MINUTES OF 18 FEBRUARY 2015

Present:

Katie Allan (Secretary), Jessica Brown, David Callaberos (Student Rep, 2000 level), Aisling Crean, Berys Gaut, Ephraim Glick, John Haldane, Patrick Hansen (Student Rep, MLitt), James Harris, Eleanor Heagney (Student Rep, 1000 level), Celia Hindley (Student Rep, 2000 level), Brian Ho, Eleanor Mullin (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Hella Peter (Student Rep, 1000 level), Simon Prosser, Ben Sachs, Joe Slater (Student Rep, PhD), Justin Snedegar, Jens Timmermann, Ieva Vasiljeva (Student Rep Honours), Christopher Young (Student Rep, Honours) and Antonia Zimmermann (Student Rep, 1000 level).

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Apologies for Absence

Sally Allmark (Student Rep, 2000 level), Derek Ball, Gabriel Bishop (Student Rep, Honours), Marilyn Cosson (Student Rep, 2000 level), Cordelia Diamond (Student Rep, 1000 level), Lisa Jones and Lauren Waters (Student Rep, Honours)

2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 29 October 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2014 were approved and adopted.

3. Matters arising from the above minutes

3.1 Facebook activity & engagement with students (item 3.1 refers)

The School President reported that all students were contacted with information regarding Facebook groups at the start of semester 1 and this did lead to a slight increase in take up by students but overall this remains disappointing. However, this initiative will continue and it is anticipated that student usage will increase over time.

3.2 Third Year Compulsory Module (item 3.2 refers)

Refer to agenda item 6 below for details.

3.3 Undergraduate Reading Party (item 5 refers)

The Reading Party will take place on 10-12 April 2015 and the following actions are aimed to increase participation amongst students: student registration fee to be further subsidised by the Scots Philosophical Association (in addition to normal departmental subsidy) to reduce the cost to students; any unsold places after the initial registration deadline will be made available for sale to 2nd year Philosophy students; School President and Student Reps to assist with promotion of the event via Facebook and other informal networks and by designing a poster for display in the department and electronic circulation.
3.4 **Group Learning Sessions (item 11.1 refers)**
The School President reported that initial trials of informal small student group learning sessions had been well-attended and something that the President will wish to encourage further in the future.

3.5 **Graph Function in MMS (item 10 refers)**
The School President made a formal request on behalf of Philosophy students to have the graph function in MMS made available on all undergraduate modules with 10 or more students enrolled. It was agreed that this item would be referred to the next meeting of the Philosophy Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

**STAFF BUSINESS**

4. **Attendance at Sub-Honours Lectures**

A Lecturer who is giving lectures on first and second year modules in the current semester noted that approximately half of student enrolled onto these modules are not attending lectures and asked the Student Reps why this might be the case, what the underlying cause might be and whether the department can do anything to address this problem.

The School President responded that the feedback from students on these modules has been positive and does not suggest any clear underlying reason and went on to suggest whether students should be required to sign an attendance register for lectures. However, staff felt that they want to positively encourage student attendance at lectures rather than seek ways to enforce attendance.

The committee went on to discuss questions around the timing of posting lecture material onto MMS and how this interacts with student attendance with some colleagues noting a clear connection between posting material before a lecture and a decline in attendance. It was agreed that it should still be at the discretion of individual module co-ordinators about how they should approach dissemination of teaching and learning materials to students.

5. **Response to Module Evaluations from Semester 1**

The Director of Teaching asked the committee, in writing via another colleague, to note the following information regarding student module evaluations.

