

# **Minutes for the Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting**

**2.00pm, 13 December, 2000**

**Present:** Steve Maddock (Chairman), Tony Simons, Guy Brown, Tony Chilton, George Wilson, Steve Renals, Monika Kus, David Gibson (4<sup>th</sup> year MEng Software Eng/Computer Science Rep), Nathaniel Van Gulck (MSc ASE Rep), Stuart McNulty (1<sup>st</sup> year Computer Science Rep), Simon Martin (MSc SST Rep), Simon Payne (3<sup>rd</sup> year Software Engineering Rep), Mark Tice (2<sup>nd</sup> year Artificial Intelligence Rep), Kasper Hunt (2<sup>nd</sup> year Software Engineering Rep), Edward Smith (2<sup>nd</sup> year Computer Science Rep), Andrea Day (1<sup>st</sup> year Software Engineering Rep)

**Apologies:** Emma Burnley, Michael Mendler

**Minutes:** Linda Perna

## **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**

Ed raised the issue that each printer in the Lewin Lab is currently linked to just two computers even though the switch box can accommodate four leads. Support has agreed to connect four PCs to one printer as a trial to see if increasing the capacity for printing will cause any problems.

SUPPORT

## **7. Undergraduate dissertation projects**

Steve has received an email from Alex Collins regarding guidance with the third year projects. Steve asked that if there were any problems with the third year projects, students should email Dr Si Wu and copy the email to Steve.

## **8. Faculty of Engineering Issue**

The issues outlined in the previous meeting were brought forward to the Faculty of Engineering SSLCOM.

In response to the high numbers of people smoking and obstructing the entrance of the Mappin Building, the reps were told that the porters would be notified. Recently the porters have been overheard telling smokers to move, possibly as a result of the committee's complaint.

Regarding the frequent re-naming of lecture theatres in Mappin, the reps were told that our Department seemed to be the only one experiencing problems, therefore information handed out within our Department will need to be clearer.

The reps were also told that complaints about the quality of lecture theatres such as Lecture Theatre 14 would be looked into.

All reps were asked to gather any complaints or comments on the quality of lecture theatres to bring forward to the following SSLCOM and subsequently to the Faculty Staff Student Board.

ALL REPS

### **9.1 New Lecturers**

Tony Simons followed up the complaints put forward by the MSc students regarding the Software Analysis and Design lectures. Tony found that the notes and quality of information for this module were well researched and that problems could be attributed to a gap in understanding between expectation of students' previous knowledge and the level of the lecturer notes. It was also noted that one student from the MSc course was responsible for encouraging others to complain.

Guy Brown also attended some lectures and found them to be well presented and organised. Question answering seemed to be a little problematic. However, on the whole, the ferocity of complaints was not justified.

Measures already taken to improve the module include having a trial exam and providing extra tutorials. It was also accepted by the last Departmental Board that a Peer Review Scheme for lectures would be introduced. The committee suggested that problems could be avoided if new lecturers were made to sit in on courses during the first semester and then teach in the second semester. However, it was accepted that this may not be a practical, working solution.

### **9.2 Number of demonstrators in Java and Databases courses**

In response to complaints about the number of demonstrators in the Java and Database courses, both Guy Brown and Siobhan North increased the number of demonstrators.

### **9.4 Other issues**

Tony Chilton raised the issue of there being no clock in St George's Church lecture theatre at the Estates meeting. It was noted in their minutes and should be dealt with.

Joab Winkler tried using a microphone in his lecture however this was unsuccessful.

## **3. Chairman's Statement**

Steve reported that reviews of the personal tutorial system and module teaching have been conducted. Feedback will be provided on these reviews at the next meeting.

#### **4. Report from Computer Science Society - Ed Smith**

The Computer Science Society now has two successful football teams - one undergraduate, and one masters team.

The Society organised for speakers from Anderson Consulting to visit the department. The seminar was well attended with around 40-50 students attending. It was suggested that SUN be contacted for the next seminar. The Society are also collecting information regarding summer placements. So far around 35 companies have been approached about the possibility of them offering summer placements or sponsorships. This information will be made available to students by February.

Regarding the Vending Machine, the Society will be speaking with Estates about the possibility of having the machine installed in the foyer of Regent Court as the door of the student retreat is too narrow for a large vending machine.

A Paintball trip is being organised, again in March. Next year, the Society is planning for more sports activities. A women's representative is also being sought to encourage more female participation. There will also be a more concerted effort to recruit more people for the Society.

Suggestions made by the committee to improve the popularity of the Society include:

- organising a Programming competition;
- having a Computer Science Society noticeboard so that students know what is going on;
- working on spreading the word about the society by publicising the web address at every opportunity;
- improving the Society's web site.

Kasper has agreed to help with the design of the web site.

#### **5. Review of Personal Tutorial System - Ed Smith**

Ed suggested that a new form of Personal Tutorial System be introduced instead of the existing Personal Tutorials which are not seen as worthwhile. The idea is that tutors who are experts in particular modules would hold tutorials for about 20 students to help specifically with that module.

However, the proposal did not attract wide support as there remained the problem of student attendance. In the past, students seemed only to attend extra tutorials if they occurred just before the hand in for a project.

Emailing the lectures with problems regarding assignment work did not seem to work as the response time from some lecturers was too long.

Some further suggestions for helping students with modules and assignment work included:

- Providing tutorials only during the week before hand in
- Having a Bulletin Board for discussing ideas
- Providing the solutions for past exam papers

## **5.1 Assignment workload**

According to Department guidelines, module assignments should take approximately 20 hours to complete. However some students complained about having to spend far more time on them.

The assignment hand in forms ask students to write in how many hours they spent doing each assignment. The figures collated suggest that the range in time spent is large. It was not clear that the figures were reliable as some students may have included lab work or reading related to lectures in the times. Some members of the committee suggested reducing assignment work and therefore increasing the percentage mark of exams or providing practical exams. Academics felt that practical exams were difficult logistically. For instance, there could be network problems during an exam. Some students said that they did too much work for the marks allocated and deciphering the information in assignments took far too long.

The following possible solutions were offered:

- Promoting discussion lists and then measuring email traffic could indicate that a certain project was too difficult or involved.
- Demonstrators could be asked to attend lectures and do the assignment noting how many hours it would take in a best case scenario.

Before the next meeting Steve asked that the committee come up with ideas on how to gather reliable information regarding the length of time spent on assignments.

ALL REPS

## **6. Issues to be raised at the Faculty of Engineering SSLCOM**

All reps were asked to think of issues for the next meeting.

ALL REPS

## **7. Other Business**

### **7.1 Marking**

Students felt that it was taking too long to receive marking and feedback after submitting their

assignments. The guidelines suggest a two week turnaround but this is not happening for all subjects. Comments on the marking sheet are also too brief, thus not providing enough feedback.

## **7.2 Entry requirements**

Some masters students appear to be struggling and the rep suggested that some may not have met the entry requirements for the course. Guy Brown explained that even if students did not meet the requirement of an undergraduate degree in a "numerate or logical" discipline, this could be compensated by subsequent computing work experience.

## **7.3 Reading weeks**

Some students have complained about the moving of reading weeks. Sometimes reading weeks have changed due to lecturers wanting to attend conferences for their research. It should be noted that the weeks allocated as reading weeks are a guide and can be changed at the discretion of the lecturer.

## **8. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 21 February at 2.00pm.