

**University of Leeds  
School of Mathematics**

**Staff Student Forum**

**The minutes of the Staff Student Forum which took place on Wednesday  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2008 at 3pm in Mall 2.**

**Present:**

*Students:* Bernadette Snell (1MM), John Power (2MM), Sana Bhatti (3MM), Yue Yang (1MK), Annie Aveyard (2MK), Fatima Dadhiwala (1JH), Peter Jameson (TPG)

*Staff:* Prof C. Taylor (Chair), Dr M. Messmer, Dr A. Baczkowski, Dr O, Harlen, Miss L. Smith, Miss H. Ugarte

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Dr M. Speight  
Rachel Sellers  
Alex Taylor  
Caroline Swanson

**2. Introduction**

**Purpose of Staff Student Forum**

- (a) It was explained to the student representatives that the purpose of the Staff Student Forum is to give feedback on teaching and any problems that may have arisen in the semester. Students were told that they should try and look at the bigger picture, these meetings allow the student rep' to comment on University problem as well as Departmental problems.

**Chairing the Forum**

- (a) It was decided at the end of the meeting that the student rep's would like Prof C. Taylor to continue chairing the Staff Student Forums.

**Representative on School's Learning and Teaching Committee**

- (a) It was explained that the student reps should elect someone to sit in the school's learning and teaching committee. All of the student representatives will be sent the agenda for the committee. This will allow the students to decide whether the rep' should attend any meetings that is relevant to them. It was decided at the end of the meeting that Sana Bhatti will be the students' representative.

## **Library Student Focus Group**

- (a) John Power volunteered before the Staff Student Forum to attend the Library Focus Group that took place on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November. He reported that there was a discussion of whether online resources are useful. Would the students prefer books or internet? It was decided that both were useful, as sometimes there are not enough paper copies in the library. Electronic copies are good as it saves the students from carrying a lot of paper copies in bags. However paper copies are good as looking at a screen all day is not good for your health.
- (b) Edward Boyle Library is to be extended. Library would like to know what the students would like the extension to be used for.
- (c) The Focus group asked the students their opinion on what computer clusters are the best in the University. The students all agreed that the computer clusters in the library are the best, as they can be used alongside the books.

## **3. Minutes from the meeting of March 2008**

- (a) The minutes from the Staff Student Forum in March were approved.

## **4. Student Representatives election and training procedures**

- (a) A new system has been piloted by LUU to elect student representatives. The students reported back that they had to put their names forward to the LUU, if there was more than one student wanting to be a rep' for the same year and programme then the year would have to vote online.
- (b) Sana Bhatti was running against two other students. She campaigned to gain votes online but wasn't sure if the whole of the year knew or understood what student reps' were. As proof of this out of the whole year only 13 students voted.
- (c) A member of staff asked how the students knew about becoming a rep. The students all said that they received an e-mail asking them to send in a campaign if they wished to become a rep. A rep suggested that maybe the school should give handouts of information in introduction week. Or maybe an announcement in a compulsory module for the years.
- (d) Training that was given to the reps was very good. They had to e-mail LUU to sign up for training. In the training they were told what the position was and what needed to be done. They were advised on how to write e-mails to students and also how to set up a facebook page.

## 5. National Student Survey Results and Action Plan

The annual exercise is completed by a central body. NSS (National Student Survey) are used for league tables etc. There were a couple of areas of concern in the survey results. Questions 8 and 9 which were aimed at feedback had low scores, as well as questions 19 and 20 aimed at personal development.

