

Faculty of Natural Sciences Undergraduate Wellbeing Student Staff Committee

Date: 18th November 2020

Time: 12.30 – 14.00

Location: via Teams

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies

Present:

Yasmin	Andrew (YA)	Physics - Student Liaison Officer
Amelia	Barron	Chemistry - Student Experience Officer
Stephen	Brickley (SB)	Life Sciences Senior Tutor
Steve	Connolly (SC)	Life Sciences UG Liaison Officer
Chris	Ford (CF)	Maths Senior Tutor
Stuart	Haslam (SH)	Life Sciences Senior Tutor
Kasia	Kmieckowiak (KK)	FoNS Administrative Assistant
Richard	Thompson (RT)	Vice-Dean (Education)
Rebecca	Middleton (RM)	Faculty Education Manager
Hannah	Armstrong	Management Trainee
Ingo	Mueller-Wodarg (IMW)	Physics Senior Tutor
John	Seddon (JS)	Faculty Senior Tutor
Ella	Robson (ER)	Student Experience Coordinator, Maths
Daniyar	Ghani	RCSU Vice President (Education)
Maria-Ileana	Borc (MIB)	Chair and RCSU Vice President (Welfare & Wellbeing)
Shervin	Sabeghi (SS)	ICU Deputy President (Welfare)
Anthea	MacIntosh-LaRocque (AML)	Physics Wellbeing Dep Rep
Nick	Bitterlich (NB)	Biochemistry Wellbeing Dep Rep
Francesca	Wittmann (FW)	Chemistry Wellbeing Dep Rep
Hugo	Chu (HCh)	Maths Wellbeing Dep Rep
Yuan	Chen	Chemistry: Year Four Wellbeing Representative
Aurora	Song	Biological Sciences: Year One Wellbeing Representative
Kauthar	Benriassa	Biological Sciences: Year Two Wellbeing Representative
Kamil	Bobrowski	Mathematics: Year Three Wellbeing Representative
Marusha	Filippova	Physics: Year Two Wellbeing Representative
Rahul	Gupta	Physics: Year Four Wellbeing Representative
Sumithra	Shankar	Biochemistry: Year One Wellbeing Representative
Pansy	Pan	Biochemistry: Year Two Wellbeing Representative
Paniz	Dogaheh	Biological Sciences: Year 3 Wellbeing Representative

Apologies:

Silke	Nodwell	Mathematics: Year Four Wellbeing Representative
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Maria-Ileana Borc, the Chair and RCSU Vice President (Welfare & Wellbeing), welcomed all and apologies as above were accepted.

2. Staff Student Committee Guidelines

The committee noted the [Staff Student Committee Guidelines](#).

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 10th June 2020

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting held on 10th June. MIB drew committee's attention to the 'Terms of Reference' document available in the Teams chat.

MIB 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.

4. Matters arising from the minutes and Review of Action Tracker

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

Action 10 related to wellbeing support needed at the Department and Faculty level which will be discussed by MIB, JS and RM outside of the meeting.

5. Reports from Department Student Representatives:

5.1 Chemistry

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and Francesca Wittmann (Chemistry Wellbeing Dep Rep), reported the key matters.

5.2 Life Sciences- Biochemistry

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and Nick Bitterlich (Biochemistry Wellbeing Dep Rep), reported the key matters.

Additional comments were made regarding some of the key survey results. A negative trend had been observed as students progressed from Y1 to Y3 in relation to satisfaction with the healthy work-life balance provided by the College. This will be discussed further with academics to address this issue.

5.3 Life Sciences- Biological Sciences

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and Paniz Dogaher (Biological Sciences Wellbeing Dep Rep), reported the key matters.

Additional comments were made regarding increasing visibility of wellbeing contacts within the department. Student Reps had designed a slide with all the relevant information to be put at the beginning of lectures. This should help students to reach out for help if needed. SB will check if the slides had been displayed.

ACTION 1: SB to check if the slides with wellbeing contacts are being displayed at the beginning of lectures.

5.4 Mathematics

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and Hugo Chu (Maths Wellbeing Dep Rep) reported the key matters.

Additional comments were made regarding surveys and focus groups being conducted among Y2 students, concentrating on their wellbeing as well as the quality of the support provided. As a result, the Department plans to review the Personal tutorial system. CF reported that the Department is aiming at providing more pastoral care, especially in the current circumstances where students are experiencing increased levels of loneliness, stress or financial constraints. ER added that, the Department would also try to provide students with more guidance about the pastoral care that is available to them.

JS and IMW reported that in the Departments of Chemistry and Physics, Personal Tutors cover predominantly pastoral and wellbeing issues, rather than academic support. SB added that in DoLS largely pastoral issues are covered but some feedback on general essay writing, study practice and exam technique etc is also provided.

MIB suggested that it would be very helpful if a survey on Personal Tutorial system was conducted across departments. The results would show students' view on the current pastoral care and what improvements are needed.

