

**Academic Sub-Committee**

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| **Meeting details** |
| **Meeting name** | **Academic Sub-Committee**  |
| **Date** | **Monday 1st November 2021**  | **Time** | **17:30 – 18:30** |
| **Location** | The Little Room, Students’ Union, Plymouth Campus  |

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| **Minutes** |
| **1.** **Welcome** | VP Education Charlie Atkinson (CA) welcomed attendees and introduced the format of the academic sub-committee. |
| **2.** **Attendance / Apologies** | Attendance:Daniella Marley - PTO WelfareFreya Rose - SR Biological & Marine SciencesLucy Metaj - SR Society & CultureWill Jones - PTO Environment & SustainabilityApologies:Amy Bishop - SR Nursing and MidwiferyAntonia-Roxana Vrabie - SR Plymouth Business SchoolEmily Schenk - SR Peninsula Medical SchoolKenza Kadri - PTO Students with DisabilitiesLeah Gray - PTO AcademicEmi Dowse - PresidentFawziyyah Ahmed- VP Wellbeing & DiversityMads Morton - VP Activities |
| **3.** **Minutes of last meeting** | Inaugural meeting of the academic sub-committee, no prior minutes for review. |
| **4. Notification of any other business** | An attendee raised a question regarding the lack of mask mandates within the University campus and enquired why students are not asked to wear face coverings in lecture theatres.* CA clarified that the University guidelines states that masks must be worn in communal areas and lecture theatres are not classified as communal areas and so face coverings are not specifically enforced.
* CA expressed understanding that the University guidelines/regulations for face coverings aren’t clear and will raise the issue to seek better clarity.

An attendee raised a question regarding funding for art history. An example was given where in the prior academic year an important field trip was cancelled to comply with the response to COVID-19 and no alternative was offered. Incoming first stage students are however now being taken on this trip and the stage above feel as if they have missed out on one of the incentives for their chosen course.* CA suggested that this issue should be raised through the School Representative for Art, Design & Architecture.
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| **5a.** **Careers service** | Siwan Tyack (ST) and Jenny Wall (JW) introduced themselves, seeking to gather feedback from the academic sub-committee and aiming to raise awareness for the services available to students through the Careers Service.ST explained that the careers service has online and face-to-face services including support for CV writing, interview preparation and searching for employment.ST highlighted that the careers service has a physical presence during the timetabled contact time for most courses, where careers consultants provide course specific careers guidance and placement preparation guidance.The careers service will be hosting a digital placement and graduate careers fair, bookable via “MyCareer,” which will have 40-45 employers participating.ST further explained that the careers service offers various employer panels and sector specific events throughout the academic year and also offers several different professional mentoring tracks which students are able to gain support from.The careers service will be launching a female development programme later in the academic year and can also provide tailored support to students with additional needs. There are bursaries and a specific mentoring track available to disabled students.JW & ST covered the support available as students go through the transition from being a student to a graduate and that the careers service provides continual support after students have graduated.ST & JW opened a Mentimeter poll and sought feedback on the concerns of final year students and enquired what support would the sub-committee like to see from the careers service.* Attendee highlighted an issue with MyCareer where student IT accounts were unable to view arts institutes apprenticeships but members of staff could – even though these were aimed at students.
* Attendee suggested that final stage students have timetabled careers service sessions as part of their courses, like the placement preparation module for first and second stage students.

Attendee highlighted that primary education courses have had no introduction to the careers service and that it seems to be largely left to students on that programme to find the careers service on their own.* ST mentioned that for vocational courses it’s generally assumed that students have already made decisions about their career. ST further iterated that as vocational courses tend to have rather busy timetables, they tend not to be timetabled with the careers service. ST sign-posted the specific careers advisor for the subject area.

