

**Faculty: FASS**

**Department: International Politics**

**Date/Time: 2 pm,**

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

**Staff in Attendance:** Lucy Taylor, Elin Royles, Simon French, Tony Orme

**Apologies/Absent:** Jack Parker (3rd year Rep)

**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 | Chair’s Business - LT contacted SU to suggest they produce a video for Freshers of their role and the services they offer | **SU is considering this suggestion** | Students’ Union |
| 2 | Yr 2, point 1 – a session on organisation, motivation and time management was organised a week after the previous SSCC meeting, 30 attended and PP slides were made available | **Complete** | LT |
| 3 | Yr 3, point 8 – there is no longer an International Office to direct queries to, this role now comes under SS & C service. Problematic as there is no direct point of contact |  |  |

3. **Employability and Careers**

3.1. Careers review from Tony Orme:

* Business as usual – daily enquiries from IP students about interviews, careers guidance, etc; online pre-prepared interviews have had 100% attendance
* Advice to 1st and 2nd years to use the Careers Service now, for work placements, etc. Do not wait until 3rd year. Lack of relevant work experience is problematic for final year students. Careers advice is available throughout the summer.
* Two guest speaker events are being organised with alumni from the Welsh Government and MoD
* Parliamentary Placement Scheme is in progress, some students already accepted onto the scheme and placements being sought in Westminster and Cardiff
* All-Wales Careers Fair to take place virtually on 1st March; all Welsh universities involved, many more employers present. Students can also attend other Careers Fairs taking place remotely e.g. in London
* For guidance interviews, go to AberConnections on the Careers website and look for ‘appointments’ or contact Tony directly on [awo@aber.ac.uk](mailto:awo@aber.ac.uk).

3.2. Student feedback:

* General consensus is that online events e.g. webinars, Departmental Roundtables, Careers talks, are easier to attend so participation is greater; for 1st years, it is less intimidating than being in a room with strangers; most would be happy for it to continue in this format

TO – an archive of recordings / podcasts is also being developed

* The fact that the Careers Service is available to AU graduates for life is an important point to highlight to final year students
* LT asked about resources for Welsh-speaking jobs and whether something could be developed in collaboration with other Welsh universities

TO – will look into it at the St David’s Day Careers Fair

* Welsh-medium Rep requested contact details of Welsh-speaking Careers officers

ER – 2 recent talks by Welsh-speaking alumni have taken place

4. **Library and Information Services**

4.1. Update from Simon French:

* Please get in touch with SF if you need resources for dissertations, etc.
* Click and Collect service still available
* Booking system for study spaces for students based in Aberystwyth
* Postal delivery service launched; you will only be asked to return a book if it needs to be digitised; freepost service for returns
* Digitising of material from collections and new purchases continues
* Physical document supply service not running as no staff on site
* ‘More books’ facility is running, please continue to use it

4.2. Feedback from students:

* 3rd years based in Aber would like later opening hours so they can work in the library in the evenings

SF – opening hours and room bookings constantly under review; risk assessments need to be done; 24-hour opening will return as soon as it is allowed

* International students appreciate AU sending physical books out; but some are reluctant to contact SF as they feel it’s cheating to ask for help

SF – it’s part of his role to help students find resources, use the library catalogue, etc.; it’s not cheating so please get in touch

* General feedback is that library resources are very good; lots of sources available online; no deadlines for returning books is reassuring; library study spaces feel safe and clean; book drops available in town (Old College) as well as on campus and Fferm Penglais

SF – for technical, connectivity, WiFi issues, flag up to students that they can contact [is@aber.ac.uk](mailto:is@aber.ac.uk), 01970 622400, or use the Live Chat

5. **Chair’s Business**

5.1. ER’s report on MEQs and the departmental action plan:

* Online completion of MEQs meant limited responses which skewed the results
* Modules identified as potentially problematic were responded to by the department; correlation between modules identified in the review and previous SSCC discussions
* Best practice for online teaching document has been produced

LT – main recommendations:

* Weekly timetable
* Structure of online lectures – clear preference for ‘live online lectures’
* Consistency of uploading lectures
* Interactive workshops and seminars

ER and Patrick Finney will take this evidence forward to Tim Woods

5.2. Feedback from Reps:

* Survey of international students found a big improvement on Semester 1; lots of help provided to students; some found the overload of information confusing
* 1st years were unclear about live lectures and whether they had to turn up live; clearer communication needed that attendance was optional and lectures would be uploaded as usual to Blackboard
* 3rd years benefitted from live lectures to help with organisation and motivation, especially as recordings and PowerPoints were available shortly afterwards; live sessions in the mornings were positive for motivation and wellbeing

5.3. Feedback on personal tutor and dissertation supervisor contact:

* Generally, dissertation supervisor meetings worked well and there was good contact with students, but some students were reluctant to contact their supervisor as they felt they were too far behind or stuck

LT – normally students are meant to initiate meetings but, under the current circumstances, LT would ask supervisors to contact students they hadn’t heard from recently

* Feedback on personal tutors was varied; some students were unaware their personal tutor had changed for Semester 2; personal tutor drop-ins online worked well for some, but others felt it was easier to approach someone in person than join a Teams meeting