5.5 Physics

The detailed report document was noted by the committee and Anthea MacIntosh-LaRocque (Physics Wellbeing Dep Rep) reported the key matters. Additional comments were regarding:

- Successful SSC meetings arranged by Student Year Reps. Any issues that had not been resolved at those meetings, had been discussed at the Departmental SSC meeting and this worked really well.
- Discussions of lab report submission process with Senior Tutor, Head of Labs, SLO, and DUGS to reduce pressure on students had been met with quite a lot of push-back. AML explained that students feel very stressed as they have to put loads of work in order to complete the lab reports. Consequently, they struggle to meet the set deadlines. The department had asked students to start the work on the lab reports earlier which had not had the desired result. The following comments were made:
 - IMW reported that staff had hoped that moving the deadlines earlier, students would realise they could spend less time on completing them. As this had not resolved the issue, he will discuss it further with the Head of Labs.
 - YA reported that students had been advised to compile references etc, earlier, as this could be done well in advance of the submission deadline. Possibly this message should be reinforced.
 - IMW added that he needed to check if the overall marks received for the lab reports are lower in the new curriculum. If not, he will identify if the weighting could be changed to reduce the stress among students. However, any changes to weighting would need to be approved by the various QA committees.
 - FW suggested that perhaps formative submissions could be required so students would start working on the lab reports early. The formative submissions could be then assessed by GTAs and their feedback would help students to finalise the lab report. The committee agreed with this suggestion.
 - YA commented that the theoretical part of the lab report should be written well in advance so students are better prepared before starting the experiments in labs. Staff should also avoid micromanaging students so they can develop a good time management skills.
 - SC said that providing students with project management skills might be more appropriate than time management. Perhaps this should be promoted via the Personal Tutors and other more informal systems.
 - RT did not agree with the idea of reducing the weighting as students should be able to judge how much time to spend on each part of the course based on weighting. However, students could be advised on how much time they should spend on writing up, for example.
 - MIB agreed that giving students timescale guidelines on completing particular piece of coursework would help, especially now when students do not see each other and have much less opportunity to discuss their coursework progress.

- SS suggested that Y2 and Y3 Student Reps could share examples of the lab reports so Y1 students are aware what it is expected from them.

6. Chair's business

MIB reported that the initial idea to run a 30 days of Wellbeing event within the department had evolved into the RCSU Wellbeing Challenge Scheme beginning on 16th November. The participants are encouraged to do various activities every day that have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. These include stretching exercises, arts and crafts, making a phone call to a friend etc., to eventually create a habit of looking after one's own wellbeing on a daily basis. Participants will be asked to upload their ideas and pictures of the activities on Padlet. MIB said that the SLOs could perhaps distribute information about this scheme within departments. The staff is also encouraged to take part in this scheme and to post pictures.

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

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

7.1 Chemistry - Undergraduate Student Experience Committee minutes - 4th Nov 2020 (Paper 7)

7.2 Physics - Staff Student Committee Meeting Minutes June 2020 (Paper 8)

8. Any other business

New Policies

- JS reported that a couple of key new student-related policies had been agreed at College level:
 - *Student Emergency Contact Policy* – it will allow contacting a named person chosen by a given student if the College had serious concerns about the student's mental wellbeing.
 - *Fitness to Study Policy* and a revised *Interruption of Studies Policy*

ACTION 2: RM to contact Registry with regards to 'Fitness to Study Policy' and 'Interruption of Studies Policy' and check when these will be circulated across the College.

Support over Christmas period

- JS reported that discussions are going on in College about what additional support needs to be put in place over the Christmas period both centrally and at departmental level. There had been some proposals being made such as arranging additional wellbeing support and social activities (online and in person if possible) for students who would stay in London over Christmas. A helpline is also being investigated, which students could use if they feel they needed mental health/wellbeing support.

Return to campus in January

- JS reported that there is no clear plan yet, with regards to the return to campus in January as it is not known what restrictions the government decides to put in place.
- RT reported that the College is planning a staggered return in January, so every department and years will start differently depending on the activities and requirements of a course. This would obviously depend on the imposed restrictions during January.
- IMW reported that the Department of Physics had asked Y1 students to return in January as the labs cannot be delivered remotely. This is to ensure the learning outcomes are met. He queried what the procedures are if students are unable to return to London due to travel restrictions, illness etc. In response to that, RT said that mitigating circumstances could be applied otherwise students should do their best to attend the labs in person in January.
- YA added that a number of students would have valid reasons not to want to come back. Many of them have to now fulfil caring responsibilities or take over their parents' business or are worried about catching Covid-19.
- JS and SH reported that the Department of Chemistry and DoLS had asked their students to come back on campus in January due to accreditation requirements. However, if a student has

a strong reason not to come back on campus after Christmas break, this will be dealt with on case by case basis.

9. Dates of Future Meetings:

Committee	Date	Time	Call for Papers	Paper Deadline
UG Wellbeing Student Staff Committee	Weds 10/03/2021	12.30-14.00	24/02/2021	03/03/2021
UG Wellbeing Student Staff Committee	Weds 09/06/2021	12.30-14.00	26/05/2021	02/06/2021