

Minutes of the Student and Staff Liaison Committee Meeting

Department of Statistics, Warwick

9:00-10:00am in C1.06 on 21st October 2014

Students: Pieralberto Guarniero (Chair), Christiane Görden (Secretary), Apostolos Gkatzionis (fourth year representative), Giacomo Zanella (third year representative)

Staff members: Dr. Bärbel Finkenstädt (Director of Postgraduate Studies), Eleanor Ingram (Postgraduate Support Officer), David Kinmond (Programmes Manager)

Agenda item 1: New workspace in Senate House

Issue At the beginning of term, the SSLC had been approached by the department to talk about new work spaces for PhD students in Senate House. There are ten desks to be filled in an open area next to offices for six Stats PostDocs who have already arrived.

Discussion The explanation for this is as follows: There are space constraints in the current building and it is a challenge for the department to be given extra space on campus. It has been an effort to get those offices in Senate House and the plan is to enlarge the space in that building over the next years by filling it up with a whole community of researchers, as it is at least a two years period to be bridged before the construction of a new building next to our current one might begin. Even though the situation is not especially pressing right now, there are going to be new professorships in Stats and the arrival of OxWaSP students in the future will demand space. However, in order to be able to keep the new space we have been assigned, it is important that the desks are actually used by people. It is not an option to use Senate House as an extra space for MSc students. The department wishes to find volunteers from the PhD community.

The student representatives reported concerns about this as had been expressed by fellow students, especially with respect to the possibility of interacting with staff in the current building and the impact of a relocation on the quality of their PhD.

The SSLC agreed that it might potentially harm the community to force people who are not willing to do so to move desks and that changes should be done on a voluntarily basis, that is no automatic relocation of fourth year students and the possibility for others to get a desk close to Systems Biology.

Every student moving to Senate House this year will be able to keep their desk in the department for the whole year but should mainly be present at their desk in Senate House.

Agreed procedure Staff members will discuss possible incentives as mentioned by the students (e.g. better computers, double screens, laptops, kitchen facilities, money for buying books) and get back to the SSLC with suggestions. It should be aimed at sorting this out before Christmas so moving desk can be done at the beginning of the new year.

Agenda item 2: Changes to the PhD Course Guide

Issue Students expressed the wish to be informed about changes to the course guide whenever it is updated. In addition, it would be desirable to add more information about the thesis awards.

Discussion The changes to this year's updated version of the course guide are mainly imposed by the Graduate School, they include the following:

- Reimbursement of conference/travel expenses: after a three-months deadline it is not possible to claim back money. Also, a travel form has to be filled in even when no expenses are claimed.
- Extension of PhD period: every student automatically has four years to complete his or her PhD, no extension has to be asked for after three years. In case of illness or other severe reasons that impede a completion of the programme in the set time frame, the option of temporary withdrawal can be applied (there might be visa issues here).
- Monitoring: if a student misses more than six monitoring points, the Graduate School will investigate their case.
- Awards: there is no early submission award any more.

As for the John Copas Prize: this award is currently under change in order to be compatible with guidelines provided by the University. Up to now, the procedure was as follows. PhD students who successfully passed their viva can be nominated by their supervisor or internal examiner for the most outstanding thesis and are then compared to other students in the same cohort. Decisions are based on the reviews of the viva panel and possibly on the student's publications. The Research Committee picks the final candidates.

Agreed procedure In the next printed version all major changes to the course guide are going to be marked so as to make it easier to spot them.

Agenda item 3: Introduction of new members to the department

Issue As the department has been growing a lot over the last months, it would be desirable to have new members introduced to the community on a regular basis.

Agreed procedure An email is going to be send out together with the ‘Monday morning cake’ email saying who has recently joined the department and stressing the opportunity to meet these new members in the Common Room.

Agenda item 4: PhD attendance at seminars

Issue Prior to the start of term an email had been sent out noticing the poor attendance of PhD students at seminars organised within the department. Concerns about unfortunate wording were expressed.

Discussion The student representatives took action by informing first year PhD students during their induction about the importance of regularly attending seminars and a list of reading groups has been set up during this term’s first YRM session.

The SSLC agrees that it is unreasonable for a PhD student to attend all seminars offered but also that it should be common practice for everybody to go to some of the seminars, preferably after discussion with their supervisors.

The department expresses the wish that PhD students take on the opportunity to suggest speakers themselves and host them together with the respective seminar organisers.

As for the wording of the email mentioned above, no telling off of PhD students was intended. It was purely meant to rise awareness of the matter of poor attendance as this is a recurrent issue. Apologies were expressed for any offence taken.