- (a) Student reps explained that they believed the feedback assessment questions were given low marks because of how the example sheets are assessed. When example sheets are marked they are given a score they do not have any feedback written on how to make improvements. However with essays the feedback that is given is of a good quality.
- (b) In regards to assessment feedback the reps made a suggestion of maybe providing a homework session, where they could receive more help aimed at exam questions and what answers are needed. Dr Messmer explained that the school does not like to teach students just to pass an exam, that is what schools provide not Universities. The maths department wishes to teach students a variety of subjects and not just work to pass exams.
- (c) Student reps felt that they needed more support from the school in regards to their personal development. Reps that were on the Maths with Finance programme saw how the Business school supported their students. The reps felt that the school of maths needed a better link with the career centre and need more internships. Students have noticed that the Business school encourages internships; they also provide a 10 credit module that provides information on how to get a position in employment.
- (d) The University also records a drop in satisfaction with students on year 1 and 2. Reps explained that students aren't happy about being made to do certain modules on the programmes and at the increase in the amount of work. Students all agreed that the workshops in year 1 were a good place to go with problems from lectures and homework's.
- (e) A member of staff asked the reps how students felt about how many modules they take throughout a year. A lot of the reps felt that they would like to be able to do more 20 credit modules. This would enable students to work on a certain module more and get in to more detail with the subject. Dr Messmer explained that if a modules credit is increased then the syllabus has to increase too. In the end the workload will stay the same. The reps response to this was that they would like a variety of 10 and 20 credit modules. If students wished to take mainly 20 credit modules then the workload would stay the same, but students would be able to concentrate on less topics when revising for exams. They also would not like the module to be changed to a more advanced but to a broader topic.

## 6. Items from Members

(a) Dr Messmer explained that the school is trying to raise more awareness with staff and students about personal tutorials. In years 2 and 3 students should meet with their personal tutor at least twice a year and preferably once a semester. The reps explained that the experience students get depends on the personal tutor. It would be helpful if students were given guidelines on what they should expect to get out of a tutorial. The Maths with Finance reps explained that they felt that our tutorial system was better than the help they receive from the Business school.

(b) A rep suggested that students would like to see past exam answers online with the exam papers. His argument for this was that students are just going to try and get these out of the tutors anyway and that it saves time. Dr Messmer explained that as a school they are supposed to educate you to work on your own and to be creative and to come up with your own idea. She as a tutor has witnessed many times solutions given to exam questions, that don't actually answer the question and it is only what the student has revised. She also stated that if students attempted a past exam paper then tutors will mark this for you and give you feedback. Some tutors also give the final answer to exam questions and then expects the student to fill in the working out. A rep suggested that maybe it was a good idea to let students know at the start of semester what past exam papers are relevant to the module being taught.

(c) The reps also explained a problem with assessments handed in during the last week of teaching. The work handed in and feedback was not given back to students until after the modules exam had taken place. This is not helpful for students as they do not know if they have made any mistakes. Dr Messmer suggested that module solution should be made available after the work has been handed in so that students can revise for the exam.

(d) It was noted by the reps that not all lecturers put notes onto the internet. The members of staff stated that it is an extra for students to have notes on the internet and generally should not be expected. They also noted that some students may be tempted to miss the lecture if they know that they can get the notes online afterwards. The reps felt that some modules had difficult notes that were hard to write down.

(e) It was stated by a rep that some lecturers expect total silence. This is sometimes not fair on students as they like to discuss parts. A certain tutor will just stop a particular topic and will just move on if students are talking. Dr Harlen explained that tutors receive complaints from students that are sat at the back as they cannot hear. Last year for modules students complained about noise so now the tutor has changed his procedures. The rep continued by suggesting that students who are disrupting the lecture should be asked to leave and the lecture should not be stopped.

(f) It was noted for module ... that a lot of new topics have been introduced and new definitions given. The students have found it hard to keep up at the start of each lecture as they are having to look back at the last lectures notes. The reps suggested that the tutor could use an OHP with the last lectures summary notes on, so that the students can always look for reference.

(g) A student rep felt that in some of her lectures don't start on time. She has two lectures that start after one has finished, that are at different buildings on the campus. The majority of students arrive on time; however the lecturer does not start the lecture on time. The average start time for the module is at 10 past the hour. The lecturer should be more punctual.

(h) The student reps on the Maths with Finance programme noticed a few problems for their students. . They have also noted that the volume of work between business and maths is different. Maths modules require a lot more work and this means that students cannot spend enough time reading up economic books.

(i) Students on modules MATH2715 have noted that the tutor does not understand what the students have learnt the year before. He should ask at the beginning of the module what the students know and then he can teach what is relevant.

(j) Students on the Maths with Finance programme also noted that the economic compulsory modules that they have to take are difficult modules especially when they have no business A-levels. The programme either needs to give more choice in what modules can be taken or the degree title needs to be changed as the students feel they are doing more subjects in economics instead of finance.