MINUTES OF 4 NOVEMBER 2015

Present:
Katie Allan (Secretary), Sally Allmark (Philosophy School President & Convenor), Derek Ball, Jude Bernard (Student Rep, 2000 level), Sarah Broadie, Aaron Cotnoir, Aisling Crean, James Harris, Ursula Guy (Student Rep, 1000 level), Eleanor Heagney (Student Rep, 2000 level), Luisa Hill (Student Rep, Honours level), Brian Ho, Andreas van den Hombergh (Student Rep, Honours level), Madeline Hyde (Student Rep, MLitt), Lisa Jones, Anita Mezza (Student Rep, 1000 level), Walter Pedriali, Simon Prosser, Theron Pummer, Ben Sachs, Joe Slater (Student Rep, PhD), Justin Snedegar, Daniel Soutter (Student Rep, 2000 level), Ieva Vasiljeva (Student Rep, Honours level),

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1. Apologies for Absence
   Fiona Dalling (Student Rep, Honours level), Peter Hella (Student Rep, 2000 level), Mateo Jaramillo (Student Rep, 1000 level), Corinne Latti (Student Rep, 1000 level), Patrick Greenough.

2. Minutes of the Philosophy Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting held on 18 February 2015
   The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2015 were approved and adopted.

3. Matters arising from the above minutes
   3.1 Honours Pre Advising Fayre (item 7 refers)
   The Director of Teaching reported that following the last meeting of the committee, the university made changes to the Honours Pre-Advising process which meant the Philosophy did hold an Honours Fayre which was well attended by students and it is planned to do the same again in the second semester.

   3.2 Facebook activity and engagement with students (item 3.1. refers)
   The School President reported that there is now very good engagement with students participating via facebook with strong numbers of students participating, especially amongst first year students.

STAFF BUSINESS

4. Attendance at Sub- Honours Lectures
   The Director of Teaching highlighted again the continued poor attendance of students at sub-honours lectures. This is the case for PY1011 Political & Ethical Controversies for which she is the module co-ordinator but it is also the case for all sub-honours lectures. The Student Reps were asked if they could provide any insight into why this might be the case but the feedback from students has suggested that the modules are popular and there is no clear underlying reason for this poor attendance. The Director of Teaching reminded Student Reps
that attendance is a requirement and asked them to convey this message to students. The first year reps volunteered to ask students for feedback on this issue and to report back.

STUDENT BUSINESS: PhD REPORT

5. The Student Rep for the PhD programme noted that he had no significant issues to report. The new intake of PhD students is quite large but the students appear to be happy and settling well into the department. Student engagement with the weekly Friday research seminar continues to be very good.

It was noted that PhD students who are employed on a casual basis to deliver postgraduate tutorials continue to be dissatisfied with the rate of pay for this work. The Director of Teaching reminded the Student Rep that tutors appear to be taking longer than expected to prepare for tutorials and to mark student work and that the rate of pay reflects the time input expected of tutors for this work. The department follows the regulations set down by the University and has limited flexibility to make any changes.

STUDENT BUSINESS: MLITT REPORT

6. The Student Rep for the MLitt programmes reported that students had raised a number of issues early in the semester with regards to the Epistemology section of the core module PY5101 Current Issues I and these issues were addressed and resolved by the module co-ordinator. The Ethics section of this module has been running well and is popular with the students.

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, some students have been concerned about the difficulty of the chosen text and how appropriate the text is for the theme. It was reported that student expectations are not being met by any stream and in particular students are concerned about the lack of research methods and research skills being covered in the weekly seminars. The Director of MLitt programmes confirmed that he had already raised these concerns with the lecturers on this module and encouraged them to focus more clearly on research methods but undertook to do this again in response to this feedback.

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 PY5319 Topics in Recent Moral Theory felt that the module was not covering enough ethics but the overall feedback on the module was positive. The module co-ordinator indicated that he felt that students might be taking a rather narrow view of what constitutes ethics.

The Student Rep concluded by reporting that students wanted more detailed information about module content in future, and at an earlier stage, in order to allow them to make more informed module choices.

STUDENT BUSINESS: HONOURS REPORT

7.1 PY3701 Language and Reality

The Student Rep praised the approachability and enthusiasm of the staff teaching this module. The students noted that certain topics could have been covered in more detail and supplemented with a more detailed reading list. The module co-ordinator confirmed that she would be happy to provide more readings. It was also noted that some students had concerns about essay deadlines on this module and specifically about the amount of time available
between the return of marks and feedback on the first essay and the submission deadline for the second essay. The module co-ordinator reported that she understood these concerns but the schedule is constrained by university assessment deadlines.

7.2 **PY4606 Contemporary Epistemology**

The Student Rep reported that this module was well-organised and covered very interesting and challenging topics that are popular with students. The module co-ordinator was considered to be very knowledgeable and approachable. The students were clearly engaging with the material and felt that there was not enough time available within scheduled classes to allow for full and detailed discussion and many students would welcome more time for this. The Director of Teaching welcomed this enthusiasm and advised students that they can organise informal groups to meet for further discussion outside of scheduled teaching hours.