Attendee highlighted that there is very little guidance or support for LinkedIn within Art History and that resources for LinkedIn hadn’t been signposted very well. Attendee explained that despite registering for alerts via MyCareer, they had not been receiving updates about specific events.Attendee enquired as to what support is available for postgraduate students. The attendee was not aware of the mentoring schemes available to them and did not feel that the careers service had been signposted within their area of study.Attendee highlighted that a good way to cascade information about the services offered by the careers team is to make use of the course representatives, who typically have good networks within their cohorts. Attendee also suggested that academics should be encouraged to promote and signpost the careers service to students.Attendee suggested that registering for “MyCareer” should be included as part of academic inductions, otherwise students aren’t familiar with the platform and trying to access the resources available through the careers service can be confusing.Attendee raised that their were the Chair of a student group and that during lockdowns in the 2019/2020 academic year, had helped to signpost the careers service by sharing content on their social media. It was suggested that the careers service continue to reach out to student groups for signposting. |
| **5b.** **UCU Plymouth Branch** | Daniel Conway (DC) introduced himself on behalf of the University and College Union, which is the trade Union representing academic and support staff in the further and higher education sectors.DC highlighted that over the last four months, he has been acting as the treasurer for the Plymouth branch of UCU and introduced the “four fights” ballot currently taking place.UCU four fights:1. Pay – UCU has been asking for a 2% pay rise and Universities often respond with a 0%-1% pay rise. This means that since 2009, academics have effectively received a 21% pay-cut.
2. Workload – DC explained that the UK Government and Universities are continually adding to the administrative workload of academics. DC iterated that Universities within the UK have comprehensive time-consuming quality assurance processes which aren’t replicated in other countries (such as the USA) and this takes up approximately 20% of academics time, which could otherwise be dedicated to students.
3. Equality – DC explained that there are still ethnic, and gender pay gaps in further and higher education and UCU are asking for a equal pay audit, covering all protected characteristics, to be shared with campus trade unions.
4. Casualisation – DC explained that there is concern regarding the way that individuals teaching are being employed – it is much cheaper to hire someone to teach for two hours and not have to pay their benefits or support their research.

In support of the four fights campaign, DC explained that UCU is balloting on two points:1. Are you (academics) willing to strike?
2. Are you (academics) willing to take industrial action short of a strike? E.g., Working to contract, only carrying out essential responsibilities.

DC explained that industrial action cannot be taken if the ballot does not exceed its threshold for engagement. The Plymouth branch of UCU has so far not passed this threshold, however DC expressed the threshold likely will be passed on this ballot due to ongoing work regarding the quality of the working environment.DC reassured that sub-committee that if industrial action does take place, the University is likely to try and tell students that any academics engaging in industrial action are being neglectful. DC explained that the reality is after fifteen years of pay cuts, industrial action has become necessary to raise light on the situation.An attendee asked if the ballot was open to students. * DC explained that the ballot is only open to academics that are members of the UCU Plymouth branch.

An attendee asked what students can do to support UCU.* DC suggested students let the University know that they support the UCU campaign, and they appreciate the work that their academics are doing.

An attendee enquired whether or not UCU Plymouth run regular meetings and if they were able to predict the outcome of the ballot.* The UCU runs an AGM where they cover the topics that had been discussed at the academic sub-committee. DC explained that over Zoom during lockdown they had considered 100/500 to be a great turnout and a turnout of 50/500 to be good.
* DC highlighted a recent survey had a response rate of 350/500.
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| **6.** **Priority work / campaigns** | CA highlighted that in a normal meeting this agenda point would be covered by Sabbatical and PTO campaigns however at this point in the academic year, it is too early to have significant information to report, |
| **7.** **Sabbatical Officer Report Q&A** | CA expressed that his officer report can be found on the UPSU website. |
| **8.****School Rep Reports Q&A** | CA expressed that as the School Representatives had only been in post for just over a week, there was not yet any School Representative reports available to discuss. |
| **9. Any other business** | Tracy Priestman (TP) expressed that it’s important that representatives appreciate that they themselves are the student union. It is not the building or the events, but representatives themselves that make up the Union |
| **10. Dates for the diary** | Next meeting due to take place on the 2nd December 2021.Location to be confirmed. |
|  | **End of meeting** |