

The University of Sheffield
Department Of Computer Science

Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting
Wednesday 24 April 2013
G22 Regent Court
13:15

MINUTES

Present:

Staff:	Present: P, Apologies: Ap, Absent: Abs		Undergraduate Year 2		
Chair	Mike Stannett [MPS]	P	Artificial Intelligence	Thomas Allen [TA]	P
Secretary	Kathryn Roden [KMR]	P	Software Engineering	Andreas Tsiapalis [AT]	P
Dept Administrator	Zoe Fletcher [ZCF]	P	Computer Science with Maths	Simou Wang [SW]	Abs
Year 1 Tutor	Amanda Sharkey [AJCS]	P	Enterprise Computing/ITMB	Oliver Grayson [OG]	Abs
Year 2 Tutor	Noel Sharkey [NES]	Abs	Undergraduate Year 3		
Year 3 and 4 Tutor	Daniela Romano [DMR]	Abs	Computer Science (Student Union Councillor)	Sam Brown	P
Director of Teaching	Mark Stevenson [RMS]	P	Artificial Intelligence	Lianne Meah [LMB]	P
MSc Director	Mark Hepple [MRH]	P	Software Engineering	Rob Spick [RS]	Abs
Head of Department	John Derrick [JD]	Abs	Computer Science with Maths	Wing Hang Vince Yeung [WHVY]	Abs
Technical Support Manager	Dave Abbott [DJA]	Ap	Enterprise Computing/ITMB	Yineng Zeng [YZ]	P
Senior Programmer	George Wilson [GAW]	P			
Faculty Librarian	Emily Stock [EA]	P	Undergraduate Year 4		
Students:			Software Engineering	Vaclav Hudec [VH]	P
Student Chair	Lianne Meah		MSc		
Undergraduate Year 1			SSIT	David Steele [DS]	Abs
Computer Science	Andrew Southon [AS]	P	ASE	Rouran Zhang [RZ]	Abs
Artificial Intelligence	Christopher Winward [CW]	P	ACS	Wanchun Zhang [WZ]	Abs
Software Engineering	Matthew Handisides [MH]	Abs	SLP	Alvin Pastore [AP]	P
Computer Science with Maths	Joe MacMahon [JM]	Abs	PhD		
Enterprise Computing/ITMB	Andrew Robertson [AR]	Abs		Sina Shamshiri [SS]	Abs

1. Welcome and apologies

Noted: MPS welcomed the committee and acknowledged the apologies.

Noted: The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a fair and accurate record.

2. Matters arising from the last meeting

Noted: (item 2 on previous minutes) MPS reported that the Faculty have decided that groups of three or more students cannot be self-selected. However students can form pairs which can then be grouped together by academics.

Noted: (item 3.1.1 on previous minutes) MPS reported that he fed the comments relating to COM1005 back to the lecturer regarding varied assignment marks. MPS explained that a different lecturer would be teaching this module next year.

Noted: (item 3.2.1 on previous minutes) MPS fed back to the lecturer of COM2002 that students felt that there was lots of content in COM2002 which had already been covered in COM1002. MPS explained that the lecturer said that the content of COM2002 is different and that it is more detailed. The lecturer will try and make it as clear as possible that the content of the modules are different.

Noted: (item 3.3.1 on previous minutes) MPS fed back the comments that the students felt there was too much content for COM3502, which is a 10 credit module, to the lecturer. MPS explained that the lecturer had made the work harder due to previous comments raised at SSLCOM saying it was too easy. The lecturer said that he would adjust the work again for next year.

Noted: (item 3.3.1 on previous minutes) MPS commented that there were problems with COM3310 due to staff illness. MPS explained that the exam board took steps to make sure that no one was disadvantaged by this.

Noted: (item 3.3.2 on previous minutes) KMR explained that she had not spoken to the careers officer (Prof Roger Moore) about creating a common tag for all email correspondence relating to careers and internships. SB explained that they had discussed this in the pre-meeting, with all the student reps, and though it would be good to create a DCS careers email list.

Action: KMR to liaise with CiCS to see if this is possible (and to make sure there is an unsubscribe option).

Noted: (item 3.3.3 on previous minutes) MPS asked student to email CiCS if they continue to have problems with the iSheffield app for android devices.

Noted: (item 3.4.1 on previous minutes) MPS passed the students comments regarding the complexity of mathematics to the lecturers of COM4502 and COM4509.

Noted: (item 3.4.2 on previous minutes) MPS fed back the positive comments regarding COM4510 to the lecturer. MPS also explained that the lecturer (Prof Guy Brown) is also going to be the Head of Department next academic year.

Noted: (item 4 on previous minutes) the new student chair is Lianne Meah

Noted: (item 4 on previous minutes) MPS explained that he has still not found out what it entails to be a faculty student rep. The faculty rep said that there was only one meeting.

Noted: (item 5 o previous minutes) MPS explained that all the comments from the NSS went to the Teaching Committee on the 14 March. MPS stated that all feedback is helpful.

