

**School of Biological and Behavioural Sciences  
Postgraduate Student Staff Liaison Committee  
23 March 2023**

**Staff members present:**

Dr Anne Ropiquet	Deputy Director PGT Programmes and SSLC Chair
Prof. Conrad Bessant	Programme Director – MSc Bioinformatics
Dr Cristina Cioffi	Programme Director – MSc Psychology: Mental Health Sciences
Dr Christoph Engl	Programme Director – MSc Biomedical Sciences
Prof. Andrew Leitch	Programme Co-Director – MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation
Dr Kalsum Yusah	Programme Co-Director – MSc Biodiversity and Conservation
Evelyn Treiber	Postgraduate Administrator (SSLC Secretary)

**Student members present:**

Florence Been	Course Rep – MSc Psychology: Mental Health Sciences
Marta Delfino	Course Co-Rep – MSc Bioinformatics
Stina Helvin	Course Rep – MSc Biodiversity and Conservation
MacKenzie Laverick	Course Rep – MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation
Sara Othman	Course Rep – MSc Biomedical Sciences

**Apologies for absence:**

Dr Richard Gianfrancesco	Programme Co-Director – MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation
Rana Khan	Course Co-Rep – MSc Bioinformatics

**Part 1 – Preliminary Items**

<b>1(a)</b>	<b>Welcome and introduction for new members</b>
2022.012	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves.
<b>1(b)</b>	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>
2022.013	Apologies were received from Dr Richard Gianfrancesco and Rana Khan.
<b>1(c)</b>	<b>Actions from the last meeting</b>
2022.014	The minutes from the meeting on 25 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record.  Actions from the meeting:

	<p>a) To discuss with programme lead if a reading list could be circulated in advance of the beginning of the course with introduction to RStudio.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that discussions had been held and that appropriate information would be given to new students when the new cohort had been confirmed. The Programme Co-Director (PCo-D) for MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation suggested to include Rob Knell's publication on R coding in the reading list as a suitable introduction to the software. The Programme Director (PD) for the MSc Psychology: Mental Health Sciences suggested that, as students had different backgrounds and different levels of skills in statistics, new students could be asked to revise statistics skills over the summer prior to starting the programme. Any individual queries could be sent to her directly for advice.</p> <p>b) Information about the assessment deadlines will be clearer on QM+ modules.</p> <p>The Chair reported that clearer assessment deadlines would be implemented from 2023/24 onwards. Each programme would also have its own page on QM+.</p> <p>c) Contact Module Lead for CANM937 to report the confusion regarding the exam component for this module.</p> <p>The PD for the MSc Biomedical Sciences had contacted the Module Organiser (MO) for CANM937 and agreed that students who were re-sitting could contact the MO with queries after mid-April.</p> <p>d) Students to be contacted with a reminder that the expectation is for on-campus attendance.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that students had been reminded about on-site attendance and that the requirement would also be made clear to new students in the new academic year.</p> <p>e) Students to be contacted with a reminder of how to access QReview recordings.</p> <p>Action completed.</p> <p>f) An email to be sent to Module Leads reminding them to provide clear marking criteria for their modules.</p>
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	<p>The Chair reported that discussions at team level had been held. MOs would normally explain to students at the module introduction what would be expected for the assessment. It had been agreed that clear marking criteria would be in published in 2023/24.</p> <p>g) PG Directors to be invited to the next SSLC meeting Action completed.</p>
<b>Part 2 – Student feedback, Programme Delivery and other matters</b>	
<b>2(a)</b>	<b>Student feedback</b>
2022.015	<p>Representatives reported on learning and teaching matters and the following points were noted:</p> <p><b>MSc Bioinformatics – Marta Delfino</b></p> <p>a) The Course Co-Rep explained that students had been given mark schemes for their Semester B modules, i.e. BIO727P Bioinformatics Software Development Group Project and BIO702P Bioinformatics Research Project, but not for the four Semester A modules (BIO720P AI and Data Science in Biology, BIO722P Coding for Bioscientists, BIO724P Statistics for Biologists and BIO726P Unix and Analysis of Large Genomic Datasets), whereas the University’s Assessment Handbooks seemed to suggest that mark schemes would be available to students from the beginning of the Academic Year (AY). For the assessments, it was not only programming but also reflection that was required of students and it would therefore be beneficial to have mark schemes in place so that students knew what to aim for. The PD for the MSc Bioinformatics commented that what was expected at assessments would normally be set out at the beginning of the module, but not necessarily in written form. The Chair repeated that discussions were being held on how best to provide students with information on expectations and marking criteria (Item 2022.014 f) refers).</p> <p>b) The Course Co-Rep mentioned that one student had struggled with the transition from the group experience of BIO727P to the individual work on the Research Project. The PD for the MSc Bioinformatics observed that the module had been substantially revised for this year and went on to say that the gap between the two modules could be bridged at the beginning of the Research Project next year so that students found</p>

the start of the module easier. The Chair summarised the Module Evaluation Reports by saying that the feedback was overall very positive and that the main comments were about lecturers being very responsive to student needs and the good communication between students and the teaching team.

