

School of History  
Undergraduate Student Staff Liaison Committee  
06/02/2020

## Agenda

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In Attendance

Sam Bennett (Chair, Secretary) SB  
Rich Evans (HSS Library) RE  
Avin Hourou (2<sup>nd</sup> Year) AH  
Jack (HSS Library) J  
Savannah Blake (Final Year) SBI

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### PART 1 – Preliminary items

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Jay (JH) & Anna (AC)

1.2 Introductions – Jack introduced from the library HSS team by RE

2. Report on matters arising from the previous meeting and action taken

2.1 SB and AC have discussed logistics for School of History Principles video. We now need student volunteers to participate.

SBI raised the point that strike action now poses time constraint. Involvement of students experienced in photo/video skills.

2.2 AC unable to take anything to Education Committee as it has not met since our last meeting. Will be bringing issues with advising consistency & new mentoring system amongst advisor groups to them Monday 10 February.

Noted

2.3 Decoration of Arts Two School of History: Faculty have suggested a memorial to the students who have passed away in third year. Conceptual statue/memorial in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor courtyard? 15 Large images funded, are we able to call on your help to help bring this to life? A number of them will be East London maps. What I would like reps to discuss please is how it would be best to do these! Should we have a working group or sub-committee? We can pay student researchers to look

for the images of East London over time, but how could they be selected? If we were to do a vote on different images, how would it work? Are there student artists who might create something (and how would we identify/commission them)?

Noted that it would be a good idea to have student researchers, gives good opportunities for students to gain experience. A doodle poll via a simple link would be a good method for voting. Alternatives presented included a Twitter poll.

Regarding the memorial, noted by SBl that it would be good to consult those who knew the former students before going ahead with anything in particular. Ensures any memorial is appropriate.

Question raised as to what will happen to existing art work? Idea that existing images, portraits etc, should not be removed, but new artwork should instead be an addition.

Suggestion that digital history students could contribute a map idea.

Problem with working groups is that students may not respond, may not engage. More likely to vote, though as this requires less time.

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## PART 2 – Programme delivery and other matters

### 3. Programme / module developments and amendments / committee volunteers

#### 3.1 What were second-years' thoughts about special subject options for 2020-2021?

AH noted that feedback was not necessarily representative, but that it was felt that medieval choices were limited. Only two. Someone else noted there was not enough modern choices. This feedback came after the fair yesterday. Perhaps a suggestion that the majority are satisfied and therefore are not feeding back but there was an amount of dissatisfaction.

Some anxiety regarding oversubscription and the whether it is worth someone applying for a particular special if they feel they may not get in. Some people struggling to find an interesting special subject.

Suggestion raised that Dan Todman/Martyn Frampton could perhaps raise awareness on what can be covered by a dissertation, i.e. the 10,000 words does not have to be tied exactly to special subject.

SBl overheard some concern regarding Robert Saunders sabbatical, and therefore less likely to take Thatcher special. Concern that this was also leading to oversubscription in other modern specials. Noted that it would be good to know before choice deadline, who was on sabbatical and who would be taking each

subject. For example whether Lindsay Aqui would be teaching Rob's special as people may still be keen to take it if they knew who would be teaching it.

People unsure of how reallocation works if a subject is oversubscribed. Some clarification on how this happens would be useful. Uncertain as to whether it was completely random.

Noted that the fayre setup was ok but not the best. A lot of the new specials were lacking in materials, perhaps understandably. Noted that lack of attendance of conveners was an issue for some. Some confusion over who would be convening the Idea of the West special subject.

*Action Point: Who will be convening the Idea of the West special subject.*

Feedback from JH: 'I haven't had too many positive responses regarding the special subjects / level 6 modules. I haven't spoken to many people outside of my modules so this is most likely because my modules are quite science / psychology based, and there is a lack of that type of history in the options (only one special subject option - Reinventing ourselves / identity). Also, some others in my modules have expressed that they wished they'd held back from doing level 6 modules in second year as they didn't realise there would be such a lack of options. 2 people have said they are going to struggle to fill up the 4 modules alongside the special subject. But, as I said, this is most likely down to the nature of my modules. Although, it is a shame that the science-based modules are so limited.'

#### **4. Learning, teaching and assessment**

##### **4.1 What was the student reaction to winter exam period? How did students feel about the longer gap between semesters?**

AH noted that for some, the presence of take home exams after Christmas caused anxiety during the festive period. Both reps noted that not having exams upon return made the break very relaxing and enjoyable.

Noted that due to strike, if you hadn't communicated with a member of staff before the strike, it was unlikely that you would hear until after Christmas. Concern raised that this was probably too long a period to wait for answers to some queries.

Noted that for some modules, some feedback did not come until 2 further pieces for the module had been submitted, this side of Christmas. Meaning new work was submitted without the influence of previous feedback.

Feedback from JH: 'Most people seemed to like having extra time in January during the exam period. Many said they only had one exam / assignment, but after that they were just waiting around for semester 2. While I'm sure having an additional week or so after assignments were finished was nice, it would have been great for our modules on QMPlus (alongside uploaded seminar readings) to be available sooner so the people who want to get a head start, can.'

#### **4.2 What was the student reaction to the take home exams this year?**

Issue raised in that the guidance on take home exams does not cover writing style/structure. Should the writing style be closer to an essay? Or to a typical exam response?

