SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE
DRAFT MINUTES
18 November 2014

Present: Dr Julie Lloyd (Chair), Dr Gareth Jones, Dr Jo Barton, Dr Phil Reeves, Dr Michael Steinke, Dr Paul Freeman, Ms Clare Birch, Clementina Olaniyi (1st year BCH), David Adebiyi, Priscilla Chin, Junior Mukhathedzwa (1st year BMS), Marie Winter (1st year SES), La Reazze Harvey (2nd year BCH), Catarina Fernandes Cosme Ferreira (2nd year GEN), Shannon Kelly (2nd year BMS), Maria Fountoulaki (2nd year MB), Thomas Jelvez Stenersen (2nd year SES), Abi Baty (3rd year BCH), Emily Armstrong (3rd year GEN), Ragaul Rajagopal (3rd year BMS), Luke Evans (3rd Year MB), Rob Sheehan (3rd year SES)

In attendance: Dr Valerie Gladwell, Mrs Olivia Pink, Miss Angela Chan

Minutes

18/14 The minutes of the last meeting held on 19 March were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

03/14 Additional online maths materials and tests incorporating a bank of questions, similar to those used in the MCQ exams, had been made available on Moodle by the Module Supervisor.

05/14 GLA roles had been clarified and students were asked not to expect them to fulfill an academic role.

06/12 The increased number of tutorials for 3rd years and scheduled tutorials for 2nd years had been positively received this year so far. Subject specific tutorials were harder to accommodate despite tutees being given course related tutors. ‘Opt-in’ module tutorials every other week, where students could request a topic for discussion, was suggested. Julie Lloyd agreed to take this forward.

Action: JCL

08/14 Earlier information sessions for summer projects had been arranged this year by the staff concerned.

09/14 Julie Lloyd hoped that more staff had been incorporating examples of their own research into their teaching, e.g. as part of BS211, students were set a task based on the lecturer’s research.

10/14 The request for more practice DAI exercises before the exams had been raised with teaching staff and Julie Lloyd reassured students that staff would be reminded again during the year.

12/14 The errors in School literature had been raised with all staff.

16/14 Two UG reps attended their respective DCT meetings. The Sports Science rep was unable to attend due to a timetable clash but would be sent the minutes from the meeting.

Action: JCL/VG
**Annual Review of Courses**

19/14 A brief overview and explanation of the draft Annual Review of Courses report was given. Julie Lloyd took the opportunity to draw attention to a few areas and ask student reps for any comments:

- The majority of coursework would now be submitted online. Many improvements had been and would continue to be made to the FASER system. Reps were encouraged to forward any suggestions for improvements so that the School could feedback to the Learning and Teaching Technology (LTT) Team.
- Attention was drawn to the 'You said, we did' summary of the actions arising from UG SSLC meetings held in 2013-14. The document would be made available for all students to view via Moodle skills module pages. Reps were also asked to feed back to their student cohorts.

**External Examiner Reports**

20/14 Student representatives were invited to comment on the 2013-14 External Examiner reports which were circulated with the agenda papers. No comments were offered but students were welcome to contact Julie Lloyd with any further feedback.

**National Student and Student Satisfaction Survey**

21/14 A brief overview and explanation of the attached responses from the NSS and SSS was given. Overall results were very similar to last year but improvements had been made in some areas. “Assessment and Feedback” was again the School’s lowest scoring category however the vast improvements made to the return of coursework and feedback system over the years was highlighted. Julie Lloyd felt that it would always be difficult for the School to achieve top scores in this area due to the number of students and the amount of marking each lecturer was required to fit in around teaching and research. She reported that with only a few genuine exceptions, the four week turnaround was always observed with reminders sent to staff a week before their turnaround deadline. Student reps did acknowledge the challenge for staff and confessed that their perception of the four week period was not always accurate. Luke Evans suggested including the turnaround date alongside the submission date on FASER so that students could see when to expect feedback. Julie Lloyd agreed this was a good idea and that she would forward it to LTT. To save time and address clarification concerns, Shannon Kelly suggested using lecture slides to feed back common coursework errors and only include comments specific to individuals on the work. Rob Sheehan reported that the use of MP3 feedback was good and Julie Lloyd confirmed that FASER was currently being developed to allow for short MP3 clips to be inserted into word files. Students were reminded that FASER was also new to staff and there would likely be some period of adjustment.

