MSc Student Staff Liaison Committee
3pm, Monday 16 March, Room 5.01, Appleton Tower

Present: I. Murray (chair), Q. Liu (rep), O. Olukoya (rep), K. Lee (secretary)

1. Introduction and Overview

The meeting opened with a brief introduction on the format and purpose of the meeting.

2. External Examiners Comments

The reps read the External Examiners comments and questioned one of T Norman's comments regarding MSc dissertation marking and improved consistency between marks. I. Murray explained how the School implemented a training course last year for markers which increased the consistency with dissertation marks and that there is a new marking form this year which should further help with this issue. There were no further comments on the reports.

2. Comments on Courses

Informatics Research Review (IRR)
There were some concerns raised about the fact that students do not know whether they have passed or failed this course until after the May exams and students would prefer to know this information. Because of the late submission date of the project (in January), the marks for this course need to be ratified by the Board of Examiners in June so it would be difficult to make this information available earlier. Other comments were that the marking forms could be quite inconsistent depending on the tutor with some markers perceived as 'harder' than others, whilst some markers had little comment at all.

Algorithmic Game Theory (AGTA)
There had been concern from students that the lecturer did not provide formative feedback or model solutions to coursework. Students would like more interaction with the lecturer.

Reinforcement Learning (RL)
The reps noted that attendance at lectures and tutorials for RL has dropped as time passed as students felt that the lecturer had little interaction with them and found lectures difficult to follow.

Robotics: Science and Systems (RSS)
Students reported that it would be helpful if there were more flexibility with the languages used. It would be useful if the course webpage advised that students require experience in C++ to do this course.

As a side note, the reps noted that there are no Level 9/10 courses that teach C or C+, similar to an Introduction to Java Programming course, which would be helpful for those without this background.

Introductory Applied Machine Learning (IAML) and
Machine Learning & Pattern Recognition (MLPR)
As maths is used quite heavily in these courses, a good background knowledge in maths is required and this is something that could be more clear to students. Student reps suggested the importance of maths knowledge be advertised more on the course webpages and perhaps more tutorial support for students without this experience. I. Murray (as MLPR lecturer) said that even with additional support students without a mathematical background will still struggle to catch up so tutorials would not necessarily help. The maths requirement is mentioned at the beginning of semester in lectures and on the course webpage.

Text Technologies for Data Science (TTSDS)
The weighting of coursework sometimes does not seem to merit the effort that is required for this course, and other Informatics courses generally. Although there are pedagogical reasons for the coursework, students felt it was unfair that TTSDS coursework did not have the same weighting as comparable assignments for other courses and suggested some coursework could be merged so that there would be fewer submissions required. I. Murray noted that these issues had been raised previously, not just for this course but generally within the School of Informatics, however there is resistance from the Board of Studies to increase the weighting of coursework in all courses across the board.

MSc Dissertation (DISS)
There were some concerns regarding the project allocations for MSc dissertations. Some students felt there were not enough choices of projects and they are having to choose four preferences whilst only having interest in two or three projects, then finding themselves allocated to the project they are disinterested in. I. Murray said that students should choose carefully and try to pick projects they have an affinity with. Reps also reported that it was felt that there may be less guidance from supervisors outside of the School of Informatics. An information session was held for new and external supervisors last year which went through the requirements for supervision and marking and may again be held this year. There were queries on the requirements of supervisors that may be overseas during the dissertation period. Despite physical absence, supervisors should at least be holding weekly Skype meetings with students and anyone who is not having these meetings with their supervisor should contact I. Murray or the ITO as soon as possible so the situation can be resolved.

General comments on courses
Student reps noted that the rules for progression to the MSc dissertation can be confusing for students, particularly as to whether students can progress if they have failed courses (especially IRR) and the 55 per cent average required. I. Murray has stated the rules on progression as clearly as possible on the MSc programme webpage but the progression rules generally are somewhat confusing.

The balance weighting of exams and coursework was discussed further, with I. Murray emphasising the need for time management in studies.

Students noted that they would like more teamwork and presentations in courses as few MSc courses have these elements.

3. Comments on Facilities and Support

The student reps were expecting better computer facilities than the ones on offer. Additionally, the angles of the desks are not always convenient and chairs should be adjustable. The reps reported that sometimes the DICE machines do not work; these should always be reported to Computing Support. There was also mention that the size of the quiet computing lab should be bigger.

A rep commented that sometimes Computing Support response times could take a while, however I. Murray asserted that a 24 hour turnaround was usual.

4. Admin Support

The Teaching Organisation had been helpful, with a quick turnaround with queries, extensions and in particular course changes.

5. AOB

The Year Organiser commented that students should and are encouraged to fill out course surveys with their thoughts, which would not only help benefit students but help teaching staff to improve their courses if required.

There was no further comments from student reps. The Year Organiser mentioned that any further comments or issues could be emailed to him directly.