

Faculty of Natural Sciences Undergraduate Student Staff Committee

Date: Wednesday 13 March 2019

Time: 12.30-14.00

Location: HXLY 341

MINUTES

Present:

Donald Craig (DC)	DUGS Chemistry
David Evans (DE)	DUGS Mathematics
Robert Forsyth (RF)	DUGS Physics
Kasia Kmiecowskiak	FoNS Administrative Assistant
Emma McCoy (EMcC)	Co-Chair & vice-Dean (Education) FoNS
Rebecca Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager
Stuart Haslam (SH)	Senior Tutor, Life Sciences
Yuan Chen	Chemistry- Year 1 Rep
Michaela Flegrova (MF)	RCSU Vice President (Education)
Lorenz Hoffmann (LH)	Chemistry - UG Departmental Representative
Theana Johnson	Life Sciences- Biochemistry - Year 3 Rep
Timothy Marley (TM)	Physics - UG Departmental Representative
Rohan Mehta	Life Sciences- Biochemistry - Year 2 Rep
Alexandra Mihailescu	Physics - Year 3 Rep
Albert Muljono (AM)	Life Sciences- Biology - UG Departmental Representative
Mika Smith	Physics - Year 2 Rep
Mark Thomas	Physics - Year 3 Rep
Alix Vermeulen (AV)	Maths - Year 1 Rep
Isabelle Zhang	Life Sciences- Biochemistry - Year 1 Rep

Apologies:

John Seddon	Faculty Senior Tutor
Huw Williams	DUGS Life Sciences
Isabelle Esain-Garcia	Life Sciences - UG Departmental Representative
Shervin Sabeghi	RCSU Vice President (Welfare & Wellbeing)

1. Welcome and Apologies

MF welcomed the attendees to the meeting and apologies, as above, were noted.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2018

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Review of Actions

The action tracker was reviewed and the following completed/ updated actions noted:

2017/18

Actions 6 and **11** were noted as complete.

2018/19

Action 1 – DC asked the DUGS how their departments manage to have longer periods of time between results being released and the resits for those students who fail:

- **Physics** – RF reported that the re-sits take place end of August and the exam board meets one week later.
- **Life Sciences** – SH reported the period between results and resits is approximately 5 to 6 weeks; the re-sits take place end of August and the decision is taken as soon as possible.
- **Maths** – DE reported that the exam board meets end of June, re-sits take place end of August and the results are released around 20th of September. He added that the Department of Mathematics deals with the visas via other means.

ACTION: RM to collect the comments on re-sits from DUGS and to share it as a good practice.

4. Reports from Department Student Representatives:

4.1 Chemistry

LH reported the following:

- There are issues with boarding the Shuttle bus by students who need to travel between South Kensington and White City campuses to attend lectures or labs as there is not enough space at peak times. The 4th year Rep who is working on this issue, had established that generally six people are left out in the first three journeys of the day. Department representative had suggested that perhaps another smaller shuttle bus should be added. In response to that, RM said that this issue had been raised at the faculty level and there are ongoing discussions taking place to resolve this problem. EC added that the GradPad residents think that if they had been provided with the accommodation, the College should also provide the transport. She stressed that the shuttle bus had been provided for work purposes and not as a commuter bus for students living in the GradPad.

ACTION: LH to send the data regarding the shuttle bus to RM and RM to pass on to the Faculty Operations Officer.

- The study space and computer room in White City had been made available, with positive feedback from students.
- The idea of going paperless at the Department of Chemistry had generally received a positive feedback.

4.2 Life Sciences- Biochemistry

AM briefly outlined several matters:

- The department, with the support of the RCSU, had made strides on a new common room for Life Sciences students. The works would possibly start at the beginning of the summer and finish by the next academic year (July/August 2020).
- Modules for third years should be more coordinated to end at the same time, as there is disparity amongst end dates.
- A point to collect feedback from Erasmus students had been arranged in order to gauge how they are doing/fitting in at Imperial.