All module evaluations completed by students in semester 1 were read by relevant module co-ordinators & tutors, and by the Director of Teaching. This feedback was then considered as part of our reflections on all S1 modules at the January module boards. In the main, feedback was positive, and it is good to know that our teaching and learning is delivered to an overall high level of satisfaction. Two main points of note:

(i) across the board, module feedback submission hovered at around 50% - i.e. only half of all students on each module completed the module evaluation forms. We’d like to see higher rates this semester, so as to get a more accurate picture of student views about our modules. The low rate of uptake was probably a result of the University’s move from paper-copy to online evaluations, and it would help this semester if our student president and class reps could raise student awareness of the online evaluations, and if staff could also remind students of these in the final weeks of the teaching period (note also: evaluations may be open as early as week 9, but it is worth waiting until weeks 10-11 to complete them, since that gives more time for students to have received feedback on work, on which they can then comment)

(ii) the main type of negative feedback from S1 concerned essay feedback being late – a few students within a couple of modules commented on this. In some cases, this
might have been due to industrial action, in other cases due to staff illness, but also in
at least one case to staff workload problems. Where lateness is due to the latter, we
have discussed this and will continue to endeavour to meet our feedback targets (the
Director of Teaching is currently working on the marking & moderation schedule for
S2, and deadline dates for feedback will, as always, be made clear to staff, with
additional reminders sent out to staff as deadlines approach).

The School President confirmed that the Student Reps did promote the student module
evaluations during semester 1 and will do so again this semester. She went on to report that
some students reported that they were unclear about the purpose of the questionnaires because
there is no opportunity for their feedback to be taken into consideration when the
questionnaires are completed at the end of the module. The Head of Department clarified that
the purpose is to allow staff to reflect on and respond to student feedback when delivering the
module in the future as part of a cycle of continuous review and improvement.

6. Update on Curriculum Review

The Director of Teaching asked the committee, in writing via another colleague, to note the
following information regarding the review of the Philosophy undergraduate curriculum.

Our plans to make changes to the philosophy curriculum at 3000-level (specifically, to do
away with 3000-level modules) did not receive the approval of the cross-faculty approval
group – the Deans are unwilling to approve removal of 3000-level modules from the
curriculum. This means we have to rethink our 3000-level provision. All of our plans for
changes to the sub-Honours curriculum were approved without question, however; so, from
September 2015 there will be a new slate of 1000- and 2000-level modules. Information about
these will be provided online in the University’s Course Catalogue, when this is published
later in this semester.

For next academic session 2015/6, we will retain our current 3000-level modules PY3701 and
PY3702, but these will be replaced with alternative modules for 2016/7. In planning for these
3000-level changes over the course of the next year, one of our aims will be to provide more
student choice/flexibility.

The School President reported that students continue to report issues with both PY3701 and
PY3702, and that joint honours students in particular are vocal in their dislike of the
requirement to take one of these core modules. In general, students would prefer not to have
any compulsory modules at honours level but the President acknowledged that this is a
requirement imposed on the degree programme by university requirements.

7. Honours Modules/Pre-Advising Fayre

The Director of Teaching asked the committee, in writing via another colleague, to note the
following information regarding an Honours Pre-Advising Fayre.

We have been looking into the possibility of providing a pre-advising event that might best be
described as an ‘Honours module fayre’, where students due to enter Junior and Senior
Honours could come along and pick up information about modules that would be running in
the following academic session, and talk to staff who will be delivering those modules.

This would be in addition to, not a replacement of, our current pre-advising practice of (i)
releasing a pre-advising handbook containing information about next session’s modules
(description, lecturer, basic information about assessment breakdown), and (ii) offering face-
to-face pre-advising appointments with the Hons advisor during the week that pre-advising
opens.
It has been difficult, however, to find a time during the working week, prior to pre-advise, when this event could be held. Classes run all day most days, and on Wednesday afternoons in weeks 7 and 8 there are already departmental meetings and events occurring that staff need to attend. One possible solution is to piggyback the event onto one of the regular PhilSoc Monday evenings. (Staff could be available in the Arts Lecture Theatre foyer, with module information, prior to the scheduled PhilSoc talk and the DoT or Honours Advisor could give a brief introduction/orientation to Honours modules).

