Minutes PPLS School Council Meeting 20/11/2015

Hosted by PPLS convenor: Samantha Magor, PPLS Vice Postgraduate convenor: Alicia Forsberg, and PPLS Vice Undergrad convenor: Josephine Teng.

20 students in attendance (circa 2/3 student reps)

1. Updates

- Class Reps: The class reps have been very actively involved in their roles in representing their peers this year. SSLC minute links were provided.
- Community Building: There have been a number of new community development projects this year within PPLS.
  - *FamiLing* is one for Linguistics.
  - An application has been submitted to EUSA for a new academic society: Cognitive Science Society.
  - There is a new peer support scheme in place within Philosophy.
  - Philosophy has implemented a new tutorial grouping model that puts single honours philosophy students together in the pre-honours years to help them get to know one another.
  - A PPLS ball is also being planned by the academic societies.
- Last School Council Update: Following through on solutions made about concerns raised in the last school council about rep structure, this year, the convenors organized a rep briefing and clarified the structure of representation for reps. Council Convenors selected reps through an application process for the first time. Cognitive science reps and a new cognitive science SSLC has also begun this year for the first time.
- Issues raised by reps to convenors regarding school wide issues include:
  - Assessment
  - Lecture Recordings
  - Inter-school communication problems (PPLS+LLC for LEL degrees; PPLS + S of Informatics for CogSci)
  - Online Forum Needed (for posting school/university responses to common student concerns)
  - More information on course selection options needs to be provided earlier on.
  - Year abroad confusions/complications
  - A need for a centralized access to feedback in LEARN – different locations used at present

2. Open Forum for Discussion (Topic and Responses)

- **Type of assessment**

  Discussion around usefulness of exams; maybe should only be pre-honours. Assessment type choice debated; conclusion - more important to have courses assessed multiple ways, there should be both essays and exams for every course. Should be more types of assessment.
• Tutorial participation marks
Generally students would like tutorial participation marks. Participation in tutorials a good skill to learn and also an incentive to work more regularly, not just twice a semester (mid-term and final essay). Also, having marks for online forum-based discussion participation might be a good option for some students who prefer to have more time to think about responses and for some subjects

• Autonomous Learning Groups (ALG’s)
Hard to get started, good idea, for people who miss discussion. The apparent unsuccessfulness some students have perceived may be due to it being still very new. Working well in psychology not so well in philosophy

• Feedback
Sometimes just getting the mark, not the specific exam components.
Markers have 15 days to give feedback – over 90% of feedback has been returned on time in PPLS. Students need extensions sometimes too, so we can understand when lecturers need them. Also, we may even want to give markers more time, so that we get better feedback.

Certain MSc courses the first round of feedback is too late; this has already been raised at PG Group and is being investigated.

• Lecture recordings
Generally felt to be a good especially if a two month gap between lectures and exam. Students are allowed to record any lecture they attend. Maybe this needs to be promoted somewhere, because students find the topic of lecture recordings to be a very important one.

• Reading week
This year there was no reading week for philosophy. Students would welcome a reading week in the middle of the semester

• Access to exam scripts
Could students get exam script returned as a scanned copy? Overseas students can’t pick them up. A lot of students don’t know they have the right to look at their exam scripts– more communication about this, required.

• ‘Mainstream learning adjustments’
The university has ‘mainstream learning adjustments’ which every school/course is required to follow. Students should be made aware that these exist.

• LEARN
Students present overall found the updated Learn is a lot clearer – depends on the lecturer, sometimes it’s still a bit unclear. The outline on the first page tends to be really good. Example: “Week 1 – what happening”, students found this really helpful. Overall, Learn has improved.

• Innovative Learning Week
Sometimes students did not know what ILW was before it was happening, and found it hard to know which events were happening. Some struggled to find them online/find paper copies around campus.
• Year abroad
Sometimes it was difficult for year abroad students to get information on dissertations before they go away. It was very stressful for those abroad. Dissertation crash course end of second year (in philosophy). Some students did not know it was happening. Need to target the year abroad people and highlight all their deadlines.

• Course Choices
Course choices not as big an issue at Edinburgh as elsewhere. Lecturers decide the courses, their interests decide the topics. More information on forthcoming courses requested and student suggestions for courses.

• Points added in absentia (online)
PGs: important to actively help to create a stronger community among the PhD students. For this, the first weeks and months of the new academic year are especially important. Suggestions included social events. This has been raised at the PG Group and is being considered.