4.3 Life Sciences – Biological Sciences

The Life sciences Dep Rep sent the following report:

FIRST YEAR

- Communication – Y1 students are not willing to fill out surveys due to the amount and the open-ended nature of the questions. In students' opinion, the open-ended questions are considered as not approachable and could be a major limiting factor for the number of responses in surveys. Therefore, the MCQs are preferable, and first year academic reps will adapt the type of questions when sending out future surveys.
- Exam revision – high number of attendants in revision lectures had been observed. First year academic representatives noted that topics such as feedback, career choices and mental health, which are considered of high relevance, could be scheduled for after exams period, and strictly cover course content in the revision lectures. It had been suggested to

upload to blackboard the material that would be covered in revision lectures. In addition, the mock exam practice and practice papers had been extremely successful and students had commented that it would also be convenient for them to have more self-testing resources on blackboard.

- General feedback – Y1 students who attended Peer-Assisted Learning sessions had found them useful and essential. However, the attendance had been low, hence academic reps will be encouraging more students to attend. He added that students had mentioned the importance of the detailed and concise feedback on coursework as it helps them to improve for future assignments.

SECOND YEAR

- Timing - Y2 students find the timing of coursework submission extremely challenging which in some cases, had been affecting the mental health and the academic performance of the students. There is a very big step between first and second year, especially in terms of coursework and practicals overload. The department noted that stress levels in second year are expected to be higher than in first year but that the academic content cannot be sacrificed. To partially resolve this issue, Wellbeing Representatives are organising several events to improve students' mental health.

FINAL YEAR

- Final year students are overall extremely happy with the modules content and quality of teaching. A few suggestions were done to improve the internal organization of few specific modules, and students were highly encouraged to express their opinions in SOLE for improvement for future years.
- Final year projects have just started and everyone is enjoying their topics of research (literature/lab). No concerns had been reported to final year reps regarding the final year project allocations.
- Students appreciate the organisation of career events by the department (eg. Postgraduate study talk).

DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

- Incentives for NSS survey completion and finalised paperwork for Curriculum Review had been discussed with the DUGS and Biological Sciences Departmental Academic Representative.
- Feedback had been collected not only from Imperial-based students but also from students currently doing their year abroad/industry or Erasmus in the department. Their opinion is being taken into account in the Student Staff Committee Meeting and they are highly satisfied with the support they are receiving from the department while performing their years in industry/abroad/Erasmus.
- A solution has been finally found for the Life Sciences Common Room situation and the department is currently sorting out the details at College level.
- FoNS Prizes for Excellence are currently being discussed and the list of nominees would be soon presented to the department.

4.4 Mathematics

AV reported the ongoing issue with regards to the lack of microwaves and confirmed that students had been told it was not possible to put a microwave in the Maths common room due to ventilation/ health and safety issues- although mixed messages have been received on this. She reported that it had been suggested to place a microwave for Maths students in the SAF building but this would be too far away. There had been also plans to provide microwaves in the Senior Common Room, but the committee agreed that this would not be practical due to a large number of students in the SCR during lunchtime. MF added, that if the microwaves were provided in the SCR, the ICU would need to arrange cleaning. Considering that other departments have microwaves in their buildings, RM will investigate the reasons of not permitting the microwaves in the Huxley building.

On a slightly different note, the Dep Reps asked about the pizza vending machine. In response to that, TM said that this proposal was almost withdrawn due to the high financial risk, but at present, there are still plans to go ahead with installation of such machines.

4.5 Physics

The Physics Dep Rep reported the following:

- Curriculum Review: Sessions were held in Level 8 Common Room asking staff and students to rank the learning outcomes of courses.
- Lecture Theatre 2 refurbishment: Schematic was approved on Thursday 7th March. Student Reps visited the University of Leeds on 6th March to view the teaching rooms there and decide on the best effectiveness of the layout proposed in Blackett building. TM said that in general the rooms in Leeds are well designed. Their layout could be well used for both group work as well as for more didactic teaching. However, some concerns had been raised such as lack of blackboards/whiteboards, some desks were facing the wall and some seats did not have desks.
- Furniture: Spaces on level 1, 2 and 3 are being updated. He had visited the Orange Box showroom and tested furniture to make better use of the student space in Blackett. The level 1 furniture had been thrown into flux due to the lecture theatre refurbishment.
- Computing Suite: The Blackett computing suite is being renovated in the summer. The suite will now (hopefully) include more seats, bookable booths, and break-out space.
- Python on Problem Sheets: Lloyd James proposed a Student Shapers program to include python-based questions on problem sheets. This was well received, but caution should be taken when setting the number.
- SOLE response: was largely very low. Students would like to completely switch to Qualtrics and subject-specific surveys doable in-lecture. EMcC reported that this had been reported at the recent Faculty Education Committee and work on updating the SOLE is underway.
- Wellbeing Week Breakfasts: Simon Bland had lead the charge on organising breakfasts during the departmental Wellbeing Week. Students could also participate in yoga and meditation sessions.

5. Standing Items

5.1 Curriculum Review (CR)

RM reported that the CR paperwork for all undergraduate programmes had been approved by the Faculty Education Committee and had been sent for approval to the Programmes Committee which meets on 26 March. Once approved, the paper work will be considered at the QAEC meeting on 10 April. DE added that some regulation issues that might affect students still need to be resolved.

5.2 Feedback on Assessment

The Chemistry Dep Rep noted that a number of students receive their feedback with a delay. The Physics Dep Rep reported that often 99% of the coursework is being marked on time and only 1% is not. Consequently the coursework can't be returned to the rest of the cohort. MF said that majority of students would appreciate if they were informed about delays in receiving the assessment feedback. In response to that, EMcC said that all departments have an assessment feedback turnaround monitoring system in place and added that quality of the feedback is most important and that sometimes it is challenging to provide constructive feedback within set deadlines, depending on the piece of work in question.

5.3 NSS Action Plans

RF reported that various events are being organised for Physics students (including MRes) as part of the NSS Action Plan. The Physics Dep Rep added that the department will provide breakfast for students during exam sessions.

DE reported that the Department of Mathematics is organising 'Outduction' sessions for final year students. In addition, the department ensures the transparency about the exam setting and scaling and the staff is open to explain various aspects of the examination process to students.

6. Chair's Business

- FoNS RCSU survey – MF tabled the RCSU Survey results. She reported that the response rate had been high (~800 responses). The questions had been similar to the NSS and the results shown that the students’ satisfaction expressed in both surveys is comparable. . The committee would not recommend conducting such survey each year, but suggested reducing the number of questions and keeping the free text option. RM noted that from her experience the comments made in the free text are most helpful when analysing survey results. They are all carefully scrutinised and form a basis for taking actions and making improvements.
- I-Explore update - MF briefly explained that the I-Explore Modules would consist of a broad range of cross-College modules grouped into four categories, two of which already exist (but which would be expanded), and two of which are entirely new. These would include Horizons Modules. All I-Explore Modules will be offered for degree credit attracting 5 ECTS, except languages that remained at 7.5 ECTS. More details about the I-Explore can be found here:
<https://wwwf.imperial.ac.uk/blog/learning-and-teaching-strategy/2018/08/29/developing-i-explore-modules/>
- Annual Monitoring Reports - MF reported that last year, students were not clear where the Annual Monitoring Reports had been published. Since this is still an issue, RM will contact DUGS and find out whether they shared the UG Annual Monitoring Reports via Balckboard or other online media and ensures that DUGS contact the Student Reps and let them know the exact online location of the reports.
ACTION: RM to contact DUGS and find out whether they shared the UG Annual Monitoring Reports via Balckboard or other online media and ensures that DUGS contact the Student Reps and let them know the exact online location of the reports.
- Microwaves in common areas – see item 6.4

7. AOB

EC reported that Albert Muljono will take over her role as the RCSU Vice President (Education) in the next academic year.

8. Dates of Future Meetings:

FoNS/ College	Committee	Date	Time	Room
FoNS	UG Academic Student Staff Committee	Monday 24/06/19	12.30- 14.00	TBC