

Minutes of the Student and Staff Liaison Committee Meeting

Department of Statistics, Warwick

11:00-12:00am in C1.06 on 19th November 2015

Students: Pieralberto Guarniero (Chair), Christiane Görden (Secretary)

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

Agenda item 1: Workspace in Ramphal building

Issue Update on Agenda item 1 of the previous three meetings (June 2015, March 2015, October 2014).

Discussion The SSLC invited Paula Matthews (Department Administrator) to provide an update on the workspace situation.

Currently there are five PhD students staying in Senate House who will move to the new offices in Ramphal as soon possible, potentially by the end of week 8. This is conditional on WBS moving out of Ramphal by the end of week 7, as promised. These students will again be sharing the same office in Ramphal. As for the facilities present in the new workspace, there are already copying and printing facilities as well as a fridge in a commonly used kitchen. A coffee machine similar to the one in the Zeaman building common room will be added, and lockers will be present either in the offices or in the corridor. Currently, six PostDocs and one member of staff are already using the new workspace. They will be joined by the students moving from Senate House and up to six additional PhD students around the start of term 3, when this year's OxWaSP cohort comes back to Warwick from Oxford. At that point, more students from Zeaman might be required to change desks.

Pier pointed out the disadvantages associated with being away from the Zeaman building, such as missing out on casual conversation with members of staff. The SSLC hopes this drawback will be having a lower impact on the quality of PhD work and their integration in the departmental community once the workspace in Ramphal is used by a higher number of members from the Department.

As for the new Mathematical Sciences building outside the Zeaman building, this will likely be completed in January 2019 and will be shared with the Department of Computer Science and others. The moving-in date depends on the work in progress on the WMG site adjacent to us and on a fourth floor extension of Zeaman, to be completed before the new building works can start.

Agreed procedure Not needed until term 3.

Agenda item 2: Master students ‘buddy scheme’

Issue The Undergraduate SSLC, based on feedback from students, pointed out that they would like to intensify the contact between MSc students and PhD students. This is thought to be advantageous for those planning to proceed with an academic career.

Discussion The current plan is to introduce a ‘buddy scheme’ where a (volunteering) PhD student acts as a mentor to three to four MSc and possibly M-level students. Informal meetings should happen about once a term, and the Department signalled their willingness to provide funding for lunches.

The SSLC student representatives suggest that a second interaction point could be to involve MSc students in more academic activities, like the YRM and to emphasise that they are invited to attend seminars like CRiSM as well.

Agreed procedure The SSLC will get in contact with Niki Sandhu, the MSc SSLC representative, and then ask PhD students to volunteer for the mentoring roles. The YRM organisers will be asked to stress in their talk announcements that MSc students are invited to attend.

Agenda item 3: Department performance in PRES

Issue The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2015 analysed the feedback of 27 PhD students within Statistics. Results revealed that the Department was doing very well compared to 2013, the only underperforming area being ‘professional development’.

Discussion The Graduate School plans to implement measures similar to the ones for undergraduate students in order to improve the professional development of PhD students across all departments. So for next year’s cohort it will be compulsory to attend courses in e.g. CV writing or thesis writing, time management etc. offered by the University.

The Statistics Department’s action plan in reply to PRES states that current PhD students will be strongly encouraged to maintain a professional webpage, with a view on making this part of the Department’s official representation compulsory. Furthermore, the PhD community is asked to discuss whether it might be helpful in improving their professional development to seek their personal tutor’s advice on the content of their webpage, on the writing of a professional academic CV and on how to talk about their research in lay terms.

Agreed procedure Bärbel will inform PhD students about the action plan via the usual mailinglists.