

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY

STUDENT-STAFF COMMITTEE 11 November 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Student-Staff Committee at held at 12.05 p.m.
on Monday, 11 November 2024 in the Faculty Board Room

Present: Eli Bertuccioli (UG representative), Alexander Bird, Selen Day, Owen Griffiths, Ellen Hammersley, Jo Harcus, Andrew Ma (PhD representative, George Wang (UG representative) and Rosie Yin (MPhil representative)

Attended: Jo Farmer (Secretary)

| | * <i>circs</i> | <i>Agenda item</i> |
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| 1. | * | <p>Starring of items was invited and declarations of any conflicts of interest requested. None were declared.</p> <p>It was requested to star item 5.</p> <p><i>EDI review of decisions reminder</i></p> <p>The Faculty Board confirmed that equality, diversity, and inclusion had been considered with regard to agenda items.</p> |
| 2. | * | <p>The apologies were noted.</p> |
| 3. | circ | <p>The draft minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 8 May 2024 were approved (SSC24-25.01).</p> |
| 4. | | <p>Matters arising from the minutes not raised elsewhere on the agenda.</p> <p>No matters were raised.</p> |
| | | <p>Staffing and associated matters</p> |
| 5. | | <p><i>Academic Administrative Responsibilities</i></p> <p>For information</p> <p>The Committee noted that the following were the academic administrative leads following areas this term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chair of Faculty Board: Alexander Bird• Undergraduate Co-ordinator: Owen Griffiths• Chair of Examiners (Tripos): Neil Dewar• MPhil Course Director: Julia Borchering• Subject Convenor (Undergraduate Admissions): Spencer Johnston• Director of Postgraduate Admissions: Clare Chambers• Director of Postgraduate Studies: Richard Holton |

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| 6. | circ | <p><i>Staffing Changes</i></p> <p>For information The Committee noted that Dr Owen Griffiths and Dr Matthew Simpson joined the Faculty on 1 September 2024.</p> |
| 7. | * | <p><i>Student Representatives</i></p> <p>The Committee noted that George Wang would be standing down and that only one student, Eli Bertuccioli, had been nominated to serve as an undergraduate representative. Eli advised that he had campaigned for nominations to be reopened as another student had expressed an interest in serving but had missed the deadline for nominations.</p> <p>Ellen Hammersley noted that if there were only two nominations, it might be possible to co-opt the nominees.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the following had been elected to serve as postgraduate representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPhil: Rosie Yin (Lucy Cavendish) • PhD: Andrew Ma (Darwin) |
| | | <p>Casimir Lewy Library Updates and Reminders</p> |
| 8. | | <p><i>Philosotea</i></p> <p>The Committee were reminded that all Philosophy students, staff and visitors were warmly invited to join the Library team for this term's final servings of Philosotea on Thursdays between 2:30pm and 3:30pm in the Faculty Old Library social space.</p> <p>It noted that timings of next term's Philosotea breaks would be confirmed after the vacation.</p> |
| 9. | | <p><i>We Welcome Your Feedback</i></p> <p>The Committee were reminded that the Library team welcomed feedback and suggestions for ways of further improving the usability, accessibility and inclusivity of the library spaces, services and collections. It noted that students could contact the team at any time, or let them know their thoughts via the feedback walls in the library or online, or via the student reps.</p> |
| | | <p>Postgraduate Students</p> |
| 10. | * | <p><i>Supervisor Feedback</i></p> <p>The Committee noted that a form had been created by Sophie Dandelet, the previous Undergraduate Coordinator. Andrew Ma advised that students were very keen to get feedback for the purposes of quality control and entry into the jobs market, but that there was some concern about using feedback for quality control, with potential issues including students not filling in the form, and the impact on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee.</p> <p>Alexander Bird noted that there was a lack of Faculty supervision of PhD students in this regard, and that it could be made part of the role. Andrew Ma agreed that</p> |