**MSc Biomedical Sciences – Sara Othman**

- c) The Course Rep had undertaken a short survey of students on different aspects of the modules delivered by the Barts Cancer Institute (BCI): CANM937 Research Methods and CANM938 Research Lab Skills. Ten of 14 students had responded and there were a number of issues to report to the meeting:
- a. CANM937 Assessment: Students found the set-up confusing and only received clarification a month before the assessment date. There were mistakes in the assessment tasks and some students did not understand the examination questions. The assessment consisted of four questions with sub-questions. It was unclear how much or how little students were supposed to write in answer to sub-questions as there was no indication of marks per sub-question, only for the four overall questions. Student queries in relation to the assessment were not answered in a timely fashion. Students felt that the examination questions did not relate to what they had been taught during the module.
  - b. Timetabling: The timetable could be clearer. Sessions had occasionally been moved around within the weekday that had been dedicated to BCI modules.
  - c. CANM938 Delivery: Students found that they had already acquired certain lab skills as part of their work on the BMD700P Biomedical Sciences Research Project module by the time the skills were taught on CANM938, which resulted in some confusion.
  - d. CANM938 Assessment: The requirements for the coursework assessment were not clear to students. On the relevant QMplus pages, instructions for lab write-ups had

been provided in two places but, later in the module delivery, they had been updated without completely removing all previous documentation, which made it difficult for students to know which version was applicable. When asked, the MO's responses did not clarify the matter.

**ACTION** = Course Rep to email survey form and results to the Deputy Director PGT Programmes and the Programme Director for the MSc Biomedical Sciences

The Chair assured students that SBBS would raise the issues with BCI. The PD for the MSc Biomedical Sciences explained that communication with BCI had been challenging but that new lines of communication had been established recently. Timetabling clashes would most likely not be resolved completely as the two institutes' semesters did not fully align. The PD had agreed with the MO that students should contact the MO so that tutoring for re-sits can be put in place (Item 2022.014 c) refers) and asked the Course Rep to inform students accordingly. The PD also asked the Course Rep to contact the MO again with any outstanding questions and offered to follow up on any queries that were not responded to by BCI.

**ACTION** = Course Rep to inform students with re-sits to contact the BCI Module Organiser in order to set up re-sit tutoring

**MSc Psychology: Mental Health Sciences – Florence Been**

- d) The Course Rep reported that regular meetings with the PD for the MSc Psychology: Mental Health Sciences were planned to improve communication further.
- a. Students' main concern was still RStudio as they were required to use the software but were unsure how. The publication mentioned earlier in the meeting would be useful (Item 2022.014 a) refers) and perhaps an additional lab session could be introduced next AY.
  - b. Student feedback had improved for Semester B, which could be due to individual tutoring for the Research Project.

- c. Student attendance was markedly better for workshops, where participation contributed to the overall module mark, than for lectures. A suggestion would be that participation at module elements, other than workshops, could also count towards the final mark to improve student attendance.
- d. Communication and information on deadlines could be clearer on QMplus. Some students still found using the online learning environment challenging.

The PD observed that support for statistics would be available to students from mid-April onwards. SBBS would work with students to make sure that information on QMplus was clear and students could access it.

**MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation – MacKenzie Laverick**

- e) Students had just returned from the field trip to Madagascar and were now concentrating on BIO709P Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation Research Project. There was nothing to report.

**MSc Biodiversity and Conservation – Stina Helvin**

- f) The Course Rep reported that module marks had not been on MySIS initially and now seemed to have disappeared. The PCo-D for the MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation responded that SBBS had been made aware of the issue with student marks and was working on resolving it.
- g) Students were pleased with the feedback they had received for BIO773P Statistics and Data Analysis.
- h) Following a recent meeting between students and the PD about BIO791P Biodiversity and Conservation Research Project, some students had the impression that they had been given incorrect information and that work they had done for their project would have to be discarded. Some supervisors had clearly shown their disapproval of the meeting between PD and students after the meeting. The PCo-D for the MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation explained that purpose of the recent meeting had been to identify any

	<p>challenges early and to address them but not to interfere with the supervisor/student relationship. It was rare that a project had to be re-defined completely but initial adjustments were perfectly normal. Any preparatory work already undertaken by students could potentially still be used. The PCo-D offered that any student with concerns about the Research Project should get in touch with him directly and asked the Course Rep to let students know.</p> <p><b>ACTION</b> = Course Rep to inform students that they should contact the Programme Co-Director for the MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation if they encountered any issues with BIO791P Biodiversity and Conservation Research Project.</p>
<b>2(b)</b>	<b>Student Survey Feedback</b>
2022.016	Student feedback via the Module Evaluation Reports for Semester A had already been discussed (Item 2022.15 refers). There was nothing additional to note.
<b>Part 3 – Any Other Business</b>	
2022.017	There was no other business to report.
<b>Part 4 – Date of the next meeting</b>	
2022.018	The next meeting will be in November 2023, with the date to be confirmed.

### Action Sheet: Student-Staff Liaison Committee

Minute	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Action status	Issue resolved?
2022.015 c)	To email survey form and results to the Deputy Director PGT Programmes and the Programme Director for the MSc Biomedical Sciences	Course Rep – MSc Biomedical Sciences			
2022.015 c)	To inform students with re-sits to contact the BCI Module Organiser in order to set up re-sit tutoring	Course Rep – MSc Biomedical Sciences			
2022.015 h)	To inform students that they should contact the Programme Co-Director for the MSc Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation if they encountered any issues with BIO791P Biodiversity and Conservation Research Project	Course Rep – MSc Biodiversity and Conservation			