



Queen Mary  
University of London

**School of Politics and International Relations  
Student Staff Liaison Committee**

Wednesday, 27 January 2021  
2pm-4pm via Microsoft Teams

**Approved**

**In attendance:**

SPIR staff: Dr Nicholas Hostettler (Chair), Prof Laleh Khalili (SPIR Director of Education), Dr Daniel Gover (SPIR Library Liaison), Mr Marlon Gomes (SPIR School Manager), Dr David Williams (Head of SPIR), Dr Chris Phillips (SPIR module convenors for POL318), Dr Joe Hoover (SPIR Careers Liaison), Dr James Strong (Director of Education), Bronwyn Murphy (Student Support Officer)

**Course Reps:**

Sonya Hofer	Economics and Politics Year 1
Pietro Barba Navaretti	Economics and Politics Year 2 - Rep
Leonardo Goehmann	Economics and Politics Year 2 - Rep
Mark Simpson	International Business and Politics (MSc) - Rep
Eunice Arias Arias	International Public Policy (Distance Learning) (May 2019 intake)
Ivie Edebiri	International Public Policy (MSc) - Rep
Haroun Lazim	International Relations (MA DL) - Rep
Vida Stanic	International Relations Year 1 - Rep
Heidi Mustafa	International Relations Year 1 - Rep
Alan Kakkassery	International Relations Year 2 - Rep
Vanessa Beale	International Relations Year 3 - Rep
Shahin Patel	International Relations Year 3 - Rep
Binta Yade	Law and Politics Year 2 - Rep
Etienne Ferenc	Politics and International Relations Year 1 - Rep
Aleksanteri Kekonen	Politics with Business Management Year 1 - Rep
Will Quinnell	Politics Year 1 - Rep
Antony Demetriou	Politics Year 1 – Rep
Adam Rook	Politics Year 1 - Rep

Secretary of SLLC: Jason Salucideen

## 1. Welcome

**2020/21 36** Noted: Vida Stanic was introduced as Student Co-Chair. It was noted that Vida would observe the role of Chair at this meeting and help chair the next SSLC meeting.

**2020/21 37** Noted: Chair received 10 written reports from School Reps.

## 2. Apologies for absence

PATRICK DIAMOND
MICKAELLA ANDRIANTSIFERANA (LAW & POL YEAR 3) ( )
CAROLINA MENDES (International Public Policy (MSc) - Rep) ( )
SATRIA SETIAWAN (politics PGT rep) )
MARK SIMPSON (International Business and Politics (MSc) - Rep)
SHAHIN HAIDER PATEL (IR YEAR 3)
REBECCA JACKSON-WALLEY (Politics year 3)
MADELEINE DAVIS
ANNABELLE WOGHIREN (Law and Pol Year 1)

## 3. Approval of the notes of the previous meeting

**2020/21 38:** The committee accepted the minutes of the last meeting held on 11/11/20.

## 4. Matters Arising

**2020/21 39** Noted re min. 2020/21 28: More information has now been sent out regarding the Library new search engine provision, including further guidance on how to use it. Reps did not raise any further issue with it.

## 5. Library Matters

**2020/21: 40** Noted that students had no issues with the Library that they wanted to raise.

## **PART 2 — Special Report/discussion**

### 6. Pandemic Provisions

**2020/21: 41** The Chair noted that some staff in the school would be meeting soon to discuss the School's response regarding pandemic provision, and were aware that some schools have already made announcements on how they will handle this. The Chair invited students to raise their concerns, thoughts and suggestions.

**2020/21: 42** Noted final year History & Politics course rep suggestion, that SPIR adopt a similar Extenuating Circumstances Policy to School of History. Rep explained History are allowing unlimited and guaranteed EC claims, and that their dissertation module's deadline has been extended by 1 month for all students. SPIR Careers Liaison explained that a drawback of extending all student deadlines would result in extending staff marking workloads, into periods where they have other work such as research.

**2020/21: 43** Noted from 1<sup>st</sup> year IR rep, that approx. 7 out of 10 students who responded to a survey had not been aware of provisions such as the hardship fund or PASS scheme. These students reported a lack of support re: Mental health, technological difficulties, unsuitable study environment for working from home. Rep noted that she had successfully accessed the hardship fund and that her tutors had mentioned the hardship fund support in sessions. 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep explained that they are a PASS mentor and send emails to students each week to let them know PASS is running.

