

**PWYLLGOR YMGYNGHOROL I STAFF AC IS-  
RADDEDIGION**

Dyddiad: Dydd Mercher 3/12/2014  
 Amser: 2.00 yh  
 Lleoliad: Ystafell Gorllewin yr Adran  
 Gwleidyddiaeth Ryngwladol.

**STAFF STUDENT CONSULTATIVE  
COMMITTEE**

Date: Wednesday 3/12/2014  
 Time: 2.00pm  
 Place: West Room International Politics  
 Building

**PRESENT:**

Patrick Finney, DUS  
 Christian Enemark, DDUS  
 Huw Lewis, DWMS

Lilian Stevenson, Information Services

Alice Hodges, First Year Rep  
 Fahreen Syeda, Third Year Rep  
 Alex Williams, Third Year Rep  
 Clare Tevlin, JH Rep  
 Emyr Taylor, Welsh Medium Rep  
 Aydan Anderson, Exchange Students Rep  
 Karolina Kobylnik, International Students Rep  
 Arthur Belsey, Employability Rep

**MINUTES**

**Apologies:** Sasha Drinkov (First Year Rep); Thomas Reed (Second Year Rep)

**1. Welcome and introduction from the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS)**

- The DUS opened the meeting at 2.05pm.
- The Deputy Director of Undergraduate Studies (DDUS) observed that no members of the Department's support staff were present at the meeting.
- The DUS invited a volunteer from among the student representatives to take the minutes of the meeting.
- No student volunteered.
- The DDUS assumed the task of taking the minutes.

**2. Matters concerning Information Services within the University**

- Lilian Stevenson (LS) from the Hugh Owen Library attended the meeting to discuss issues concerning the library and computing services in the University.
- LS emphasised the importance of student feedback on things that are working well.

- The Joint Honours Representative (JHR) claimed that Departmental policy was vague on what to do if a student is locked out of Turnitin due to, for example, Wi-Fi failure.
- LS reported that Gregynog is notorious for internet connectivity problems.
- The DUS remarked that the Department is on a learning curve and expressed hope that Turnitin problems would be satisfactorily addressed through the University's Special Circumstances procedures.
- The DUS suggested that, as a last resort, an essay could be emailed to the module convenor before the deadline.
- The DUS expressed hope that the University would err on the side of caution and generosity when considering Turnitin-based Special Circumstances claims.
- A First Year Representative (1R) claimed that, before first-year students arrived at the University, they did not know what Blackboard was and where to find it.
- LS noted this claim.
- The same 1R reported that there was a glitch in Turnitin: comments on a submitted assessment item would appear, but not the mark.
- The DUS replied that the mark appears eventually (over a period of hours after feedback has been provided by the marker).
- On the issue of formative assessment and the timeliness of feedback, the DUS explained that IP12520 Exploring the International 2 would have fewer assessment items than IP12420 ETI 1. This would ensure that feedback on one assignment will be provided in advance of the deadline for the next assignment.
- The Employability Representative (ER) reported that noise and food regulations in the Hugh Owen Library are not being enforced by library staff.
- LS undertook to raise this matter with her colleagues.
- The ER asked whether a representative of the National Library of Wales (NLW) could visit the University and deliver a presentation to students on how the NLW system works.
- A Third Year Representative (3R) supported this request.
- LS suggested that such a presentation could form part of IP30040 Dissertation, and she undertook to discuss the matter with Dr Alastair Finlan (Interpol Library Representative).
- LS asked: how many people use Ebrary? How many people know about More Books? Are people aware of the official documents that are available in the Library?
- LS encouraged students to use More Books (automatic ordering of books valued at up to £50).
- The International Students Representative (ISR) suggested that students should be able to see the originality (text-similarity) report on Turnitin.
- The DUS replied that the Department's policy is not to allow this and rather to regard text-matching software as a tool to assist academic staff.
- A 3R raised the issue of module convenors setting up Turnitin assignments so as to allow multiple submissions of essays.
- The DUS replied that is simpler to allow just one opportunity to submit (this avoiding the technical complexity of having multiple drafts of a document in the Turnitin system).
- The ISR, a 3R and the Welsh Medium Representative (WMR) expressed concern that some international students struggle to comprehend feedback delivered in audio format.
- The DUS suggested that individual students should raise any concerns over the modality of feedback with module convenors directly.

- A 3R commented that the standard of feedback had improved since the Cover Sheet was abandoned.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 05/03/2014

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting:

- The DUS reported that careers drop-in sessions had been discontinued for staffing reasons.
- Regarding the idea of a common 'reading week', the DUS reported that the Department's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) had decided instead to retain staff discretion on the scheduling of a reading week during semester.
- Regarding the availability of module handbooks at the start of semester, student representatives (SRs) reported that availability problems had not since recurred.

### 4. Items from the Director of Undergraduate Studies

#### 4.1 Annual Monitoring of Taught Schemes

- The DUS tabled the AMTS document that had been circulated to SSCC members prior to the meeting.
- The Employability Representative (ER) asked why he was not consulted on the employability data in the AMTS.
- ACTION: DUS to send ER additional employability documentation.

