



School of Politics and International Relations

Student Staff Liaison Committee

Wednesday, 2nd February at 2pm in Laws 1.02 & Online (Hybrid)

Present: Dr Nicholas Hostettler (SPIR UG Senior Tutor and Chair)

Dr Stijn Van Kessel (co-convenor POL318)

Prof Laleh Khalil (Co-Director of Education)

Dr Tamara Popic (SPIR staff Library Rep)

Dr Javier Sajuria (PGT Director)

Dr Felipe Antunes de Oliveira (POL318 co-convenor)

Jai Johnson (Law & Pol year 1)

Samiha Khanom (International Relations year 2)

Salwa Sufian (History & Pol)

Setareh Dashte Bozory (Pol & International Relations year 2)

Katarzyna Makowska (Pol & International Relations year 2)

Bushra Ashkir (Pol & Sociology year 1)

Judi Naim (Pol & International Relations year 1)

Ethan Shoben (Politics year 1)

Sonya Hofer (Economics and Politics Year 2 – Rep)

Binta Yade (Law and Politics Year 3 – Rep)

Louis Gouget (Politics and International Relations Year 2 – Rep)

Adam Salim Omar (History and Politics Year 1 – Rep)

In attendance: Mr Jason Salucideen (secretary)

Part 1 – Preliminary items

Welcome and introduction to new members

1. Welcome

2021/30	Chair welcomed members of the committee, and asked if any had been newly elected. There were no newly elected reps in attendance.
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2. Introducing Bushra as Co-Chair

2021/31	Re: min. 2021/08 Reps were interviewed for position of Co-Chair and Bushra was appointed. The committee congratulated Bushra on her appointment. Noted that Bushra would shadow the Chair during this meeting and Bushra would then act as student Chair for the 3 rd and final SSLC meeting of the academic year.
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3. Apologies:

2021/32	Mai Kato (MSc International Public Policy), Bethlehem Telahun (MA IR Public Policy), Amerisida Dibra (SPIR PG administrator) David Williams (Head of School) Dr Richard Johnson (SPIR Joint Hons Co-ordinator)
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4 Approval of minutes of last meeting and matters arising

2021/33	Minutes of the last meeting were approved.
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5. Matters arising from the previous meeting

2021/34	Re: min. 2021/06 – SPIR has set up a whatsapp group and students have also set up their own whatsapp groups. Email groups were also set up. This would improve reps ability to communicate with their cohorts for feedback. Econ/Pol and Law/Pol reps explained that the degrees feel very separated between department and that their students seem to prefer talking in a Politics whatsapp group and another whatsapp group for their other department, rather than a single whatsapp group specifically for that joint programme. Noted that the faculty have employed staff to look at the improving the experience for joint students.
2021/35	Re: min. 2021/10 three course reps applied to be join the SPIR equality and diversity committee, and all three were appointed.
2021/36	Re: min. 2021/26 PG administrator was informed and responded that they were aware of a couple individual problems that were addressed with the individual students.

Part 2 – Special report/discussion

6. Strike Provisions

2021/37	Noted that an FAQ on the Strike would be going up on the landing page for SPIR. Any questions which arise from this SSLC will be added to that FAQ. The SPIR FAQ will differ in tone and content from the central QMUL FAQ as it will be specific to SPIR.
2021/38	Noted that Reps were asked to send any questions they had about the strike to the director of education.
2021/39	Noted that a Rep raised concerns that they would still be paying the same amount of tuition fees and queried if the school would be providing materials in lieu of the strike which would be equal to the teaching that would be cancelled. Director of Education responded that if a tutor is on strike they are not obligated under union rules to provide any replacement for the cancelled teaching. It may be that some tutors will choose to make some accommodations. Not all tutor's will be on strike and they will tell you if they are not.
2021/40	Noted from Director of Education that assessments and deadlines affected by the strike will be reviewed by the School and appropriate measures put in place to ensure that all assessments are reasonable and fair. A rep responded to this that they are still concerned that they would be missing out on the knowledge they would have been provided with even if such assessment adjustments are made. Director of education responded that the readings would still be listed for the modules but the lecturer notes on a topic may not be, as it will differ by module.
2021/41	Noted strong support for the strikes from another rep in response to the concerns raised by one rep (2021/39). Rep who raised concerns responded that while they understood the reasons for the strikes were valid they also felt obliged to argue the position of their cohort that would be missing teaching as a result of the strike action. Noted response from other rep that they were representing their cohort, and the responses they received were that students were in favour of the strike and felt strongly about supporting it and were angered to be informed they could not support it via picket lines.
2021/42	Noted that the Chair thanked the reps for their feedback about the strike and expressed how devoted staff are to the wellbeing of their students, and their education, that it was regrettable that in the short term students would be impacted by the strike but it was being done for the long term interest of teaching and learning. Chair noted it was his absolute pleasure and privilege to work within SPIR, staff that are unrelenting committed to the interest of students. SPIR would take measures as explained, to minimise the impact on students. Course rep responded that it was reassuring to know that students were not being forgotten in this process
2021/43	Noted strike dates as 5 days from 14-18 th Feb, 2 days 21-22 nd Feb and 3 days 28 th Feb – 2 nd March. Chair noted that the Head of School has asked that staff inform their students in advance if classes are not taking place due to strike action, but that staff are not required to let students know. Rep asked if there was the possibility of further strike action or reduced strike action, depending on if demands were met or not? Staff committee members, explained that this could not be known but could be possible. Noted from one final year rep that they were aware of only one time when strike days were cancelled due to successful negotiations.
2021/44	Noted that on a jointly taught module where the convenor was on strike no teaching would take place, but on a module where the convenor was not on strike then it would be the decision of individual tutors on the module whether or not to strike or to teach. Rep queried if that meant some students could go to classes where staff were not striking.

