

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS  
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL & FILM STUDIES

PHILOSOPHY STAFF/STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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MINUTES OF 17 NOVEMBER 2010

**Present:**

Faisal Alkhatib (Student Rep, Honours), Katie Allan (Secretary), Jessica Biggs (Student Rep, 1000 level), Sarah Broadie, Josie Buerger (Student Rep, 1000 level), Rebecca Curzon-Edwards (Student Rep, PhD), James Harris, Ben Hofmann (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Holly Johns (Student Rep, Honours), Lisa Jones, Matthew Knotts (Student Rep, MLitt), Simon Prosser, John Skorupski, Amy Taggart (Student Rep, Honours), Qi Tian (Student Rep, 1000 level), Jens Timmermann.

**PRELIMINARY MATTERS**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 20 October 2010**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2010 were approved and adopted.

**3. Matters arising from the above minutes**

**3.1 10 credit modules at 2000 level (item 5.2 refers)**

The Director of Teaching confirmed that this matter continued to be considered by the Department.

**3.2 Timetabling Issues for Joint Degrees (item 6.1 refers)**

The School President informed the committee that he had discussed this matter with the School President in Physics & Astronomy.

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

**4. Election of a Student Library Representative**

The School President informed the committee that the University Library was keen to encourage and promote student engagement with the Library, particularly during the forthcoming period of re-development. He went on to request volunteers to stand as Departmental Student Library Rep for Philosophy which will involve attending meetings in the Library once or twice per semester. Matthew Knotts, Student Rep (MLitt) was the only volunteer and was duly elected to this position by the committee for session 2010/11.

## **STUDENT BUSINESS**

### **5. General Matters**

#### ***5.1 Review of the Advising Process***

The School President reported that there have been a number of complaints from students in other departments about the Honours Advising process, with students expressing confusion about the purpose of the process. He sought the views of staff and students members on the experience in Philosophy. The Student Reps are not aware of any concerns relating to Honours Advising in Philosophy and the Honours Advisor was pleased to outline the process and to confirm that the Department considers it to provide a welcome and important opportunity to meet with students on an individual basis and provide detailed advice and guidance at the start of the academic year.

#### ***5.2 Change to Module Feedback System***

The School President reported on the proposed changes to the student evaluation questionnaire process which is to be implemented this semester by the University and sought the views of student members as to how they would like to see the process improved.

The Director of Teaching clarified that this process provides the Department (and the University) with valuable information from students about how the module ran overall and an opportunity to evaluate lecturers and tutors delivering the modules. She went on to report that the selection of questions can be tailored to the needs of individual departments and, after the initial trial of the new software this semester, it is anticipated that the questions can be developed further to be more relevant to the department in future.

#### ***5.3 Teaching Awards***

The School President asked the committee to consider a proposal to award annual awards for teaching excellence locally within the Department as an additional recognition to the University Teaching Awards awarded via the Students Association.

While the Department agreed that it is important for students to be able to acknowledge teaching excellence and for staff to be honoured in this way, there did not seem to be a need to have an additional awards process administered within the Department. Although the committee felt that it may be more appropriate to have a local award for teaching excellence for postgraduate tutors for whom it may be more important to acknowledge in this way. This proposal will be considered further by the School President and student members of the committee.

#### ***5.4 Appointment of Professor Roger Scruton***

The School President reported that there continued to be a negative debate amongst students in Philosophy, and amongst the wider student population, about the appointment of Professor Scruton to the position of Professorial Fellow in Moral Philosophy. It was reported that students were concerned about his views on a number of issues and felt uncomfortable about having Professor Scruton as a teacher.

The committee discussed this matter in detail and the committee noted the concerns reported by the student reps.

### **5.5 *Careers Advisor***

In response to the question raised by the School President, the Director of Teaching confirmed that the department does not have a Careers Advisor and that students should refer directly to the Careers Centre for guidance and advice.

## **6. Sub - Honours Matters**

### **6.1 *PY1105 Ethical Controversies***

It was reported that some students had raised concerns about both the quality of the lectures and the quantity of work to be covered in the section on Kant for this module. The Director of Teaching indicated that the section on Kant and Mill did cover a lot of theoretical material and that at the start of the module students were informed of this and advised to begin the indicated reading prior to the weeks when these topics would be covered in lectures. If some students have not acted on this advice then they may have found these lectures challenging. The lecturer delivering the Kant section confirmed that he would be willing to provide an additional revision lecture on this topic during week 11.

It was also reported that a student had informed a Student Rep that they found the feedback provided on the first essay for this module to be ‘humiliating’ and ‘personal’. This was in response to feedback which advised the student to seek further guidance and support from the English Language Teaching unit to improve his/her writing skills. The Director of Teaching clarified that this form of feedback to a student is normal and professional, and that staff are expected to provide such guidance by the University to assist students with their academic work, and it is not intended to be unhelpful. If the student is concerned then they should be advised to speak further either with his/her tutor or the module co-ordinator.

### **6.2 *PY1005 Mind and Reality***

The Student Rep reported a good response from students on this module and no substantial concerns have been raised for consideration by the committee.

## **7. Honours Matters**

The Student Rep reported that he had received good feedback from students and had no specific issues to raise.

## **8. MLitt Matters**

### **8.1 *Allocation of Advisors***

The Student Rep reported that a student had noted concern about the allocation of advisors to students and the lack of student involvement in this allocation. The Director of the MLitt Programme confirmed that the basis of the allocation was the choices that students had made for the Research Methods module which was taken as a guide to a student’s academic interests. The advisors role is a pastoral support role and is not related to eventual dissertation topic choice and supervisor allocation. It was confirmed that if a student is very unhappy with their allocation of advisor then they should contact the Director who will see if a change is possible.

**9. Research Postgraduate Matters**

**9.1 Honours Prize Seminar**

The Student Rep reported that she had received very positive feedback from postgraduate research students about this proposal. She noted that some students had noted concern about continued student attendance at all of the not-for-credit seminars and about the amount of work involved in preparing an application for the competition. The School President also reported that a number of Honours students had expressed interest in the proposal. It was agreed that a formal proposal will be presented to the Philosophy Staff Council next week for final consideration with a view to a pilot project next semester.

**MATTERS FOR NOTING**

**10. AOCB**

There were no items of any other competent business.

**11. Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is *Wednesday 23 March 2011* at *2pm*.

*Katie M Allan*  
*Senior Administrator*  
*23 November 2010*