

Student Welfare Forum

Notes from the meeting held on Wednesday 11th December 2013.

11.00am – 12.00pm, Rialto, Students' Union

Present: Sidonie Bertrand-Shelton, Christopher Butler, Denise Keable, Cate Irvine, Janette Back, Charlene Dawkins, Carolyne Wishart, Amanda Ellis and Brian Irvine.

Apologies: Tina Rainer.

Action / information points in red

1. MEMBERSHIP / APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted from Christopher.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the last meeting, held on Tuesday 28th May 2012, were confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

- No matters arising were discussed.

4. SIXTY SECOND REPORTS FROM SUPPORT & ADVISORY SERVICES

Careers Service (Janette Back)

- Busy Autumn Term.
- A number of new members of staff have joined the Careers Service.
- Many students have used the Quick Query service and made appointments to have their CVs checked.
- Currently seeing one student referred from ESO and will be seeing another at the start of next term.

Questions:

What does a referral from the ESO involve?

- Janette sees students registered with the ESO outside the usual appointment system and their meetings are tailored to give advice depending on their needs and the stage of their degree.

Do you advise them to disclose their condition to employers?

- It depends on the individual, but generally they are advised to disclose their condition. For example, it can demonstrate that they have developed extra skills in coping with their condition or ensure they are allowed additional time to sit written assessment that are part of the interview process.

Are students increasingly stressed by the need to do part-time work?

- The stress has increased with the introduction of university fees. Students who are legally unable to work, eg Bulgarian and Rumanian students have been in a dire situation and have been referred to Financial and Funding Support, but there are limits on how they can help. This situation will improve for them in the New Year. This will remain a problem for other students, eg from Croatia.

Christopher has 20 copies of Stonewall LGB Careers Guide that are available for everyone.

Chaplaincy & Faith Support (Cate Irvine)

- Nabil Hawa has completed his first term as the Islamic Faith Advise. He has achieved more than they had hoped for during his seven hours each week. In particular, liaising with the College about the plans to move the Prayer Room including obtaining assurances about its size and facilities.
- The precise location of the Prayer Room has not yet been decided.
- The Christmas services have all taken place and went well.
- Fr. John is having his operation today.
- Chaplaincy held an interfaith breakfast which was well attended by both previous attendees and new student groups.
- An interfaith evening called 'What does my faith mean to me' was a success.
- Chaplaincy maintains good contact with Christian and Moslem faith societies and has invited groups from other faiths to attend.
- The Hindu faith group has made contact with Chaplaincy and has approached the College for a multi-faith room. There may not be space for permanent provision for this, but the College is currently exploring options.
- There is currently no Jewish faith group but Fr. John is organising the plans for Holocaust Day including trying to arrange for a Rabbi to preach on that day.
- James McMillan, Scottish composer, is coming to Royal Holloway next term and to speak and lead singing.

Questions/Observations:

Why isn't there a Jewish Faith Society as they have a Facebook page?

- There are some students in the University but they are reluctant to head up the society.

Do the contact details on the webpage need to be updated?

- This will be checked.

Community Liaison & Support (Amanda Ellis)

- Generally a relatively quiet term for community complaints which is good and would suggest that the **Be a Good Neighbour** promotion is having a positive impact. This led to a quiet Community Liaison Forum.
- Participated in a welcome induction for all student residents of The Pad on Egham Hill.
- Lots of promotion of the usual personal safety messages to the student body, with a large number of personal safety alarms being collected from the office by students.
- Re-worked the safer walking route map leaflets into an A5 booklet format.
- Safe & Secure day held in Tommy's in October with the support of the Runnymede Safer Neighbourhood team and Crime Prevention Adviser. Also held a bike marking day at Kingswood; with another planned for the start of term 2.
- A large number of wellbeing case work including reports of harassment between students and following up reports of excess alcohol consumption with students where there has been a welfare impact (e.g. injury).

- Compiling a briefing of FAQs about private sector housing in advance of the January Housing Fair.
- Working on updating website presence and ensuring a better impact from students and continuing to contribute towards student media each month.

Questions/Observations:

Have we received reports of students being followed? The SU has an app that allows students to report such incidents anonymously.

- Helen meets the police regularly and is generally aware of such incidents but it is helpful if the SU share these reports with her.

Action: Sidonie to share the link for the app/information received via the app with Helen

Sidonie has 2,000 community postcards showing information about all SU events and offered to send some to S&AS to distribute.