	<p>Director of Education explained that the Head of School has said there was a principle of equity in place, which meant that you can't have some students on a module receive their tutoring while others do not.</p> <p>Chair noted that this may mean that if any staff on a single module strike then the whole module might be required to cancel its teaching for that affected week.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ACTION: Chair to investigate</p>
2021/45	<p>Noted, in response to course rep query, that students could write to the Principal, Colin Bailey, if they wanted to raise their concerns and/or note their support for staff, regarding the strike action. Noted that the Union and the Students' Union would be in discussion with each other and with students about ways they could support the strike, should you wish to.</p>
2021/46	<p>Chair thanked the committee for their discussions regarding this matter and reiterated that students would not be assessed on any topics which were not covered due to the strike action where it was unreasonable</p>

Part 3 – Student Reports

7. Written/Verbal reports from student course representatives

2021/47	<p>1st year rep raised concerns about transparency regarding which modules have exams. Specifically students were not aware that POL180 had an exam, until it was mentioned in a seminar.</p> <p>Chair responded that QMplus should include such information in the module area and to let staff know if this info re: the Exam was missing, and that we appreciate students could not have been aware of missing assessment info prior.</p> <p>Rep responded that the information was added now to QMplus but only after students raised the issue of it not being included on the QMplus page prior.</p> <p>Chair apologised for the omission of that assessment information, and noted this appeared to be a one off incident.</p>
2021/48	<p>2nd year rep asked about the dissertation in their final year, what information would be provided beforehand, including for joint students and would they get the opportunity to choose modules which complement their dissertation.</p> <p>POL318 co-convenor explained that SPIR based students would be invited to a session at the end of their 2nd year, giving information on the POL318 Dissertation module and what work they are advised to do over the Summer. Students are encouraged to read up on the topic they want to write about over the summer and also provide us with information on their chosen topic so that they can be assigned to a supervisor that is suitable to supervise their project.</p> <p>Econ/Pol rep raised concerns they were unaware of what options they had to choose a dissertation with either school.</p> <p>The Director of Education explained that the Home School were responsible for deciding which modules students were eligible to choose and joint students were advised to check with their home school.</p>
2021/49	<p>Noted from Rep that one of their cohort informed them that they changed a module in semester B and were still not timetabled for it. Director of Education asked that the student be told to contact her if the matter was still not resolved.</p> <p>SSLC Secretary noted that when a student changes a module it takes around 48 hours for the software to update and let them be timetabled, so the office email students a timetable to use in the interim until the software updates and they can be timetabled. The office also manually enrol students to the QMplus page of the module so they get access to it without delay. There seems to have been some issue this year where students who were manually enrolled may still not have access to the module on QMplus, so the Secretary had sent a list to a colleague in the office who manages QMplus to make sure they were given access.</p>