**Action: JCL**

**Student Assessment of Modules and Teaching**

22/14 Julie Lloyd gave a brief explanation of the SAMT process and asked for any comments on the attached responses. The School did not feel there were any particular areas of concern that had not already been addressed and announced the only change to procedure this year was that the questionnaires would be carried out electronically with the use of the EVS clickers.

**Third Year Business**

23/14 Current 3rd year students felt that PhD application talks would be better scheduled towards the end of the Spring term of 2nd year and that talks for MSc could take place either at the same time or at the beginning of the 3rd year. It was generally felt that this would get students to start thinking about what they wanted to do, what was available and when they would have to start applying before they started their final year. Ragaul Rajagopal reported that as a front runner last year, he helped put together a lecture slide with a table of all the deadlines for graduate applications which did not appear to have reached the School. Julie Lloyd thanked Ragaul for bringing this to the Committee's
attention and asked Olivia Pink to follow this up as it would be a very useful document for both staff and students and could be published on Moodle. The suggestion that 3rd year students could be invited to 2nd year careers lectures for guidance on this subject was also something Julie Lloyd agreed to investigate.

**Action: OP, JCL**

24/14 3rd years asked if there could be more science related stalls at careers fairs or better advertising for external careers fairs that specialised in science. Julie Lloyd explained that this was something the School and students had raised with the ECC previously, ECC were aware and worked hard to try to improve this but had found it hard to persuade scientific companies to attend. Many science students get jobs in other sectors and should not ignore the ‘any graduate’ opportunities. She also reported that the School is working to increase employers’ input with regards to careers in order to identify the skills employers valued and to create new research links and placement opportunities, and would be establishing a new Employer Advisory Group. She agreed that increased advertisement of external careers fairs was the best solution in the meantime and agreed to take this forward.

**Action: JCL, OP**

25/14 Luke Evans asked if it would be possible to ‘drop in’ to other lectures for related subjects and talks by guest speakers. Julie Lloyd agreed with the idea but felt that timetabling and space constraints may not allow for this. The School Seminar series was mentioned and although announcements for these could be found on the School’s weekly newsletter, students requested a separate email advertising the seminars as they felt they were more likely to notice what was coming up. Julie Lloyd agreed to follow up this request with the seminar organizer.

**Action: JCL, AM**

26/14 The request for mock exams and/or Moodle tests during the year was noted. Julie Lloyd agreed to propose the idea to staff.

**Action: JCL**

27/14 Julie Lloyd and Phil Reeves would be looking at the allocation of 3rd year projects early next term. They hoped that this would resolve the perceived limited project choice areas for Genetics students.

**Action: JCL, PR**

28/14 Emily Armstrong reported that a few students felt the human genetics topics for modules in the 2nd and 3rd year were a bit repetitive and requested more plant genetics and plant biotechnology content. Julie Lloyd hoped that there wasn’t too much overlap in content and explained that some Biomedical Science students on the module would not have the same background in genetics. There is a substantial plant genetics content in BS234 and BS323, compared to other institutions.

29/14 3rd Year Reps asked if a simple guide to stats tests and when to use them could be provided on the BS831 and BS832 Moodle Resources page for information while writing up their results. Julie Lloyd agreed to look into this but also advised students to ask Project Supervisors for assistance on appropriate stats for their research. Michael Steinke advised that the library had some of the best books on stats and reassured there was lots of helpful guidance available. The request for an optional stats refresher workshop was agreed for Week 22 when students could bring their project data and any questions to the session.

**Action: PR, MS**
Second Year Business

30/14 2nd year students felt that the teaching methods being used for BS372 were too interactive and not informative enough. The module supervisor, Valerie Gladwell, acknowledged these comments and explained that she had tried to address SAMT comments from last year suggesting that the teaching material had been too heavy. Rob Sheehan reported that 3rd year students taking this module enjoyed the more interactive teaching style and all agreed that it was difficult to find a balance to suit all preferred learning styles. Valerie Gladwell agreed to make sure the more formal lecture style sessions were more evenly spaced between the more interactive sessions for next year.

