

Foundation Year Student Representative meeting

22nd February 2024

Present: Laura Green, Agnes Akele, Shay Wilson, Malachi Daniel, Mari-Paz Balibrea, Holly Nicholas, Davin Sidhu

Minutes

- LG welcomed the representatives and asked for their feedback, which has been organised by theme below.

Experience of being a student representative

- SW and AA had created feedback forms which they would be circulating in the coming weeks. Based on preliminary feedback SW had identified that students in their department were less likely to recommend their second module, so the forms would help in finding a possible reason for this.

- MD has enjoyed the experience of being a rep so far. He has used a Whatsapp group to gather feedback and has raised issues on students' behalf to staff, as well as organising a trip to the House of Commons. He has arranged social events for students as well.

- DS said she had been busy being a liaison between students and the programme director. This was needed as students seemed not to be aware of the existence of the support offered by the programme director and also their personal tutors.

- Reps discussed the merits of various ways of seeing opinions. DS suggested using open space like the cafe at Central building for transparency because students might not want to be in a closed room, or the student advice pods at Malet Street if students require privacy. It was also suggested that reps have drop-ins.

SUGGESTION: Reps could gauge interest for drop-in sessions on their feedback survey communications.

Administration

- On the module Breaking Boundaries of Knowledge students were given the opportunity to choose a topic to study within the module, but there was some dissatisfaction as some students had not received their first choice topic. One student said that he dreaded these seminars as he was an Arts student and did not enjoy studying his Politics-related topic. Another student reported that there was no dissatisfaction in their class regarding topic choice, but this may be because it aligns more closely with their future programme. Nevertheless it was felt that it was a good idea to address how topics are assigned on this module.

- LG responded that this was the first year students could choose topics so there were some teething issues, however it was made clear that students were not guaranteed their first choice and it was highly dependent on availability as all the tutors taught one class only. The module was also primarily a study skills module with the subject topic used as material to practice study skills. It is also unusual for Foundation Year core modules to offer this much choice, as it is important the core content has to be covered.

SUGGESTION: reps could include a question on topic choice on their surveys to better gauge opinion.

SUGGESTION: Breaking Boundaries of Knowledge tutors could give a short presentation on their topic so that students would have a better understanding of what the topic involved.

SUGGESTION: students on this module could have a two-week window at the start of the module to change topics if they were unhappy.

SUGGESTION: Breaking Boundaries topics could be retooled to offer more flexibility to students doing different degree pathways.

- MD reported that there had been mistakes on timetables. This had been raised but not addressed or rectified.

- DS reported issues with optional classes appearing on students' attendance records and thus making it appear they had less than 100% attendance.

ACTION: LG to conduct mapping exercise of Breaking Boundaries of Knowledge topics and ensure that the range reflects the cohort of students on the module.

Teaching and content

- In general the quality of teaching had been praised. On the Law core modules students felt that they were challenged academically, and that their tutors had the credentials and expertise they needed. Some students enjoyed their Law lectures so much they wished they were longer than 90 minutes.

- For Fundamentals of Study, a rep reported that they had encountered one student who felt there was a big imbalance of abilities in class.

SUGGESTION: extension activities could be provided to cater to students who were able to complete work faster.

ACTION: LG will incorporate post session activities in Fundamentals of Study next year to offer opportunities for student to stretch themselves

- AA reported a jump in level of difficulty between the first and second semesters. This would have been helped by access to course materials further in advance so students could prepare. This would also be useful for starting their first-year modules. MPB responded that there would be a session addressing this at the end of the Foundation Year.

- For the Law core modules, some students reported that they had prepared for classes using particular questions and prompts, and these were then not the ones used in class. Some also reported being concerned about the expression of political opinions in assignments, as they felt that if a lecturer had a conflicting opinion they might be more harsh, even if the assignment had a personal reflection element rather than being objective.

- Some students encountered dead links on reading lists and MD had had to contact the relevant parties to restore access to these additional readings.

- Some students had heard of further subject-specific study help but were not sure how or where to access it. LG suggested this could refer to the Learning Development tutors.

ACTION: LG to circulate information about accessing Learning Development tutors' help.

Assessment

- Some issues were reported with the quality and timeliness of feedback. One rep had had to intervene when a fellow student did not receive feedback before the next assignment was due. Others reported that feedback was only a line or two

ACTION: LG to follow up with reps confidentially to establish which tutors may be responsible for poor feedback

Delivery methods

- On the Law core modules, the mode of delivery had changed from in-person to online and this was unpopular with many students. Many people did not switch on their cameras and participate, and students who did participate felt that they were not getting the experience they were paying for.

- The Arts rep agreed, saying that they personally had switched from online attendance to in-person and much preferred to study face-to-face. When they were studying online, the tutor sometimes finished early as the class was based heavily on participation and discussion. It was agreed that online study could be more accessible but sometimes felt like a lower quality experience.

- LG and MPB responded that tutors were aware of the drawbacks of online classes and felt frustrated as well. Online delivery is used for very large lecture-style classes such as those on Fundamentals of Study for several reasons. For seminar-style classes, students were asked to

confirm they have the requisite technology to participate fully in small online classes, such as a working camera and microphone, and a stable internet connection, although this was difficult to enforce. The rolling out of Hyflex technology may solve some of these issues but if students are in receipt of student finance or if they have a student visa, they must attend in person every week.

Closing:

LG thanked all reps for attending and providing such helpful feedback. LG committed to following up on actions and feedback given.

Date of Next Meeting- Reps requested that next meeting be held until after the Spring Break to enable them to complete Term 2 assessments and process further feedback from students.

ACTION: LG to circulate a Doodle Poll to establish a good tie to meet in the fortnight after the Spring Break