Action: Sidonie to provide S&AS with a number of community postcards

Educational Support Office (Brian Irvine)

- A busy term making exam arrangements and providing dyslexia support.
- Scoping evacuation routes in case of fire.
- Increasing accessibility, eg organising additional ramps for the Music Dept.
- Support Tutors are fully booked.
- Have developed an improved electronic system to record conversations with students so that they are aware of previous conversations with students.
- Working with the disabled students working group.
- Supporting the Disabled Students Rep.
- Increased Facebook and social media usage.
- Reworking the website to be more visual and may have weighted text so that it is more accessible for those with dyslexia. This will be launched in February.
- They are looking into (i) lending library dyslexia software, assistive technology and upgrading voice recorders, (ii) creating an accessible computing area and (iii) creating a disability app that involves employing a company to take photos to provide a visual guide on how to get out of buildings. All these are dependent on acquiring funding.

Questions/Observations:

What do the Support Tutors specialise in?

- One tutor specialises in dyslexia (ie essay writing skills, decoding texts etc) and the other tutor specialises in study skills (how to plan an essay).

How often would a student see each Tutor?

- A student would see the dyslexia tutor weekly and the study skills tutor for 2 or 3 sessions ideally before a set of essay deadlines.

Have you had to turn students away?

- Not yet, but getting close. Students are told to come back in January and will be seen early in the term.
- Study skills training is only provided to students registered with the ESO and is not available for other students. The Registry is investigating

whether to utilise the RHI trainers to offer generic study skills course as part of a general foundation course to other students.

Student Finance & Funding (Charlene Dawkins)

- Working with many students to apply for hardship funds and grants.
- Attending the UCAS Open Days to give advice to potential students and their parents advice about funding.
- Giving away piggy banks.
- Reviewing the finance and funding information for 2014.
- Considering whether to create one application form that can be used to apply for a grant, hardship funds and a loan.
- Selecting merchandise with the new University logo.
- Planning for the money week next term which will actually be one day a week for 4 weeks and dealing with different topics.
- Promoting financial advice and support through social media.

Questions/Observations:

How do you give advice to students about budgeting?

- The website has an budget spreadsheet with advice on how to complete it, offer advice during meetings with students and hardship fund interviews. However, this can only be advice on to improve spending and is not compulsory action unless they apply for help term after term.

How do you advertise the advice you can offer?

- On Facebook, The Orbital, Support & Advisory Services blog, on posters, run competitions and Message of the Day.

Sidonie suggested that they should advertise through the SU and on their webpage, preferably in a visual way. She was keen to pre-empt financial problems before students found themselves in trouble.

Action: Sidonie and Charlene to discuss ways to publicise the work of Student Finance & Funding through the SU.

Health Centre (presented by Christopher Butler)

- Sue Harman continues to be the named nurse and chief contact for S&AS at the Health Centre.
- The appointment system for the nursing team continues to work well with no complaints received from patients.
- The decision has been made to drop the Saturday morning surgery due to lack of patients, and the money has been diverted to pay for an extra half an hour of the sexual health clinic.
- In 2 incidents, the hospital's A&E have contacted the Health Centre asking them to follow up with students after discharging them. This seems to be a new proactive approach.

Questions/Observations:

What is the procedure for making a complaint about the Health Centre?

- Send the complaint to Sharon Hector or the local Primary Health Trust and copy it to the University.

What are the details of the increased half hour for the sexual health clinic?

- Contact Helen for the details.

Action: Helen will send details of the change to the sexual health clinic to Sidonie.

International Student Support (Denise Keable)

- Very busy with various immigration issues, particularly with arranging the visas of pre-sessionals who completed courses at RHUL or elsewhere and who needed visas to start their degree courses.
- The move to the International Building has gone well. It has given them more space and has helped them to complete their on-line registrations.
- Welcomed Stephanie Holley as the new International Support Assistant.
- Have arranged trips for International Students to Stonehenge and Bath (which Sidonie went on too). The trips were so popular they had to turn people away.
- Looking at arranging more social trips, including possibly a weekend away.
- Host programme has gone well.
- Promoting the International Student House Christmas programme.
- Preparing for the arrival and orientation of 60 new ERASMUS and study abroad students who were arriving at the start of next term.

