University of Warwick
Department of Computer Science

Minutes, Postgraduate Research Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC)
MB5.19 1am-2pm Wednesday 29th January, 2020

1  Present

Aparajita Haldar  2nd Year PhD Representative, SSLC Chair
Sam Coy  1st Year PhD Representative, SSLC Secretary
Thejaswini Raghavan  Athena SWAN
Maria Ovens  Head of Administration
Richard Kirk  4th Year PhD Representative
Sara Kalvala  SSLC Convenor
Sharon Howard  Departmental and PG Secretary
Tanaya Guha  STP Convenor
Paolo Turrini  STP coordinator
Ruqayya Awan  3rd Year PhD Representative
Marcel de Sena Dall’Agnol  1st Year Representative
Karen Jackson  Library representative
Teddy Cunningham  2nd Year PhD Representative
Florin Ciucu  Head of PGR studies

2  Absent

Mike Joy, Jasmine Grosso, and Isabella Slattery were absent with apologies.

3  Corrections and Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting
Held on 4th November 2019

The minutes were approved as a correct and accurate record of the previous meeting.

4  Matters Arising from the Minutes

All matters arising from the previous meeting are being taken care of.
5 Matters Arising from the Staff Meeting

No significant matters arose directly from the staff meeting. The topic of plagiarism came up during the meeting, but it was decided that, especially as PGRs were not explicitly asked to provide feedback, and that the agenda for this meeting was quite full, that the topic would not be discussed in this meeting.

6 PhD Issues

The fire evacuation on January the 7th was considered by some students to be suboptimal - there was a big queue up the staircase. We assume this has been fed back to the relevant parties, whoever they are, and we think it would be useful to circulate some fire evacuation information to PGRs.

There were notes about wellbeing, and that the department’s provision for wellbeing events and resources was too low.

Aparajita reminded the SSLC that the first PGR boardgames were happening on the day of the meeting.

Maria said that the department was buying boardgames - and if anyone had any suggestions for any they should let her or Marcin know.

Aparajita suggested providing fruit to MSB (as the DCS gets some on Wednesdays) - Maria will follow this up. A complaint was raised about the food available in the vending machines, and how generally unhealthy it was. Maria had previously spoken to Mark Potter about the vending machines; but said that when healthy options are put in the vending machines, people don’t tend to eat it. The vendors can in principle get a hold of anything though. Maria is open to requests.

MSB level 4 has no skimmed milk in the dining area. This is something worth raising with Yvonne.

Monitoring point emails - Sharon thinks that reminders are sent out. Due to recent changes, Sharon can no longer adjust monitoring points. It is advised that PGRs make the monitoring points within 2 days of meeting supervisors. The university is soon to be audited - this is important. Sharon will ensure that the reminders are being sent out to PGRs.

An outside query was raised asking whether group accounts could be made available for STP modules to make it easier for students to ask questions, rather than emailing individual PGRs. Sara reminded the SSLC that there is an increased push to use Moodle, and that students can use Moodle forums to accomplish the same thing, explaining that keeping questions public is probably a good thing. Moodles are created automatically when module organisers set up lecture capture.

7 WPCCS Retrospective

Teddy led a retrospective on WPCCS. WPCCS 2019 was the highest attended ever, with good feedback from students and staff about the event, specifically about the date and venue change. The next thing to do is to put a call out for people to organise the next one, Teddy and Aparajita to do this soon. The report written about the event was well-received and is being used as a template for other student-led conferences within the university. There was still a very low staff attendance (one of the aims of the date change); future organisers need to think about ways to encourage this.

8 STP Update

Term 2 is proceeding well.
The upcoming changes to the system at the university level, specifically the changes to the system and the way that TAs are going to be contracted, has received largely negative feedback, and its future is uncertain. There will be consultations concerning the reforms with PGs who teach, with one arranged for the 19th of February.

