

Summary of PTES Free Text Comments

This summary is intended to support some discussion at Teaching committee. The students mostly made constructive comments on the issues they faced in AY 2017/18. This is a summary of the comments with potential measures we could take to help resolve the identified issues. Issues are included here if they occurred across multiple comments. Of course, this is an unrepresentative sample, but we should reflect on these, consider the extent to which these issues are manifest in our programmes and consider how we might resolve them. Academic year 2017/18 was not an easy year and the students were completing the PTES questionnaire when the UCU action was ongoing. Many students found the UCU action quite disruptive to their studies and this is reflected in the comments to some extent.

Following the list of issues is a list of potential solutions. This is intended to start discussion and should not be thought of as concrete proposals. We have limited resource and so should develop a manageable collection of actions and a plan to implement over the next year. I'd like the conclusion of the discussion to include a small number of measures we can take promptly together with some longer term measures that we will consider in more detail together with implementation details.

Proposal: That we publish this list and make it available to the incoming MSc cohort so they can see we are responding to comment.

Degree programme issues

- No difference between the degree programmes
- Too much flexibility in course choices, makes it possible to avoid difficult courses
- Lack of detailed info on degree programme, confusion over specialist areas
- Lack of guidance on course choices – no difference between one MSc or the other
- More guidance on pre-requisite knowledge for courses (maths, coding, etc)
- Lack of cohesion between courses (same content in some of them)

Potential Solutions (to happen in sequence):

1. *Change of curriculum so that degree programmes have compulsory course collections.*
2. *Cap number of students for each degree programme.*
3. *Quota individual course numbers at a level sufficient to make the degree programme numbers viable but within the resourcing allowance for the course.*
 - *More guidance for students in induction week as to how to choose courses*
 - *Stricter DPTs for MSc degree programmes – giving more structure*
 - *More guidance to be provided on pre-requisite skills (e.g. Iain Murray's MLPR webpage) – pre-arrival emails*
 - *Take into account "prohibited" combinations which may have similar course content*

Teaching

- Students felt research was prioritised over teaching
- No space in the labs or lecture theatres, lecture theatre issues re sound and recording
- Courses were too big – not enough time to ask questions in lectures
- Group work policy should be introduced as this can cause issues – there is no way of formally reporting issues such as a team member not contributing etc
- Workload is too high for 10 credit courses, no time to process material being taught
- More year-long courses to spread out coursework so they can master the content

- There is too much weighting on exams
- Consistency of information between courses e.g. different format of webpage (hopefully Learn will fix this?) but coursework deadlines are an issue
- Lack of communication to students – e.g. deadlines change without an email to students (or staff)
- Feedback is late and not detailed, more marking transparency and consistency

Potential Solutions:

1. *Take more account of course surveys by offering “buddying”/mentoring to those concerned by their evaluation scores.*
2. *Training session for academics on AV equipment in lecture theatres.*
3. *Teaching lunches to focus on assessment design, including group work.*
4. *Emphasise the recommendations for coursework in 10/20 credits courses.*
5. *Give clear direction to PTs that choosing lots of 10 credit courses in each semester can be difficult for student workloads and advice on how to manage workload, especially in Semester 1.*
6. *Make clear the overall exam/coursework weighting for the degree to students (all of our programmes have more than 50% coursework determining the outcome).*
7. *Attempt to provide a calendar of events and deadlines – emphasis that changing deadlines and events has a high perceived cost to students.*
8. *Reinstate feedback deadlines, communication plan to staff and students – can this be done via BI reporting?*
9. *Teaching lunch to focus on designing feedback in complicated settings (e.g. Feed Forward), getting students to let us know what they want feedback on.*

Tutorials

- Tutors need more training on how to structure – IRR cited as a big problem with discrepancy between quality of tutors/tutorial content/feedback
- Courses were too big - tutorials too big to get focused helped
- More structure is required for tutorials

Potential Solutions:

1. *New IRR/IPP course organiser who is restructuring the tutorials*
2. *Smaller, fortnightly tutorial groups – e.g. Software Testing, Professional Issues*
3. *Quizzes in Learn could help with tutorial content*

Social

- No fostering of a cohort, no sense of community within MSc cohort
- No single programme events for students, no sense of community within the same MSc programmes

Potential Solutions:

1. *Social events for IRR interest groups*
2. *Events for specific career paths*
3. *More School-wide events*

Additional help / Resources

- Lack of formal instruction on academic writing
- Students want additional events outside of teaching – talks, etc – they feel they want to benefit from the Informatics environment.
- Management appear to be “fire fighting” problems and nothing gets resolved, issues tend not to get resolved and then continue into the next year
- Poor computer resources, support is bad, DICE computers freeze etc
- Peer support/technical mentoring (similar to UG resources)
- Personal Tutors not approachable or available and they feel they don’t care
- Additional computing support beyond how to use DICE
- Option for a structured course which focuses on industry sector necessities at PGT level

Potential Solutions:

1. Restructure of IRR and IPP will help with academic writing, also planning writing clinics
2. Plan some external talks for students – careers, technical talks
3. More transparency on issue resolution (student rep blog etc)
4. More mid-semester training from Computing Support (e.g. long jobs etc)
5. Consider MScPALS – instigate peer system around IRR and IPP, structure this via course organiser
6. Increase visibility of Student Support Team for pastoral care issues and University teachers for course advice
7. Option of recommending courses from other schools which are tied to particular industry – compile list of helpful courses from external courses

Dissertations

- Feel that supervisors don't have sufficient time for them
- DPMT is not an adequate system and is chaotic
- Supervisors do not know enough about the topic
- Some kind of structure for meetings? Students unsure of how to contact supervisors and how often
- Rude project organiser
- "The irony of a 'black box algorithm no one understands and whose decision is final' in an Informatics Department is striking."
- Standards and requirements for the dissertation could (should?) be discussed/formalised during IPP
- Project allocation is an issue
 - o Self proposed projects are not possible after allocation
 - o Too many AI students and not enough AI / machine learning projects – some felt NOT taking MLPR was a disadvantage for these projects

Solutions:

- Continue to include Project Manager in supervision issues and ensuring availability of supervisors
 - "Project Fair" week? Three supervisors per hour with an hour of questions afterwards
 - More information/flexibility around self-proposed projects in IPP sessions
 - Students to be given more information on how to self-propose