Minutes for the Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

1.30pm, 5 March 2001

Present: Steve Maddock (Chairman), Julian Briggs, Steve Renals, Tony Chilton, Tony Simons, Michael Mendler, Paul Brechany (1st year Artificial Intelligence Rep), Andrea Day (1st year Software Engineering Rep), Stuart McNulty (1st year Computer Science Rep), Simon Payne (3rd year Software Engineering Rep), Alex Collins (3rd year Computer Science Rep), Mark Tice (2nd year Artificial Intelligence Rep), Kasper Hunt (2nd year Software Engineering Rep), Steve Morris (2nd year Aerospace Rep), Ed Smith (2nd year Computer Science Rep), Nathanial Van Gulck (MSc ASE Rep), David Gibson (4th year Rep)

Apologies: Emma Burnley

Minutes: Linda Perna, Monika Kus

1. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved with comments made under matters arising from minutes.

2. Matters arising from minutes

2.7 Survey of Teaching Equipment in Computer Science

Support has connected four PCs to one printer as suggested to them. Up until a week ago, the new system worked well and students found it to benefit them. Around a week ago, the printer failed. However it will be repaired or replaced.

5.1 Assignment workload

All reps were previously asked to come up with ideas on how to gather reliable information regarding the length of time spent on assignments. Some of the suggestions put forward included:

- Perhaps asking that a form be passed around at lectures as some students felt that hand-ins were normally rushed and therefore no thought would be put into the hand-in forms. Some students and staff did not see this as a suitable solution because students were likely to forget how much time they spent on an assignment weeks after the work was submitted.
- Changing the wording on the assignment hand in forms to include more specific instructions on filling in the slip, therefore clarifying the information wanted for statistics that are more accurate. This was seen to be a more appropriate solution. Steve Maddock agreed to look at the wording on the existing forms.

3. Chairman's Statement

The Chairman's Statement was primarily regarding the following issue of attendance at lectures.

4. Attendance at lectures

Attendance at lectures is becoming a concern with attendance in some cases falling below 70%. In response, some lecturers have considered not putting notes on the web and have complained about attendance to students at their lectures. Students who are attending lectures feel that they are being targetted for those that are not going to classes. Particularly with the issue of making notes unavailable, this tends to create problems when a subject is quite technical and having the notes before a lecture aids in note taking.

Steve was asked to put these concerns forward at the next Departmental Board.

SCM

It was suggested that attendance sheets be passed around at lectures. Tony Simons added that in City College, Thessaloniki Greece (an affiliated College), failure to attend lectures can lead to suspension or the failure of a module. This received a mixed response from the committee.

5. COM1100 Network Architectures - Andrea Day

Andrea raised concerns regarding COM1100 taught by GL. Many students on the course are annoyed at being asked to hand write their assignments which is said to be more time consuming, especially when changes need to be made, than typing up assignments. Students are asked to work in groups and then each member of the group needs to hand write a copy of the final assignment. The students feel that they are being treated as 'children'. However it could be regarded as a way of forcing all group members to work on the assignment and a way of striking a balance between group work and individual work. The students felt that the majority of people tended to work hard and are being penalised for those that don't put as much work into group work. As there will be eight assignments set for the module, the students feel that this will be too much work.

The issue was unresolved and Steve would talk to GL about any other options.

SCM

6. Web page access from outside firewall - Simon Payne

With the advent of free internet access, Simon suggested that perhaps a password should be put on web pages instead of having their access restricted through RATS. Julian said that he would look into the possibility of putting passwords on web pages.

7. COM308 Theory of Computer Science 2 - Simon Payne

Simon raised the issue of the corrections to the COM308 exam paper during the exam. The errors in the exam caused students a lot of stress. Michael Mendler apologised for the regrettable mistakes. He explained that there had been minor typos and a mistake with one of the subquestions. This was noticed and amended about half an hour before the end of the exam and as the subquestion was worth just 10%, an extra 15 minutes was added to the end of the exam.

A taskforce was set up to deal with the problems caused. Exams were marked without the subquestion included and then with the subquestion and then the better mark was taken as the final mark. Most students actually benefited from the marking procedure.

David Gibson raised the concern that the exam officials were not from mathematical backgrounds and therefore, when the corrections were called through, they were unable to explain the correction clearly to students. He suggested that in future, exams involving mathematical formulas should be supervised by technically minded staff or if this is not available, then the exam could be held up and the lecturer could go directly to the exam hall to eliminate any confusion.

Students also felt that it would have been beneficial to have received some feedback after the exam to let them know how the matter would be dealt with as following the exam students were upset and angry.

The committee felt that more needed to be done to prevent errors in the future despite the fact that three lecturers check each exam paper and problems are rare. One suggestion was that another lecturer should attempt each exam paper to ensure that the questions are correct.

Steve noted that the article printed in the Steel Press about this issue was inaccurate and that the Department had written a stern letter to the newspaper.

8. COM321 Network Systems - Alex Collins

Alex raised some problems with COM321, taught by SW last semester. Students expressed that they were unhappy with the module and there have been 17 emailed complaints about it. The exam mark distribution was bi-modal. Some students wanted the exam to be re-marked by another lecturer.

Students complained of poor lectures and slides and a language barrier. There was no course work component for the module despite the web description stating a 40% course component would be involved. There were also no past exam papers or notes available as the previous lecturer left the Department and did not allow for his notes to be used.

It was noted that some of the problems may be attributed to poor lecture attendance for this module and the technically demanding nature of the course being difficult for some students in exam conditions.

Tony Simons explained that a taskforce has been set up to have a look at course material and the exam. The taskforce would then report to the summer exam board with any recommendations.

Finally, it should be noted that SW has spent time recently with students to try and sort out problems.

9. Report from Computer Science Society - Ed Smith

Ed reported that since the last SSLCOM, the Society's web site had been much improved and is up to date with the help of Ian Munday. The recent IBM seminar was not well attended but was very worthwhile for those that went to it. A seminar held by Electronic Arts was very successful and Ed reminded the committee that EDS would be in next Wednesday for a seminar. Sun would also be contacted shortly. The paintball day was well attended.

The summer placements guide was now updated and available on the web. Steve congratulated Ed and his team for all the work they have done regarding the placements and the web site in general.

The Society has looked into programming competitions. Some mentioned include:

- BCS Computer Challenge
- 2001 ACM Northwest European competition in Germany
- Robotics competition in Seattle - substantial sponsorship required!
- BCS Young Programmers.

Accenture have provided the Society £500 in sponsorship money that is yet to be earmarked but may be used for sports uniforms.

The Society were also hoping to organise a Careers day with an evening function possibly at the Red Deer.

10. Union Rep - Ed Smith

The Student Union have a new initiative to try to make themselves more representative of all students. There are now more Reps with one from each department. A current Union activity is pushing for anonymous marking for all course work as well as exams.

Ed asked that a copy of the SSLCOM minutes be sent on to Sarah Hollis from the Union.

LP

As Ed is now Union Rep, he felt that with his workload, a new Undergraduate Rep was required for the Departmental Board. David Gibson agreed to take on this role.

David Gibson

11. Issues to be raised at Faculty of Engineering SSLCOM

The committee put forward the following issues to be raised at the Engineering SSLCOM:

- Smokers in front of the Mappin Building causing an obstruction to the entrance area.
- Working out of hours in the Department for undergraduate and masters students. Tony Chilton would raise this issue.

AJC

12. Other business

Ed requested tea be made available for the next SSLCOM.

LP

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 8th May at 1.30pm - 3.00pm.