University of Warwick
Department of Computer Science

Minutes, Postgraduate Research Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC)

Microsoft Teams 12pm-1pm Wednesday 19\textsuperscript{th} August, 2020

1 Present

Aparajita Haldar 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year PhD Representative, SSLC Chair
Sam Coy 1\textsuperscript{st} Year PhD Representative, SSLC Secretary
Richard Kirk 4\textsuperscript{th} Year PhD Representative
Sara Kalvala SSLC Convenor
Sharon Howard Departmental and PG Secretary
Teddy Cunningham 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year PhD Representative
Florin Ciucu Head of PGR studies
Mike Joy Senior Tutor
Roger Packwood DCS Technical Manager
Kelly Chennery DCS PGR Manager
Matteo Mazzamurro Co-Chair, WPCCS 2020
Alexander Noll Co-Chair, WPCCS 2020

2 Absent

Tanaya Guha, Paolo Turrini, Maria Ovens, Jasmine Grosso, and Isabella Slattery sent their apologies.

3 Corrections and Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting
Held on 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2020

The meeting minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Details of the annual review process for this year have been sent out by Kelly. Questions about re-opening continue to be raised as the situation develops. WPCCS now has organisers: Matteo and Alexander.
5 Implications of COVID-19 for PGRs

The building will open on the 27th if all of the risk assessments have been completed, but this looks fairly unlikely at this stage. Taught students will have priority on entering the building when it re-opens. The university is trying to limit the number of people on campus to ensure safety. The building will probably not be open 24/7, and in general its use will be markedly different than it used to be. The six-person rooms in the PGR part of the MSB building, just off the kitchen and common area, can probably only seat three people and this might have to be scheduled. The Urban Science CDT group, especially the students near to completion, have been particularly concerned. One of the Learning Grids has been re-opened for PGRs as of the 17th, but it seats few people and does not offer the same opportunities for collaboration as the office. Face coverings will be required in shared spaces.

Concerns have been raised with the SSLC concerning the detrimental implications of working from home, and whether some funds that would have been used for travel purposes could be used to aid this. Any equipment would have to be returned. This may be difficult to fund due to the university’s policy of reducing expenditures.

It was raised that some PGRs have left personal equipment on campus and would like to collect these. Roger advised that PGRs should hang on a bit longer, as the building should be accessible in some capacity soon anyway. He emphasised how difficult the re-opening process is, how moving the target is, and how complex the situation becomes if an outbreak is detected.

Sara wondered how difficult supervisor interaction is at the moment, especially in groups. Roger advised that this might be easy enough, with social distancing, in a larger room: but no arrangements specifically regarding this have been considered. We have to wait for further guidance on this.

Regarding wellbeing, students are advised to have a look at what the university is offering at the moment. There are quite a few online meet-ups, including some organised by the library.

Concerning the impact on annual reviews: emails have been sent to all PGRs by Kelly, as noted above. Some students are asking for extensions on this, and there is currently a “light touch” approach with this, recognising that students are in varied and challenging circumstances.

Planning is underway for the induction and virtual welcome events for the new intake of 15 PhD students.

6 STP Update

Paolo had given apologies for being unable to attend a meeting during August, and relayed to the SSLC that many logistical and financial concerns are very up in the air at the moment.

The PGR application process has been changed a lot; a lengthy application is now required (despite a previous assurance by the university that this would not be the case) and many aspects of the contracts seem concerning and vague. The difficulty of the application process might be discouraging for returning PGRs.

Florin raised that a lot of the sessional teaching will be done face-to-face, by TAs; and that TAs have neither been consulted about the arrangements in place, nor asked how they feel about in-person contact with students.

Departmental communication has been somewhat lacking, according to several PGRs, regarding teaching. Sara suggested that a regular PGR-staff meeting might be useful; Richard agrees. Kelly will have a think about ways to improve the communication to PGRs.

There are many serious issues and uncertainties facing Teaching Assistants currently. Therefore, the committee resolved to meet separately with Paolo and Jane when they return from their annual leave to discuss issues including the sessional teaching budget; the application process for tutors and the new contracts; and the safety and logistics of sessional teaching work next term. Sam to arrange this meeting.
7  WPCCS 2020

Matteo and Alexander are co-chairing WPCCS this year, and they introduced themselves to the committee. It seems very likely at this stage that the conference will be held online. Format discussions are ongoing. Current dates being discussed are about the same time as last year: about the 14th of December (the first Monday after term).

The budget for this conference is likely to be minimal due to the university’s current policies regarding expenditures.

Teddy pointed out that in-person conferences are currently illegal, and recommends an online-as-default approach. Aparajita seconded this.

Sam suggested a suggestion-box where people can recommend ideas to the committee, as due to the current climate, there have been several interesting format innovations with online conferences. Alexander agrees.

Sara pointed out that poster sessions don’t really work very well online. Richard suggested perhaps removing posters.

Alexander suggested pre-recording videos for the conference; others wondered whether a live presentation might allow more opportunity for questions.

8  Administrative Matters

Sharon is currently dealing with PGR applications up to the point at which they arrive, at which point Kelly is responsible for them. There is nothing to raise except for what has been discussed: monitoring points, annual reviews, inductions, and so on.

9  Any Other Business

No other business.

10  Time and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting should be a few weeks after the staff meeting, as per usual. This will likely be in November.