

**Faculty: FASS**

**Department: International Politics**

**Date/Time: 10 am, 7th May 2021**

**Reps in Attendance:** 1st year Rep – Jasneet Samrai; 2nd year Rep – Helena Eaton; 3rd year Rep - Olly Parry; Welsh Medium Rep – Aaron Jones; Joints Hons Rep – Ela Bozdag; International Students Rep – Jakub Klepek

**Staff in Attendance:** Lucy Taylor, Simon French, Tony Orme, Amy Goodwin (SU)

**Apologies/Absent:** Jack Parker (3rd year Rep), Nathan Anderson (2nd year Rep), Elin Royles

**Agenda**

1. **Previous Minutes:** Approved

2. **Matters arising from previous minutes:**

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| **Action Number:** | **Action:** | **Action Status and Outcome:** | **Whose Action:** |
| 1 | Yr. 1, pt. 1 – no volunteer came forward to replace Thomas Quine as 1st year Rep, so will try again next academic year | **recruit another Student Rep** | SSCC Chair |
| 2 | Yr. 1 pt. 4 – SU contacted and issue resolved | **completed** |  |
| 3 | Yr. 2, pt. 2 – PowerPoints now provided by module coordinator | **completed** |  |
| 3 | Yr.1, pt. 6 – issue of English language-only emails. See under Careers update |  |  |
| 4 | Yr. 3, pt. 6 – concerns over Student Support & Student Wellbeing – see further discussion under Chair’s Business |  |  |

1. **Library and Information Services**

3.1. Update from Simon French:

* Book returns are a priority at this time of year, please get in touch if you have any issues returning books to AU
* Click and Collect and the postal service are still running
* Due to essential maintenance, level E and F will be closed for several months, so no study spaces available. Instead, 150 study spaces have been made available elsewhere in the Hugh Owen building – messages have gone out to students
* SF still available to help with finding and accessing resources, e-resources, etc.

3.2. Student feedback:

* One student had to return home to study due to problems with booking study space in the library (high demand and lack of space) and poor internet in their accommodation

SF: alternative study spaces made available throughout HO building; would need to know where accommodation is located to address poor internet issue – system is constantly being upgraded

LT: students don’t always know who to contact to resolve issues

SF: any IT issues, contact – [is@aber.ac.uk](mailto:is@aber.ac.uk), 01970 622400, or Live Chat

Student Rep – will send general email with IS contact details

* Praise for SF for support with dissertation
* Room booking system worked well, esp. when extended to later in the evenings

LT: Please send thanks to whole library team, who have stepped up fantastically during the pandemic with a whole range of services and support, both IT and academic study-related

4. **Employability and Careers**

4.1. Careers Service review from Tony Orme:

* No. of webinars, guidance interviews, drop-ins, etc. has increased significantly; many more 1st and 2nd years engaging with Careers this year
* Service continues through the summer
* From September, probably a mix of online and in-person service
* Work experience placements and graduate jobs have been affected by Covid; Industrial Year programmes in Interpol have been problematic
* More employers have been brought in to do webinars, e.g. MoD, and several talks from AU alumni have been held. Further talks by Interpol graduates planned for the autumn term
* Gerry Hughes currently working on the Parliamentary Placement Scheme
* AberForward scheme extended to 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students, as well as last year’s graduates – 4-week work placements within AU for students with limited work experience
* Careers event planned for 7- 9 June, focused on bringing in employers e.g. Civil Service, funded by Welsh Gov. ‘Class of 21’

4.2. Student feedback:

* Final year students asked if they could contact Careers as normal

TO – guidance interviews will continue over the summer, dependent on demand – contact [careers@aber.ac.uk](mailto:careers@aber.ac.uk) or [awo@aber.ac.uk](mailto:awo@aber.ac.uk)

* Welsh medium Rep thanked Careers for support received

4.3. Bilingual emails: Item was raised at last SSCC concerning lack of Welsh translation for some emails from the Careers service. University policy is that all emails sent to all students should be translated, ideally using the two-column format with Welsh on the left. LT raised this issue with TO.