7.3 **PY4608 Political Philosophy in the Age of Revolutions**

The Student Rep reported very positive student feedback on the lectures and lecture content. The students also particularly enjoyed the presentations in this module and felt that they were learning new skills. It was reported that some students found it difficult to cope with the amount of reading and had requested further guidance on exactly what they were required to read. The module co-ordinator responded to advise that the amount of reading was not inappropriate for a module of this nature and the module handbook did provide significant guidance on specific reading required for each seminar and lecture.

7.4 **PY4610 Philosophy of Perception**

The Student Rep reported positive feedback on this module and students are enjoying the interesting module content. It was reported that a number of students are finding it difficult to understand some of the terminology used in the module which is having an impact on their ability to engage in seminars. The module co-ordinator responded that he often encouraged students to use a dictionary of philosophy but he will consider producing a glossary of terms for the module in future.

7.5 **PY4635 Contemporary Moral Theory**

The Student Rep reported that this module was well-received by students although some students did raise the issue of availability of lecture slides. Although it was reported that students had some concerns about certain material being covered in a slightly biased way by the module co-ordinator, further examination revealed that this issue was raised only by one student and did not appear to be a general concern of students on the module as a whole.

7.6 **PY4638 Philosophy of Religion**

The Student Rep reported that this module received very positive student feedback, although a small number reported that the module content was different to what they had expected with more of a focus on ethics and morality. Student also reported that they did not like having the same submission deadline for the two short essay questions. The module co-ordinator reported that these were short, independent pieces of work that students had been expected to work on and to manage their own time.
STUDENT BUSINESS: SECOND YEAR REPORT

8.1 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 handout very helpful. Students reported that they would find more examples in lectures to be helpful and also wanted their weekly logic exercises to be marked. The module co-ordinator acknowledged that there appeared to be different approaches taken by tutors with regards to providing feedback on logic exercises. He will contact tutors and ask them to ensure consistency of practice. It is intended that the answers to weekly logic exercises are gone through in the exercise classes but are not individually marked and individual feedback is not provided.

8.2 PY2011 Foundations of Western Philosophy

The Student Rep reported that this module has received very positive student feedback with students particularly impressed by the standard of lecturing on the module and the care taken by the lecturers to make the lecture content clear and accessible. Some students had reported that they felt there was a lack of structure in tutorials but the Student Rep attributed this in part to the need for students to take responsibility for participating in tutorial discussion. It was also noted that some students felt that the essay questions were structured in a complex way with a number of subsidiary questions which some found confusing, although this was not felt to be a significant issue overall.

STUDENT BUSINESS: FIRST YEAR REPORT

9.1 PY1010 Mind and World

The Student Rep reported that students were finding this module challenging but enjoyable. Students reported that they would like more structure in tutorials. The module co-ordinator indicated that with seven tutors teaching on the module some variety of approach in tutorials was inevitable and asked for suggestions from students on the module as to exactly what they are looking for in terms of more structured tutorials so that this can be considered for the future.

9.2 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, in particular in the way that it relates to issues in everyday life. Some students have reported that they prefer lecturers to use PowerPoint presentations rather than projected word documents and one lecturer was asked to consider slowing his pace a little in lectures to allow students to keep pace with this new material.

MATTERS FOR NOTING

10. Any Other Competent Business

10.1 Examination Feedback

The School President reported that students do wish to have more feedback on examination scripts than they do currently i.e. more than the examination feedback drop-in session and the availability of one-to-one meetings with module co-ordinators (which few students make use of in practice). The generic feedback on examination scripts provided by staff on a number of modules last semester was welcomed by students who felt that it helped them to understand
how their marks had been arrived at but students would like to see this available for all modules. The Director of Teaching confirmed that some module co-ordinators have concerns about providing generic feedback on examinations even with a range of safeguards in place but all module co-ordinators will be urged to adopt this approach for the December 2015 examinations.

10.2 General Student Feedback
The School President reported that the department is very popular with its students and academic staff who are valued for their helpfulness and approachability. Students would like to see more feminist philosophy, more meta-philosophy and more logic on the programme.

10.3 Arts Lecture Theatre
A Student Rep reported that the chairs and in particular the writing tablets in the Arts Lecture Theatre are uneven and difficult to use. This is in contrast to newer furnishing in the Maths building which is easier to use. The School Administrator agreed to forward these comments to the Timetabling Team and seek an update on any plans for an upgrade to facilities in this lecture theatre.

10.4 Essay Submission Deadlines
The School President reported that many students have more than one essay submission deadline in one week and are unhappy about this. The Director of Teaching confirmed that there is limited opportunity to address this issue for students given the constraints of the semester and university assessment deadlines.

10.5 Module Evaluation Questionnaires
The Director of Teaching reported that the module evaluation questionnaires will shortly be available on-line and requested that Student Rep actively encourage students to participate and to complete their questionnaires.

11. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday **17th February 2016 at 2pm**