

Sol Course Proposal Review Form

Version: Nov 2021

Reviewer Name: John Longley

Name of Proposed Course: Foundations of Cognitive Modelling

Date of review: 24 November 2021

Instructions to reviewers: please read through the course proposal and answer the reviewer questions below. Return your completed review form to iss-bos@inf.ed.ac.uk by the review deadline. If you are new to the School or to reviewing course proposals, it may help to read some of the guidance provided to course proposers, mostly included as prompts in the course proposal form itself (including links to external reference materials).

1 Course overview and case for support (Sec 1 of proposal)

1.1 Course name and acronym

Given the course description, are the name and acronym appropriate, or would you suggest any changes?

The title is reasonable, but might there be an alternative that reflects the 'IRR' dimension of the course as well as the CogSci content? E.g. would 'Foundations and Research Methods in Cognitive Modelling' be too long?

1.2 Summary and Description

Do the Summary and Description make the course sound attractive, including a student-friendly overview of the learning aims, content, and style of the course, and (if need be) who the course is aimed at? Are there any issues with content or wording that you feel should be addressed?

The Summary and Description cover the essential points, but I'd suggest revising the Summary so as to communicate better with students who don't already have a clear grasp of what 'cognitive models' are. It may be worth taking a few more words to anchor it with reference to a few specific, accessible examples of such models and what their purpose is.

The Description partially addresses this by providing a long list of specific topics, but still doesn't exactly explain what cognitive models are.

1.3 Target audience and contribution to the School's curriculum

Please comment on the case made for this course and its contribution. For example,

- Is there good evidence that it would attract students, or is otherwise necessary (e.g. strategically)?
- Do you have any concerns about how it would fit in with other courses (or even concerns about other courses that come to light here)?
- Is the description of the target audience consistent with the requested SCQF level? Are there any cohorts of students (degree programmes or years) that may not have been considered, including students from outside the School?

Note that even if a course is academically sound, BoS can still reject it if the case for support is not convincing (ie if developing and delivering the course is unlikely to be a good use of resource).

The course is envisaged as fulfilling a dual role, both teaching the generic research-related skills fostered by IRR and giving students a broad overview of the Cognitive Modelling landscape. The course would be compulsory for CogSci MSc students and available to certain other students. Unlike the 10-point IRR in Semester 1, this would be a 20-point Full Year course – this would mean less freedom for students to select their own courses than on other MSc programmes, but I assume the programme coordinators have considered this and are happy with it.

I think the proposal adequately makes the case for a CogSci-specific incarnation of IRR. In view of the dual role of the proposed course, an obvious question is whether it would be better to make it two 10-point courses, or one 10-point course plus some CogSci provision within the existing IRR structure. The sense I get from the proposal is that a single 20-point course would allow for closer integration between the two strands – but it might nevertheless be worth addressing this question explicitly.

The mere fact of being a compulsory course for the CogSci MSc would ensure a good number of students, so no concerns there.

1.4 Learning Outcomes

Please comment on the Learning Outcomes. Questions to consider include:

- Are the verbs specific enough that it is clear what type of assessment could be used for each Learning Outcome, and what level of cognitive skill/understanding is needed (e.g., Bloom's taxonomy low levels such as recalling or defining, medium levels such as applying or explaining, high levels such as evaluating or designing)?
- Are the Learning Outcomes appropriate to the level of the course, and at an appropriate level of generality?
- Are there any LO's that you feel are missing, or other suggested changes?

These all look good.

1.5 Other comments

Do you have any other comments about anything in Section 1 of the proposal?

Not sure if this fits best here or in Section 2, but I'll mention it here. The proposal anticipates 20-25 MSc students a year, and proposes a quota of ~40 students in total. Moreover, Section 2 (page 10) is explicit that the course would not scale to more than 50 students. In view of this, it seems to me that there should be some plan for what happens if the number of MSc CogSci students is much larger than expected. Or is the programme itself capped in some reliable way?