Given the time and effort this requires, it is really only worth doing if there is a real need for it, and if philosophy students would take up this opportunity to inform themselves about Honours study. Is there a sense among our students that this event would be popular, and uptake would be high? If so, we will liaise with PhilSoc to try to arrange a time for it.

After some discussion, it was agreed not to organise an event this year but to keep the option open for the future. The Student Reps felt that any issues are satisfactorily addressed by one-to-one advising appointments with the Philosophy Honours Advisor during the Pre-Advise period.

STUDENT BUSINESS: PhD REPORT

8. Tutor Pay

The Student Rep (PhD) reported that postgraduate tutors continue to feel under-paid and under-valued for the amount of work that they actually do around tutoring on sub-honours modules. He also noted that postgraduates at Stirling get paid more for tutoring which has meant that this is a more attractive option for postgraduate tutors.

The Head of Department noted that this is an on-going issue and the department is acting in accordance with university guidelines for payment of casual staff for tutoring work and cannot choose to be flexible in this area. The issue is under discussion at institutional level and the department will follow any guidance that might emerge from these discussions.

STUDENT BUSINESS: MLITT REPORT

9. MLitt Report

The Student Rep (MLitt) reported that the students on the programme were very appreciative of the support and guidance that they receive from the Director of the MLitt Programmes.

He went on to note his concern about the on-going political situation in Syria and Iraq and wished to urge the department to endorse a petition calling on the University to host a summit in St Andrews, to be attended by all interested parties, in order to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The Head of Department responded to confirm that this was a matter of individual conscience and not something that the department could take a position on as a whole.

STUDENT BUSINESS: HONOURS REPORT

10. PY4643 Philosophy of Law

The Student Rep reported that the student feedback on this module was positive. The students felt the course material was interesting and stimulating and that the lecturer’s teaching style was engaging and energising. A small number of students felt that frequent references to material to be delivered in future lectures was distracting and should be kept to a
minimum. The lecturer responded that he would address this concern in the next lectures and thanked the students for the helpful feedback.

11. **PY4624 Philosophy of Art**

The Student Rep reported that the module was well received by students who were overwhelming positive about the module. The students particularly enjoy the presentations, alternative forms of assessments, including the use of blogs, and the take-home examination. Some students commented on the heat and stuffiness of the Arts Seminar Room and it was agreed that this would be reported to Estates for attention.

12. **PY3702 Value & Normativity**

The Student Rep reported that, leaving aside general student frustrations about the requirement to take a compulsory module at honours level, the module is well received with the module being well organised and the teaching standard excellent.

13. **PY4614 Philosophy of Mind**

The Student Rep reported that the student feedback on the module was positive and students were engaged with the lecture content and the level and quantity of reading. Some students suggested that they would appreciate more structure in tutorials but the module co-ordinator sought clarification on this because each tutorial is based around a topic and specific readings and questions connected to the topic as set out in the module handbook.

14. **PY4647 Humans, Animals and Nature**

The Student Rep reported that the student feedback on this module was positive and students especially noted that this was a very well organised module with a clear structure.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: SECOND YEAR REPORT**

15. **PY2004 Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Kant**

The Student Report reported that this module was very well received by students who commented positively on the interesting, well-structured and engaging lectures and the tutorials which help to clarify lecture content. They also noted, and recorded their appreciation, of the detailed feedback provided on essays. Some students felt that the amount of reading required for the module was too burdensome with students unsure which were the key items for each week. The module co-ordinator undertook to provide more guidance and/or restructure the reading list for the rest of the semester in response to these student concerns.

16. **PY2101 Aesthetics**

The Student Rep reported that the student feedback on this module was positive although students feel that the workload is not reflective of the 10-credit weighting of the module. Some students reported that while engagement in tutorials has improved since the start of the semester, some students continue to report that they find the lecture content difficult to engage with.

17. **PY2103 Rationality and Action**

The Student Rep reported that the module was well received by students who were overwhelmingly positive about the module. The students reported that the lectures and
tutorials were interesting and engaging and the module co-ordinator helpful. Some students noted that they would like to have more detailed lecture notes provided via MMS.

