

Philosophy SSLC Minutes

Meeting held on Wednesday, 1pm – 2.30pm
7.01, DSB

In attendance: Dr Nick Treanor (SSLC Convener), Dr Aidan McGlynn (Acting Head), Dr David Levy (Exams Convener), Tsengelsaikhan Enkhbat, Jo-Anna Schuller Hagen, Antonina Bargielowska Johnsen, Harriet Jennifer Hendersen, John Massey, Michael Awdankiewicz

Guest: Prof Nik Gisborne

Minutes: Sarah Nicol, Student Support Officer

1. Apologies

Dr Debbie Roberts

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the last SSLC were agreed.

3. Convener's Report

Reading Party – 3rd and 4th Years invited to the same one in week 6 this semester. NT ask the group what their thoughts were on splitting it so there is one group for Y3 and one for Y4 next academic year. After some discussions about the pros and cons of holding it early or later in the year, the group decided it was a good idea, and the sooner the better, Week 3 was agreed as good time to hold them.

Writing Weekend – Dissertation students are invited to a reading weekend for the first time this year. NT is looking for feedback from department, but ideally like to do this every academic year as standard. DL suggested perhaps holding it in Semester 1, would be more beneficial for some students. Everyone agreed it would be ideal to happen in Semester 1.

Logic 1 – After discuss from last SSLC, it has been considered and now can be confirmed that Logic 1 will move to Semester 2 and Philosophy of Science to Semester 1. The advantages and reasoning are; allow single honour students to have two back up subjects at the start which will give them more time to decide which one to pursue in semester 2. To give students a chance to settle into University life before starting Logic 1.

Logic groups - NT explained there are 12-14 students currently in tutorials groups, all at different levels of understanding. The department are considering trialling a new system; tutors would meet in pairs, then in a few

weeks split into smaller groups according to student's ability, this would be the student to decide whether they felt they were understanding Logic or not. After much discussion in the department, this seemed like the most logical option. Timetabling would have to be sorted for larger rooms, this could be an issue. **ACTION: NT** to speak to Teaching Office about timetabling issues, and check if this was possible. Rep's think this would be valuable as students would be more likely to admit to not know what they were doing given the option, and would help students speak up about struggling. It would also mean students who are advanced can concentrate and not feel held back.

Logic Software – NT stated there would be workshop about how to use it, as an extra to a lecture, however there is likely to be new software which is currently being developed by Dr Brian Rabern.

Word Count – From the last SSLC discussion about Word Count, NT brought it up to department. Staff didn't think word ranges would be a good idea for all sorts of reason. Staff felt that it would have no benefit to the students. Consensus was upping the limit to 1,750, would create the same pressure with a higher limit. Reps felt that in Year 1 and 2, 1,500 words limit is fine, but in honours it is much harder to fit your ideas into the word limit. Could the limit be raised in honours? Feedback was that students would like more words. DL – explained that limits are part of life, it forces you to concentrate and focus on your argument. DL explained the reasoning behind making all the coursework the same limits. DL – asked the students - would you choose a course based on the word limits? Student's general feeling didn't think it was the most important factor. AG gave an explanation about markers response – 'you should have explained it more', it means not that you should cut vital parts of the argument but to concentrate on the question. It would be useful for a study skills on how to answer essay questions the most effectively. There was a lot of discussion about the benefits of word count, and if it did change from pre honours to honours, what benefits that may give students.

4. Year 4 Report

The reps raised the issue of lack of feedback for final essay. Students get invited to see Course Organiser to discuss feedback in person. The students reported that for the final essay, you don't get the same as the course is finished. There is no invitation from the lecturers in the same way. AG explained in his experience of feedback days; there has been no uptake from students, so it doesn't seem like students want to come. NT stated it doesn't have to be a feedback day but just a reminder from the Course Organiser that they are welcome to come and chat over their feedback. However, for any piece of coursework, students should be able to approach the marker for feedback. DL reminded the students that staff put in a lot of effort into writing feedback, and agreed with the importance of students discussing this. NT agreed that encouragement from the department may be beneficial. A

suggestion was that the Course Organiser could send out an email as reminder of their office hours. The group had a lot of discussion about how students collect feedback in general. AG – suggested that the Personal Tutors should be encouraging tutees to talk about feedback as well.

Readings for Honours Courses – it was discussed that perhaps students would find more guidance on background reading. Some Lecturers are very good with giving reading and advanced reading. It is very useful for writing midterm and final. However, some courses don't have the same information available to students. It would be useful to have more text to refer to and to become more informed on the topic. DL explained how a reading list is constructed for his course, and suggested that he would be happy for student's approach him as Course Organiser about readings when writing an essay. Student gave an example of the need for background reading. DL agreed for background reading he understood why this would be useful. The consensus was if you don't understand this, then read up to find out about it. The problem can be is no foundation or pre requisites for Philosophy courses, therefore this can be a problem with a student how has never come across something until Year 4. It was agreed this could be an issue, but everyone was unsure of the solution. NT reminded the group that it is a mainstream adjustment that reading lists must be available 4 weeks before the course starts and he will investigate why this may not have happened for some courses. All reading lists are in the course handbooks, but the group was unsure when the semester 2 guides were made available. **ACTION: NT** to check with Teaching Office when course guides were released.

5. Year 3 Report

Students report that they would like lecturers to ensure that there are short breaks in 2 hour seminars, to give students a chance to rest. It was also requested that students would like lecturers to monitor class discussions in lecture's to make sure that the lecture stays on topic and materials are covered. In some cases some students may have a lot to say but the discussion can lose track, this was an issue in Themes in Epistemology in particular.

Reps asked if the Midterm Essay questions could be released earlier. This was discussed by the group to whether this was actually beneficial or not. It was summarised that everything about the course is on the guide, and students should be learning all the material. The committee then went on to discuss the different methods of assessment - take home exam vs essay – was discussed at length. NT explained that the take home exam you don't get the topic until the time of the examination, so why would an essay topic for a midterm produce an advantage? Students felt that more time they are given, the more they can produce.

6. Year 2 Report

Overall students are very satisfied with Knowledge & Reality. They said it was well organised and that the readings and lectures were engaging. Same goes for Philosophy of Science 1, where the only trouble reported was some confusion over where/what the essay questions were.

7. Year 1 Report

No report.

8. Any other business

Formative Writing Clinic – Prof Nik Gisborne, Linguistics and English Language – Introduced himself and explained to the committee that the about the proposal within PPLS for a writing clinic. He explained the clinic would be run by trained people who would provide feedback for students on coursework before submission. He explained the background about the proposal going through various committees and the working group deciding what is viable. The working group is looking for a Philosophy Rep to join then as they would value their input on what is helpful and not to students. If anyone would like to take part, contact NG directly (n.gisborne@ed.ac.uk). The grant fund application is due by 22nd March, with the hope of rolling out clinic for September 2016. NG explained the Reo would be committed to turning up to a meeting or two to participate in discussions.

9. Next Meeting – Monday 21st March 2016, 1pm – 2.30pm, S38, 7 George Square