2 Course delivery, assessment, resourcing (Sec 2 of proposal)

2.1 Use of time

After reviewing the proposed content, use of timetabled activities, and plans for assessment, please comment on the use of time, in light of the guidance to use no more than 6-7h/week for a 10pt course, or 13-14h/week for a 20pt course, including all course activities. For example,

- Does the course appear to be keeping within those guidelines, is it over-ambitious, or is that difficult to determine based on the proposal so far (and if so, why)?
- Is the balance of activities reasonable (e.g., will students have enough self-study time outside of timetabled activities and assessment)?
- Do plans for support activities (labs, tutorials, etc) look appropriate or could they be improved?
- Are there any inconsistencies between what is stated in the text, and the “breakdown of activities” table? (This table is notoriously confusing; if you’re not sure just say so.)

The overall workload looks fair. By comparison with a ‘typical’ course, the contact hours are heavily weighted towards seminars/tutorials rather than lectures, but that seems fine.

I have a slight concern over the time taken for the first assessment component, but will discuss this below.

2.2 Assessment and feedback

Aside from the amount of time spent on assessment (discussed above), are there any other issues with the plans for assessment and feedback? For example,

- Is the number of items of assessment reasonable (normally, no more than 1 summative coursework for a 10pt course, or 2-3 for a 20pt course)?
- Is it clear which learning outcomes are assessed by each piece of assessment, and that all LOs are covered?
- Are there any concerns about whether the assessment will scale effectively if the class is larger than expected, or whether the assessment design will make it difficult to align marks with the Common Marking Scheme (e.g., due to automarking)?
- Do the plans require tight turnaround times which may not be feasible?

My one concern here is over the first assessment component: the ‘weekly brief responses’, worth 20% of the course mark. It is stated in Section 2 that these should take no more than an hour each. But how many of these are envisaged? If they are really ‘weekly’ for both semesters of a full year course, that is potentially up to 20 hours of work, whereas the other two assessments, each worth 40%, are allocated just 8-12 hours each. This may be the intention and may indeed be reasonable, but the intended number of these brief responses should be clarified – as should their length (e.g. in number of words).

It's stated that feedback on these brief responses will be provided orally during discussion, and written formative feedback will be provided on one of them. But I think that for a component worth 20% of the course, more definitive written feedback should be given on the responses as a whole. Not necessarily on every individual response, but perhaps at the end of each semester?

2.3 Decolonisation, inclusion, and ethics

Are you satisfied with the plans for making the course inclusive and decolonising the content and delivery (including designing for accessibility; gender, racial, cultural, and other issues)? Do you have any suggestions for improvement in these areas?

This all looks fine.

If the course proposal does not already mention social or ethical issues related to the course topic, should these be addressed in the course somehow? This is especially relevant for 20pt courses. If so, please provide suggestions if possible. *(Note that if others agree, the proposer may be asked to modify the course description, Learning Outcomes, and/or Graduate Attributes, as appropriate.)*

In view of the breadth of the course, I imagine there would be plenty of scope for engaging with social and ethical issues, though I am not qualified to make specific suggestions.

2.4 Resource requirements and other comments

For now we will mainly have SG and/or BF evaluate the resourcing section, but if you have any comments about that, or anything else to say about Sec 2, please say so here.

See 1.5 re the course quota. No other comments.

3 Sample course materials and publicity (Sec 3 of proposal)

Do you have any comments about this section? *(You may wish to consider whether the materials provided teach or assess the types of learning outcomes listed in Section 1.)*

Sample documents on preparing presentations and preparing final essays are provided. These look fine to me.

4 Requisites, timetabling, and other details (Sec 4-5 of proposal)

4.1 Delivery period and requisites

Do the delivery period and co-/pre-requisites present difficulties for any particular cohort of students? If so, who? *(Consider all years/degrees for whom the course is intended, both UG and PGT. Note that most PGT students will not have taken any of our UG courses, so “other requirements” or recommended prerequisites should often be used instead of required prerequisites).*

No problems. Computational Cog Sci is named as a recommended but not required prerequisite.

4.2 Other requirements

For courses open to PGT students or other courses without formal prerequisites, does the “other requirements” box provide sufficiently specific guidance about required background in mathematics, programming, or other areas, and is it reasonable to expect most target students to have this knowledge? Please highlight any concerns.

Yes, this is clear.

4.3 Tags

If this is a level 9-10 course, do the chosen tags (Sec 5) seem appropriate? If not, please suggest changes. (SG will also review this section, in case you’re not sure.)

These seem correct.