TO: Careers Service often receive emails about events at very short notice; it’s better to send the information out to students as an English-only email, following up with the Welsh language version once received back from Translation, than not send the information out at all. TO agreed that translation was desirable and would redouble efforts to supply translation.

TO: Welsh medium staff in the Careers Service are Morwenna Jeffrey, Anna McAdam and Siân Furlong-Davies.

Feedback on format of bilingual emails – 2 separate columns with Welsh on the left and English on the right is much clearer than having to scroll all the way down to the bottom of an email to try to find the information in English.

LT: Thanks to TO for all his hard work, energy and enthusiasm

5. **Students’ Union**

5.1: Amy Goodwin was invited to attend the SSCC and gave a brief update of SU services:

* SU comms has sometimes been difficult in the present circumstances, but work has taken place to improve services, advice, representation. The aim is to promote other SU activities such as charity support, sports, societies, volunteering – it’s not just about drinking in the SU bar
* Any feedback for improving Academic Rep training would be appreciated

5.2. Feedback:

* SU student advice line is very helpful
* Beneficial for SU rep to attend SSCC meeting to find out what happens, as this should feed back to improved Rep training. This suggestion warmly welcomed by AG.

6. **Student Matters**

**Year 1 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1** | Live lectures praised for keeping students on track with their studies – with uploaded recordings alone, people lose track easily  LT: noted increased attendance as well as a much better learning experience |  |  |
| **2** | No negative feedback – everyone is so relieved and glad to be back in Aber, finally getting to meet each other  LT: next year crucial for current 1st years to get to know each other and departmental staff | Organise 2nd year and whole dept events for September | Dept |
| **3** | In-person teaching is so much better than online |  |  |
| **4** | International student requested online only seminars, rather than ½ online, ½ in-person |  |  |
| **5** | Joint Hons Rep:  Very little feedback as students focused on exams and assignments  History and IP depts have been very adaptable, working together to address timetable issues, assignment deadline clashes, etc.  Having 2 personal tutors has been excellent |  |  |

**Year 2 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1** | Students appreciated in-person seminars as a much better experience than online – less anxiety-inducing, face-to-face communication so much easier, a far more productive seminar experience |  |  |
| **2** | Live online lectures and in-person seminars should be prioritised – felt much more like a community, part of the university, not just taking an online course, less isolating |  |  |
| **3** | Much improvement to a particular module discussed at last SSCC with the addition of PowerPoints. |  |  |
| **4** | Simplified extensions process much appreciated by students |  |  |
| **5** | Waiting list for NHS counselling is 1 year – definite need for Student Wellbeing to provide 1:1 support for students, as current provision is very limited |  |  |

**Year 3 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1.** | While never as good as in-person lectures, live online lectures are the next best option, under current restrictions, as it’s more of a real lecture experience. Recordings are also useful, allowing you to go back and make more notes. |  |  |
| **2.** | Praise for LT and AE for Dissertation module; scheduling it every Monday afternoon gives a positive start to the week |  |  |
| **3.** | Online seminar sizes should not be too small – many students do not show up and many others do not speak, so pressure is put on one or two people to speak for the whole hour |  |  |
| **4.** | Feedback on module mentioned at last SSCC – PowerPoints a great improvement. The module really makes you think and engage, intense but good, very rewarding, made you think more than any other IP module |  |  |
| **5.** | Much praise for Alistair Shepherd for use of Murals / Menti – used the tech really well; increased the interest and engagement in seminars as you could see people’s views and opinions in the comments |  |  |
| **6.** | Appreciation expressed for the extensions policy |  |  |
| **7.** | Some students expressed anger at the changes to special circumstances, regarding final degree classification and window of opportunity – the argument that students are more used to the situation now doesn’t wash; the difficult studying conditions have not changed, and they’ve had to put up with them for an even longer period of time, so are even more weary and anxious  (It was noted the Interpol dept opposed these changes)  1st year Rep sought clarification on special circs and extensions – LT explained and noted current 1st years would need information on normal university policies when Covid rules no longer applied | Update students on extension & special circs rules in September | DUS |
| **8** | 3rd year Rep – 3 years on SSCC has been an amazing experience, an excellent forum for sharing views and resolving issues  LT Congratulated him on his nomination for SSCC Rep of the year! Very well deserved. |  |  |
| **9** | International Students’ Rep:  Only negative comment was the issue of a lack of study spaces and poor internet previously discussed |  |  |
| **10** | Students desperate to get back to in-person seminars, as no-one speaks in Teams seminars, so they feel they are not getting the full benefit |  |  |
| **11** | Student comments:   * Academic structure and schedule are good * IP modules are fun * IP dept goes above and beyond to help students out * Live online lectures keep students motivated * Praise for James Vaughan – an amazing lecturer * Praise for all IP lecturers and personal tutors * Praise for SF and library service for sending books abroad   LT: live online lectures also helped staff structure their time |  |  |

