

Minutes of the School Meeting held on 1st February 2017

1. HOS Update

Tamas announced that Andrew Bourke will take over from Andrea Munsterberg as Research Director from 1st August. Richard Bowater will take over from Sam Fountain as Employability Director from May. There are now vacancies for Enterprise Director, Deputy Head of School and there is an open seat on the Promotions Committee. A formal invitation for applications will be released soon, and due to gender balance Tamas urged female staff to apply.

Laura Lehtovirta will be joining BIO from the University of Aberdeen as a Royal Society Fellow, and she will become part of Colin Murrell's Laboratory. There is no set date for her joining BIO, but Tamas thinks it will be in the next couple of months.

On 10th February BIO will be holding a Teaching Excellence Framework day.

2. Admissions Update – Kay Yeoman

Admissions Presentation

Kay stated that all students have now made their 5 choices through UCAS, which will be slimmed down to their firm and insurance choices. Slide 1 of Kay's presentation shows a comparison between 2015, 2016 and 2017 of the number of applications made. Slide 2 shows a breakdown of the numbers by specific course. Kay talked about the applications being down at the moment, but that this wasn't unexpected and that UEA isn't out of sync with the rest of the sector, as there is a decreasing pool of students. Students aren't yet choosing their firm or insurance choices but Kay expects our numbers to increase in the next 2-3 months as students make up their minds.

Kay spoke about the upcoming applicant days and encouraged as many faculty to attend as possible as she expects it to be busy. Saturday applicant days are expected to be very busy and Kay implored faculty to come for the lunch to meet with applicants as they have been stretched on previous Saturday applicant days. With Andrew Hemmings absent, assistance on applicant days with Biochemistry students would be appreciated.

3. Reasonable adjustments on teaching/coursework/assessment – Iain Barr

Iain started his presentation by explaining the process of the Reasonable Adjustment (RA) forms and his involvement in the process as a member of the SCI Faculty Appeals and Complaints Panel. Reasonable adjustments are put in place to address barriers to achievement and can comprise extra time with examinations, extended loan times for library items, provision of assistive technology or similar. Iain showed an example of an anonymised form and then talked about the various boxes and how they worked. Iain talked about the limitations of the form and that there are 'grey areas' with the form in

terms of who actions the reasonable adjustments. Iain talked about some of the grey areas such as the lack of specificity on the form, inconsistency language used throughout the form, vague action points, lack of overview and a lack of 'realism' on the form as some measures are simply not possible to follow through.

Mark Coleman asked about the various versions of the form in circulation. Iain responded that he has examples of different versions of the RA form being submitted by students, and submitted in the same term. Sam asked about the role of the Module Organiser (MO) in these forms, and if it was his responsibility to inform all demonstrators or staff involved in his module of the form and its affects. Iain replied that a student can appeal against an action not followed even if it's by a demonstrator. There are also data protection issues when it comes to sharing information on a form submitted by a student.

Mark Coleman explained that he and Maria Vardakou (Disability Liaison Officer) had discussed this, and Maria was now working with SSS to revise the form, and stated that he felt that Iain's presentation should have included this aspect to it. Iain responded that he wasn't aware of Mark and Maria's work on the revised form, that he looked forward to seeing it but in the meantime students were still submitting different versions of the RA forms and that faculty needed to be aware of the issues that exist with them, and that the appeals process is upholding a lot of complaints based on inaction or staff confusion over the forms. Iain asked those in attendance if they had used or actioned an RA form – the room was about 50/50 in terms of awareness.

Iain emphasised that there needs to be clear guidelines on the revised form as to who is undertaking the action agreed. Mark Coleman and Maria responded that the revised form will be much clearer than the old/current form in this area. Maria talked about meeting with students and ensuring that communication is clear so that student's expectations are managed as to the action being taken. Andrew Bourke spoke about the issue of how far MO's want to take RA forms, arguing that it isn't possible to interview every student about sensitive matters and that additionally MO's aren't qualified to judge or manage students health issues. A discussion then ensued about how to put forward BIO's comments to Student Support Services (SSS). Mark Coleman and Tamas in agreement that someone from SSS should attend a School Meeting to address BIO's concerns, specifically around accountability and the responsibility of who is 'actioning' the forms.

Iain finished by talking about the core issue of RA forms, namely 'natural justice'. If a student submits any form, not necessarily limited to but including RA forms, and it is signed by a UEA member of staff, then the student has a natural justice case. Iain argued that it is therefore important to make forms as watertight as possible, with clear wording and a clear understanding of what the form means and who does what according to the form. Iain stated that in his role on the appeals panel he has seen cases where appeals are upheld, despite the panel disagreeing, because the natural justice argument prevails.

Action: Mark Coleman/Maria Vardokou/Tamas Dalmay to explore inviting SSS to come and talk at a future BIO School Meeting.

4. Any Other Business

None