

# UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

## School of GeoSciences

### Staff/Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014  
Room 304, Crew Building, 10.00am

### AGENDA

**Present:** Dr Margaret Graham (Convener), Dr Gail Jackson, Dr Kate Heal, Joe Boyle (1<sup>st</sup> Year EES), Stephanie Wolff (1<sup>st</sup> Year EES), Lisa Kopsieker (2<sup>nd</sup> Year EES w/ Mgmt), John Godlee (2<sup>nd</sup> Year EES), Anja Liski (4<sup>th</sup> Year Ecol Sci), Sarah Greenwood (4<sup>th</sup> Year Ecol Sci)

**In attendance:** Emma Latto (Student Support Coordinator), Meredith Corey (Programme Secretary)

**Apologies:** Lily Asch (1<sup>st</sup> Year EES w/ Mgmt), Ivan Paspaldzhev (3<sup>rd</sup> Year EES), Cameron Brown (3<sup>rd</sup> Year EES w/ Mgmt)

#### 1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convener welcomed everyone to the Semester 2 Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meeting and noted the apologies sent. She thanked everyone for attending and noted that she had taken over the role of Degree Programme Convener.

#### 2. Minutes of the SSLC Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Copies of the Minutes from the previous meeting and the follow-up 'You Said, We Did' document were circulated to the Committee members. The Convener asked for any comments on the Minutes.

JG noted that it was good to see the changes recorded for Principles of Ecology in the 'You Said, We Did' document. Regarding the Personal Tutor (PT) meetings, he asked if it was enforced that there was more than one meeting per semester. MG said it was not, but students were encouraged and welcome to contact their PT to arrange a meeting whenever they needed to.

Both 2<sup>nd</sup> Year reps said they really liked the layout of the 'You Said, We Did' document in two columns. They said that it would be very helpful to have it online to send to their classmates for reference and MG noted that it would be added to the website soon for students to access.

There were no further comments about the Minutes of the November meeting and the Minutes were accepted as a fair and true record.

#### 3. 1<sup>st</sup> Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management) Student reps: Joe Boyle, Stephanie Wolff

The Convener invited the class rep to make any comments regarding Semester 2 courses and the degree programme.

JB said that there were no complaints. All students were very happy with Biology, Ecology and Environment (BEE). He said students liked having a lab session every other week, which allowed them to mix in project work. SW suggested that the BEE course model be adapted for other courses. Students liked the labs, films, and class test (rather than a lab book).

Sustainability, Society and Environment (SSE) was a very interdisciplinary course, which the students liked. JB noted there were only three tutorials for the course, which meant that the tutors did not really get to know the students. He said that it would be good to have more regular contact between students in the group and the tutor. The tutorial sessions were good, but it would be useful to have more throughout the course. The Convener noted that she would feed back to the Course Organiser that students wanted more tutorial sessions.

JB asked why students' marks for a tutorial write-up were capped at 40%, if they were absent from the tutorial without a reasonable cause. The staff explained that this was done to encourage students to attend all tutorial sessions and indicate that attendance was not optional. Staff members of the Committee also noted that it was better if students attended the tutorial group they had signed up for online, rather than swapping unofficially between groups for various tutorials/practicals because staff allocated resources based on expected student numbers. It was asked that the student representatives feed this back to their classmates.

Regarding Semester 2 course choices, it was noted that BEE clashed with Meteorology: Weather and Climate. MG said that the staff always tried to avoid timetable clashes if possible, but it sometimes was impossible. It was noted that students could take the Meteorology course in Year 2, when it did not clash with any compulsory course.

The Convener noted that Lily Asch had submitted notes, as she was unable to attend the meeting. MG summarised the notes for the Committee:

- Overall, students were happier this semester; they were enjoying courses more and felt they were more relevant
- Some concern about the difficulty of the Molecules, Genes and Cells examination
- Students appreciated the Junior Teaching Fellows feedback on BEE
- SSE was enjoyed for its interdisciplinary approach and the diversity of lecturers, but some lectures seemed a bit irrelevant/patronising
- Students asked for better communication about the Field Ecology course and said they hadn't been given advanced notice.

Regarding the last point, MG said that students were told about the course at the Induction Meeting (and Visit Days, if applicants had attended those) and it was included in the degree and course information handed out at that meeting; they were also told about it by their PT when they met to sign up for Semester 1 courses; and MC had circulated an email to all 1<sup>st</sup> Year students about the course in December. MG said she was not sure how else the information could be circulated that was not covered by these areas.

There were no further comments about 1<sup>st</sup> Year courses or items.

#### **4. 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management) Year Reps: Lily Asch (EES w/ Mgmt), Joe Boyle (EES), Stephanie Wolff (EES)**

The Convener invited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year reps to make any comments regarding the degrees.

JG said that, regarding the comment about SSE tutorials, in Soil, Water and Atmospheric Processes (SWAP), students signed up for each week's tutorial or practical separately, rather than signing up for the same time each week throughout the semester. He said this meant that students had to commit to each session.

