

# **Agenda for the BIO Staff Student Liaison Committee 2017/18**

Date/Time: Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from 14:00 to 15:00

Venue: ARTS 01.15

For background information concerning the SSLC please see the 'Student Representation Code of Practice' that is now available at: <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8540534/Student+Representation+Code+of+Practice+2015-16.pdf/86f57373-5624-48f6-8e67-f1b7356f5ab9>.

## **1. Welcome**

## **2. Apologies for absences**

Maria Vardakou, Andreia De Borges Lima, Matthew Gardner, Liz Clarke, Tyler Bunyan and Saleen Chowdhury

## **3. Sophie Smith**

Andy wished to place on record that our thoughts are with Sophie Smith's family and friends following her disappearance on Boxing Day. Andy spoke briefly about the support services that are in place for both students and staff, and thanked Tamas for all his efforts involved with this.

## **4. Minutes from 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

Actions Arising –

In the last meeting, we discussed advisor training and the possibility of having a list of advisors and the training they had received. Andy explained that he has to go through Tamas to get data on individuals, but that he can give out more generic data if requested, though it will take some time to generate this data.

SITS Timetabling – Malcom Rae has moved positions in UEA and now works in the School of Psychology. As such, Jo Jennett (Head of IT Service Management) has taken over from Malcom in a BIO SSLC IT capacity. Andy explained the issues to Jo, namely that advisors do not have sufficient training on the system to utilize it to its full capacity and that advisors have experienced problems with double booking appointments through the system. Jo stated that she would look into the issue. Andy asked if she needed a copy of the previous minutes; Simon offered to email Jo with the minutes.

**AP: Simon to provide Jo with a copy of the minutes of the previous minutes**

No issues raised with the minutes by any member present.

## **5. Course Rep Elections 2018**

Andy explained that there is now a clear distinction between what is delivered by BIO, and what is delivered by the SU, in relation to electing committee members. Nominations for Reps/Student Convenor will be open from 18th March to 20th April. Andy explained the process as follows: they will need to log on to the SU website (using University credentials), head to Course Rep Elections page and select the position that they would like to run for. They are then encouraged to submit a photo / image and up to 100 words as to why they would like the position. Mark pointed out that of the nomination period, only 1 week was during term time (16th to 20th April) and wouldn't this affect the nominations. Based on the number of students in BIO, the SU has allocated 19 course rep positions (these include but are not limited to Biochemistry, Biological Sciences, Biomedicine, Ecology and MSci positions for these and the other available positions). The voting period for students is open from 20th April to 4th May. Andy explained that the Course Rep Elections are an external process which all SSLC's are bound by.

### **AP: BIO SSLC to publicise the Course Rep Elections.**

Discussion about the number of course reps available and the feasibility of Bio getting all the positions filled. Andy remarked that he would be pleased if we could fill 25% of the positions. Andy has also relayed his concerns to Clive Matthews (Academic Director of Taught Programmes - LTS) about the previous issues BIO has experienced with the Course Rep process and the SU. Mark asked if it was possible to get the positions filled, given the difficulties the Committee has previously experienced with electing members. Andy feels the problem is 'Getting the message out', and Simon followed up by stating that this has always been a long-standing problem. Mark asked what would be the best way of reaching students, as he felt that emails weren't the best route. Andy responded that he feels the best way is to publicise it in lectures/seminars. Mellieha asked if the Bio Atrium screen could be used to advertise the BIO SSLC.

### **AP: Andy to ask Lewis Spurgin if the Atrium screen can be used for BIO SSLC advertising.**

Hans spoke about 'selling' the SSLC to BI students more, that it is the opportunity to engage with issues and find solutions and that it can be included on students CV's, showing engagement on their part. Mellieha mentioned the BIOSOC, and that getting them on-board could prove useful.

## **6. BIO-5011A Essay Marking**

Saleen was not able to attend the meeting due to a workshop timetable clash but he provided Andy with some agenda items. 'BIO-5011A Essay Marking', 'Strikes' and 'Exams' are all agenda items that Saleen had questions for.

Several students had raised this issue with Saleen feeling that the essay marking for BIO-5011A (Clinical Genetics) was overly harsh and that the marking was mostly performed by a lecturer who wasn't involved in the module in any form. One student had their mark increased from 54% to 65% on appeal, and another student had theirs changed from 64% to 71%. Mark explained that he had seen the 65% mark, as any increase over 10% goes to the DLT, and he approved the re-mark. Mark explained that this was down to a single individual's marking and that it would not be an ongoing issue as the individual will not be doing this again. Mark explained that any student could appeal against a mark, up to 10 days after the mark has been given, but warned that marks can go down as well as up.