STUDENT BUSINESS: FIRST YEAR REPORT

18. PY1006 Reasoning & Knowledge

The Student Rep reported that student feedback on the module was positive. The students find the tutorials interesting and engaging and are happy with how the logic element of the module is being taught, although some students do not understand why logic is a compulsory element for students wishing to proceed to study Philosophy at honours level. Some students felt that the lecture content might be improved by considering ways in which arguments could be disputed and engaged with rather than focusing on the background established philosophical issues. Students continue to find the 5pm lecture slot difficult and the department shares those concerns but is restricted by the university timetable.

19. PY1106 Society, Authority & Freedom

The Student Rep reported that the module was well received by students and the student feedback positive. In particular, students commented favourably on the size of tutorial groups, the interesting discussions in class and the accessible and engaging material. Students did raise a concern about the set text for the module which is expensive to purchase and not available on-line.

STUDENT BUSINESS: GENERAL

20. Exam Feedback

The School President reported that students wanted to receive more structured and detailed written feedback on their examination scripts and to have greater accessibility to their examination scripts. She suggested that a checklist proforma could be utilised without causing too much additional work for staff marking scripts and reported that other departments use similar checklists.

The Departmental Examinations Officer clarified that the written comments on the examinations scripts are intended for the other markers, including external examiners, and not primarily as a source of feedback to students on their performance. Instead, as detailed in the Undergraduate Student Handbook, students are invited to attend the drop-in session held at the start of each semester where they can look at their own examination scripts and then if they have further queries or wish to receive more detailed feedback they are encouraged to contact their module co-ordinator to make an appointment to receive one-to-one feedback. It was noted that attendance at the drop-in session is low and that very few students take up the opportunity to meet with module co-ordinators to discuss examination scripts which suggests that students are not yet making use of the opportunities currently available to them.

It was agreed that this matter would be referred to the Philosophy Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

21. Size and Access to Arché

The School President reported that some students have felt that the Arché seminar room is cramped and can get too hot during tutorials. Furthermore, when postgraduate tutors have arranged to meet with students in their own offices located in the building, students cannot gain access and are often left waiting around in the street and unable to contact the
postgraduate tutor inside the building. This is unsatisfactory and it was agreed to refer this matter to the Philosophy Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

22. Opening Hours of Edgecliffe Library, and the type of chairs available

The School President sought clarification of the opening hours of the Edgecliffe Library and it was confirmed that the library is only open during the hours when the building is open i.e. between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. In addition, some students had reported that they found the chairs in the Library uncomfortable but the Head of Department advised that current resources will not allow for refurbishment of this space at the present time.

23. Variety of Modules Available

The School President reported that this issue is connected to the issue of the core modules at honours level and joint honours students. She reported that students would be very interested in an honours module on feminist philosophy and/or more prominence given to feminist philosophy within existing honours modules. The Head of Department confirmed that some aspects of feminist philosophy are already covered within the existing provision and noted that the topic will appear in PY1106 Society, Authority & Freedom later in the semester and more extensively in the new sub-honours programme to be introduced next year, in addition to inclusions in various honours modules.

24. NSS Survey Promotion

It was noted that the School President and Student Reps will continue to support module co-ordinators in promoting the National Student Survey to students and encouraging participation. The deadline for the survey is 30 April 2015.

25. Including Tutorial Participation in Assessment

The School President reported that those students who actively participated in tutorial discussions felt resentful of those students who do not and felt that participation should be rewarded via the assessment mechanism for modules, although it was noted that this might cause difficulties for students who are shy or have difficulties.

The Departmental Examinations Officer responded that tutorials should be about free discussion to aid learning and therefore are not part of the assessment of a module.

MATTERS FOR NOTING

26. AOCB

There were no items of any other competent business.

27. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.

Katie M Allan
Senior Administrator
10 March 2015