Annual Academic Monitoring - Dissemination Event

‘Student Peer Mentoring Scheme [PGT]’ – Report to Proctor Nov 2013

Background

At the meeting on 9 October I spoke about the origins, nature and working of the scheme and its initial outcomes. The School was interested in finding a way of providing information and responding to queries from PGT “firm acceptances” that could supplement in a more personal way all the online information available to them. Simultaneously, PGT students taking the option module MN5511 Leadership in Organisations were tasked as part of their assessment to devise their own “leadership challenge”. Some students in the group felt it would have been helpful to them if they could have had access before they arrived in St Andrews to some current students to whom they could put various questions relating to what life was like as a student in St Andrews, what tips and suggestions could be offered to help with orientation and adjustment, etc.

To satisfy the assessment requirement, the students proposed a “PGT Peer Mentoring Scheme” and outlined how such a scheme would work. With the module assessment requirement completed the students discussed their ideas with Julie Brooks, Director of Postgraduate Programmes in the School of Management and Cat Wilson, Head of Organisational Development in CAPOD. The scheme that evolved was pitched at helping new students with aspects of student life at St Andrews – it was not to be concerned with academic issues. A mentor handbook was developed which explained the nature of the scheme, how it would work, the role of mentors, timescales and time commitments, etc. The scheme was publicised among PGT students and those expressing an interest in being a mentor were invited to a briefing event. Approximately 20 students volunteered to be mentors. A website was also created by one of the students originally involved in the exercise as part of MN5511 and the scheme which was launched in June 2013.

Some 130 PGT “firm acceptances” for 2013-14 were informed about the scheme and its website and invited to participate. Via the website the mentee could “tailor” their request for a mentor based on programme, country and gender. Using email and Skype, mentee and mentor then explored various questions as posed by the mentee. Due to the mentors working on their dissertations over the summer, the number of mentees each mentor had and their time commitment to each had to be limited to a reasonable and realistic level (typically, each mentor had three or four mentees and engaged with each via three or four email exchanges and one Skype call).

Feedback from mentees has been overwhelmingly positive while mentors have expressed satisfaction with being able to support new students and help the School of Management through their involvement with the scheme. Their role as a mentor would also be a useful addition to their CV.

Discussions

At the dissemination event on 9 October, Anne Campbell (School of Computer Science) and Bernhard Stuck (School of History) discussed the scheme further with Martin Dowling. The three had a further meeting over lunch on 15 November and were joined by Julie Brooks from the School of Management. Suggestions to run a similar scheme in both Computer Science (for PGT students) and History (for PGT students and potentially for doctoral students both mentored by 1st or 2nd year PhD students) are being considered by Anne and Bernhard in each School. In the School of
Management discussions are underway as to how the scheme might be continued for new PGT students arriving in September 2014.

Proposal

The group felt the scheme was worthy of a University-wide initiative subject to an evaluation of a pilot scheme to operate in the summer of 2014 in the three Schools represented by the group. For the pilot in summer 2014, the website that had been developed for the School of Management scheme in 2013 could be adapted to include also the School of Computer Science and the School of History. Mentors in each School would be sought and orientation provided. “Firm acceptances” in the three Schools would be informed of the scheme and invited via the website to link with a mentor in the relevant School.

Subject to an evaluation of the pilot scheme in say October 2014, and with appropriate resources to support it, consideration of how the scheme could be rolled-out across the University could be undertaken. A University-wide scheme, informed by the platform created and operated in the 2014 pilot scheme and employing one or two graduates as interns (thus offering them valuable work experience), would enable all Schools to become involved and avoid the duplication of effort that might otherwise occur if Schools were to attempt their own schemes.

Martin Dowling
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Julie Brooks

15 November 2013