

Teaching Committee Minutes - Wednesday 29 April 2015

Present: B Franke (Convener), P Anderson, G. Bell, J Bradfield, S. Cohen, K. Farrow (ITO Manager), R. Fisher, S Goldwater, K Hardman, K Lee (Secretary), J Moore, I. Murray, N. Nardelli (student), D Sannella, I. Stark, C Stirling, A. Storkey, C. Sutton, H Thompson, M Wright

1. Apologies for Absence: M. Cryan, J. Lee, V. Nagarajan, J. Oberlander, H. Pain, R. Shillcock, P. Stevens, S. Vijayakumar

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were taken as read.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Communication with External Examiners

ACTION COMPLETE: J. Bradfield has brought an item to this Teaching Committee

3.2 Teaching Support Roles for Honours and Masters Students

ACTION COMPLETE: C. Stirling has brought an item to this Teaching Committee

3.3 Archival/Deletion of pre-2006 Teaching Courses/Web Content

ACTION COMPLETE: Knowledge Management Team have confirmed the policy is now online.

3.4 Project Marking Scheme Modification

D. Sannella has liaised with Computing Support and the marking forms have been changed to make it clear that comments will be available to students. Automatic provision of feedback to students is underway but will probably not be ready for 2014/2015 projects. The change required to the algorithm for computing the mark range from the criteria has been implemented.

4. InfPALS Update

A programme report on InfPALS (Informatics Peer Assisted Learning Scheme) for 2014/15 was provided; this is a University-wide initiative and the first year that the School has run it. The general comment was that InfPALS had done very well and the useage has been quite steady with less fluctuation than InfBase.

It was noted that a senior leader role for InfPALS is required for 2015/16, a substantive post which took approximately 50 hours last year and may take up more, with up to 70 hours being a realistic figure. The post should remain funded by the School of Informatics. The School of Maths have a full time academically qualified officer in this role as Student Learning Advisor, which has significantly helped the student experience and Informatics should reflect on the value of such a post. Teaching Committee was in favour of continuing with the InfPALS senior leader role as outlined. Because of the space issues at Forrest Hill, the venue for InfPALS is still uncertain.

5. Outstanding Projects

At the latest TPR it was noted that other universities gave MSc dissertations with a mark of over 80 per cent the label "distinguished dissertation" which are also made available online. It was proposed that Informatics could take the same approach, with MSc project marked over 80 per cent labelled as "Outstanding" and only make these available for download online, rather than our existing policy of projects over 70 per cent being online. No new formal moderation would be required to label these projects as Outstanding. The proposal for labelling Outstanding Projects was supported by Teaching Committee however it was agreed the current policy of projects with a mark over 70 per cent being available to download should remain. The "Outstanding Project" label will be added to the students' HEAR transcript via EUCLID. Students should sign a release to allow their dissertations to be available online. A similar Outstanding Project policy will be looked at for Honours projects.

ACTION: I. Murray will liaise with Computing Support to arrange for a new 'showcase' webpage to be created for projects over 70 per cent.

6. Secure Communication with External Examiners

Guidance on communicating sensitive information to external examiners was provided, along with the range of technologies to do so. The information will be delegated to the relevant Conveners.

7. Teaching Support

Due to the shortage of teaching support and increase in student numbers, there has been an increased use of Honours and some MSc students as tutors for non-honours courses. A policy has been proposed to allow Honours and in exceptional cases MSc students to be tutors for UG1 and UG2 courses with various conditions for employment. These include a first class average across studies in previous years, a limit to the number of tutorials taken and on marking, the interview process being followed and the student undertaking the appropriate training session. The ITO also commented on this policy, noting that there should perhaps be a maximum number of hours imposed and seeking clarification on some items, such as the exceptional cases in which MSc students would be employed and who would make this decision and the process in which students previous marks would be checked as being first class average.

After some discussion, the maximum recommended hours was agreed at 15 hours, with a suggestion of 3 tutor roles or 2 tutor roles and 1 demonstrating role to be taken per student. The policy should contain a further amendment on marking, in that students who do mark coursework should be limited to a certain percentage of the overall course mark. The first class average required by Honours students should be checked at the discretion of the lecturer who interviews the student. There will also need to be a way of monitoring the amount of hours that students are employed for which should be added to the policy. It should be made explicit that the policy only relates to Honours courses.

ACTION: ITO to amend the policy on the basis of the discussion and agree with Director of Teaching

8. Communication of Progression Decisions

The deadline dates for communication of final course, progression and awards for students was provided, noting that there would be an additional progression Board meeting held from now on. The outcomes from the progression meetings will be uploaded to EUCLID, formalising the reporting of progression decisions. The minutes from the progression meeting should be approved by the Convener by the next day to ensure these deadlines are met.

9. December Exams for Honours Courses

UG3 student N. Nardelli presented a petition signed by 130 Honours and MSc Informatics students which called for the consideration of alternative options to the current Semester 2 exam schedule, which they believe can be stressful and problematic. These options include having Semester 1 courses examined in December, allowing lecturers of Semester 1 courses to choose when courses are examined, split examination across two exam diets or lowering exam weightings to a maximum of 50 per cent of the course mark for Semester 1 courses examined in April. It was noted that the exam periods for 2015/16 courses were not able to be changed however potential solutions for future were discussed, including increasing the number of 20 credit courses to lower the number of exams and having higher coursework weighting for the overall mark. Any changes to the current system would also impact on deadlines for both Semester 1 and Semester 2 courses which need to be taken into account. It was decided that a working group of staff and students should be made up to discuss the pros and cons of these suggestions and the proposals from this group should come to a future Teaching Committee meeting. The third year curriculum review may also bring up these issues.

ACTION: C. Stirling and B. Franke to put together a working group to discuss these concerns and find potential alternatives to Semester 2 exam, with representation from UG3 up to MSc students and staff.

10. Year Organiser Reports

The UG1 Year Organiser reiterated concerns over tutorial sizes for 2015/16 and the space issues at Forrest hill. The increased UG1 cohort in 2014/15 meant that each student received slightly less time

and attention which was not to the benefit of the student and the same issues will be faced as they become the UG2 cohort next year. Advertising for Non-Honours tutors earlier than usual is a difficult option as the conversion numbers will not be known until August. Larger example classes instead of tutorials were discussed as an option.

The MSc SSLC meeting and course surveys brought up several course specific comments on teaching styles and individual staff practice. Peer observation was discussed as a way helping to improve the standard of teaching by encouraging lecturers to view excellent teaching. Course surveys and SSLC's have continuously identified this gap and there was discussion on formalising this process.

ACTION: C. Stirling to propose a policy on peer observation with input from the Head of School and to bring this to a future Teaching Committee.

The other reports were taken as read.

11. Recruitment Report

The current undergraduate target for Scottish/UK/EU students this year is for 145, with additional students from the rest of the world increasing this figure to over 160. The targets are similar to last years, but these increased greatly at a later stage. The conversion rates are lower however the number of students applying has increased considerably. The difference from last year is that College are not accepting lower standard grades however there was confusion over what a 'typical' offer that is outlined in the prospectus consists of.

ACTION: H Pain to confirm what a typical offer to UG students comprises as outlined in the prospectus.

12. Director of Teaching Report

The report was taken as read, noting that there would be a decant meeting held on Monday 4 April for staff.

13. AOCB

There was no further business discussed.