6. **Learning and Teaching Opportunities**

6.1. Feedback on online learning – what works well and what doesn’t:

* Easier to organise large meetings, Roundtables, etc.; attendance and participation are higher
* Higher attendance for live online lectures, especially among students who previously did not attend morning lectures
* Interactive activities in seminars and workshops were appreciated and additional software made it easier
* Channels v Break-out rooms – breakout rooms work best as students can get lost and frustrated trying to find a channel
* Very mixed feedback on break-out rooms for seminars:
* some students feel awkward about speaking, only 1 or 2 are prepared to talk, those that do feel forced to keep the conversation going, while others switch their camera off
* group discussions often lag and it’s the luck of the draw whether they go well
* group dynamics is important, so you need to see other people’s reactions
* in-person, the lecturer can prompt and help the discussion along
* the ideal group size was debated (3 was too small, 10 was too big)
* it was also noted that in-person seminars can be equally awkward, with only 1 or 2 willing to speak
* use of Menti, Mural and other interactive software helps to instigate conversations
* it’s important to break the ice at the start of a session

7. **Student Matters**

**Year 1 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1** | One of the 1st year Reps Tom Quine has withdrawn from the course | Recruit another Rep | LT |
| **2** | Any library issues were sorted out and overall they have been brilliant |  |  |
| **3** | Low participation in MEQs was partly due to the timing, when students were travelling home or worried about travel arrangements |  |  |
| **4** | Rep is organising events e.g. exam support groups and needs access to the mailing list; SU wants a signed document but she has no printer | LT to contact SU | LT |
| **5** | Welsh medium 1st years wish to praise GW12920 for the live lectures and additional support with reading lists, articles, etc. |  |  |
| **6** | One issue is some official emails are not bilingual e.g. Careers | ER to raise with the dept  ER to also raise the possibility of Welsh-medium online careers events | ER |
| **7** | Positive feedback on live lectures, but there are some clashes with History seminars for Jt. Hons students  ER – Timetabling is looking at clashes across departments |  |  |

**Year 2 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1** | Positive feedback on live lectures for helping students with organisation and planning |  |  |
| **2** | One negative is a module with no PowerPoints or notes provided and key information written on a whiteboard which is hard to see online | ER to discuss further with module coordinator | ER |
| **3** | Lots of positive feedback for IP2/38720 |  |  |
| **4** | Seminar issues were a concern, as outlined above |  |  |
| **5** | Some students felt assessment dates crept up on them without warning; no reminders from lecturers as there would be during in-person classes |  |  |
| **6** | Students inundated with emails for Teams links, sometimes 8 notifications for 1 seminar | LT will raise at staff meeting | LT |

**Year 3 / Module / Rep Role**

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|  | **Comments/Feedback:** | **Action  (where applicable):** | **Whose Action:** |
| **1.** | Concerns about how to structure work were dealt with in the Dissertation module. It would be useful to have sessions in modules on how to structure essays. This is done already in some modules. | ER to raise this suggestion with staff (again) |  |
| **2.** | Concerns raised about final year marks and whether the same rules would apply as last year e.g. preponderance, no detriment, etc. Also whether dissertation extensions would apply as last year  LT – all students can apply for a 2-week dissertation extension with no special circumstances evidence required  ER – expects rules on preponderance, etc to be the same as last year; we await confirmation of the exact rules regime. | ER/LT to communicate the University policy to all students once it is confirmed. |  |
| **3.** | Suggestion that an official study group for each module could be set up for students to help and support each other; discussing dissertations with each other has proved very useful  LT – more emphasis could be put on encouraging study groups; this has been the case in the past | ER/LT to raise this suggestion with staff |  |
| **4.** | For future years, it was suggested that there should be more links with the local community in Aberystwyth e.g. a Welsh history project; students would like more opportunities to interact with the town |  |  |
| **5.** | More outreach to students who are struggling with anxiety; students feel anxious about contacting lecturers as they seem so busy  LT – this is difficult as staff can only send emails, which students may not read. Reminders that office hours can be for personal as well as academic issues could be sent out; an issue for personal tutors |  |  |
| **6.** | General consensus is that services for students suffering anxiety and mental health issues is very poor. Many negative comments on Student Support Services, e.g.:   * when you contact them, they don’t really come back to you * very bare bones replies, just signposting to your GP or to websites you could have found with a Google search; when you’ve reached out for help, it’s even more demoralising to be told to go elsewhere * Raising Concerns form just leads to a very generic email being sent out, more demoralising than no response at all * SSS do not respond until it’s too late, when situations have escalated to an emergency * Students living in Halls felt that if SSS intervened earlier, they could prevent situations deteriorating and reduce the number of traumatic experiences for students * The lack of response until it was too late was seen as a major issue * Significant lack of proper counselling, just ‘Resource appointments’ with no meaningful follow-up that have little or no impact * Support is only given to those with very severe MH issues   One suggestion was that the SU could get more involved e.g. advice on acceptable behaviour, consent, etc. | ER to raise the issue with Tim Woods |  |
| **7.** | Positive feedback from international students on live lectures (it feels more normal) and use of Menti/Mural; personal tutors and a significant number of staff members were singled out for praise, for both academic teaching and pastoral care |  |  |
| **8.** | Negative comments mostly focused on the situation in general e.g. lack of motivation with online learning; campus life essential for the university experience; anxiety, stress and boredom impacting on students’ work | LT to flag up her the motivation talk and remind students of the hardship fund | LT |
| **9.** | International students’ comments: some technical issues in seminars; assignment deadlines too close together; no extra time for takeaway exams  LT – assessments have to be towards the end of a module, otherwise you won’t have covered the work  ER – has asked Kamila Stullerova (Learning and Teaching Officer) to look into the deadlines issue |  |  |
| **10** | Can international students change seminar groups if they are scheduled at inconvenient times (e.g. 1 am in the morning)? 1st years don’t know what’s available to them or what their options are | ER – will email students to let them know what their options are |  |

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