

STUDENT-STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Meeting #1, 2023

2nd March 2023

Not for general publication

Present: Olivia Uy (Chair), Samuel Weir (Secretary), Prof. Daniel Zizzo, A/Prof. Ian MacKenzie, A/Prof. Heiko Gerlach, Mr. John Raiti, Carter Douglas Stuart Hoffman, Nikolas Stamatiou, Francisco Tavares Garcia, Brandon Botting, Hamish Trim, Nishay Bhikha, Laura McBurnie, Varen Arya, Amelie Marsland, Margaret Hayes, Danya Mody

1. Apologies:

Sophia Psaros (UQES), Téa Van de Brenk (UQPPES), Eliza Madden (UQWIES), Serena Huang, Benjamin Stephens, Natasha Brettell, Wen Hsi Chua, A/Prof. Marco Faravelli, Mr. Joe Symons

2. Confirmation of the minutes from the previous meeting:

Yes

3. Business arising from the previous meeting:

- i) Applications for student representatives have now closed, and, since the previous meeting new members of the SSLC have been chosen. The results of this process were discussed.
- ii) Updates on Sections 4 and 5 of the School Review was discussed by Prof. Zizzo and members of the SSLC.
- iii) The committee was provided with updates regarding a previous inquiry into introductory writing and coding courses for students.

4. Business arising from this meeting:

- i) Olivia welcomed returning members of the SSLC alongside newly recruited student representatives, and invited them to introduce themselves:
 - Nikolas Stamatiou
 - Amelie Marshland
 - Danya Mody
 - Carter Douglas Stewart Hoffman
 - Serena Huang
 - Nishay Bhikha
 - Francisco Tavares Garcia
 - Varen Arya
 - Margaret Hayes
 - Brandon Botting
 - Laura McBurnie
 - Jayde Parker

- Hamish Trim

ii) Further to the previous item, Olivia provided the Committee with some updates about the recruitment process for student representatives:

- Received 21 applications overall – around 43% of the applicants are female, 48% are from diverse backgrounds, 1 applicant is the first person in his/her family to attend university. In addition, 48% were international students.
- Shortlisted down to 16 candidates for an interview, and ultimately 13 candidates are now student representatives.

iii) Prof. Zizzo provided the Committee with an update on the School Review process, specifically the drafts of Sections 4 and 5:

- Prefaced by the fact that the sections remain a work in progress, Sections 4 and 5 are now a semi-complete draft and are subject to a final round of consultations, though direct submissions remain open.
- Ultimately, this process will culminate in a visit by distinguished panel assisting the School with the review precise time TBC, but will take place in the week beginning the 22nd of May 2023.
- Prof. Zizzo describes that the key to these sections is an emphasis on equity and diversity (which is a major issue for economics as a discipline worldwide). Chapter 4 discusses where the School is placed currently in terms of gender, and a reconciliation action plan (RAP)/pipeline for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent – which is an area of particular emphasis – given a significantly limited number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economists in the workforce.
- Several stakeholders are concerned with these developments and the outcomes of the review process (including public/private sector interests and other bodies domestic and international)
- On another note, the School is leveraging regional trips organised by the University (Rockhampton, SEQ, St George) to attract regional and rural engagement and to raise awareness of the School amongst regional and rural students
- Prof. Zizzo passed the discussion to A/Prof. MacKenzie for elaboration on Section 5
- A/Prof. MacKenzie elaborated on the review process for individual courses – despite the 5-year review cycle for courses the School review provides a great opportunity for a broader spectrum refresh of the School and it's courses - making courses 'future focussed' is a key priority. In addition, diversifying course offerings, teaching modes and the makeup of the student base is paramount.
- There are three main priorities for the review from a Teaching and Learning perspective:
 - The introduction of short form credential courses with a focus on postgraduates
 - Engaging new courses that grapple with emerging topics in economics on a global scale
 - Relating more with the UQ strategy – implementing a RAP, indigenising the curriculum using UQ support, and furthering diversification efforts

