

School of Geography

Minutes of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught
Student Staff Liaison Committee held on Wednesday 17th June 2020
at 14.00- 15.00 via MS Teams

Staff Members present

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| Dr Philippa Williams (PW) (Co-Chair) | Senior Tutor |
| Catherine Mills (CM) (Secretary) | Student Experience and Admissions Administrator |
| Prof Alastair Owens (AO) | Head of School |
| Andrew Loveland (AL) | Professional services manager |
| Emma Shapcott (ES) | Teaching and Learning Manager |
| Dr Tim Brown (TB) | Director of Education |
| Dr Will Monteith (WM) | Invited |
| <i>Kate Amis</i> | <i>Minuting meeting</i> |

Student members present

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Deanna Emeny (Co-Chair) | 3 rd Year Environmental Science |
| William Robertshaw (WR) | 2 nd Year BA Geography |
| Rianno McFarlane Thomas (RM) | 2 nd Year BSc Geography |
| Joseph Brown (JB) | 3 rd Year Geography with Business Management |
| Aminah Ossman (AOS) | 1 st Year Geography with Business Management |
| Nevroz Fehlimi (NF) | 2 nd Year BA Geography |
| Sarah Shafique (SS) | 1 st Year Environmental Science |
| Mima Moyo (MM) | PGT Human Geography |

1. **Welcome** from PW and DE who jointly chaired the meeting.
2. **Apologies** received from Martin Beeson and Emily Lines
3. **Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.**

| 4. Matters arising from the previous meeting and action | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|---|
| Minute | Who? | Details | Action to date as reported Green= complete Orange= in progress and to be reported next meeting Red =Awaiting action/ roll over |
| 2020:30 | PW and CM | Enable student led group to feedback on new learning community and virtual welcome week. Send emails to course reps to set framework etc | Meeting took place on Thursday 11 th June 2020, 12pm, via MS Teams. notes from meeting area attached as appendix one to these minutes. Agreed that there would be discussion around the proposals in an additional SSLC to be held the week of 22/6/20 |
| 2020:31 | PW,CM, RT NF | Action PW and CM to help RT and NF set up student consultation on best anti- racist practice in teaching, learning and curriculum in the SOG | Meeting took place the week of 15 th June. The proposals and discussion in the meeting were reported under agenda section 7 below. |

5. Well- being check and pastoral support

None raised specifically but items in 6.1a) have relevance to pastoral support

6.Teaching and Learning and Learning resources

6.1 feedback from student led meetings

a) Best anti-racist practice in teaching, learning and curriculum

RT and NF had facilitated a meeting attended by 9 students across BSC and BA, Mainly Yr1 and Yr2. RT and NF reported back on issues raised as follows (*relevant comments/ responses from others in committee in italics*)

- Eurocentric reading lists. *All staff are looking at their reading lists and module content (AO)*
- Lack of diversity in curricula. Too much repetition of eg Neo liberalism, gentrification. In 1st year could we speed up on all areas and leave time to extend area of study? *Current staff discussions ongoing on explicit decolonising curricula for 1st Yr module geography in the world (AO)We need to embed the anti -racist content/ decolonised approach across all we do rather than just one part of a module (PW)*
- Limited location for study abroad –consider how being a person of colour affects the experience when studying abroad. Need more African, Caribbean, S American and Asian places available.
- Lack of interaction with academic Staff – seminars would help here. Seminars would be helpful, approx. 10 students to get max benefit. These would work well digitally. *It is fine not to have the camera on (TB). It is not just about changing the content we also need the format built in where we can discuss (WM)*
- If we are in a large lecture theatre with one white man at the front what are we saying here?
- In physical geography there was a need to learn about non -white environments outside Europe and the US. Physical geography at QMUL was still very rooted in UK and local Europe. Branching out here could be attractive to new students too.