JG reported that most of the comments from 2<sup>nd</sup> Year students were that they were scared about 3<sup>rd</sup> Year. Students felt like they were being left on their own and asked if it would be possible to set up a year-wide page on Learn where students could go for reference. MG said that this was done for the two Honours years, so would be possible to do for pre-Honours. She reminded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year representatives that there was a meeting at the end of the month about 3<sup>rd</sup> Year, which would, hopefully, answer a lot of their questions.

It was noted that in Biological Sciences, students received a booklet at the start of 2<sup>nd</sup> Year with recommended course combinations.

Other student feedback was that students liked that all coursework could be collected from the Crew Building. The feedback on SWAP was good and prompt.

LK said that on SWAP, the tutorials were held after students had to complete the work and students felt it should be the other way around because students found out the answers after doing the assignment. She said this was especially true for the Nitrogen Dynamics tutorial, as the material was not covered in lectures before the assessment was due. KH said that should would feed these comments back to the course team, but said that in the past tutorial work had been due after the tutorial, but they had found that it meant students were then not doing any prep work for the tutorials, so they had restricted it to the way it was currently run.

LK said that students felt the soil lectures were not clearly set up and did not have a clear structure. Students did not feel that the Post-it notes system was not beneficial; too much time was spent reviewing the Post-it notes, rather than lecturing, which meant the lectures were not very detailed. Students were also unsure what to expect on that part of the exam, whereas they felt more confident about the atmosphere and water sections. KH recommended that students review the past papers available online.

Students really liked the outdoor aspects of the course, but asked that they be more interactive. KH asked for recommendations on how to do this. LK also noted that it was very nice to have the background reading online to review in advance of the session. JG suggested a practical session to carry out the string measurements, rather than the theoretical session.

LK noted that there was a lot of overlap between BEE and Principles of Ecology and, therefore, some students did not attend the Principles of Ecology lectures because of that. GJ, as Course Organiser of Principles of Ecology, said that the issue had been raised before and she thought that it had been sorted out for this year and one of the lecturers had changed some of his material that had overlapped with BEE. GJ asked LK to let her know in more detail the areas of overlap between the two courses.

JG asked if there was anything that needed to be fed back to the students. MG asked that JG and LK remind all 2<sup>nd</sup> Year students to attend the meeting in late April about 3<sup>rd</sup> year and said that she would look into put together a degree booklet.

There were no further comments about 2<sup>nd</sup> Year courses or items.

## **5. 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Ecological and Environmental Sciences (with Management)**

The Convener said that neither of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year representatives was able to attend the meeting.

MG, as Course Organiser for Environmental Pollution, had met with the class representative. The class representative had minuted the meeting and the minutes had been circulated to the class; no further comments had been made by other members of the class on the minutes. MG summarised the minutes for the Committee:

- Students enjoyed the three visits at the start of the course and found it valuable to see applications of science and potential careers

- Some students felt that some of the first coursework assignment instructions were better defined than others. MG would pass this comment on to the relevant members of staff to clarify for next year.
- Some students complained that for the first coursework assignment, the 'Pollution of the Biosphere' material was covered in lectures, but not for any of the other three topics. Students said that the assignments were on things they had 'never even seen or studied before'. MG said that these assignments were supposed to get students to explore unknown topics and assimilate the information. Some assignment topics might link more closely with what was covered in lectures, but all students still had to do a significant amount of outside reading.

There were no further comments about 3<sup>rd</sup> Year courses or programme items.

## **6. 4<sup>th</sup> Year Ecological Science and Ecological and Environmental Sciences**

### **Year Reps: Anja Liski, Sarah Greenwood**

AL said that some students said that on Geoscience Outreach, students were unclear on what the output what they needed to produce (a poster or presentation).

She also noted that the Geoscience Outreach deadline was the same as that of the Honours dissertation. It was noted that students had been aware of both of these deadlines since the start of the year.

SG said that she had minuted the meeting she and GJ had to discuss the feedback on Current Issues in Ecology. These had been approved by GJ and then circulated to the rest of the class for further comments, but none were made.

AL said that the new system for the SSLC was good. She said the only problem was that none of the three 4<sup>th</sup> Year representatives had taken Effective Project Planning and Management, so suggested that the Course Organiser ask the class for feedback.

There were no further comments about 4<sup>th</sup> Year courses or programme items.

## **7. AOCB**

KH said that lecture attendance seemed lower this year for Soil, Water and Atmospheric Processes than in previous years (approximately 2/3 of students seemed to be attending lectures, whereas in past years it was more like 4/5). She asked if there was a clash with another course or any other reason the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year representatives could think of for the low attendance. JG said that there was a clash on Tuesday afternoon with an Environmental Chemistry practical, but that not all students would be taking both courses. LK said that some students did not like the 4pm timeslot for the SWAP lectures, but said that was purely a personal matter. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Year representatives said that many students only had two courses in Semester 2 and were, therefore, not that involved and may have started to slack in their studies. They had not heard any direct feedback about why students would not be attending the SWAP lectures on water and atmosphere; the only issues were with the soils lectures. It was suggested by a 4<sup>th</sup> Year representative that the lecturer on soils need to be more explicit with what material students needed to cover on their own outside of class.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 10:35am.