## **7. Strikes**

Saleen asked for feedback on the impact on student experience. Hans spoke about the difficulty on a PhD student had in reaching his PhD supervisor, and that he hadn't been able to catch up with them when they've returned from strike as they have been catching up with their work. Mark suggested that the student talk to his supervisor to see if there is anyone he can talk to when his supervisor isn't there. Andy asked how many 3rd year students' projects had been disrupted due to the strikes. Mark replied that he couldn't speak to the 3rd years' experience directly, but that as DLT he has been contacted by a number of concerned students. Mark asked the committee if they thought it was best to wait for students to bring strike related queries to them or if we needed to be more proactive. Simon asked if there was an issue with staff not having to report that they are on strike, meaning that BIO cannot get 'ahead' of the problem. Mark explained that the initial communication from the University may have confused this matter, but this has since been clarified.

Saleen asked how much BIO teaching was affected by the strike, as student feedback to himself was that it wasn't as bad as they feared. The recent snow and bad weather had a greater impact on teaching than the strikes. Mark explained that he was aware of some issues, as some students had contacted him directly, but that BIO wasn't majorly affected. Andy explained that Tamas has made a commitment that no exam questions that will cover any area that was not delivered due to lecture cancellations. Either the teaching will be rearranged to cover any missing areas, or exam questions will be changed, and Mark expects it will more likely be the former option which is taken.

Saleen asked if there is any official list of lectures/seminars of modules that have been cancelled due to the strikes. Mark responded that all strike action has to be reported to Tamas, in his capacity as HOS but there is no obligation for staff to report their intention to strike. Mark's intention is to write to all module organisers after the strikes to ensure that all exam papers haven't been 'compromised' by the strike action (i.e. no questions set that haven't been covered by teaching).

## **8. Snow**

Saleen asked if teaching that was cancelled due to the recent bad weather has been rescheduled. Mark and Andy were aware of some rescheduling but they didn't have a complete list. Graham spoke about his experience, where he was able to make it onto campus and attend his teaching class but that no students attended. Mellieha responded by stating that she knows that some students commute in from Lincolnshire, so there would be circumstances where travel simply wasn't safe or possible. General agreement that the official UEA response to the extreme weather was poor, particularly around communication.

## **9. Exams**

Saleen asked about the students having at least one instance of 2 exams scheduled in the same week, the impact this has on student's mental and physical health, and the possibility of extending the assessment period.

Mellieha talked briefly about her student questionnaire which asks students about a January assessment period. Andy pointed out that students might want the exams spread out whereas others might like them bunched together. Mark followed up by stating that UEA's only specific commitment to the assessment period is not scheduling 2 exams in a single day. Mark is in favour of a longer assessment period but stated that UEA as an institution is not. Mellieha stated that in her experience most students, whilst not happy that they had their exams in a short space of time the up side was that they would be finished quickly, rather than have the stress of exams spaced out. Andy and Mark both in agreement that this issue needs to be student led, as staff have 'lost' this battle, due to institutional requirements.

## **10. Any other business (AOB)**

Equality & Diversity Committee

Charlotte sits on the Equality & Diversity Committee and was asked to bring students attention to the committee as they would like more student involvement in the committee.

## Lunch Space in BIO

Hans raised the issue of a lack of a social space in BIO for people to sit and eat their lunch. He stated that he was aware of the BIO atrium but that this gets very busy and noisy, and with few alternatives people were either eating at their desks or alone. Hans expressed his disappointment that BIO doesn't have dedicated spaces for groups to gather in and socialise. Mark suggested that the best avenue for getting this situation resolved is Tamas, as he misses the social element of interacting with his lab group. Mark explained that the issue has been discussed at BIO Exec and that Tamas has explored several options such as extended kitchen areas with social spaces or 'pod' units which fit into spaces however none of these have been found to be appropriate. He finished by explaining that the UEA plans to eventually refurbish the whole building and therefore they are reluctant to spend money now when in a few years' time there will be more money spent on a raft of building improvements.

## IT

Jo is available for any IT issues and is keen to engage with students, particularly around issues such as phishing attacks and how best to communicate with students. Jo finished by saying that she is keen to hear about students' experience with IT at the start of the year (she said she was aware that this was a while ago, thus students may have 'moved on' on this)