7. **Chair’s Business**

7.1 Meeting with Student Welfare Services (SWS)

Following up on issues raised at the previous SSCC, a meeting was arranged with Caryl Davies and Samantha Glennie. ER and LT attended. The following concerns and suggestions were raised:

* Concern that there is a gulf between SWS and the general student body. A significant issue is the lack of direct contact with students – support via modules and links to external providers is insufficient
* SWS website is rather impersonal, with no sense of real people behind it
* From students, the perception is that only those with serious mental health issues are seen by Student Wellbeing
* Suggestion – that SWS should engage more with academic departments in order to reach students – we know them personally and they know us and are more likely to engage with us.
* Suggestion – early intervention and embedded support would prevent many situations escalating and improve the general student experience
* Suggestion - a representative from SWS should attend SSCC meetings, in the same way that the Careers and Library Services do
* Suggestion - SWS should have more involvement in Welcome Week; a greater focus on student welfare during WW is important

Feedback from Reps:

* Agree there is a divide between SWS and the general student body
* A very good idea to invite them to SSCC meetings – warmly welcomed
* Definitely a good idea for them to get a broader view of student issues and the wider student community, not just those with serious MH issues or in crisis. Increased focus on MH support is very important, as the demand will not go away
* Is there any Welsh-medium mental health provision available?
* Only one slide about SWS in Welcome Week info; 1st years have no idea how to access services; information is available on Blackboard, but students know nothing about it
* Students should have access to more info e.g. what are the symptoms of anxiety or stress? People don’t know what’s wrong with them and it’s hard to explain to others

LT: Bridging the gap between SWS and the student community is key

7.2 One IP student with disabilities raised the issue that, under current Covid guidelines, there are no additional adjustments for a disability – everyone can get an extension and there is no extra time for takeaway exams. Has this been raised as an issue with Student Reps?

* No Reps reported anyone raising this issue, but were sympathetic to this situation.

7.3 Diversity Working Group (DWG)

* Interpol DWG is proposing an award for students promoting diversity in the Dept.
* DWG was set up last summer, members include staff and PGs
* Focuses on the curriculum, research, etc.
* Spearheading ‘[University of Sanctuary](https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/)’ – offering places to refugees, solidarity with academics abroad facing difficulties, etc.
* Aim of the award is to raise awareness of students promoting diversity in any area – gender, ethnicity, etc and offer a prize, to recognise & value these efforts.
* If approved, it would be promoted in September. Nominated students would produce a video and poster of the work they’re doing in the area of diversity, outside of academic studies, which would be displayed in the dept over Easter and lead to a vote for the award.

Feedback from Reps:

* Could it be a blog or social media, as an alternative to a video?

LT: Great idea – will feedback to the group

* How can you do a video if you’re nominating someone else?

LT: Good point – collaboration will be key

* What counts as diversity and improving diversity?

LT: Great point – examples would help to clarify

* What’s the scope and criteria? Could examples be provided?

LT: Agreed – she will feedback these points to the DWG and L&T

8. **Learning and Teaching Opportunities**

9. **Any other** **Business**

Lucy Taylor thanked the SSCC Reps for their hard work over the year, as well as Hazel for her excellent minutes. SSCC meetings are always enjoyable and hugely valuable for the work of the Department.