SBI noted that there was still some concern that exams will disappear completely. Noted that some students, albeit a minority, enjoy exams and they could be kept on a limited basis, but with less weighting.

#### **5. Academic support: Academic Advisors and Office Hours**

Not Discussed.

#### **6. Organisation and Communication**

##### **6.1 Education Committee will meet 10 February 2020.**

Date was noted by members present but acknowledged that with such limited representation at SSLCs, the turnout at other committees would also be limited.

**6.2 Asian Heritage month – two guided tours at British Museum (History Society?), and AC to give tour of South Asia Room in V&A. Student presentations on history & heritage? Possible Islamic World Seminar – waiting for speaker response.**

Noted by the group.

#### **7. Learning resources:**

##### **7.1 Library facilities / resources (books, journals etc.) (RE).**

RE touched on the possibility of volunteering/placements for students in the library, raised by AH last meeting. Noted that placements are a possibility and did exist to some extent already. Mentioned that following the Head of Schools meeting, Dan Todman may consider helping students get into placement at the library archives. Perhaps in the periods now covered by the extended exam window. RE to continue to push on this.

RE reminded the group of the more books form on the website which should be used for further book orders. Noted the moving of certain collections, to increase visibility and create space for an LGBTQ+ collection in the teaching collection.

Noted that the online library catalogue will be getting an upgrade shortly. A move towards a Senate-House style system, which may be familiar to many students.

AH noted that the door was still causing issues for students. RE explained that this could still change in the summer with library upgrades.

AH also noted praise for diversity expressed through the Library's LGBTQ+ display.

Noted some dissatisfaction with the library notification system, that they are not necessarily noteworthy and are easy to ignore. RE acknowledged this.

SBI asked about a specific issue to do with book reservation. RE requested further details over email to resolve the issue.

AH raised the issue that the extended Christmas loan period was not particularly useful for History students, who are still not on campus during the new exam period, due to the School having no January exams. Will be feedback to library leadership by RE.

## 8. Any other business:

**8.1 A new democratic structure was proposed to Student Council, which passed on 19 November 2019. From 1 August 2020, each School will have an elected School representative, who will support the work of the Course Representatives and will work directly with the new Vice President Humanities and Social Science and Vice President Science and Engineering in their respective faculties. What committees or meetings should this representative attend for the School of History? Co-chair of SSLC?**

Noted that this seems like a very large role to take on. Is it paid? Would they attend all school meetings? Good idea to co chair SSLC but workload may be very large if they also attended a number of other meetings. Noted that only one school of history representative had elected, and that this individual was currently a course rep already.

**8.2 Impending strike action: Students may now be aware that further industrial action by UCU is planned for 20,21 Feb (week 5); 24,25, 26 Feb (week 6); 9,10,11,12,13 March (week 8); 16,17,18,19 March (week 9). The School understands the stress and concern that this news will cause to all students, and particularly to those in the final year. As before, strike action is an individual choice and an important democratic right - not all staff will strike, and not all will strike for all the days of the action, but those who choose to strike are under no obligation to tell managers beforehand about their intentions. This makes it very difficult to predict the effect on a module by module basis in advance. Last time we experienced a lengthy period of industrial action such as this, we were able to mitigate the effect on student grades in a variety of ways depending on circumstances, including moving deadlines, changing exam papers so that students did not have to answer questions on topics they had not been taught, and in some cases discounting pieces of assessment entirely (with the module grade calculated from other work). We only received confirmation of the dates yesterday, and the School's management team is now examining all the implications - given the number of modules we teach, I am afraid this does take some time. We will endeavour to give clear advice as quickly as possible, but it would be good if Course Reps could reassure their peers that we are working really hard to find solutions that will minimise disruption and that the University will ensure that there is no impact on degree outcomes.**

*Action Point: Check with Dan Todman whether this message can be circulated to students. ASAP.*

**One thing we did learn from last time was that some students rely on the structure of university life to scaffold their mental health. Although we cannot replace content from striking colleagues, this time we will put on scheduled supervised study sessions so that those who want the routine of coming in or a quiet place to work can have it.**

Supervised study sessions praised as a good idea. Noted that this would help with lack of structure, which was echoed as an issue.

Request for strikers not to take over the chapel, as this is where some students work. So to have this occupied by striking staff created even further disruption for those trying to continue to work.

Questions:

1. Compensation, final years have experienced around 11 weeks (or 1 semester) of disruption across their degree. This has been raised by multiple students as point of concern.
2. Special subjects: request for clarity on assignment adjustments.
3. Could the school enforce special subject tutors to reply to final year emails.
4. Does the school have an official stance on the strike?
5. Will dissertation hand-in be extended beyond current date?
6. Will exams be pushed back if dissertation deadline is extended?
7. Will all assignment deadlines during that strike period will be moved forward as they were last semester?

AOB: Point raised that The Crusades module lectures not recorded, whilst attendance is taken, causing issues for those with accessibility issues.

Request for more to be done in the school for LGBT+ month, as was done for black history month, which was praised as being good.

Noted that Linda Briggs practice of giving a 2 minute break in the middle of lecture should be shared amongst other groups as gives a break to students.

## **9. Date of the next meeting.**

26 March 2020, 12:00-13:00, Scape 3.01