Action: VG

31/14 2nd year BMS students asked if deadlines for worksheets could be extended to a week and a half instead of the normal one week after a practical. Julie Lloyd explained that for worksheets, most of the work was carried out in the practical and could be written up quickly. This also prevented a buildup of deadlines or other deadlines straying into the Spring term. However, she agreed to ask Year Organisers to consider this for the Spring term.

Action: JCL, PR, MS

32/14 Genetics students reported difficulty finding the relevant reading material in textbooks and Biomed students asked if compulsory reading or specific chapters could be made available as pdfs on Moodle. Unfortunately, the School was unable to do this due to restrictions of copyright law but Julie Lloyd agreed to ask staff to clarify page numbers, chapters or direct students to targeted reading.

Action: JCL

33/14 A request for more guidance to be included in practical handbooks was raised. Shannon Kelly cited the BS223 lab handbook as a good example as it gave additional details regarding writing up the lab, approximate word counts, etc. Julie Lloyd asked if she could send further details of this and offer other good examples of handbooks that could be used as a model.

Action: SK

34/14 Shannon Kelly asked if it would be possible to arrange informal meetings or allow a few minutes at the end of lectures for students to ask questions in advance of coursework deadlines so all students could benefit from the advice given. It was mentioned that some staff already used Moodle forums to do this virtually however some students were reluctant to participate as comments could not be made anonymously. Julie Lloyd had previously queried this with LTT but had not yet received a response. She agreed however that making advice available to all was a good idea and would follow up with LTT regarding a ‘Post Anonymously’ tick box.

Action: JCL

Secretary’s note: The ‘Feedback’ tool in Moodle can do this. You can set up an anonymous ‘Feedback’ link, then give students the opportunity to answer questions about something. You can either get them to choose from multiple choice questions or you can ask them free-text questions where they can type what they want. By default the Feedback tool isn't anonymous but this is something you can change in the settings.

35/14 Concerns were raised regarding the short notice of the BS214 one day visits to hospitals due to students having to organise their own transport to attend. Julie Lloyd had brought these concerns to the attention of the Module Supervisor who explained both the difficulty and the hours put in to arranging the visits with hospitals. In this instance, the date was only confirmed by the hospital.
the day before. Inconvenience to the small number of students affected was acknowledged but unfortunately there was little the School could do at short notice. As a result of the problems experienced by both staff and students this year, the visits would be discontinued next year. Shannon Kelly was unaware of both the efforts made by the Module Supervisor and the difficulty with arranging the visits and agreed to report this back to the students.

36/14 Some Genetics students felt that lectures starting at 9 or 10am were too early. Unfortunately occasional early starts were unavoidable. The School had worked hard to avoid large gaps between classes during the day and had not had to extend teaching hours after 5pm or into Saturdays. The 3rd year timetable had been carefully looked at to allow students full days in the week to concentrate on their final year projects. 3rd year reps reported that they were very happy with their timetables this year.

37/14 Students requested that they be allowed to submit one late piece of work a year. Unfortunately, the request would be too difficult to administer but students were reminded that the current late submission policy would allow for lateness with good reason. Some confusion was reported regarding the new way in which lab group deadlines were being displayed on FASER and students were often not aware which group they were in. Julie Lloyd felt that this problem could be resolved if FASER was linked to the timetable which was not the case at present. She agreed to follow this up with LTT.

**Action: JCL**

38/14 A recent misunderstanding regarding the release of practical data prompted requests for staff to clarify by email when data had been posted to Moodle. Julie Lloyd agreed that if data was sent out later than anticipated, the coursework deadline should be moved to allow for writing up. Students suggested a ‘What’s New’ Moodle feed would be a useful facility. Julie Lloyd agreed to feed this back to LTT and make staff aware when sending out lab data.

**Action: JCL**

**First Year Business**

39/14 Marie Winter requested more than just one session to practice on the lab equipment before the BS142 Practical Skills assessment. Jo Barton agreed to look into an additional practice session on the timetable and provide a list of key points and common errors for additional support.

**Action: JB**

40/14 First Year Biomed reps commented that they found the Mastering Biology web-based learning resources used in BS101 very helpful. They reported that students would welcome the possibility of using the equivalent resources in their Anatomy and Physiology module.

**Action: VG**

**Next meeting**

41/14 The date and time of the next meeting would be confirmed in due course.