MINUTES OF 22 FEBRUARY 2017

Present:

Katie Allan (Secretary), Joseph Bowen (Student Rep, PhD), Sarah Broadie, Jessica Brown, Alex Douglas, Alison Duncan Kerr, Adam Etinson, Alice Fanner (Student Rep, Honours level), Ephraim Glick, Freya Goble (Student Convenor), James Harris, Andreas van den Hombergh (Student Rep, Honours level), Lisa Jones, Illya Nuzbrokh (Student Rep, 1000 level), Walter Pedriali, Simon Prosser, Taabish Rayani (Student Rep, 2000 level), Sophia Rommel (Student Rep, 2000 level), Ben Sachs, Paige Schönher (Student Rep, MLitt), Molly Sharkey (Student Rep, 2000 level), Victoria Skeie (Student Rep, Honours level), Justin Snedegar, Mark Thakkar, Jens Timmermann, Polken Turkmen (Student Rep, 2000 level), Silvia Ventura (Student Rep, 2000 level), Elen Young (Student Rep, ID1004)

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Apologies for Absence

Anna McAlpine (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Theron Pummer, Michael Walschots.

2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 12 October 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2016 were approved and adopted.

3. Matters arising from the above minutes

There were no matters arising.

STAFF BUSINESS

4. National Student Survey (NSS)

The Director of Teaching reported that the NSS 2017 has recently been launched and all final year students will have received an email from the university in recent days about the 2017 survey. All 4000-level Student Reps were asked to encourage all eligible students to participate in the survey.

5. Equality & Diversity

The Director of Teaching reported that the School has established an Equality & Diversity Committee which has been active over the last 12 months. Student Reps may be aware of this committee because of the student focus groups aimed at providing a forum for students to raise any equality & diversity matters which took place in semester 1. The committee is part of action planning for enhancing Equality & Diversity in the School and establishes a regular forum for discussion. In addition, this Staff/Student Consultative Committee will in future have a standing agenda item on Equality & Diversity.
The Director of Teaching also reminded the committee of the active Student Society, Women & Minorities in Philosophy, which has been working with staff in the department on module content and reading lists to ensure that Philosophy modules are as diverse as possible.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: PhD REPORT**

6. 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.

   It was reported that one student has expressed concern about whether the available study space for PhD students in the department is being allocated in the most effective way and it was agreed that this matter would be referred to the SASP Joint Committee to be discussed at its next meeting in May.

   It was also reported that those postgraduate students who are taking part in a trial use of Panopto this semester are very positive about the system which they have found to be helpful to use for preparing for tutorials.

   A number of postgraduate tutors continue to have concerns about their remuneration for tutoring work and the Director of Teaching reminded the committee that this is an issue for the university and students are advised to lobby the university on this issue.

**STUDENT BUSINESS: MLITT REPORT**

7. The Student Rep for the MLitt programmes reported that some students would like to know why the lectures on the core module PY5102 Current Issues II this semester are two hours in duration when compared to the lectures on the core module PY5101 Current Issues I in semester I which were one hour. The MLitt Director reported that module co-ordinators can choose to structure the teaching on modules as they think best and noted that the important point is that all students receive three contact hours of weekly teaching on both modules. The Student Rep also reported that where there are two hour classes, all module co-ordinators should provide a short break for the students.

   The Philosophy of Language component of PY5102 Current Issues II was well-received with students reporting that the module co-ordinator was good at explaining concepts and very approachable but a number of students reporting that they felt the content was too technical and narrow especially where many of the students have not previously studied philosophy of language and therefore often felt that they did not fully understand the context.

   The student feedback on the two sessions held in semester I for MLitt students covering material on how to apply for a PhD and how to prepare a research proposal was very positive and many students reported the value of these sessions when working on their own applications.

   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. The module co-ordinator for PY5402 Advanced Epistemology was praised for being an excellent lecturer who is good at facilitating discussion. The students on PY5320 Mediaeval Philosophy are enjoying the readings. Student on PY5324 Philosophy of Logic were positive about the module co-ordinator and the module content but many felt that the volume of assigned reading was too great which made it difficult to fully engage with the material.

   The Student Rep concluded by reporting that there is an overall concern amongst the students on the programme about unnecessary stress being generated by competition between students which has created an environment of insecurity with students reluctant to engage in
discussion and share their thoughts in class. The committee discussed how this pressure might be relieved by, for example, asking current PhD students who were on the MLitt in previous years to be available to provide advice and support, whether more social activities might aid improved cohesion within the cohort, whether this pressure could be alleviated by better access to study space/resources. The Student Rep agreed to discuss this issue further with the students and to report back to the Director of MLitt programmes with any suggestions on how this issue might be addressed in the future.

STUDENT BUSINESS: HONOURS REPORT

8.1 PY3200 Reading Philosophy 1

The Student Rep reported that feedback on this new core module was generally very positive with students in particular liking the range of topics covered on the module, although a few students suggested that fewer topics could be covered and explored in more depth. The students also suggested that two presentations for 10% each of the final module mark was very time consuming for the credit available.

8.2 PY3999 Special Topics in Philosophy

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

8.3 PY4607 Continental European Philosophy from Descartes to Leibniz

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

8.4 PY4614 Philosophy of Mind

The Student Rep reported positive feedback on this module and the module co-ordinator is praised for his engaging and insightful lectures. The students also reported that they are impressed by the online resources available for this module.