- Could we change it up a bit for Green London content to create space for more critical content? *There is scope to do things differently here and that is planned for this academic year. Work is underway. I like the idea of a more hands on workshop approach (AO)* Workshops could be included in Green London to help 1st Yrs get to know peers as soon as possible. We shouldn't shy away from issues of race and using words like white in the Green London content.
- We are proud of our number of female staff in SOG. Why can't same recruitment approach be done in terms of ethnicity? *We are too white as a staff body. We do not reflect the diversity of London or our student body. Both sector and UK wide we need to be aware of the pipeline of staff coming through into academia. There is a new initiative to fund/ support BAME applicants into PhD. For current staff the university has frozen new appointments. We have always tried to be fair and transparent, but I think there is now a case for hard wiring affirmative action on this (AO)*
- We are aware that an attainment gap exists and some work has been done on this. What is being done further to shrink the gap? *We take the attainment gap seriously. Three years ago there was a gap with white students coming out ahead (for good honours). Two years ago the gap closed and last year BAME students did slightly better than their white counterparts. Reasons for this include reducing assessments and using more formative feedback. A safe space for everyone to thrive is certainly needed. (AO) I agree on attainment gap issues. There is still work to do on analysis of data (TB)*
- MM: on making people feel welcome whilst I have been made to feel welcome there is more to this in terms of creating an understanding of what we are assuming. We need to ask hard questions, have conversations, be inclusive, get to know everyone. I do not like the term BAME as it lumps us all together. It removes the seriousness. It is alienating. If we have conversations like this in the first year it will be better. It will be easier to be more like a community in Yrs 2 and 3. (NF)
- MM: Currently BAME students need to check that they will be safe as a person of colour. Affirmative action is great, but we need to go further than this. We need the same treatment- to feel safe. *Thank you. A point powerfully made. (PW) Yes, we acknowledge that just saying is not enough (AO)*
- WM: Do we know who is taking forward the discussion on behalf of staff? *We haven't identified a leader yet, but we will ensure that this student voice group are involved and are put in contact with each other. (AO)*

Issues raised relating to online learning / Covid

- RT: It would help if online lectures were in real time.

b) How to build an online School of Geography community

This item deferred to next meeting for full discussion but please note minutes of meeting regarding this as appendix one to these minutes

Action: to be covered in next meeting

6.2 Online marking and feedback

This item deferred to next meeting

Action: to be covered in next meeting

6.3 Library updates

None at this meeting

7. Organisation and Communication

i) **Ethics forms for postgraduate students:** MM raised issue that ethics forms are taking a long time to be returned to students delaying progress on their dissertations. There is a fear that postgrads will not be able to finish by 4th Sept in time for the exam board. MM asked for consideration of later date which would give more time without moving to the later January exam board. AO thanked MM for bringing this matter to his attention via a recent email and apologised that the level of support and service has been a problem and acknowledged that it needed fixing. He was looking to see if the process of agreeing the ethics forms could be brought in house to SOG to speed the process up. This was also affecting some PHD students. TB agreed and stated that he had spoken to Hazel Covill who has assured that they do now have additional staff resource in place to deal with the backlog. He assured that the SOG would have this conversation though ultimately, we are limited by the structures of the School Board on this.

ii) **Guest speaker possibilities:** NF suggested that we don't need to use USA academics or other speakers to talk about eg the issue of police brutality as we can ask UK academics who can connect with our students with local lived experience on this. WR suggested that these lectures could be a good way of increasing connections with other universities In Asia and Africa to broaden our experience.

iii) **Querying marks and feedback on some modules:** RT feedback that several students on the GIS module had received marks which were much lower than expected and felt that the feedback didn't match the mark.

Action PW to discuss the specifics of this via email with RT

AO explained that the moderation process will take action if the marks are out of sync across a whole module. This was reiterated by PW in response to WR who had heard from several people that marks were being generalised at the 58 – 60 point.

iv) **Clarification on release of results and moderation process:** JB asked for clarification over the process of marks being released as he had heard of marks being released and then withdrawn which had caused concern amongst peers. CM acknowledged that we were working with a new online system and there were some teething problems. ES added that we are working as quickly as possible but that there are issues around QMPLUS and online marking to be resolved, She had emailed some individuals who had enquired about some problems but would be emailing out to whole cohort to include info about important dates for release of grades etc. PW apologised that some results had gone out by accident and for any distress this had subsequently caused when the results were withdrawn.

JB asked what happens if you are on the border line / grade boundary and ES explained that until the exam board in early July all results are provisional. At the exam board we look at borderline results and make decisions. After the exam board the results become official. ES would check the published FAQ regarding information given on borderline results.

