

## **Update on Educational Priorities**

### **Academic Board is asked to receive an update on the Students' Union Educational Priorities 2012/13**

As part of the implementation of the SOAS Students' Union strategic priorities towards the centenary, which feature improvement in education standards as the most prominent priority for SU activity in the next 5 years, the Students' Union presented to Academic Board the first set of Students' Union Educational Priorities in the 2010/2011 academic year. Both the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 Educational Priorities were drafted after a process of consultation with the student body, and their aim was to provide the School with direct input on what are the changes in SOAS' educational provision that students would most appreciate and benefit from.

This year's Educational Priorities included two carried on from 2011/2012 with the remaining eight identified through a consultation with the Students' Union Executive Committee, Student Representatives and the wider student body. There has been much welcomed, extensive progress made on the 2012/2013 Educational Priorities, and we have continued to work with the Academic Board and in consultation with LTQC and the Faculties to continue to improve the experience of education at SOAS.

Additionally, through this year's QAA Institutional Review, the Students' Union Educational Priorities and the School's reaction to them over the past three years have been identified as examples of good practice. In this, we will continue to work on and improve the Students' Union Educational Priorities to ensure they remain relevant.

### **Exam Feedback**

In line with the 2011/2012 Educational Priorities, the Students' Union continues to see the implementation of Examination Feedback as a key Educational Priority. Throughout this academic year the School has continued to be responsive to this priority, as can be demonstrated through the running of an 'Examination Feedback Pilot' in the summer of 2012/2013. It is the Students' Union's hope that the results from this Pilot will be built upon in the coming years. Through this, students will experience an improvement in their overall satisfaction levels, as it will provide a further opportunity for the development of students' learning.

### **Quality of Coursework Feedback**

The monitoring of the quality of coursework feedback arose as an Educational Priority as a response to results from both Course Feedback Forms and the NSS. The categories of Assessment /Feedback and Academic Support consistently come up as areas requiring improvement in these surveys. It is the Students' Union's position that a School-wide policy implementing coherent standards of feedback will ensure feedback that is useful and aids in the development of learning experience. This will enhance students' ability to reach the learning objectives of their courses.

It is our hope that the discussions surrounding alternative assessment will result in the sharing of good practice in relation to feedback. However, we note that there is more work to be done in this area to ensure that high quality feedback is received by all students.

### **Timeliness of Coursework Feedback**

The need for timely coursework feedback is a concern shared by many students throughout the country, with the NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report showing that almost a quarter of students have to wait more than five weeks to receive feedback. During the Quality Assurance Agency Institutional Review, feedback from students and internal monitoring data show that this is an issue at SOAS. In response to this data, the QAA have recommended that we securely put in place the three week turnaround time policy, and successful monitoring of turnaround times by the Faculties has been implemented.

### **Having a clear system for mitigating circumstances that remains fair and just for all students**

The proposed Mitigating Circumstances Policy makes great progress towards having a clear policy that is fair and just for all students. We hope that this good work continues and that both the Mitigating Circumstances Policy and the accompanying document regarding disabilities continue to speak to one another in order to allow for the fairest decisions to be reached, and should be well publicized and understood by those that will have to use them.

### **A commitment to flexible learning spaces throughout the school**

Over recent years, SOAS has made consistent efforts to increase the number of study spaces in the library. This has improved the students' experience, shown in the increased library satisfaction rates. In the 2012/2013 Educational Priorities the Students' Union hoped to continue this work through its commitment to the creation of flexible learning spaces.

Throughout the year, the Students' Union has not only been in conversation with the School to find spaces within the School that could be used as flexible learning spaces, but has also taken part in discussions planning the creation of flexible learning spaces in the North Block. In addition to being part of these discussions, a new study space has been created in 21 Russell Square for the exam period. This has been welcomed by the students and the Students' Union, and it is our hope that this work will continue through to the opening of the North Block building.

### **Provision of alternative 'good' forms of assessment**

In line with the NUS Charter on Assessment and Feedback, the Students' Union made it a priority to work with the School to ensure that there is greater innovation in assessment methods throughout each Faculty. In endeavouring to establish this, we have held a workshop on assessment innovation that was attended by both students and staff members. In addition, a paper is currently going through the Committee Structure which encourages the sharing of good practice; the engagement of student representatives in the development of assessment; promotion of midterm coursework sessions to encourage students to think about topics, sources, approaches, and the staggering of coursework deadlines, amongst other actions.

### **Teaching innovation through technology and fostering/sharing good teaching practice**

In line with the 2011-2012 Educational Priorities, the Students' Union aimed to continue working towards the use of technology in teaching. In this, work has persisted in

encouraging the use of Moodle sites and the development of Lecture Capture software is underway. In addition, the Quality Assurance Agency's report recommended that the School implement a minimum time for material to be uploaded to the BLE as a response to feedback in the Institutional Review. While we hope these moves will greatly improve students' learning experience, we also hope that work will continue in these areas so as to improve retention and better students' learning and that the inclusion of 'Good Practice' in the SU Educational Priorities will aid in this.

### **Diagnostic Course Work for PGT Students**

The 2012/2013 Educational Priorities highlighted the need for further support in coursework for Postgraduate Taught students. Most PGT students receive coursework feedback at the halfway point of their degree. The paper emphasised the importance of formative assessment and urged the implementation of diagnostic coursework for PGT students. It is our hope that work on implementing this across Faculties will continue into the next academic year.

### **Clarifying and Improving Personal Advisory Systems/Pastoral Care**

This year, the School and the Students' Union have continued to work closely in developing the Personal Advisory System. This work has included meeting with the Senior Tutors (where possible), meeting regularly and liaising with Student Services in order to increase communication between Student Services, the Students' Union, and the rest of the School; holding meetings with students and student representatives to discuss pastoral care provision, and working to create a peer support group to enhance this provision to students. In addition, a paper has been put forward for consideration regarding the process of the Personal Advisory System during the 2013/2014 Welcome Week. Being supported by the academic structure of the School is something that can change not only the student experience in terms of welfare, but has a profound effect on students' academic experience- with the implementation of the new Welfare and Campaigns Sabbatical Officer let us hope these improvements will continue.

### **Maintaining our courses being driven by student interest rather than employability policy**

While less work has been accomplished regarding this priority, there has been much welcomed movement on the creation of lifelong e-mails as well as some work regarding the possibility of free, post-graduation careers-advice. In addition, it is our hope that we keep in mind that SOAS encourages and fosters free spirits and open minds, and that we maintain the importance of the critical academy.

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