Residential Support (Student Life) (Carolyn Wishart)

- Residential Support has moved to the Student Life team, although they continue to report to S&AS too. They remain in Founders Building for now.
- They are currently recruiting for a Campus Support Co-ordinator to look after the RSAs and students in hall and a Campus Life Co-ordinator to publicise their events and who would be working with the SU.
- The Peer Guide scheme has been working well and has been more successful than the pilot was.
- This term has been busy mainly dealing with welfare issues and flat tensions rather than disciplinary issues.
- Campus Life are planning events for the Re-welcome week for the first week of next term.
- Reviewing the process for recruiting RSAs.

Questions/Observations:

Is there Mental Health training available? As part of the SU's Mental Health Awareness Week, they are looking at providing advice on supporting friends with mental health issues.

- This is generally run by Counselling

Student Counselling (presented by Christopher Butler)

- The number of students registered is fairly high, although lower than last year.
- For example, 95-98 out of 100 available sessions are used and there is a small waiting list.
- The life skills workshops held this term were well attended and an extensive programme has been arranged for next term.
- Counselling is closed over the Christmas holidays, as there is not much demand for it.

Head of Support & Advisory Services (Presented by Christopher Butler)

- There has been a slowdown in the number of disciplinarys for drugs and violence.
- The re-organisation of the Department so that Residential Support joined Student Life while still reporting into S&AS has worked well.
- Working with the students on the Vulnerable Students List.
- There has been an increase in extra-mural welfare issues, including violence from non-student partners.
- Christopher expressed his thanks for the increasing support of the SU.
- More outreach workers and mental health works to be more proactive and not just help when there is a crisis.
- There is increasing support to change the name of Support & Advisory Services to Welfare and Wellbeing. However, there is no timescale on changing the location of the Department.
- Helen is working with Comms to upgrade the website.

5. SIXTY SECOND REPORTS FROM THE STUDENTS' UNION

Welfare Adviser and Vice President – Education & Welfare (presented by Sidonie Sidonie Bertrand-Shelton)

- For the first time, Tina has three part-time welfare assistants working with her for a total of 10-15 works per week to help with welfare and deal with appointments. This allows her to focus on the actual meetings with students. She hopes to keep them for next term.
- Liaising with the Kingswood Halls rep who wants the Sshh! bus to run an hour earlier to cover the break between the RHUL bus and the SU bus.
- The trips with the international students had gone well. Sidonie took a video of the trips.
- During the SHAG week, they handed out free SHAG bags that included information about LGBT, condoms etc and T-shirts that were free as long as they were worn on a certain day.
- Free chlamydia testing kits and condoms have been available from the SU and judging by the numbers taken, they appeared to be a success. The chlamydia testing lab will send Sidonie a report which will show how many have been used.
- The 'Keep Calm and don't Sign' campaign appeared to be working, although they are considering amending the signs to make it clearer what this was about.
- The first speed house mating event has taken place and was a success, with a number of students going as individuals. Another event is being planned for the Re-welcome week.
- The 2,000 Community postcards were printed after the SU ran a competition for local school children to design a postcard and the winner was selected at the Community Liaison Forum.
- The Community Tea Party was a success.
- Currently preparing a video about being a friend of someone with mental health issues. This will be released towards the end of Mental Health Awareness Week.

- Arranged for Battersea Dogs Home to bring 3 puppies to RHUL for students to stroke with the aim of helping stressed students. 265 students came to see the puppies in 3 hours. They also handed out information on Nightline. They are planning further events, including an event specifically for disabled students.
- The roles of Education and Welfare will be split as part of a shake-up in the roles of the Sabbatical team for next year. There will still be 4 posts.

Questions/Observations:

Denise offered to provide signpost-style training for the Welfare assistants if this would be useful.

Action: Sidonie would discuss with Tina whether it would be useful for the Welfare Assistants to receive training.

Did Sidonie have any suggestions for how students could be encouraged to attend the SWF meetings?

- Sidonie commented that she hadn't realised that students could attend. She suggested greater publicity, eg
 - creating a Facebook event;
 - she could contact a number of people that she believed would be interested in coming. She asked for a copy of the terms of reference for the meeting to help with this.

Action: Helen would send Sidonie the terms of reference for the SWF.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Carolyne explained that the Residential Support team would be sending packs to every flat as part of the Re-welcome week. Sidonie asked if she could include some SU information in these packs, which Carolyne agreed to.

Action: Sidonie to liaise with Carolyne about the information she wants to include in the Residential Team's packs for Re-welcome week.

7. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

- To be arranged over the spring.

*Amanda Ellis
(12th December 2013)*