**2020/21: 44** Noted discussion re: how best to communicate with students. Reps suggested using 'Whatsapp'. Staff explained that SPIR try to limit the number of messages students receive, for example by making modular announcements via QMplus that go to only students registered on that module. However a whatsapp group for all announcements would send too many irrelevant announcements to students, there is also concern it would move communications over to personal devices, and that SPIR could not continually adapt to each new communication app that is popular that year. It was explained to reps that each year this issue is raised to essentially address students habit of not checking their emails, however students must learn to check their email for university just as they would need to at the workplace. The Chair noted that if students desire notifications on their phones they should turn on notifications for the QMUL mailbox so that they receive notifications. Head of School explained that he would like this committee spend time considering what good communication look like and how best to implement that.

**2020/21: 45** Noted from Student Support Officer that staff also receive a large number of communications from students and asked reps to encourage students to check the Student Handbook which contains in depth information on a variety of issues and may answer their queries and also that students be encouraged to check QMplus announcements regularly.

**2020/21: 46** Noted 2<sup>nd</sup> year IR reps surveyed students and received approx. 99 responses. When asked how satisfied students were with SPIR's response and communications during Covid, 33 said they were neutral, 35 satisfied, 15 unsatisfied, 7 very unsatisfied, 9 very satisfied. Common concerns amongst respondents were re: tuition fees, no detriment policy, marking leniency, Exams, assessment weightings, support from staff for lowering student tuition fees. The Director of Education complimented the survey and it's response rate, and explained that some staff may view the lowering of tuition fees resulting in job cuts for staff. Head of School explained that tuition fees is in most part a government decision but we are very sympathetic to the view that online learning is not as beneficial an experience as in person teaching.

**2020/21: 47** Noted: from final year IR rep concerns that, students are limited to 3 self-certifications when applying for extenuating circumstances, deadlines are bunched up within the same period and suggest following School of History's decision to give all students longer deadlines, and concern that Russell Group universities including QMUL do not support a no detriment policy and suggest SPIR at least adopt something similar to no detriment. The Director of Education explained that the school would do everything it could to help students do well in their degree during the pandemic while still maintaining the same quality of the degree, so that it is valued by prospective employers equally to degrees obtained in periods before the pandemic. The Chair noted that staff are also experiencing difficulties resulting from the pandemic and are not unsympathetic to student concerns.

**2020/21: 48** Noted from Head of School that QM has decided against a no detriment policy in conjunction with Russell Group universities but it may be that this position may change in future due to student pressure, if some Russell Group universities shift their position, and when the impact of the pandemic is more apparent in future weeks. It is regularly discussed at meetings with Heads of Schools. QM will institute provisions to help with the pandemic including, Extenuating Circumstances, but discussions between the college and students union are still ongoing. SPIR has been given flexibility with regards to the assessment deadlines it sets as these could help students however SPIR also has its own deadline for reporting student results to the college and must consider this when considering extended deadlines. Exam Boards will be given more flexibility to ensure students are not disadvantaged by the pandemic, but the exact details were still being discussed. Staff marking assessments will be asked to consider the lack of access students may have had to teaching and resources when marking. These are some of the actions to help mitigate the circumstances resulting from the pandemic. There are other issues still being discussed.

**2020/21: 49** Noted from Head of School that he would be holding an open Q&A which students have been invited to attend, on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2021.

### **PART 3 — Student Reports**

#### **7. Verbal/written reports from students**

**2020/21: 50** Noted: concern from 1<sup>st</sup> History and Politics rep regarding the POL199 exam, when it would be and what form it would take, e.g. take home exam. Chair noted that all SPIR exams are online and within a 48 hour period. The specific exam timetable will not be set until approximately week beginning 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021, but exams will run between 6<sup>th</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> June.

**2020/21:51** Noted 1<sup>st</sup> year rep submitted feedback on issues with Lecturers reading off power point slides in lectures, lack of diversity of topics, lack of assignment clarification and suggestions on aiding learning through interactive tasks like breakout groups. The Chair responded that all these points should be raised directly with the module convenors. The rep also had issues with some topics overlapping between modules and the Chair explained that this is best raised with tutors as a point of discussion.

**2020/21: 52** Noted query from 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep regarding why lectures are not held live. The Chair explained that there is no consensus amongst students, some prefer recorded lectures other prefer live. It would be useful if the rep could get feedback from each group on why they prefer each. Staff are still adjusting to online teaching and staff also have different preferences for live or recorded lectures. 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep suggested all staff do live lectures that they then record, however the Chair explained that a recorded lecture is not the same as simply a live lecture that it recorded, a recorded lecture can be segmented for example. Chair explained students could raise the issue with individual module convenors.

**2020/21:53** Noted from 2<sup>nd</sup> year Law and Politics concern that students are being denied module change requests due to capacity limits and asked if capacities could be increased since teaching is online. The School Manager explained that class limits are based on more than just room capacity, it is also based on staff resources so we cannot expand module capacities solely due to teaching moving online, though SPIR have made some increases due to this. The Director of Education explained staff have had to do more work this year to convert teaching to online and extra students increases workload in other areas such as emails, office hour appointments, marking workload etc.

