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

PHILOSOPHY STAFF/STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF 12 OCTOBER 2016

Present:

Katie Allan (Secretary), Doyin Animashaun (Student Rep, 1000 level), Liz Ashford, Derek Ball, Joseph Bowen (Student Rep, PhD), Jessica Brown, Aaron Cotnoir, Alice Fanner (Student Rep, Honours level), Berys Gaut, Ephraim Glick, James Harris, Lisa Jones, Anna McAlpine (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Walter Pedriali, Simon Prosser, Theron Pummer, Paige Schonher (Student Rep, MLitt), Victoria Skeie (Student Rep, Honours level), Justin Snedegar, Daniel Souter (Student Rep, Honours level), Polken Turkmen (Student Rep, 2000 level).

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Apologies for Absence

Sarah Broadie, Zoe Garvie (Student Rep, Evening Degree), Patrick Greenough, Andreas van den Hombergh (Student Rep, Honours level), Barbara Sattler, Jens Timmermann.

2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 17 February 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2016 were approved and adopted.

3. Matters arising from the above minutes

3.1 2016 National Student Survey (NSS) Results (item 5 refers)

The Head of Department reported on the strong results of the 2016 NSS survey which saw Philosophy at St Andrews ranked 1st out of 57 departments in the UK for student satisfaction. He reminded Honours level Student Reps of the important role they play in encouraging fourth year students to participate in this annual national survey.

STAFF BUSINESS

4. Feedback from MEQs

The Director of Teaching reported on the various feedback mechanisms in place which ensure that the department is aware of, and able to respond to, any student issues as they arise during the academic session.

One key mechanism is the Student Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) which are completed on-line by students at the end of each semester and which provide important information on the student experience of teaching and learning at module level. Student Reps are advised that the MEQs are examined carefully by individual module co-ordinators who are able to make amendments to a module before it is next delivered thereby enhancing the module for future students. Any issues arising from the MEQs are also discussed at each Board of Examiners meeting, in the presence of External Examiners, and at each SSCC meeting and changes are made as a consequence of this feedback. For example, in PY2013 Moral & Aesthetic Value, which ran for the first time last session, student feedback suggested...
that the order of the topics covered in the module should be revised. This change has been
implemented for the current session and will again be evaluated at the end of the module by
both students and module co-ordinators. Finally, the Director of Teaching noted that since
MEQs went on-line, rather than being completed in hardcopy, the student participation rate
across the university has dropped significantly and therefore reminded Student Reps of their
role in encouraging student participation.

5. Feedback from previous SSCC Meetings

The Director of Teaching highlighted the important role of the SSCC meeting in enabling
constructive discussion about experiences of teaching and learning between teaching staff and
students at all levels. The Student Reps on SSCC have a key role to play both in terms of
collating feedback from students to report at the meeting and in providing feedback to
students about discussion at the meeting. The minutes from the SSCC are posted on-line for
wide dissemination shortly after each meeting and all students should be encouraged to access
them.

6. Feedback from External Examiners

The Director of Teaching also explained that the undergraduate and taught postgraduate
programmes each have External Examiners appointed who are senior members of academic
staff at other leading universities whose role is to provide a means to ensure the quality and
standards of awards, the standards of student performance and the validity of assessment
processes. The feedback that Philosophy programmes received from External Examiners is
uniformly positive and the Director of Teaching outlined the following aspects from reports
submitted by the examiners in 2015/16.

An External Examiner for the logic and metaphysics elements of the undergraduate
programmes noted the high standard of student work across the board and commended staff
on the feedback provided to students, particularly on coursework. He reported that the
department’s assessment practices are robust and varied and he was particularly pleased to see
detailed written feedback provided to students that was helpful and constructive rather than a
simple justification of the mark awarded. He noted that the student dissertations were
outstanding with very good feedback provided to students. The department is clearly
delivering high quality teaching with examinations and assessments pitched at the right level.

An External Examiner for the moral philosophy elements of the undergraduate programmes
confirmed that the marking was fair and sensible throughout and he was impressed by the
thoroughness and detail of the marker’s comments to students. He commented on the very
high standards in marking and feedback to students and was impressed by some excellent
student work. He reported that he was favourably impressed by the ambition of the teaching
material covered in modules and in students responding to the challenging materials. In
particular in the area of History of Philosophy (classical, mediaeval and modern) the level of
sophistication and knowledge was exceptional for undergraduate students.

An External Examiner for the logic and metaphysics elements of the taught postgraduate
programmes noted that the teaching materials were good, including astute selection of essay
titles. This, and the high standard of teaching, was reflected in the student work. He went on
to note that the range of literature that students made use of in their essays was especially
impressive. He also confirmed that the marking seemed to be fair and robust, and the
feedback substantive and constructive.