	It was reiterated that students with timetable issues should email spir.timetable@qmul.ac.uk and those with module issues should email spir.modules@qmul.ac.uk
2021/50	<p>Noted from rep that some students have raised concerns that there is not enough general support on academic skills. Director of Education explained that there is a Library subset which specifically deals with providing academic/writing skills. If students go to their website they can book various support such as one to one support. It is in the Academic Skills section of the Library website, the support if not SPIR specific. There are also modules which can be applied for via MySIS which relate to academic skills.</p> <p>Chair explained as a school we are devoting some resources to looking into and enhancing literary skills for our students.</p> <p>Chair added that it does help for students to take samples of their writing to their tutors in advice and feedback hours and it does help to work with other students more. Students need to pay attention to these skills and develop them over a long period of time.</p>
2021/51	<p>Rep raised concern that for study abroad, for single semester abroad in 2nd year there are currently no European destinations offered.</p> <p>PGT Director responded that this was unfortunately true for various reasons. Universities in general prefer students to come for a full year and not a single semester. The UK left ERASMUS, so we had to renegotiate with universities one by one. SPIR were left in a position that it was unfortunately less likely to be able to go for a single semester abroad than for a full year.</p>
2021/52	<p>Rep asked if a student goes abroad for a year do they pay QM or the university abroad, for their year abroad of study.</p> <p>PGT Director explained that if they get tuition fee funding for their degree they'll also receive it for their 4th year abroad, whatever the process for the funding it should be extended to the 4th year. The exact amount paid would depend on a student's fee status but it would be a reduced fee for the year you go abroad, not more. The fees are paid to QM, you do not have to pay anything to the Host university.</p> <p>If you receive any allowance you'll continue receiving it while abroad.</p> <p>Noted that if you are want to apply for a single semester abroad you should apply in this period in your first year to go abroad in your 2nd year. If you want to go abroad for a full year you should apply in this period but in your 2nd year of student, to then go abroad in your final year.</p>
2021/53	2 nd year rep noted interested in holding an event to allow students the opportunity to meet one another and get to know each other on a personal level. Noted suggestion it be advertised as less of an academic gathering and more of a social event. Reps were asked to volunteer to help, Louis Gouget volunteered plus another rep (name to be clarified). Noted that all UG students could be contacted.
2021/54	Final year rep noted that there are no concerns to raise from final year students. Final year rep noted that some of her cohort had asked her to pass on their support and best wishes for the strike action and understood that it could not have been an easy decision to make.
2021/55	Noted that there were not PG reps present to provide feedback from their cohort.

8. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

2021/56	Students were asked if they wished to discuss any issues pertaining to this item, nothing was raised.
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9. Learning Resources

2021/57	SPIR Library rep asked students if they had any Library issues to raise, or any issues accessing/using the library resources. Rep responded that they felt the 'Library Skills' section
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	of the Library was clear but that perhaps an hour long session per year would help students learning to use the Library. Another rep explained one of their modules had covered this. Noted that Academic skills and Library Skills sections can be accessed via the Library website.
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10. Academic Community

2021/58	Chair noted that ideas for fostering our Academic Community had already been touched on earlier in the meeting.
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11. Any other business

2021/59	Noted by Director of Education that there would be a Townhall concerning the strike, given by the Head of School and PG Director, one of the Directors of Education and some other staff, next week. Tomorrow when the FAQ concerning the strike is live on our website we will send an email to invite all students to the townhall. The Townhall would be Wednesday 9 th Feb, 10-11am, Arts Two LT. Reps were asked to inform their constituencies.
2021/60	Rep asks if students can get careers advice on internships from both schools. Director of Education explained that students can contact our careers adviser and they will try to respond but please be aware that if you are enquiring regarding Law there could be a delay due to the careers office having a shortage of staff dealing with Law.
2021/61	Rep asks what can be done about conflicting essay deadlines. Director of Education explained that since students can't be assessed until around the last 6 weeks of the semester on a module it is difficult to schedule submissions dates that do not conflict. The Chair of Exams and office staff have worked hard to minimise clashing deadlines. We used to have more ability to stagger deadlines however SSLC asked that there be specific single days for submission so these were moved to Sundays which further constrained this process, so we have again shifted this around but it is not wholly resolved and some submission dates may conflict. PGT Director explained that there has been some improvement in this regard as it was not uncommon before the pandemic to have two exams in person in the same day one after the other. Chair noted that we do our very best to avoid clashing deadlines as far as possible but it is not completely avoidable
2021/62	Student Support Officer noted that the National Student Survey was an annual survey organised by HEFCE looking for feedback from final year students. Student Support Officer appealed to Final year reps to help promote the survey. Students would already have received an email from Ipsos MORI who are conducting the survey. SPIR Head of School also made an announcement about this, as will lecturers at the start of upcoming final year lectures. The closing date to complete the survey is 13 th April. We encourage students to complete the survey as soon as possible to avoid being sent weekly reminders from Ipsos MORI. It is important that we receive honest feedback from students, what worked? What could be improved? Teaching, Learning, Resources etc. Your feedback will be used to help improve education for future students. If students do complete the survey the University and SPIR will be donating some money to charity.

12. Date of next meeting: Wednesday, 6th April 2022, 2-4pm. Location: to be confirmed.