University of Warwick
Department of Computer Science

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

MSB2.22 1-2pm Monday 22nd October, 2018

1 Present

Richard Kirk 3rd Year PhD Representative, (SSLC Chair)
Jasmine Grosso 2nd Year PhD Representative, CDT (SSLC Secretary)
David Purser 3rd Year PhD Representative, CDT
Ruqayya Awan 2nd Year PhD Representative (International Representative)
Isabella Slattery 3rd Year PhD Representative
Eleanor Davies Welfare and Communication Committee Representative
Dr. Sara Kalvala SSLC Convenor
Dr. Sascha Ott STP Coordinator
Prof. Mike Joy Senior Tutor
Dr. Florin Ciuci Head of PGR studies
Sharon Howard Departmental and PG Secretary
Alex Baker Postgraduate Research (non-Medicine) Faculty Representative

2 Absent

Ruth Cooper was absent with apologies.

3 Matters Arising from the Minutes

3.1 Action Items from last Meeting

7.1 Assigning advisors to new students is still in progress. There will be a meeting this week to process Annual Reviews.

7.2 Sharon Howard has investigated the issue of advisors without PhDs being assigned to students, as was told that this was fine. Members of the committee were not okay with this occurring regardless; Dr. Sara Kalvala has discussed this with Prof. Ranko Lazic who agrees. Dr. Florin Ciuci will talk further with Ranko about this.

8. A second form about teaching was sent out.

9. The Welfare and Communication committee chair is now Marcin Jurdzinski is undergoing changes and a new constitution that would make WCC and Athena Swan separate committees is being considered.

9. Student webpages have been implemented
4 Corrections and Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting Held on 14th August 2018

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record with no amendments.

5 Election of Chair and Secretary

Richard Kirk has stepped down from his role as chair. Isabella Slattery was elected as the new chair of the DCS PGR SSLC. Jasmine Grosso will remain as secretary for the DCS PGR SSLC. No objections were raised.

6 Issues Raised in Staff Meeting

This year there has been an intake of around 290 undergraduate students. A smaller intake of undergraduates is predicted for next year, as well as a smaller taught postgraduate intake. This is due to the criteria for accepting new students has been raised.

There will be four new academic staff starting from January 2019, as well as increased recruitment for various roles.

A suggestion was made to have a PGR student represented on the teaching committee that is held.

The Research Excellence Framework 2021 was discussed, in particular the fact that completion rates for PGR students are a factor in scores. This may lead to some pushes for PGR students to finish before the deadline for this.

7 PhD Issues

A PGR student was approached by an undergraduate concerning parking permits. The undergraduate was told by a member of staff that they could use the PGR students parking permit, which is not permitted. Staff were requested not to tell undergraduates this.

A PGR student has brought up that they have had an inappropriate amount of teaching hours assigned to them. The current system requires that teachers must reject a contract if they feel the number of hours is too high, however many PGRs feel that they are in a position where they cannot reject contracts. It was suggested that the system be changed such that a PGR is never assigned more than the recommended 6 hours a week in the first place, rather than assigning more hours and the student turn them down. In this situation the PGR student was encouraged to meet with Dr. Sascha Ott, as this case may have been an oversight.

A general discussion was had about the causes of teaching issues within the department, with points including:

- There is a general feeling of burn out amongst PGR teachers, generally caused by increased class sizes and amount of marking.
- The number of PGR teachers has dropped each term, with 60 students teaching in term one last year, but only around 36 this year.
- Alex Baker confirmed that most departments are having similar teaching problems under the STP system, and the university is investigating changing it. Many of the problems seem to stem from the contractual nature of the system, which leads to decreased flexibility.
- The academic staff wanted to let it be known that teaching help is much appreciated and needed.
• When STP was introduced, there was no discussion about the differences between demonstrating for a computer lab and for other more experimental labs, such as chemistry. This was to keep costs down, but led to less appropriate contracts being drawn up.

• Generally the lack of flexibility of STP is a problem for PGR teachers, as contracts take a long time to be changed. It is often difficult to predict ahead of time how many hours a module is going to need.

• We need to be honest and direct with provost about these problems in order to improve the system in future.

An update was given about the term two allocation of teaching. Dr. Sascha Ott will talk to module organisers directly to get a more accurate idea of how many teaching hours are needed, and will also send out a similar survey to PGR students. For term two teaching there are a number of post docs who are required to teach, which should alleviate some of the burden, as well as PGR students who weren’t ready to teach in term one should be ready in term two. Overall there are less teaching hours in term two, so teaching issues are expected to be less. There should be another update within the next two weeks.

Alex Baker was asked his opinion on 4th year undergraduates teaching, but he has not heard of this occurring in any other department.

8 Annual Review

Annual reviews are currently on-going. Sharon Howard is not sure how many have been completed, but most of the first year PGR students have completed their annual reviews. It is difficult to get academic support in the process, as often it is not seen as a priority.

The CDT Annual Review progress happens independently of DCS. One or two people are still remaining who haven’t completed the process.

A suggestion was made to get a student representative on the annual review committee.

9 STP Update

STP was discussed during the PhD issues section.

10 Welfare and Communication Committee Matters

Dr. Claire Rocks requested separate wellbeing and careers matters noticeboards, however there may not be space in the staff room. It was felt that this may be better communicated using email or the website. The screens on the ground floor of Computer Science could be used, as they probably are viewed more by PGR students.

11 Any Other Business

Blinds are not very good in the new building. Sharon Howard has a form for people to fill in about issues with the new building, which will be sent round.

Action Point (Sharon Howard) will send circulate the form.

An issue was raised by Dr. Claire Rocks where some female undergraduate students are not confident in labs, and asked for suggestions on how to make students feel more confident in labs.

• In theory the Moodle module taken by PGR students who teach should help with these matters.
• There is an issue where lab tutors have conversations with each other in labs which may make them harder to approach, which perhaps should be discouraged.
• There may also be an issue with the labs becoming loud outside of normal working hours, with people treating them as social spaces. It may be useful putting signs up confirming what behaviour is appropriate in the labs.
• This may be a matter for another SSLC.

12 Time and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held one week after the next staff meeting, which will be around week two of term two.