8.5 PY4626 Life and Death

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

8.6 PY4634 Philosophy of Logic

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

8.7 PY4643 Philosophy of Law

The Student Rep reported generally positive feedback on this module and the students liked the range of topics covered on the module and also reported that the tutorials are very popular, with students finding them engaging and intellectually stimulating. It was also noted that some students reported that they would have liked to have more than one essay question to choose from and that it was often felt that the lectures were being interrupted by questions which took the lecture off course and interrupted the flow. Some students also noted that the module seemed to focus on ‘punishment’ and that perhaps the title of the module should be revised to more accurately reflect the module content.

The module co-ordinator responded that the examination paper has a greater choice of questions and is less restrictive than the question set for coursework and that he will reconsider how questions are handled in the lectures for the second half of the module. With regards to the module title, the module co-ordinator noted that there may be a case for
developing a new module on ‘punishment’ to run in addition to a broader module on the philosophy of law.

8.8 PY4647 Humans, Animals and Nature

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

8.9 PY4650 Philosophy, Feminism and Gender

The Student Rep reported very positive feedback on this module and the students are finding the lectures very engaging. The students are enjoying the readings on the module but a number of students have reported that they do not enjoy having to read passages out loud in tutorials. Students also asked whether it might be possible to change the submission date for the weekly blog posts and the module co-ordinator agreed to amend the deadline to midnight on Wednesdays. The students also raised a concern about the fact that they are required to bring hardcopies of key readings to tutorials but these are not provided and they are required to print the hardcopies personally.

STUDENT BUSINESS: SECOND YEAR REPORT

9.1 PY2012 Meaning & Knowing

The Student Rep reported that this module received positive student feedback and students are enjoying the material covered on the module and the depth in which it is explored in lectures. The students are happy with the readings on the module, and with the inclusion of female authors, but some students have found a number of the readings in the epistemology section challenging. At the same time, other students felt that this more challenging material was good preparation for honours level study and that they felt more confident about the material after the relevant tutorials.

The module co-ordinator responded that the reading list includes a wide-range of readings and materials and that she is aware that some of the journal articles will be challenging for students who are encouraged to read this more challenging material alongside the introductory material. The questions posed on the reading list/module guide are designed to focus attention on key parts of the more challenging journal articles.

9.2 PY2013 Moral & Aesthetic Value

The Student Rep reported that this module received very positive student feedback and students felt that the module covers interesting material and that the module is both interesting and enjoyable. The students reported enjoying the lectures which are considered to be well-paced and interesting, although a few students felt that the lectures could be a little slow, particularly when interrupted by questions. The use of Panopto to audio-record lectures is being trialled on this module and students are pleased with the system with many reporting that they use the system to listen back to the lectures.

The module co-ordinator reported that she has changed the format of the lectures on the module to include more Q&A and discussion to address concerns that the use of Panopto will lead to a further reduction in student attendance at lectures. The Panopto system only captures speech from the lecturer and does not pick up on discussion in the wider lecture theatre. The module co-ordinator encouraged students to make their views on Panopto known via the student module evaluation questionnaires at the end of the semester.
STUDENT BUSINESS: FIRST YEAR REPORT

10.1 ID1004 Great Ideas II

The Student Rep reported it was difficult to get feedback from students on this module because of its interdisciplinary nature with students drawn from across the university. The students have enjoyed the blog posts which they feel has encouraged participation. The main concern noted by students on the module is that there is no comprehensive reading list and students report that materials required for tutorial preparation can be hard to find. The weekly quizzes have not been popular, with students noting that they are too simple and fact-based. The module co-ordinator confirmed that this is the purpose of the quizzes and they are a quick way to check knowledge. Students also reported that although the module is interdisciplinary in nature, it feels very science focused and information heavy. Student report that they are finding it hard to take their learning and apply it to an essay or examination. The module co-ordinator confirmed that essay questions are available on MMS and have been since week 1 and sample essays are also available for reference via MMS. The module co-ordinator stated that he understood these concerns which are to be expected of a module of this interdisciplinary nature.

10.2 PY1012 Reasoning

The Student Rep reported that students are enjoying this module and are happy with the pace of lectures, the interesting topics covered and the engagement with the materials on the module. The students would like to see more materials available on-line, especially access to lecture notes and a link to library resources. Some students reported that they have found the tutorials disappointing and they feel that they are not taking away much from them. It was also reported by a number of students that they feel that too much time is given to informal logic where they feel that they would benefit from more time focussed on formal logic.

The module co-ordinator reported that lecture notes had deliberately not been posted on MMS as a way of encouraging students to attend lectures and that this seems to have worked as student attendance is better than in recent years.

10.3 PY1013 The Enlightenment

The Student Rep reported that this module received very positive student feedback with student in particular finding the topics covered stimulating and the lectures very good. It was noted that many students would like to see more on-line resources for the module. Some students have expressed concerns about the tutorials and would like more clarity about the purpose of tutorials. There was also concern about the availability of readings via the library with only one copy of a book being available via short loan and having 7 callbacks waiting. The module co-ordinator noted that this was for items on the secondary reading list but would look into this with the library.

The module co-ordinator reported that he makes the PowerPoint presentation of each lecture available via MMS and would welcome guidance on what additional materials students think should be made available. He reminded students that office hours are available each week for students to speak directly with the module co-ordinator and raise any concerns or ask questions.

The Director of Teaching highlighted that the postgraduate tutors are subject to compulsory training by the university, within the department and within each module before and during their tutoring to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge required.
STUDENT BUSINESS: EVENING DEGREE REPORT

11. 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 his lecture style, enthusiasm and commitment to his students. Some students reported that they would welcome more guidance on essay writing and on how to adhere to the word counts.

MATTERS FOR NOTING

12. Any Other Competent Business

There were no items of any other competent business.

13. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday to be confirmed.

Katie M Allan
School Administrator
28 March 2017