BA Staff-Student meeting, 10 Dec 14 – report

In attendance: Robert Northcott, Hunain Saeed, Manuele Mandolesi, Dmitri Kljutsnik, Charlotte Daly

Summary
There was widespread praise for the new seminar system. Non-Y1 students strongly prefer the new system, as apparently do repeaters in Y1. It is deemed well organized.

There was also unanimous praise for Verena’s efficiency and for her welcoming nature.

Perhaps as a result, most comments concerned the details of how seminars are run (see below). Many of these comments would serve as inputs or reminders for when we train TAs rather than as requests for any administrative changes.

The Philosophy Society was praised. Its meetings should be advertised more to all students.

A few L6 BA students expressed dissatisfaction that MA students get the lecturers for the seminars too whereas BA students get only graduate TAs. This dissatisfaction became apparent if the graduate TA didn’t seem sufficiently competent or knowledgeable. On the other hand, the absolute level of this dissatisfaction seems relatively low.

Individual points about seminars
Regarding the details of seminar teaching:
-- Tutors should deal with uneven participation, e.g. explicitly giving the opportunity to speak to all members of the group (even while allowing each not to). This would help keep up attendance.
-- Discussions should be kept from becoming too scattered or unfocused.
-- Tutors should always remain supportive of students even, or perhaps especially, after incompetent comments.
-- Sometimes it's good to begin a seminar with a very brief summary of the lecture’s main points, especially if there are no student presentations or something else performing a similar function.

Ideally, on L4 and L5 modules the same seminar group should have the same seminar tutor throughout the year.

Readings should be reliably accessible via Moodle.

Perhaps tutors should be prepared to offer 5 minutes’ verbal discussion of an essay on the occasion that it is returned to students (for those students who want it).

Not having to produce an essay for every seminar was cited as an advantage of the new system. On the other hand, there was also some support for the possibility of submitting short one-paragraph written pieces more frequently.