TRAs had started and also for industrial placement students and the year abroad students who came back.
 - There had been sessions provided on the scanning and uploading of documents during exams for Y1 students in Autumn term.
 - Students had also received a detailed Exam Guidance document on the remote examinations.
- **Mathematics**
IH reported the following:
 - The department always sends the marking criteria to students.
 - Information had been sent to students about the changes made as a result of changing the format of the exams to open book.
 - In terms of revision, IH runs a session on that for Y1 in December.
 - There are peer tutorials outlining revision tips and giving students the opportunity to ask questions.
 - Fun social revision quiz will be run for Y1 in the following week.

SC added that the DoLS offers the peer assisted study skills which are very good. The problem is the lack of engagement from students. The sessions are run by students to students and only 20 attend out of 150. In response to that, TW (Biochemistry Student Rep) said that if the first session is not very good, it can discourage students from attending subsequent sessions. Perhaps more training for peer mentors should be provided. SC commented that it would be very useful to receive feedback as this is the only way to make improvements.

- **Physics**
Yasmin Andrews, (Physics SLO) reported that:
 - The Department is conducting trials of the Timed Remote Assessments.
 - Mock papers for each of the exams will be available, so that the new formats this year are clear.
 - The Head of Year 1 had given talk on Revision Skills in Term 1.
 - Y1 students have the opportunity to go through January exam for exam technique in personal tutorials.
 - Y2, Y3 and Y4 students can discuss exam preparation and technique in personal tutorials at the end of Term 2.
 - All physics students can make an appointment with YA and/or with DAS for study skills support.
 - Physics helpdesks run twice a week, can offer help with exam preparation and technique.
 - Y2 Student Representatives had set up their own study groups platforms for Y2 students.
 - Y2 students have asked their Head of Year for a revision skills talk. The staff are trying to set that up for last week of term.
 - Y3 and Y4 have revision lectures in Term 3.

8. Minutes of Departmental Student Staff Committee Meetings

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

8.1 Maths – SSC meeting Minutes 27th Jan 2021

9. Any other business

MIB asked if the departments provide mock exam papers and who is encouraging the departments to distribute them. The following comments were made:

- **Physics** - RT said that in Physics he was told by the DUGS and the Exam Coordinator to produce mock papers and upload them on Blackboard. If the practice papers are not made available, this is then chased by the Exam Coordinator.
- **Chemistry** - AB reported the Exam Officer is working with the DUGS and the HoOT. Any issues with mock papers would be chased by the Exam Officer.
- **Mathematics** – IH reported that DE had sent an email to staff to provide revision material. The Mathematics staff is not required to provide mock papers as it can give false guidance. Instead, revision guidelines are made available.

MIB asked how long in advance the mock papers will be provided to students:

- RT reported that Physics mock papers will be available by end of this term and this will be communicated to students.
- SC reported that most of the DoLS past papers are on Blackboard. The past papers had been passed to mentors in the peer assisted study skills. JY reported that past papers had been provided in the last two years for all modules; some module convenors provide week revision session at the end of module and others provided bullet point guided answers which are very helpful for students to structure the exam answers. In DoLS, the exams are mainly essay based hence guidelines on the open book exam format had not been provided.

10. Dates of Future Meetings:

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