#### 4.2 2014 National Student Survey (NSS) results

- The DUS tabled the NSS results that had been distributed to SSCC members prior to the meeting. He invited student representatives to share the results with other students.
- The ER asked: what is a good mark? Should we be getting 95%?
- The DUS replied that a NSS score above the national sector/subject average was a good score
- The ER reported that some students were "appalled" that the Department had "Shanghai'd" third-year students into completing the NSS.
- The DUS acknowledged that too much encouragement can sometimes be counterproductive.
- A 1R reported that school students use NSS rankings lists to decide which university they wish to attend
- The JHR argued that Aberystwyth University as a whole needs to "up its game".
- The ER claimed that NSS rankings matter to employers
- The DUS replied that members of the academic staff are expressly prohibited from linking NSS results to the value of a students' university degree.
- The JHR claimed that students might feel a greater sense of working hard and getting value-for-money if they were required to write more essays.
- The DUS replied that there is now more assessment, and a greater variety of assessment, in International Politics degrees than was the case in the past.
- The ISR expressed a preference for being able to choose whether to submit an exam or an essay

- The DUS replied that some module convenors believe strongly in the value of exams, and he observed that students are able to register in modules that do not have an exam.
- The ER deplored the “horrendous” NSS score for satisfaction with the Students Union.

#### 4.3 Update on UCU assessment boycott

The DUS reported that the boycott had caused some delays in the marking of essays and that a reactivation of the boycott might occur in January 2015 (possibly resulting in delays in marking exam scripts).

#### 4.4 Teaching Program

- The DUS advised the committee of major changes to the Part One curriculum (including new core modules, and new forms of assessment).
- The DUS reported that the 2015/16 teaching program was taking shape and would be finalised by March 2015.
- The DUS informed the committee that, at Part Two, degree scheme core modules will in future be offered every year and that the number of contact hours in these modules will increase to 30.
- A 1R claimed that Exploring the International 1 (IP12420) was very advanced (in terms of theory), that students were “leaning” on seminar tutors rather than talking a lot, and that the participation of senior academics made students feel like they were part of the University straight away.
- A 1R claimed that “lots of people” want the number of assessment items in IP12420 to be reduced, and that students liked the lack of an exam in that module.
- The ER suggested that students should receive more warning about module evaluation.
- The DUS replied that many members of the academic staff are dissatisfied with the existing system of module evaluation.
- The JHR asked whether the University would allow her to spend her “spare 20 credits” in Interpol rather than in Law.
- The DUS replied that the degree scheme’s structure would inform an answer to that question.
- The ISR asked whether students may do 4 modules (80 credits) in semester 1 and 2 modules (40 credits) in semester 2.
- The DUS replied that the University enforces a maximum 70:50 split.

#### 4.5 New procedures and systems

- The DUS identified Turnitin and the Extensions Policy as new procedures and systems
- On the matter of Personal Tutors, the 1R claimed that “some of us don’t know our Personal Tutor”.
- The ISR expressed a preference for getting to know a Personal Tutor and claimed that “our Personal Tutors change from year to year”.
- The DUS replied that the Department tries to provide continuity despite the complication of staff taking leave.
- The ER claimed that Personal Tutors are not contacting students.
- The WMR claimed that the Personal Tutor experience was fantastic.
- The DUS reported that academic staff have been experiencing a lot of extra pressure due to administrative changes within the Department.

- The Exchange Student Representative (ESR) claimed to have had no idea until that point that students had Personal Tutors.
- The JHR encouraged academic staff to upload more material to BlackBoard and claimed that lecture recordings are useful for revision.
- The ISR and WMR replied by claiming that the posting of lecture recordings caused students not to attend, and the ISR claimed further that the recording of lectures meant students had no incentive to learn how to take notes.
- The 1R praised the availability of digital materials on BlackBoard.

#### **5. General matters raised by the Undergraduate Students**

No matters raised.

#### **6. Matters raised by First Year Representatives**

The 1R asked for more information about modules (especially reading lists) to be made available earlier.

#### **7. Matters raised by Second Year Representatives**

No matters raised.

#### **8. Matters raised by Final Year Representatives**

- The 3R suggested that all module convenors should avoid clashing assessment deadlines with the Dissertation (IP30040) Research Proposal deadline.
- The ER claimed that deadline clashes are a “perennial complaint”.
- The 3R suggested that departing (graduating) students could donate books to the Department.
- The DUS replied that the Department would appreciate any such offering.
- The 3R raised the issue of international flight bookings clashing with scheduled exams in January
- The DDUS replied that, if there is independent evidence that attending a January exam is impossible for a particular student, that student may be granted the option of submitting an essay instead.

#### **9. Matters raised by Welsh Speaking Students Representative**

- The WMR claimed that “a large number of students” had complained that *Studying in Interpol* (SIP) and *Writing and Referencing in Interpol* (WRI) were not available in Welsh at the start of the academic year.
- The Director of Welsh Medium Studies (DWMS) replied that, due to recent changes in Interpol’s administrative arrangements, the Department was more dependent on the University’s translation unit than previously.
- The DUS and DWMS apologised for the non-availability of SIP and WRI in Welsh.
- The WMR claimed that not a lot of material was being placed on the BlackBoard sites of GW versions of modules.

- The DWMS replied that English-speaking convenors of the IP version of modules find it difficult to keep the GW versions of BlackBoard sites updated.
- The DWMS reported that he had had discussions with the BlackBoard Team about linking corresponding IP and GW sites so that material uploaded to one site automatically goes to the other.
- The WMR asked modules convenors to ensure that all BlackBoard-generated emails to students on the IP version of a module should go also to students on the GW version.

#### **10. Matters raised by Joint Honours Representative**

No matters raised.

#### **11. Matters raised by International Students Representative**

No matters raised.

#### **12. Matters raised by the Employability Representative**

- The ER reported that he had suggested to First Year students that they start looking for a job now.
- The 1R reported that some students are visiting the Careers Centre to work on their CVs.

#### **13. Any other business**

The ER reported that the Crisis Game was a really good experience.

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The DUS closed the meeting at 4.22pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday 4/3/2015 at 2pm