- iv) Brandon raised a point that, in relation to the previous summarisation of the School Review, a major issue for the School is to engage with high-school students. Anecdotally, there is a lack of familiarity with Economics as a discipline and the School needs to address this in order to engage with an increasingly diverse student base and drive engagement and enrolment.
- Prof. Zizzo agreed, citing that the RBA has studied a decline in the perception of economics as discipline amongst high school students – many students have a limited idea of what the discipline is, or one that conforms to stereotypes that exclude themselves.
 - To combat this it is important to present Economics as interesting, engaging, and relevant for a number of career outcomes. The School has expressed interest in ideas to address this issue, including a potential podcast by the Queensland Department of Education.
 - Adding to Brandon's point, Hamish described how, in his experience, Years 9 and 10 are the most important to engage with regarding subject choices and this should be kept in mind.
 - A/Prof. MacKenzie completely agrees and adds that students can only see and experience the benefits of studying Economics if they have an understanding of it, and it's the School's job to connect with them
- v) Adding again to this point, Margaret described that in Ipswich many schools don't offer Economics and this is a significant roadblock in engaging with students before they begin university or consider applying.
- Prof. Zizzo acknowledged that this was a particularly topical issue in his previous conversations. Economics, as a subject in high school, is shrinking, creating a perverse cycle that will exacerbate the diversity issues and shrink the student base.
 - The School needs to continue to engage with the Queensland Economics Teacher's Association, other teachers associations, and directly with schools to encourage the study of Economics and engage with students.
- vi) Laura expressed interest in the professional certificates (mentioned by A/Prof. MacKenzie in point iii). Questioned if there are ways to engage regional students and areas specifically with these courses as a pathway into an Economics degree (at a discounted rate, or fully online for ease of access).
- A/Prof. MacKenzie elaborated on the concept as being fully online, and with a competitive pricing structure (at the time of the meeting). These can be reviewed with a regional focus in mind.
- vii) Olivia asked about any advances regarding introductory writing and coding courses Rhian mentioned at the SSLC's fourth meeting of 2022.
- A/Prof. MacKenzie indicated that there have been two free courses offered to all University students focussed on essay writing. However, these were poorly advertised and could be more effective if embedded in Blackboard or more easily accessible.
 - Prof. Zizzo suggested that a communication 'burst' in Week 3 or 4 could be much more effective, positing that this isn't a question of remaking the wheel but properly utilising pre-existing support materials.

- In addition, Francisco mentioned the University Library's offerings of free coding courses for students as a potential tool to educate new students
- John agreed with this, mentioning that the Library's website is accessible and perhaps needs to be supplemented with specific classes for Economics related coding software (such as R).
 - John specifically provided the example of the Library's *Academic English Short-Course for Student Support* (see attached PowerPoint), and two web resources provided by the library accessible at:
 - <https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/student-support/study-skills-and-learning-advice/assignment-writing>
 - <https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/student-support/study-skills-and-learning-advice/assignment-writing>
- Francisco suggested a mid-semester break 'camp' that could be useful for students
- Nishay mentioned that in some courses, like FINM2411, students are provided with a more extensive guide as to how to write at a tertiary level which he found helpful
- A/Prof. MacKenzie agreed that this format was easy to embed into course and seen as effective, anecdotally.

viii) Regarding feelings of isolation and lacking student engagement, Olivia asked SSLC members whether there were any solutions that could be put in place to combat this.

- A/Prof. MacKenzie brought up the success of induction programs that the Business, Economics, and Law (BEL) Faculty had put in place to address this, such as BELfest.
- Prof. Zizzo also brought up the SSLC's previous attempts to organise social mixers as a means of combatting this issue. Similar events in the future are possible and encouraged by the School, but attendance needs to be considered.
- Hamish posited that an event organised without society involvement (solely by the School and/or SSLC) could lack means of engaging with students and societies should be seen as an effective means of engagement and awareness-raising.
- Prof. Zizzo agrees that engaging with societies, including those other than UQES, UQPPES, and UQWIES (such as international students societies and others) is a promising avenue. We must, however, also work on reaching out to particularly isolated constituencies, like postgraduate international students (with the example of postgraduate students from China).
- In addition, Prof. Zizzo added that gathering feedback at monthly drop-in sessions last year had mixed results, and driving student awareness of the SSLC, and constructive engagement with it would be something to work on.
- Olivia mentioned plans to engage with UQES and UQPPES specifically to do this.
- Brandon asked how these events would be branded, with Prof. Zizzo specifying that these events would be SSLC branded, and mentioning that we need to engage with students in a way that appeals to them – themed nights (international holidays as an examples), and through their course offerings.
- Sam agreed that this was an important point, and queried whether we could use Blackboard and lecture times as an opportunity to advertise the SSLC and potential future events.

- Prof. Zizzo and A/Prof. MacKenzie agree that this is an effective way of reaching students, particularly isolated ones, but would need to be used sparingly and with Course Coordinator permission.
- Nik raised the point that in his Engineering courses previously this was used to an extent, and students were engaged with extensively, unlike in Economics.

5. Actionable before the next meeting:

- i) Organising and advertising potential events to be hosted by the SSLC or in partnership with University Clubs and Societies.
- ii) School Review Panel engagement in the week of the 22nd of May

6. Next meeting:

Wednesday 31st May, TBC