

**MINUTES OF THE HISTORY HONOURS STAFF-STUDENT LIASON
COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 15:00 HRS, 7 DECEMBER 2011,
Room G.13, William Robertson Wing, Teviot Place**

In Attendance:

Ewen Cameron (Convenor); Talat Ahmed, Thomas Ahnert, Steve Boardman, Tom Brown, Sarah Cockram, Robert Crowcroft, Adam Fox, Fabian Hilfrich, David Kaufman, Tina Picton Phillipps, Wendy Ugolini; Phoebe Coghlan, Alexandra Baumont de Oliveira, Ashleigh de Verteuil, Stephanie Hawkins, Oliver Davidson-Richards; Rosie Filipiak (Minutes).

Apologies:

Staff: Alex Murdoch, Gayle Davis, Margaret Forrest, Wendy Ugolini
Students: Marie Alter, Helen Kennedy

1. Welcome

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Matters Arising

2. *Library*

The incorrect link on the University Library catalogue to the Scottish History collection has now been suppressed.

3. *History in Practice/History in Theory*

The format of this has now changed from previous years. It is now a coherent and discrete course in Semester 2, students take one Workshop rather than two as previously. There is now an even balance across the year with History in Theory in S1 and History in Practice in S2.

3. *Feedback on coursework*

This will be discussed later in the meeting.

3. Honours course choice

Prof Cameron explained that next year's Honours course choice process would start in Semester 2 and be run through the intranet for students to list their choices, information would be well publicised in advance. He also noted that with a large upcoming Year 4 cohort all courses, especially 4MAs, would be very full. Students would need to make their choices carefully as there would be little room for change afterwards. The Head of School is currently

considering the deadlines for dissertation and Honours course choices with regard to synchronicity.

4. Dissertations

Prof Cameron noted that some changes had been made to the Dissertation with the introduction of a Proposal worth 5% of the final mark. This element had previously worked well in the Economic and Social History dissertations and had been introduced following student requests for formal feedback on their dissertation at an early stage. It was felt useful by staff for focussing students at an early stage in the year. TPP found the proposal a helpful exercise and commented that although there may be a discrepancy between the Proposal and the final Dissertation the Proposal did provide a basis for students to work on. Students commented that they felt the Proposal was motivating and prepared them for Semester 2 dissertation work, it provided a catalyst to move their work forward. EC asked if there were any issues regarding supervision, none were reported by the students present.

5. Moderation

It was explained by Prof Cameron that honours work was moderated rather than second marked with the External Examiners monitoring this as part of their overall review.

Dr Boardman noted that moderation fits in with the UoE regulations and is a standard feature across the HE sector. Honours marks are compared between and across courses, and together with the statistical information from several years contributes as part of the review process of honours marking, moderation helps add to this.

EC explained that there is a clear process to be followed for moderation. Moderators are asked to sample coursework and if they think that the sample marking is consistent they sign the pro forma to confirm, if they disagree then all the coursework is second marked, this brings consistency to the marking process. He further commented that students might see original and moderated marks on their feedback sheets, but if a mark had changed then all essays in that marking group would have been second marked.

Dr Fox commented on History's 3-week turnaround of feedback to students, noting that with moderation and administrative tasks as well as first marking the timescale was often difficult to achieve. Dr Boardman reiterated that all marks released to students are provisional until ratified at an Exam Board.

It was also noted that whilst all marking is carried out anonymously, students can, after receiving their feedback sheet, seek additional feedback in person.

6. Honours essay submission procedures

There was considerable discussion on the Honours essay submissions. It was noted that there are a large number of courses with the same deadline, but very many students had left submission until the last minute and were poorly prepared. EC asked the Honours reps to relay back to the students the need to be better organised in advance, the information forms required for each essay can be prepared well in advance, and students must take into account that the Library computers and printers will be very busy in the weeks leading up to the end of the Semester. It was queried by one class rep that

'Post-Colonial South Asia' may have different submission instructions, RF will look into this as all Honours coursework should have the same instructions for dropbox submission.

Electronic submission as the sole means of submission was discussed. Many staff did have experience of this within other courses or institutions and there was considerable variation in their liking of online marking. Dr Picton Phillipps commented that she currently takes in weekly written work and releases marks and comments via WebCT, the class reps liked this form of formative marking.

EC noted that electronic submission, as currently required for dissertations, HiT and HiP, would be extended to all History courses. There was some discussion as to which submission method would be used for the recorded deadline. After discussion it was agreed that a concurrent deadline for hardcopy and electronic copy submission would be fairest and should be a universal policy through the subject area. EC agreed the subject area would like to take this forward and will raise it at the next Subject Area Meeting.

7. AOB

Feedback

The student reps raised the NSS results and queried the inclusion of subjects outwith history in the statistics. It was confirmed that this has already been raised at a University management level and with NSS, who have responded that they cannot change their framework. EC encouraged students to complete the NSS survey. Last year our School's NSS results were very encouraging for several of the indicators.

The EUSA rep asked if they could seek qualitative data from HCA students to answer the question "what students think feedback should be" and that if the questionnaire was passed to EC it could be circulated to first year reps. There was some discussion as to whether it would be more valuable to seek responses from all years as student perceptions change with academic maturity, also the more responses received the more accurately student views would be reflected. EC agreed the EUSA rep could email him the questionnaire for circulation to all class reps.

Exam Review Sessions

The class reps reported that they were pleased to have the exam review sessions which they felt were well organised and useful. EC noted that relatively few students do take up the opportunity to review their exam scripts, and FH added, from a Course Organiser viewpoint, that whilst he encouraged students to seek further feedback on coursework very few did. EC confirmed that the exam review sessions would continue.

Honours courses

Extra classes had been put on for 'Divided City' and 'Revolutionary Russia' which enabled more students to take these course options, the class reps noted this had been appreciated by students and EC expressed his thanks to his colleagues for taking on larger numbers in these courses.

Exam Timing

The timing of Semester 1 exams was queried, and it was explained that whilst two History sub-honours exams were in the December diet, the rest were in the April/May diet. Dr Boardman commented that 3rd and 4th year exams all had the same weighting and if 3rd year S1 exams were taken in the December there was a long time interval between that and the 4th year April/May diet, thus the earlier (December of 3rd year) exams might suffer due to the lack of experience of the students, this argues against holding S1 exams in December.

2011-12 Exam Timetable

It was noted that there would be a compressed exam timetable in April/May with no Honours exams scheduled after 19 May, Registry was setting three exam slots per day therefore students could have two exams in one day unless this was precluded by an adjustment schedule. EC commented that exams are set by Academic Registry and although representations had been made to them about exam scheduling, but the fact that it is a large and complex timetabling operation means that Registry have not been able to make changes.

It was explained that EUSA's petitioning for a revision week and Innovative Learning Week had a knock-on effect in compressing the exam timetable.

Honours course choices

A student rep reported that one joint Politics student's honours course choices had been 'lost' at selection time. It was explained that the school that owns the degree is responsible in these instances. SB noted that we need to defer to the degree owning School with regards to which courses are required for the specific degree and it can occasionally be difficult to obtain this information.

The class reps felt a good effort had been made to get everyone their first choice of Honours course, and EC acknowledged the staff involved had tried their best with the large numbers involved to satisfy choice requests.

Prof Cameron closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and noted the next meeting would be held in Semester 2.