**2020/21: 54** Noted from 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep concern regarding distribution of deadlines across modules. Chair explained that SPIR consider this but it is difficult because deadlines must be set at periods where enough teaching has taken place to properly be able to assess students. So while SPIR does try to distribute deadlines as far as possible students would have to plan ahead as well to ensure they can meet conflicting deadlines. A 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep noted that they had 3 deadlines on the same day and felt this was too much, though one of their deadlines was ultimately moved after raising the issue with the tutor. The Chair explained we must coordinate deadlines across modules across the schools and often with other schools in the college so the scope modules convenors have is often limited. The Director of Education explained that it's difficult as students have different combination of modules but we would usually avoid setting 3 deadlines on the same day and we would feed this back to the Exams Chair.

**2020/21: 55** Noted 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep concern regarding assessments that contain questions on topics which are only taught shortly before the assessment deadline. The Chair explained that because of the teaching structure it would always be the case that some topics are taught near to the deadline and that some students find this ok and do the necessary independent work to prepare, and that students can speak to tutors about that. Also explained that there would almost always be options available to choose questions that were on topics taught earlier in the semester.

**2020/21: 56** Noted: report from Final year rep concerning the dissertation deadline, conflicting deadlines and increasing the word limit for exams. With regards to Exams, the Chair explained the assessment level is set, each module has to create assessments which fall within the criteria for its level and SPIR work with the assessment requirements which were set several years ago. Chair explained take-home exams will resemble a real exam more than it would an Essay, and students should treat it as an exam. The conflicting deadlines issue has been discussed previously in the

meeting. The dissertation deadline will be discussed by the school at a meeting discussing pandemic provision.

**2020/21: 57** Noted Masters rep concern regarding technical requirements for citations and bibliographies. Chair directed students to the Politics Masters Shared Area of QMplus which contains this information in the Master Handbook, and module areas should also contain guidance and a style guide.

**2020/21: 58** Noted Masters rep concerning the delivery of BUSM095. As SPIR do not run this module the PGT administrator would raise the issue with School of Business

**2020/21: 59:** Noted: Masters rep suggestion that lectures should be uploaded in a format which students can listen to at different speeds. Also suggestions on presentation of topics. Chair explained students could raise these issues directly with convenors.

**2020/21: 60:** Noted query on whether or not the 7 day grace period applied to an upcoming formative assessments for POL318 Research Project module. It was explained that students could not apply for formal extensions on formative work, they should instead email their supervisor and explain that they would require further time, an email will be sent to students to explain this in further detail.

**2020/21: 61:** Noted query regarding whether students could 'self-certify' when applying for an extension for POL318's final assessment. The POL318 convenor responded that this would need to be a decision for the school to make as a whole rather than for an individual module convenor. The Chair explained that discussions on this would begin within the school soon.

### **PART 3 — Programme delivery and other matters**

#### 8. Learning, teaching and assessment

**2020/21: 62:** Noted final year concern that in the vast majority of her experience, students are not engaging in 'break out' groups in webinars, that most students either talk about things unrelated to work or are silent. Law and Politics rep suggested making it mandatory for students to turn on their cameras in webinars, using more interactive methods such as polls and making participation graded – as ways to encourage greater student participation. 1<sup>st</sup> year rep explained that some of her peers were strongly against mandatory use of cameras, and that some students environment may make it too difficult. Another rep explained that some tutors have asked students to vote on how they approach the webinars, e.g. break out groups or one single group for discussions.

**2020/21: 63:** Noted from 2<sup>nd</sup> year rep that one of their lecturers does post lecture which can be sped up for those that want to listen at faster speeds. The Chair explained that he is aware some formats allow it and others do not and that all staff are constantly sharing their methods.

**2020/21: 64:** Noted from the Director of Education that he'd shared notes on lessons learned from term A including feedback from term A tutees, with all SPIR teaching staff before the start of term B. Staff have not been trained for online teaching and they are working on improving their methods as there are many different approaches, and worked hard over the summer to learn new skills to prepare for online teaching. Consistently feedback from students was that live lectures were least popular. Re: min 2020/21 62 the Director of Education recommended break out groups be left short to mitigate issues with this method of learning in an online environment, and also suggested that webinar staff and students discuss and agree what web cam policy they prefer for their webinar.

**2020/21: 65:**

#### 9. Any other business

**2020/21: 65:** The Chair shared a job advert link with reps regarding a part time 'student voice' role within Queen Mary University.

10. Date of next meeting: 7 April 2021, 2- 4pm