

Update on Students' Union Educational Priorities 2013-2014

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. Educational Priorities for 2010/2011, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 were drafted after a process of consultation with the student body, and their aim was to provide the School with direct input on the changes in SOAS' educational provision that students would most appreciate and benefit from. The educational priorities that have been presented provide a useful basis for collaboration on educational issues between the Students' Union and the School. With the paper being noted by the Academic Board and with considerable progress being made on a number of our highlighted areas of concern, it is the Students' Union's aim to continue this into the next year.

This year's Educational Priorities contain three points carried on in some form from the 2012/2013 Educational Priorities, with the other six identified through informal consultation with students and consultation of the Student Written Submission for last year's QAA Institutional Review. There has been much welcomed, extensive progress made on the 2013/2014 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.

- **Encourage greater use of the BLE as a learning tool**
 - The Students' Union appreciates the progress that has been made in fostering greater use of the BLE and other online resources. A minimum standards policy has been adopted by FLTCs – however we are disappointed that it does not stipulate the uploading of weekly lecture content. Progress in the Panopto pilot has been positive, and we hope that the school is successful in acquiring a license for the entire campus. Also promising is the recent decision to pilot Unitu, software that provides an online hub for students and student representatives.
- **Schoolwide implementation of exam feedback**
 - The Students' Union welcomes the recognition that students would prefer individual exam feedback on request as opposed to a general statement to all students in a course. We hope that the need for a formal policy for individual exam feedback will be recognised.
- **Departmental General Assemblies**
 - Many departments have held General Assemblies or Staff-Student Forums (the terms are held to be synonymous) in some form over the academic year. It is important to note that the staff-student forum should not be considered a replacement to the system of inviting student reps to department meetings but as a complement to it. The department of Anthropology is taken as an example of best practice in this area. The Team Leader (Student Support) is actively working with the Faculty Senior Tutor to enhance student support and representation in Arts & Humanities.
- **Student involvement in design of assessment strategies, course approval and withdrawal**
 - The Students' Union notes that the programme approval process is under review and hopes to be included as part of these discussions.
- **More frequent and more transparent student evaluation of courses**
 - Positive progress has been made in the Student Evaluation of Courses working group. The working group's suggestions will go to LTQC in June.
- **Change the Masters dissertation cap**
 - Unfortunately, no progress has been made on this point this year. The current practice is to only award the mark of a distinction to PGT students who have also achieved distinction in their dissertation mark, regardless of whether their exam results might put them over the overall threshold for a distinction. The Students' Union suggests that changing these regulations is considered in the wider review of all taught regulations next year.
- **Encourage sharing of best practice in teaching and assessment methods**
 - The adoption of a Best Practice policy has gone some way to meeting this goal. The Students' Union also notes and welcomes the fact that the BLE steering group's priority next year will be to focus on innovative modes of assessment through technology.
- **Schoolwide implementation of diagnostic coursework for PGT students**
 - Both this year and last year's Educational Priorities highlighted the need for

further support in coursework for PGT students. Most students receive coursework feedback at the halfway point of their degree. It is our hope that diagnostic coursework will continue to be implemented for PGT students across faculties.

- **Greater support for Graduate Teaching Assistants**
 - Learning and Teaching Quality has recently approved new guidelines for the mentoring of GTAs, which we hope will improve the support system available. The Fractionals for Fair Play campaign, while independent of the Students' Union, has also taken a leading role in highlighting the concerns of GTAs.