Noted: (item 6 on previous minutes) the department have been offered courses by the library. MPS took the comments that the students would be interested in these courses to the Teaching Committee.

Action: ES to let Helen Moore know that the department are interested in these courses.

3. Teaching Related Matters

3.1. Level 1

3.1.1. Course delivery

COM1001 (Crossover project): Some students felt that the mark scheme did not match the requirements. AS brought this up with one of the lecturers (Kirill Bogdanov) and received emails clarifying. However the requirements were fundamentally changed half way through the course. AS commented that a different lecturer (Marian Gheorghe) marked to different requirements.

Action: MPS to pass comments on to lecturers.

COM1002 (Foundations of Computer Science): Students are very happy with the lecturer (Paul Mitchener)

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

COM1003 (Java Programming): Students are concerned that the final assignment is based off their performance in a tournament of their respective game programs. Students are worried that they could lose marks dependant on the performance of other people, not their own.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

COM1005 (Machines and Intelligence): The lecturer has mentioned to students that there are languages which are more suited to artificial intelligence which could be used instead of Java. Some of the students feel that Java isn't the right choice of language for the module and feel that learning how to apply it to AI problems is a waste of time.

COM1006 (Devices and Networks): Students have raised a number of concerns regarding teaching and support for this module.

The lecturer will stop teaching for an unnecessarily long amount of time when he sees students using mobile phones or who appear to be distracted. Students feel that it is these peoples own fault if they don't pay attention and that the lecturer should continue to teach those who are interested.

The lecturer won't answer questions outside the lecture which is a problem for students who may be too shy to ask in lectures and for those who have missed a lecture for legitimate reasons.

Students would like answer sheets for practical classes to be made available rather than just going over them in lectures. Students would like copies of the worked answers after the lecture has taken place.

The lecturer has commented that he finds the subject matter of the course boring which the students feel doesn't help their confidence.

If students don't bring the notes (a 60 page pdf document) to the lectures then the lecturer will point this out in a lecture and tell them they need to bring them as he didn't like it when he had to make notes. Students would prefer to make their own decisions on how to make notes in a lecture.

Noted: The L2 and L3 SSLCOM reps confirmed that similar issues were also reported last year about this lecturer.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

3.1.2. Library and IT

Noted: Some lecturers have commented to students that the library didn't have copies of books they had recommended for their course.

Noted: ES suggested that students encourage the module lecturers to contact the library so they can order more copies of the books.

Students are also encouraged to put in reservations for books as if there is a large demand for a book then more copies will be ordered.

3.1.3. Resources

Noted: Students prefer computer based methods of presenting lectures rather than when lecturers use overhead projectors.

3.1.4. Strengths of the course and areas for improvement

Noted: AS reported that most students are happy with their course and where there is a problem it is normally about individual features of a module.

3.2. Level 2

3.2.1. Course Delivery

COM2003 (Automata, Logic and Computation): TA reported that having the lectures combined with the problem classes in the second semester worked really well as attendance was much higher than in the first semester.

3.2.2. Strengths of the course and areas for improvement

COM3420 (Software Hut): Students feel that the forced use of software and frameworks is not necessary, there have been lots of problems with git/shell server etc.

Noted: TA explained that students would prefer if a piece of software was recommended rather than being told what to use. MRH responded that if a version control wasn't required then students would not use it, he explained that git is a serious piece of software which should still be

used. SB suggested that having a tutorial about it would be useful and LM felt that it is assumed that students know how to use it.

Noted: MPS asked what extra information would students like. The students responded with

- Slides with necessary basic commands

- Links to other tutorials

- More on merging

- More information on what errors mean and how to fix them

- Better teaching in the first year such as a proper lecture on it

- More lectures in Software Hut for example best practice when using frameworks

Action: MPS to pass comments on to lecturers which use git (COM1001, COM3420, COM4525)

COM2003 (Automata Logic and Computation): Students would like an exam in January. Many were upset to learn the reason that there wasn't an exam in January was because of the EYH/GEC weeks.

Students feel that having a year-long module with only one end of year exam causes a lot of stress. SB and LM have heard that the January exams may be coming back.

Action: SB to speak to Union Officer to ask about January Exams

Action: MPS to ask lecturers who teach module which have exams affected by the EYH/GEC weeks to get their opinion on having January exams.

COMU27 (ITMB course):

Noted: YZ explained that students on the ITMB course feel under a lot of pressure as there are no exams in the final year; they have to do all assignments and a dissertation in 12 weeks and all the deadlines are close together. MPS explained that students can speak to lectures to see if they can get deadlines moved and to see if they can make use of the full 15 weeks (three week exam period).

3.3. Level 3

3.3.1. Course Delivery

COM3504 (The Intelligent Web):

Noted: Students felt that the lab classes were not properly focused with no clear objectives being set. Students would like the lab notes to be in a separate document rather than being combined with the lecture slides. Students would also like to have longer lab classes as much time is taken up setting up platforms or interfaces (for example, Eclipse).

Noted: Students have reported that the TomCat server is unstable. GAW responded that there have been problems with the TomCat server but if students have their settings wrong it can break. SB suggested it would be good to have more information on how to use TomCat in Eclipse.