An External Examiner for the moral philosophy elements of the taught postgraduate
programmes reported that feedback from markers is always detailed, helpful and encouraging.
Both External Examiners commented favourably on the strength of the taught postgraduate programmes overall and highlighted the care and attention taken with marking and moderation of student work and the constructive and detailed written feedback provided to students.

STUDENT BUSINESS: PhD REPORT

7. The Student Rep for the PhD programme noted that he had no significant issues to report and that PhD students appear to be satisfied with their studies.

As reported at the last meeting, students remain concerned about the content and appearance of the SASP webpage. The Senior Administrator was able to report that a number of updates to content on the SASP webpage have been made over the summer in response to feedback as follows:

- the PGR Friday Seminar Series is now listed in the main Philosophy events directory on the Philosophy homepage and the seminar organisers are reminded to provide as much detail as possible to allow the schedule to be maintained
- individual profiles for academic staff at both institutions have been added to the SASP webpage
- individual profiles for all PGR students are also on the SASP webpage but the support of the Student Rep was sought in encouraging students to provide the Postgraduate Course Administrator with information, including a photograph, to be added
- individual profiles for the new MLitt students are being developed and will be posted on-line shortly
- a new events page has been added to the SASP webpage which brings together information from a number of sources about Philosophy events and activities at St Andrews and at Stirling.

STUDENT BUSINESS: MLITT REPORT

8. The Student Rep for the MLitt programmes reported that students provided very positive feedback on the core module PY5101 Current Issues I with the lecturer proving to be very popular.

The other core module is PY5103 Research Methods which is organised around three themed streams and run as book seminars focusing on one key text. In all three streams, students are concerned about the lack of research methods and research skills being covered in the weekly seminars. Students on the ‘History’ stream have reported that they do not feel that the chosen anthology is good and on the ‘Logic & Metaphysics’ stream some students have reported that they are finding it hard to get clarity on key points. The Student Rep advised that she had raised these issues directly with the Director of MLitt programmes in a meeting earlier in the week and that he confirmed that will raise these concerns with the lecturers on this module to see how these issues can be addressed promptly.

The student feedback on the option modules this semester has been very positive and students have been impressed by module content, module organisation and teaching. Some students on PY5205 Origins of Analytical Philosophy felt that the module was covering sophisticated material at an early stage and that the module co-ordinator was assuming a lot of prior learning in the area by students.
9.1 **PY3100 Reading Philosophy 1**

The Student Rep that feedback on this new core module was generally very positive with students in particular responding well to the small-group structure of the module. The teaching staff are praised for their approachability and support. There has been a more mixed response from students about the readings for the module, particularly about the background reading.

9.2 **PY4615 Metaphysics**

The Student Rep reported that no specific feedback had been received about this module.

9.3 **PY4624 Philosophy of Art**

The Student Rep reported very positive student feedback on the lectures, lecture content and the structure of the module.

9.4 **PY4639 Philosophy of Creativity**

The Student Rep reported positive feedback on this module and students are enjoying the interesting module content. The students also reported that they were satisfied with the range of and access to learning resources.

9.5 **PY4644 Rousseau on Human Nature, Society & Freedom**

The Student Rep reported that this module was well-received by students. Some students reported that they would like to have further information about secondary texts and other feedback suggested that some students would like to see the primary texts being given more prominence in discussion.

9.6 **PY4646 Reasons for Action & Belief**

The Student Rep reported that that no specific feedback had been received about this module.

9.7 **PY4648 Conceptual Engineering and its Role in Philosophy**

The Student Rep reported that this module has received very positive student feedback with students particularly impressed by the PowerPoint presentations in lectures.

9.8 **PY4651 Effective Altruism**

The Student Rep reported that that no specific feedback had been received about this module.

9.9 **PY4652 The Philosophy of Human Rights**

The Student Rep reported that this module was popular with students who are enjoying the interesting topics covered. The lecturers are supportive and helpful which is appreciated by students on the module. Some students reported that they felt that the lectures could benefit from being a little more structured with some feeling that too much time in lectures is spent simply summarising readings.
9.10 **PY4701 Philosophy & Pedagogy**

The Student Rep reported that no specific feedback had been received about this module. *(Secretary's Note: The Director of Teaching subsequently clarified that there are no students taking PY4701 this year).*

9.11 **PY4698/99 Dissertation**

The Student Rep reported that a few students had asked why the single semester dissertation and the full year dissertation appeared to have the same workload and length of dissertation when they assumed that the requirements would be different. The Director of Teaching clarified that both dissertation modules are weighted at 30 credits which reflects the amount of workload, so although the dissertation modules take place over different time periods the workload expectations and weightings are the same. The Student Rep further reported that students with experience of doing dissertations in other Schools have enjoyed the opportunity to give presentations on their dissertations as part of the process, like a ‘work-in-progress’ session where they can then receive feedback from other students and staff. The Director of Teaching suggested that this was an interesting proposal and advised that she would ask the Honours Advisor, who is responsible for the dissertation modules, to explore the proposal further.