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| | | <p>this seemed sensible, noting that the supervision system could be difficult to navigate if new to the University.</p> <p>Eli Bertuccioli advised that the undergraduate students were sensitive to the issues raised by Andrew Ma and the Faculty Board. However, he noted that the proposed feedback system would act as a 'guardrail' for the undergraduate students, advising that there had been issues with supervisors from outside the Faculty not turning up on time, or being unprepared.</p> <p>It was agreed that this proposal should be taken back to Faculty Board, as it was clear that this was not a simple issue.</p> <p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexander Bird and Owen Griffiths to discuss |
| 11. | * | <p><i>PhD Feedback Reports in Michaelmas Term</i></p> <p>Andrew Ma advised that he had received feedback from the cohort last year. He noted that the main thing was the expectations of what was involved in the process; there was only one page on the Faculty website and the language was quite technical. He also noted that when his cohort submitted, there were found to be variations in what was in focus, and so it was not clear what should be included on the form. He raised the possibility of a having a session in Lent Term to advise students.</p> <p>He further noted that there had been some complaints about feedback only being provided on the work and nothing wider. There were also concerns about the turnaround time of notifications from the postgraduate team on whether students had passed or not.</p> <p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearer and better documentation to be produced Creation of a session for 1st year students Alexander Bird to consult colleagues for their input Quicker turnaround time for notification of results from postgraduate team |
| | | <p>Tripos Students</p> |
| 12 | * | <p><i>Undergraduate Funding</i></p> <p>George Wang raised the issue of Faculty funding for the Amoral Sciences Club, noting that it had made contributions in the past. They noted that while previous years' contributions had not been used well, and that events had not been well attended, it was no longer the case this year.</p> <p>Eli Bertuccioli raised the issue of financial support from the Faculty for an undergraduate social event, noting that students were trying to raise money themselves towards the event by selling a tote bag. He estimated that approximately £80 would be needed from the Faculty for the event.</p> <p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> George Wang and Eli Bertuccioli to provide Jo Farmer with budget proposals for the Faculty's consideration |
| 13. | * | <p><i>National Student Survey Results</i></p> |

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| | | <p>The Committee noted that the University had previously had a poor return on National Student Surveys, because of objections raised by the Cambridge Student Union. It was also noted that the Faculty wanted to encourage students to participate.</p> |
| | | <p>General Matters</p> |
| 14. | * | <p><i>Update Regarding Nathan Cofnas (Joint Request to the Chair)</i></p> <p>Alexander Bird advised the Committee that Dr Cofnas had no teaching or supervising responsibilities this academic year. He provided an overview of the situation to date, namely that in Easter Term 2024 the Faculty had instigated an investigation process on whether Dr Cofnas had violated EDI and other policies in a manner that was not afforded protection by general, or other academic, free speech norms, and that this question had been passed to a leading KC, who had then sent a report to the previous Chair of Faculty Board. The Committee noted that this report was not available to Alexander as he was not Chair of Faculty Board at the time.</p> <p>He noted that there had been a separate question to consider, relating to the effect that Dr Cofnas' actions had had on the University and the student body, and advised that interviews would take place to gather facts, with the resulting report being sent to him as the current Chair of Faculty Board.</p> <p>The Committee noted that it was not certain whether students would be interviewed as part of this process. It also noted that this second investigation was being conducted via the Human Resources Division and not via the Office for Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals, although some students had complained to the latter.</p> |
| 15. | | <p><i>Upcoming deadlines</i></p> <p>The Committee noted the following deadlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPhil 1st essay submission deadline Tuesday, 3 December 9:00 – 10:00am. • Extended Essay/Dissertation Title Submission midday on Thursday, 21 November 2024. <p>It also noted that IB Reading group choices would be issued for response by the end of term.</p> |
| 16. | | <p>Any Other Business</p> <p>George Wang raised a concern about marks on transcripts, noting that the maximum potential mark on the Formal Methods paper could not be greater than 85, and that this may be confusing outside the University. Andrew Ma suggested that it may be useful to have a page on the Faculty's website to clarify how the marking system worked.</p> <p>Eli Bertuccioli queried whether it was possible to get a mark of 100 on any paper. Ellen Hammersley advised that the Chair of Tripos Examiners sends through the expected grade boundaries each year, and that the Faculty then sets it and notifies the Student Registry. It was suggested that the Faculty could make it clearer that it was not possible to obtain a mark over 85.</p> |

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Date of next meeting

Monday, 17 February 2025

Please note the remaining meeting dates for this academic year:

Easter Term 2025

Monday, 12 May 2025