BSc Social Work 2023/24 - Semester 1 SSLC

Present: Barbara Minteh (Year 1 Rep); Steve Kirkwood (Acting Programme Director); Katerina Valenti (Year 1 Cohort Lead); Will Rennie (Student Adviser)

Apologies: Nathan Tanner (Year 1); Ciara Janes (Year 3, but submitted feedback via e-mail)

Intro

- SK introduced the meeting and explained the purpose of the meeting

Feedback

- BM explained the form she had put together and distributed to her cohort, which was completed by 18 students including herself:

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- greatest concern was around the workload (esp. the amount of reading, which was felt to be too much)
    - **KV**: students were asked to complete a reading (sometimes two) in advance of tutorials, but were advised to consider what was most relevant to them as the readings provided material for later essay questions
    - **BM**: the students felt that in sum, over three courses, the reading got overwhelming. Different students having different ways of working added to this.
    - **SK**: the ability to read strategically and quickly identify relevant info in longer texts is a skill which needs to be developed
- students also felt that the essay preparation lessons were too close to the due date
    - **KV**: difficulty of moving this further in advance would mean there would be less time to cover the course material.
    - **SK**: might be possible to have different type of prep sessions: an assessment briefing early in the semester, followed by a more specific later session on a Q&A basis.
    - **KV**: there was an overview of assessment in week 2 and students were advised to submit a plan early on, which was followed-up with guidance. The students who completed it benefited from it. The final session in question was given 10 days before the deadline, as Barbara mentioned, which seemed reasonable given the prior opportunities for support
    - **BM**: not every student necessarily wanted to send a plan, not suiting their typical approach to essay-writing. Most students who responded were not in a position to send a plan as early as week 2.
    - **KV**: it also seems that students on Study Skills would prefer the assignment guidance to come earlier
    - **SK**: building in guidance as the semester progresses might be an alternative approach - to be discussed at the teaching committee
- a number of students were also concerned about having been locked out of the system early in the semester due to having their records withdrawn, which led to ongoing issues
    - **KV** explained the stress this had caused for the students involved; **WR** is aware and is supporting the students to ensure all affected have Special Circumstances in place
- about a quarter of respondents would have preferred not to have elective courses, and to have been allocated 120 credits of compulsory courses
- there was some concern among about half of respondents about the in-person exam for Social Policy and Society
- lecture recordings not being available until the day after was another source of concern – could this be adjusted to a livestream, or perhaps the uploading done sooner?
    - **KV**: livestreaming would be a great idea, but unsure if this is possible
    - **SK**: at the moment, the idea is that it's recorded for someone to watch later which is different from livestreaming. There is a lack of supporting technology at the moment to make this work, but it's something that can be considered. On lecture uploading, these are processed centrally so not really within the control of Social Work as a subject area to make faster. The hope is this will become quicker in future

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- two-thirds felt their lecturers and tutors were extremely supportive and helpful
- two-thirds felt that their lecturers and tutors were approachable and helpful
- two-thirds felt there was a good range of support across the University
- almost three-quarters of students felt that learning resources were easy to access and complete enough to allow them to submit work
- all students indicated they knew where to go for help
- **KV**: not mentioned in Barbara's feedback was students not being able to see the relevance of the Social Policy courses
    - **BM**: the feeling was that the Social Policy courses were aimed directly at Social Policy students, and as such it was found to be difficult for Social Work students to follow
    - **KV**: perhaps these courses could be brought together early in the year and students made more aware of the relevance of Social Policy to Social Work
- **BM**: on the other hand, Social Work: Making a Difference was very enjoyable for respondents and was felt to be the most relevant to the Social Work degree
    - **SK**: this makes sense as the only Social Work course this semester. However, the nature of the degree programme is that the students have access to a range of subjects, which is why there is a requirement for students to complete elective courses. This is seen as a great positive generally across the University as it makes for a more enriching educational experience.
    - **BM**: the main issue was actually the huge range of options, which was quite overwhelming alongside the SSSC registration process etc.
    - **SK**: it might be that this is one of the opportunities which life presents from time to time – however, we can recommend courses to make this process a bit less overwhelming
    - **BM**: part of this is also that the group at first-year students. As we get further into the programme, I expect this to get easier.
    - **SK**: we will consider how to give students a bit more guidance on this.

- **KV**: interim feedback had suggested there was some unhappiness about the tutorials, which KV had asked students about once the feedback was received. It seemed post-feedback that students had thought this improved over the course of the semester – was this reflected in feedback?
    - **BM**: based on responses, students would like to see tutorials straight after lectures. There are instances in which students had to come in for just one lecture, for example.
    - **SK**: that's quite difficult as the lectures are much bigger than the tutorials, and this depends on tutor availability
    - **BM**: it's an impossible task to make every student happy all the time
    - **SK**: true, but at least if we can get a sense of the overall pluses and minuses then we have a good guide for what we can do

- **SK**: there have been some very challenging staffing issues this semester, which have made things difficult. We're doing what we can but unfortunately some of the things we would usually have done haven't been possible. Thank you for your understanding and patience with this. We're still working to support cohort building events, for which if the group have any ideas then please let us know. The Student Development Office has some funding available for these and are often best when the students suggest it themselves.