

Academic Council

DATE: Monday 6th February 2021

ROOM: 0050 **TIME:** 12.00-1300

Aasiyah Patankar; President – Academic Life

Chair: Louise Ford; President – Student Activities

Secretary: Julie Read – Student Support Coordinator, SU

Sacha Forbes – Deputy Manager, SU

Attended: 16

Apologies: 11

1. Welcome and Introduction

Aasiyah welcomed everyone, introduced herself and the other staff members, and shared the Agenda. This AC was the third of the new academic year 22-23.

2. Student President Update

Aasiyah reported that timetabling issues are ongoing and being looked into by the university. They are trying to recruit a new timetabling manager but there are issues with software and hardware too.

Also, TGIT (Thank Goodness it's Thursday) has started again this semester with free meals available in 1875 between 1700-1900 every Thursday with a social activity on the first Thursday of each month. Last week, over 300 meals were served.

Finally, the National Student Survey (NSS) has been launched for final year students to give feedback on their university experience and maybe win a prize too. This is a survey that staff take very seriously as it provides useful feedback and is one of the ways that staff gain information on issues faced by students. Final year students are encouraged to participate.

3. Guest speakers – Lauren Smith, UCU

Lauren gave some background to the role of Trade Unions and explained that the UCU (Universities and Colleges Union) is open to staff and PhD/PG Research students to join. It exists to support workers in the workplace either on an individual level or at an institutional level. It also gets involved in industrial action of the type we have seen recently. All branches of the UCU can vote to withdraw labour in an attempt to enter negotiations with the UCEA. Currently strikes are to raise awareness of the lack of funding to pay for staff or resources. A marking and assessment boycott will start in April to target graduation. This is not an ideal situation but it is hoped it will force employers into negotiation.

The floor was opened up to questions.

Q: What can students do to support staff?

A: They could join the Student-Staff Solidarity Network Whatsapp group, join the picket line, write to the Principal expressing support for the strikes and encouraging negotiations. They can also wear UCU stickers showing support for the strike. Email LSmith1@qmu.ac.uk for information/to show support

Q: Should Student Support continue (e.g. PALS) during strike action?

A: Student support is ongoing. Those members of staff in the UCU will not provide support on strike days but staff who are not members of UCU will continue to provide support. On strike days the Students' Union building/Maggie's is not behind the picket line so perhaps meetings could take place there.

Q: QMUSU is not affiliated with the NUS (National Union of Students). How, when and why did this happen? Who made the decision to disaffiliate? Other SU's are actively supporting the UCU action.

A: QMUSU disaffiliated around 2018/2019. As a small university, reps had often felt unsupported by the NUS and that concerns were not listened to at the NUS conference for example, with the focus always being on bigger universities. The SU asked the student body if they wanted to disaffiliate and the student body voted to do so. This saves the QMUSU a lot of money each year but our presidents are still invited to events which enhance the student experience outside QMU.

Q: Does the SU have a position on the UCU strikes?

A: The SU is impartial unless students express a desire for it to be more involved.

Q: If students are unaware that the SU disaffiliated from the NUS, how would they be informed?

A: The information has been out for some time. Aware that some lecturers erroneously tell students that we are still affiliated to the NUS. SU are looking into putting out information regarding the previous disaffiliation to NUS to help newer students understand the decision.

4. QMUSU Update

Sacha gave an update on the student elections. This year we are looking for two student presidents, which are full-time, paid positions. As an example of the kind of things that presidents have been able to influence, Sacha stated that students used to receive moderator emails on a daily basis but, with Aasiyah's work on this, it has been reduced to weekly. In addition there are several part-time volunteer officer positions. These can involve as much or as little work as the student wants but getting involved would be better.

Nominations are now open and will remain so until 24th February at 12 noon. Voting opens on 6th March at 10.00 and closes on 9th March at 12 noon. Students will receive a daily email to remind them to vote. These will end when the student has voted. Results will be announced in Maggie's on 9th March at 5pm. Historically, turnout can be low so we would encourage all to get involved and vote.

Aasiyah reminded all of the upcoming STaR (Student Teacher and Representation) Awards. Nominations are now open and will close on 1st March. The awards ceremony will be held on 31st March at 4pm in the Halle for nominees and afterwards (5pm onwards) in Maggies for all to celebrate. Voting is a great way of recognising staff and students who are making a difference.

Aasiyah also announced Thank Frock it's Thursday on 16th February from 2-5pm. Students will have the opportunity to buy and sell formal wear in time for the graduation balls. Details will be issued soon but students will be able to bring clothes in from Monday to Wednesday 13-15th Feb.

5. Question of the Semester – TBC

6. Class Reps feedback

Q: Plugs in the floors in classrooms are constantly locked. Can we get better access?
Students need to be able to charge laptops etc.

A: Aasiyah will email facilities to ask. She reminded students they can also borrow fully-charged laptops from the LRC. Lauren Smith added that charging lockers in the LRC can also be used for students' personal devices.

Q: Is it possible to have the plug key in each room?

A: Currently there are none in the rooms but this will be fed back. One student added that the architects will be here in a few days and ASSAM SAB will pass this concern on.

Q: How can Art Therapy students access the risk assessment for the art rooms which hold very few students?

A: Not really a Students' Union issue. Best to raise this with academic staff or contact room bookings.

Q: Can the January intake stand for the PG Officer role in the upcoming elections if they would not be on campus for their second semester?

A: Sacha answered they are welcome to contact her for a chat about the role.

Q: Podiatry students are complaining that there are no online classes and students do not like travelling to and from the University for a two hour in-person Class in the middle of the day.

A: The University has a hybrid working policy but it can be hard to find the balance. Also, resources and space are limited. If this hasn't been taken to the SSCC it would be a good idea to start there. One student stated it was university policy to have 1st years on campus as much as possible. AP stated every class was different and had different needs. LS added that it can be difficult to find space for online teaching or PL's might have asked for all classes to be held in person.

Q: The strikes are concerning for 4th years in particular who are worried dissertations won't be marked and graduations will be missed. Some have had no dissertation supervision for a month. Would like it passed on that students are unhappy about this. Should there be Extenuating Circumstances for assessments?

A: This might be appropriate but AP felt graduations unlikely to be affected. LS added that librarians were available to help in the LRC.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 16th March 1300-1400 Room 0049

Contact Information

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