Noted: LM reported that the assignment brief was updated three or four times which caused a setback for some students who had already begun working on the assignment.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

COM3240 (Adaptive Intelligence):

Noted: Some students felt the lab classes were initially daunting and would have liked clearer objectives and explanations. There were some complaints about the teaching and some students felt that the level of the lab class was much higher than what they had been taught.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer

COM3501 (Computer Science and Forensics)

Noted: Students would like lab classes. They feel three hours of lecture is too much and it would be better to have a two hour lecture and 1 hour lab class. Students reported that lectures often finished early.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

3.3.2. Strengths of the course and areas for improvement

Noted: With the proposed release of Java 8 students feel it would be useful to incorporate the functional programming aspects into the Haskell Module (COM2001) so that there is some overlap with a previously taught programming language and a new one.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

Noted: Students would like Departmental computers to be ready with all the necessary plugins etc. for course work but they have found they are often not. GAW commented that every summer the support team ask the academics to let them know what software they need but they don't always receive this information. MPS added that if a lecturer takes over teaching a module they may change the teaching material and not tell support. MPS explained that over the Easter break some of the servers crashed and there were problems migrating things to new servers. GAW added that the academics are encouraged to do assignments on the Departmental machines to make sure that everything works.

3.3.3. Other

Noted: LM asked if the department would pay for refreshments at the pre-meeting which student reps attend to try and encourage attendance.

Action: KMR to find out if this is possible.

3.4. MSc**3.4.1. Course Delivery****COM4513/6513 (Natural Language Processing).**

Noted: Students would like the first part of the module to be more engaging so students can maintain concentration throughout lectures. The lecturer just reads through the slides. The students are happy that the lecturer is always available and is helpful.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

3.4.2. Library and IT

COM4511/6511 (Speech Technology)

Noted: The choice to use Matlab created some problems for students:

Students cannot afford it on private machines

Need to work with remote servers (Hornbeam broke over the Easter vacation)

Because of these problems student have to work in the Lewin which has limitations (opening hours, booked for labs etc).

It was suggested that Python is used next year as it is free and you can do the same things with it.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer

3.4.3. Strengths of the course and areas for improvement

COM3504/6504 (The Intelligent Web)

Noted: Students would like a "how-to" style guide to help when setting up the programming components at the start of lab classes. Students find that setting up the programming components at the start of a lab can take a long time and is not always successful.

Action: MPS to pass on comments to the lecturer.

4. Student dissertation project allocation

Noted: TA felt that the current way of allocating third year dissertation project is not optimal and that there was a lack of guidance for students wanting to propose their own projects. MPS explained that we will consider any ideas that anyone has to improve the system but did warn that any changes can take a long time as they have to be approved by the Departments Executive Committee or Teaching Committee

Noted: RZ asked how the deadlines are decided. MPS explained that for MSc dissertations their deadlines are affected by student visas as they work on their projects over the summer so the poster session is set before the handing in of the dissertation. For UG students the dates are fixed and are always in the same week of term.

Noted: SB asked about the marking of projects. MPS explained that two markers independently mark the project. The marks need to be within 10% of each other and if they are not it is sometimes required to ask a third person to mark the dissertation.

Noted: MPS suggested that supervisors can recommend good past dissertations to look at.

5. Two new module proposals

Noted: MPS asked the members of SSLCOM what they thought of the two new module proposals (COM4518: Natural and Unconventional Computation and COMPPP: Algorithms, Computability and Complexity). All the students thought that these would be interesting modules to study.

6. Student scholarships

Noted: A first year Computer Science student asked, by email, if the scholarship arrangements could be reviewed. He pointed out that scholarships are being offered to students starting in 2013/14 but those who started in 2012/13 were not offered anything.

Noted: MPS explained that this comment was sent to the Executive Committee. He explained that if we could have offered the scholarships last academic year we would have done, but we only got approval to offer them for 2013/14.

Action: MPS added that SSLCOM was probably not the right committee to raise this issue in but will find out who can help and pass the comments on.

7. Staff Responses to Autumn Semester Student Evaluation

Noted: Members of the board were asked to look through the comments and to raise any issues to the Chair.

8. Library news

Noted: ES introduced herself as the new Faculty Librarian. St Georges Library is now going to be open 10:00 – 18:00 at weekends during the rest of term time.

Noted: ES asked if anyone had any issues to raise about the library. The students mentioned the plug sockets in the IC. SB commented that the plug sockets in the meeting rooms have been done. ES said she would feed this back to staff at the IC.

9. Any other business

Noted: Many students are unhappy that MGT388: Finance and Law for Engineers is a core module for the third year. It was explained that the module is core to ensure the courses get BCS accreditation.

Noted: MPS read a note from the suggestions box which is located in the Lewin Computer Room. A student has requested that a message pop up before the computers automatically log off at 22:00. As the lab closes at 21:00 this forced log off should not affect students.

10. Date of next meeting

Noted: The dates of the next meetings will be set at the start of the next academic year.