

**School of History, Classics and Archaeology  
School-wide Staff/Student Liaison Committee  
Notes of Meeting, 23 March 2011, 1.00pm**

**1 Attendance**

Student Representatives:

Ben Morse, Chair (Classics), Phoebe Coghlan (incoming School EUSA reps)

Staff Representatives:

Pertti Ahonen (Deputy Undergraduate Director/Honours and History), Sandra Bingham (Classics UGSC Representative), Ewen Cameron (Head of History), Kathy Christie (School Undergraduate Administrator), James Fraser (School Director of Quality), Karen Howie (School eLearning and Web Development Officer), Robert Mason (Undergraduate Director, UGSC and UGBoS Convener, and History), Magda Midgley (Senior Director of Studies and Archaeology),

Apologies:

Student Reps: Brittany Harbidge (History), Jeff Soares (EUSA Rep)

Staff Reps: Margaret Forrest (School Liaison Librarian), Gordon Thomas (Archaeology UGSC representative)

**2 Matters arising from meeting on 2 December 2010**

Progression from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year: had been discussed at Classics and History subject area meetings, and at the Board of Studies (in relation to the revised 2<sup>nd</sup> year courses in Archaeology and related pre-requisites and progression issues).

Innovative Learning Week: Reps had raised this at various SSLCs, and it had been discussed at UG Studies Committee also, with the incoming UG Director suggesting options for consideration.

National Student Survey: addressed within agenda items below.

**3 Items proposed by Student Members**

Feedback questionnaire:

The incoming EUSA Rep presented a proposal to compile a questionnaire for our School's students on feedback, to be circulated at the start of next session. She considered a survey by students rather than staff might result in better response rates, and findings could be presented to the next School SSLC (Dec 2011).

There was discussion on the range and nature of feedback already available to students in the School and suggestions that it would be helpful if any questionnaire could include all of these, as this would also help develop students' awareness of all of these opportunities. It was noted that a surprising amount of coursework and feedback comments remain uncollected each year.

The committee agreed that it would be helpful if the School UG Administrator (who does not undertake any academic marking or feedback provision so could offer

objective assistance) liaise with the drafters of a student questionnaire on feedback.

#### Honours choice processes:

It was noted that some students were finding the processes for choosing their honours choices for 2011/12 confusing. It was generally agreed that it is a very complex process, although staff hoped they were providing clear information to students about the process and the deadlines.

It was acknowledged that the process would generally be helped if all three of our subject areas had the same deadline. This had not been possible this year, but every effort would be made to ensure it happened next year.

It was noted that Directors of Studies should encourage students choosing their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year courses to think ahead and consider whether they were going to achieve the necessary pre-requisites for honours options they might wish to follow.

It was reported that some students were anxious they might not get their first choice courses in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year, but it was agreed also that there was a very good range of courses to choose from.

#### Dissertation topics' choices:

It was reported that some students (History, mainly) felt the choice of dissertation topics had been too restricted. It was noted, however, that guidance to History students had made clear that they could come up with any topic of their own and could pursue it if a member of staff were prepared to supervise them. It was also noted that in History, the availability of source materials was an important factor in proposing topics and several members of staff had proposed topics for which they knew there were appropriate sources available to our students.

It was suggested, and agreed, that meetings to inform 3<sup>rd</sup> year students about the Dissertation, and related processes would be very helpful – perhaps in semester 1 of each session.

**Action:** 3<sup>rd</sup>-year talks on the Dissertation to be introduced, where these are not already offered by Subject Areas.

#### Scheduling of SSLCs:

It was suggested, and agreed, that it would help the flow of information between the School's SSLCs if course/programme meetings could be scheduled ahead of the School-wide SSLC (which is usually in week 11 of semester 1/2). It was agreed to recommend that subject areas try to arrange this next session, although there was usually a delay of 2-3 weeks at the start of each semester until class reps were selected.

**Action:** Inform Subject Areas of this recommendation.

## **4 Items Proposed by Staff Members**

#### National Student Survey: Subject Mapping (James Fraser):

It was reported that further information about the way our School's degree programmes 'mapped' to national subject (JACS) codes in the administration of

the NSS had been made available this year. This highlighted some anomalies: Classical Archaeology is mapped to the Archaeology JACS code, and Ancient History, History of Art and Architectural History are mapped to the History JACS code.

The impact of this was that only 75% of the 'Archaeology' return represented students on Archaeology programmes with the remaining 25% being on Classical Archaeology programmes. Only 70% of the 'History' return represented students on History programmes with the remaining 30% on Ancient History, History of Art or Architectural History programmes. And the 'Classics' return, in its entirety, included only 60% of students on what we consider to be Classics programmes.

These JACS codes are determined nationally (by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, HEFCE) and are applied across all programmes in all UK universities to the NSS data.

However, these anomalies may explain some of the difficulties experienced in analysing the subject-related data reported to our School from earlier NSSs. There were concerns expressed at the meeting that the results of the NSS are published and may not be presenting an accurate picture of these subjects at this University.

The School's Quality Director is pursuing the issue within the College and University. Classics reps indicated they would be willing to help, if they could.

He reported that School-level data from NSS did, however, relate to students and programmes within our School.

#### National Student Survey: Update on Response Rates (Kathy Christie)

As at 21.3.11, the School response rate was 59.75% and each of the subject (JACS) codes were:

- History: 56.44% (171 individual responses)
- Classics: 65.63% (21 individual responses)
- Archaeology: 69.23% (27 individual responses)

#### Tutorial/Seminar Attendance (Robert Mason)

It was reported that the College has a working group on student attendance (at tutorials and seminars) and is seeking student views on why this can be low, and looking for suggestions to tackle this issue.

Student reps felt that attendance in their classes had been good, however.

In discussion, the following were noted/suggested:

Factors likely to encourage attendance:

- Marks to be gained for tutorial participation (as in History)
- Being asked to leave a tutorial if unprepared and to attend an alternative tutorial upon completing the work (as in Classics)
- Generally, if there were some 'stake' in attending
- Good rapport between tutor and students
- Informality and 'friendliness' of group leading to better class discussion

Factors likely to discourage attendance:

- Essay deadlines or other coursework clashing with tutorials

## **5 Library and Study Facilities**

### SRR:

Students reported the SRR going 'from strength to strength'.

Issues relating to Main Library Catalogue information about the location of some books (eg, Scottish History) had been reported and the School's library representatives were liaising with library cataloguers.

Issues relating to the SRR doors had been reported to security.

## **6 Any Other Business**

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## **7 Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed, in December 2011.