Action: /6 ES to check the FAQ regarding borderline results

8.AOB . None

9.Date of next meeting – Weds 24th June 2- 3pm

Actions from this meeting

| | | |
|----------|-----------|--|
| 2020: 32 | CM and PW | Add item deferred to agenda for next meeting – online marking and feedback |
| 2020: 33 | CM and PW | Add item deferred to agenda for next meeting- How to build an online School of Geography community |
| 2020: 34 | PW and RT | Action PW to discuss the specifics of this GIS marking issue via email with RT |
| 2020: 35 | ES | ES to check the FAQ regarding borderline results |

Appendix One: Key notes from the Student Led Discussion held on Thursday 11th June 2020, 12pm, via MS Teams

Attendees

AO Aminah Ossman
RT Rianno Thomas
DE Deanna Emeny
SS Sara Shafique
WR Will Robertshaw

How can you stay connected with peers when returning in September? What online social and study spaces do you think would work/be welcomed?

SS: Has been hard to stay engaged with online classes, somethings were uninteresting.

WR: Retention may also be difficult looking forward.

AO: Also, a lot of our lectures were not in real time. Having classes in real time may be more beneficial and increase engagement.

WR: Our priority should be establishing a very large online community.

AO: Personally, I haven't been able to meet new people. The first-year chat isn't as active as it used to be.

WR: Yammer (aka Communities) is a Microsoft owned app. We all have a membership and log in. It is like a company social network. We could use it to create different communities e.g. SoG, Geography society, year1, 2 etc. Some of the things you can do are ask questions, polls. It is also hashtag integrated.

WR: Planning to formulate and circulate (through course reps) Survey for returning students. Some of the key questions Do you want recorded lectures, will you be watching them live, do you plan to come to campus in September?

How do you want to stay connected with staff in the School of Geography? What kind of online interaction do you want with staff around lectures and outside of these?

SS: There hasn't been much contact between First years and our tutors and advisors

AO: Lack of attendance to tutorials that occurred. Tutor altered it so that they would be available on Teams for drop in chats during scheduled tutorial times.

WR: Using the chat on MS teams rather than emails would be more engaging. We can have teams with different groups. This instant messaging seems quicker than emails. Agreed that it takes time getting used to

WR: Training sessions for teams /QMPlus along with highlighting where to go for information would be crucial for integrating first years as well as returning students to the online learning environment.

WR: It would be nice to have conversation with general teaching staff about what they are comfortable with doing, what they want to or will be doing with regards to online teaching.

AO: We would benefit from a more of a bridge between students and staff.

How can we welcome first year students into the School of Geography community? How can current students be involved?

BUDDY SCHEME& FIRST YEARS:

Aminah and Will have signed up. Course Reps to encourage peers to sign up.

DE: Arranging a system to put people together by signing up, get rotated around to different activities, whether that be virtually or in person

RT: If we link this to the buddy scheme, we could have buddies running different events throughout the days of welcome week through zoom/teams/Yammer etc. Quizzes, online games

DE: Even if there aren't enough buddies, we could post online games/links with times. That way the new first years could join and interact together.

Third year graduation? There is a Queen Mary virtual event scheduled for early August, but should we, or how can we mark graduation within Geography as well?

THIRD YEAR GRADUATION

DE: The idea of getting an online speaker would be good. Maybe Alastair could lead on online event, it doesn't have to be long. Just something to conclude/ solidify the completing of our degrees.

Any other ideas, comments, concerns, questions about temporarily shifting to an online social and learning community?

WR: Although this is meant to be a temporary measure. Even if we can have full-size lectures, we should still use teams as a communication network. Another point is understanding whether students and lecturers want to keep using it. Should we be putting in things in place that are long term, we can use both online and face to face interactions, even when things go back to normal.

DE: Having the option to do a class online would make a big difference even when we no longer have social distancing. Especially if students for example have one class for a day.

COURSE REP ACTIONS

- 1. Encourage peers to sign up to the buddy scheme**
- 2. Will to create the survey and put in in course rep chat for distribution**
- 3. Look into other online games to play**
- 4. Have a look at Yammer/Communities App on MS Teams**