9.12 **General Honours Issues**

The School President reported that honours students are happy with the wide range of modules offered and the variety of topics covered. Some students have also requested further guidance for junior honours students about how to write essays of a longer length. The Director of Teaching noted that there is a significant amount of guidance on essay writing in the Undergraduate Handbook, that this material has been covered in the ‘Introduction to Honours Philosophy’ sessions held in the department at the start of the session and also in courses delivered via CAPOD on ‘Academic Skills for Philosophers’.

The School President also reported that a Study Abroad student has suggested that the department establish ‘safe psychological spaces’ and implement a system whereby teaching staff do not mark or assess their own students’ work. The Head of Department noted that the university operates a system of anonymous marking for all coursework and examinations to guarantee integrity in the assessment of student work.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: SECOND YEAR REPORT**

10.1 **PY2010 Intermediate Logic**

The Student Rep reported that this module received very positive student feedback and students considered the module to be well organised and the handouts very helpful. The ‘logic surgeries’ are particularly popular with students finding them very helpful in developing their skills, although some suggested that it might be helpful to have more time to practice logic trees prior to assessment.

10.2 **PY2011 Foundations of Western Philosophy**

The Student Rep reported that this module has received very positive student feedback. Some students reported that the pacing of delivery in lectures could be improved in that students ask questions during the lecture which often means that the lecturer is rushing through material in the later part of the lecture hour in order to cover all of the content. In terms of the tutorials, some of the students reported that tutorials could be more focused and sometimes feel like a
re-hashing of the lectures. The main concern noted was about uploading lecture notes to MMS with only one week of material reported to being made available to date and also that students with special needs have not been provided with the lecture notes in advance of lectures. The Module Co-ordinator was not in attendance at the meeting, but these matters were raised with her immediately and it was found that a technical problem had meant that uploaded material was not visible to students.

STUDENT BUSINESS: FIRST YEAR REPORT

11.1 PY1010 Mind and World

The Student Rep reported that this module has received very positive student feedback with students particularly impressed by the clarity of the lectures and the approachability and helpfulness of the lecturers. Students also appreciated the use of comprehension questions which they found a helpful way of guiding their own reading. Some students with no background in Philosophy feel that they need more explanation of key terminology and ideas and there was also concern about materials not being made available on MMS sufficiently in advance of the lecture. There has also been some concern amongst students about the format of tutorials and some students have criticised tutorials for being student-led and discursive. The Director of Teaching clarified that the purpose of tutorials is to provide a context for students to discuss and reflect on material introduced in lectures and the role of the tutor is to facilitate that discussion. She went on to note that first year students were informed of the role of tutorials, their purpose and function, in the introductory session for first year Philosophy students held at the start of session and requested that first year student reps assist by clarifying this for the students who have expressed concern.

11.2 PY1011 Moral and Political Controversies

The Student Rep reported that students were enjoying this module and responding well to the module content which they have found to be stimulating and engaging. Students commented that they appreciated the brevity of the lecture notes made available via MMS as they provide ample guidance for those students who attended the lecture while still encouraging non-attenders to attend the lectures. There was also some concern about materials not being made available on MMS sufficiently in advance of the lecture as many students reported that they still liked to print out the notes in advance of the lecture and then annotate them during the lecture.

11.3 General First Year Issues

Student on both modules indicated that they would like more guidance on essay writing. The Director of Teaching again noted that there is a significant amount of guidance on essay writing in the Undergraduate Handbook, that this material has been covered in a Philosophy essay writing skills session held within the PY1011 lecture schedule (which was poorly attended) and also in courses delivered via CAPOD on ‘Academic Skills for Philosophers’. She asked student reps to ensure that students are aware of all the information and assistance that is available to them both within the department and via the university more widely as the department struggles to understand what further information and assistance they can provide.

STUDENT BUSINESS: EVENING DEGREE REPORT

12. The students on the Evening Degree have reported a high degree of satisfaction for the module and are especially enthusiastic in their praise for the Module Co-ordinator, who is praised for the clarity of his explanation of complex ideas, his knowledge, approachability and enthusiasm. Students reported that the lecture room is cold and it appears that the central heating is being switched off in the evening. This is a common problem that affects evening
teaching and the Module Co-ordinator will report this issue to the University’s Evening Degree Co-ordinator.

MATTERS FOR NOTING

13. Any Other Competent Business

There were no items of any other competent business.

14. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 15th February 2017 at 2pm

Katie M Allan
School Administrator
21 October 2016