There is a concern that everything - how TAs are allocated especially, is under threat, and that there might be much more casualisation as a result. Richard suggested another STP meeting, Paolo agreed to set one up - all parties agreed that after the consultation on the 19th was the best time for one. **Sam and Paolo are to arrange a good time for this. Maria will send a link to signup for the PG consultation on the STP changes.**

There was an incident involving a module being removed from a PGR TA. Paolo has resolved this now however and all parties are happy.

### 9 DCS Education Strategy

The SSLC moved on to discuss the department’s education strategy briefly. Aparajita met Mike (who asked for it to be raised at the meeting) - this education strategy is to complement the university’s strategy. The department wanted their own that has specifics for CS. There’s been feedback from staff and the steering committee. There are another few months to gain feedback on the department’s strategy - the university’s one has been published.

Some questions were raised about both documents. The university’s strategy refers to only students and staff. What about students who teach? Sara explained that this is specifically about teaching - PGRs are “staff” in this context. Questions were also asked about the differences between “teaching staff” and “academic staff”, as referenced in the document. It was clarified that academic staff refer to research track staff rather than teaching fellows.

We agreed that more specificity an clarity might be needed in the document, especially concerning the distinction between the roles of postgraduates and staff.

### 10 Administrative Matters

Maria told the committee that Yvonne is leaving on the 8th of April, after a long service in many roles within the department. The post has been readvertised. The aim is to hold interviews on the 26th of February. Hopefully we will have the new staff member in before Yvonne leaves. Replacement will be a full-time post, responsible for all PGR admin, taking also the responsibility of dealing with students that have unconditional offers and those on leave.

Aparajita suggested to bring together a welcome pack of sorts for new PhD students explaining all of the admin trivia that they need to know. Maria agrees this is a good idea, and that Yvonne is already working on something similar to ensure that her handover is smooth.

It was asked if the new member of staff will be using Yvonne’s office. It’s likely that they will use Yvonne’s office, partly because Katie will still be there, and it makes sense for them to be co-located.

### 11 Welfare and Communication Committee

Nothing was raised.

### 12 Athena Swan and Women in Computing

Thejaswini said that there has been an ongoing plan to incorporate a “Women in CS” community, planning activities and finding sources of funding for these activities. **Aparajita, Tanaya, Thejaswini,**
and Sara are meeting to discuss it. The plan is to involve admin staff, academic staff, and PG students - not sure about UG students as of yet.

13 Any Other Business

We’ve had a comment from PGR’s about possibly obtaining a Overleaf Pro subscription for the student body to use. Aparajita asked Karen whether it could be possible to obtain a subscription. Karen explained that this was not the remit of the library and that the SSLC should contact ITS. Karen resolved to figure out who the appropriate point of contact is.

Karen re-iterated that the Library are currently very keen to accept suggestions for additional books for the library. This is also a good time of year to begin appealing to the library for additional subscriptions to journals.

Sara raised a point with Karen that she seems to be able to access fewer papers than she used to. Karen explained that the university no longer permits IP authentication (as it allows, in theory, non-Warwick students and staff to access journals to which their institution is not subscribed), and that accessing through the library, rather than through the journal, is usually a more effective method. Karen also reminded us that Mike Joy is the point of contact for the library in the department.

The UG SSLC wants to arrange a regular social event with PGRs, perhaps weekly at lunchtimes. The UGs would like to invite PGRs, partly for help on modules that they are struggling with. Aparajita says it could be a good opportunity for PGRs to talk to UGs. Sam and Aparajita resolved to continue discussions with the UG SSLC about this.

There is still nowhere in the department to have Skype calls, and it’s a bit over the top to book a 20-person room for a Skype call. Sadly this is standard practice. It was pointed out there are sadly also no offices for visitors, they are all allocated. Discussions were had some time ago about closing off the ends of the third floor, but this discussion did not progress. Maria and Sharon are planning to talk about space allocation with the university as part of an annual process soon anyway. It was pointed out that we should assess the size of this problem; how many people really take Skype calls, especially concurrently? It was suggested that we do a survey on this. There were then discussions about the idea of a “pod” (a kind of temporary structure) for taking calls. Maria and Sharon agreed to look in to this.

14 Time and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place a week or two after the next staff meeting, in Term 3.