1 Present

Aparajita Haldar 2nd Year PhD Representative, SSLC Chair
Sam Coy 1st Year PhD Representative, SSLC Secretary
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
Marcel de Sena Dall’Agnol 1st Year Representative
Teddy Cunningham 2nd Year PhD Representative
Florin Ciucu Head of PGR studies
Mike Joy Senior Tutor
Isabella Slattery 4th Year PhD Representative
Jasmine Grosso 3rd Year PhD Representative
Roger Packwood DCS Technical Manager
Greg Watson Teaching Fellow, DCS
Kelly Chennery Incoming DCS PGR Manager

2 Absent

Thejaswini Raghavan sent her apologies.

3 Corrections and Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting
Held on 29th January 2019

The meeting minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the previous meeting.
4 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Last meeting it was resolved that we would like to look into “Skype pods”. Due to COVID-19, this is no longer as urgent, but we should continue to look into it so that a solution is ready by the time we return to the office.

Progress in obtaining an Overleaf Pro subscription is also slow. Due to the financial impact of COVID-19, expenditure for it may be harder to approve, and ITS may be slower to respond to queries about it. We should continue to enquire about this.

The wellbeing events jointly involving the PGRs and undergrads were largely held in person and for the time being are not happening. Attempts are being made to turn this into a virtual event (the virtual “DCS Atrium” for example).

5 Matters Arising from the Staff Meeting

An environmental agenda item is to be added to the staff meeting in future. Sara is one of those involved with this initiative and is keen to accept comments about ways to reduce the energy footprint of the department, and on matters such as saving food and printing volume. There was a discussion about the relative merits of the mandatory cover sheets on undergraduate printing.

6 PhD Issues and Implications of COVID-19

Funding extensions for PhD students are currently only available to people with funding end-dates between March 2020 and March 2021. It is likely that no funding extensions will be offered to students earlier in their PhD program, in part because of the financial situation post-COVID. Kelly is currently dealing with UKRI extension requests; final year PhD students should hear back about funding extensions in due course.

Sharon will be handing over responsibility for the Annual Reviews to Kelly in due course. These will mainly be happening virtually. This includes Vivas; the doctoral college will be advising on the best way to conduct these. Sara pointed out that annual reviews are especially important at the moment, due to the increased difficulty of monitoring student progress and offering students support. Sharon added that supervision notes should ideally include detailed information about how work is progressing, and that this should help monitor student wellbeing and progress.

There is currently no need to do Change of Study Locations for students on Tier 4 visas; this is a directive from the government.

We might want to consider a PGR annual review session run by other PGRs, as has happened in the past. Sam and Aparajita to look into this.

Some students are worried that they are unable to access equipment useful for their studies. It might be useful as a matter of policy to determine whether students might be able to take some equipment home. We need to consider the cultural implications of this for the PGR community post-COVID; we must continue to encourage collaborative research. People need to be comfortable working from home in the medium- to long-term, and health consequences of a change of work environment must be considered. In cases where students are currently located close to campus, it might be possible to support them with equipment. Maria will raise, to the back-to-campus working group, the issue of final-years perhaps returning to campus slightly earlier in order to assist them with writing-up.

It can be difficult to ascertain how everyone is at the moment. The department is trying to promote initiatives such as the virtual atrium and is keen to engage with everyone. It is worth reminding PhD students to register with a GP if they are not already.
7 WPCCS 2020

Big uncertainties surround the state of affairs later this year. It could be possible to arrange a virtual conference, and this would be well worth doing if the current situation remains going forward. There is considerable friction in organisation because of the lockdown at the moment. We need to start moving forward with organisation, and the first stage is to identify a list of organisers. It might be wise to delay planning the nature of the conference for a couple of months, in order to obtain a clearer picture about what will be possible.

8 STP Update

Preference forms for next term have been sent out to PGRs. We don’t know how teaching is going to take place next year; it could be online, or we might be allowed back on campus. It’s worthwhile to prepare a draft allocation and to see what can be done with it next year. Paolo is currently working on the assumption that the resources available are to be relatively normal, as this is easier to revise downward than the converse.

9 Administrative Matters and IT

We welcomed Kelly Chennery to the DCS PGR community. Kelly will take the position previously held by Yvonne, and will join us from June 1st. She is currently working on some issues regarding COVID, including UKRI funding extensions.

We noted that it was a shame that Yvonne did not get a proper farewell and we hope this can happen in the future.

The financial circumstances the university faces are serious and we need to make savings across all departments in the university. Currently the message from central university is that catering, travel, equipment, and non-capital project funds are to be heavily curtailed. Maintenance will only be done for health and safety reasons or for reasonable adjustments; this includes the toilets on the ground floor of Computer Science. We need to see exactly what this means in practice though.

10 Welfare, Communication, and Athena Swan

The department publicly announced their successful Athena Swan (Bronze) application. The Women in Computer Science group should be revisited in a future meeting at some time in the near future, as a part of implementation.

11 Any Other Business

A project is underway to revamp the website for Computer Science; Greg Watson is the project lead. Issues like the tree of links which takes you to a webpage need to be looked at. We did not have much time to discuss this, but anyone with comments are advised to contact Greg Watson, and he will circulate some documents concerning the proposed changes.

The education strategy document is fairly finalised at this point; Mike Joy is accepting any further comments on this.

12 Time and Date of Next Meeting

We may want a meeting at some point in August due to the circumstances we find ourselves in. If we do not have such a meeting then the next one will be shortly after the staff meeting in Term 1 of
the 2020/21 academic year, in November. A new secretary and chair will be elected in the meeting in November.