

SSLC Meeting
Thursday 8th November 2018
Informatics Forum IF 2.33

Present:

Alex Lascarides – Deputy Head of the Graduate School
Patrick Hudson – IGS On-course Student Support Administrator
Ishaq Ishaq – LFCS representative
Michael Camilleri – Data Science representative
Anna Currey – ILCC representative
Marija Jegorova – IPAB representative
Amna Shahab – ICSA representative

Meeting was conducted as an open forum and representatives were asked in advance to bring any issues or discussion points with them to be raised with other students in attendance or IGS staff. Also prior to the meeting Alex Lascarides sent out an email and asked the student reps to contact their students and ask the following question:

1) The School of Informatics will be undergoing a Postgraduate Performance Review (PPR) in 2020 and the school needs to provide a list of areas that the school would like reviewers to look at. AL has asked students to suggest areas in which the school can improve and if these can be included in the review.

1. Matters Arising

- a) AL had passed on feedback regarding teaching support to Stuart Anderson and also Vicky MacTaggart was sent this feedback. Improvements to various areas of this have been made but there are still some areas where the school can do better. Teaching Support was discussed later in this meeting – agenda point, 2(c).
- b) Career Services were invited to the September PGR induction day. The committee received a little feedback regarding this and it seems to be a positive addition.
- c) PH did communicate the shower issues to Dave Hamilton. It is unclear if any improvements have been made.
- d) AL has raised the computer cluster issue to various levels within the school. Improvements have been agreed and a sum of 200k has been agreed to be spent of improvements. No timescale has been set for this but it is a priority.

2. PPR

AL explained to the committee what the PPR was and what would be involved. Discussion points for the review are due in February/ March 2019 so it was important to discuss this with the committee at this time to get their feedback. Below are a list of points raised by the student reps and discussions from each topic.

- a) Tier 4 Completion Rates:
 - a. At the moment if a tier 4 student wishes to complete an internship or work placement they can only take a leave of absence (LoA) to do this. Therefore this does not stop the clock on their studies. The LoA has to be directly aligned with their research therefore making it more difficult to find these opportunities as the restrictions are quite strict on this.
 - b. AL rightly mentioned that unfortunately this issue really lies with UKVI and the restrictions they place on the university. It was agreed that this should be something which should be discussed in the PPR as it does negatively affect a large number of our students. Raising it at the PPR may help to put pressure on UKVI to relax their guidelines for tier 4 students.

Action – Add ‘restriction on tier 4 students taking interruptions’ to the PPR discussion point

- b) Dealing with mental health amongst the PGR cohort:
 - a. The first point raised was that some students are unclear of who they can speak to within the school if they are suffering from mental health issues. Some felt there could be a better support structure to help students.
 - b. AL pointed out that she is open to students coming to her with issues and also the current PGR Personal Tutor, Paolo Guagliardo, is available for similar support.
 - c. It was agreed that this is a very important matter. Students should feel comfortable talking about their mental health and it should be engrained in the culture of the school to do this. This should be added to the list for the PPR.

Action – Add ‘PGR mental health awareness and support’ to the PPR discussion points
Action – PH to send out information regarding the support structure within the school

- c) Teaching Support:
 - a. Student numbers at the taught level have increased drastically and this has had an effect on the teaching support the school provides. With growing numbers this has meant a growing workload for those students who do take on teaching support.
 - b. The potential for compulsory teaching support was mentioned. Student reps felt this would not be looked on favourably by the PGR student cohort.
 - c. One of the reps mentioned that they felt more students would be keen to assist with teaching support if it was possible to take an interruption to do this therefore not affecting their ability or time to complete their research.

Action – Add ‘Teaching Support’ to the PPR discussion points
Action - PH and AL to look into the possibility of packaging bundles of teaching support work. These bundles can then be taken on by PGR students on a full time basis with an approved INT

Action – Action for reps to inform their institutes that if they have not been fully paid for teaching support they have completed then they should report this directly to AL for escalation

d) Computing Resources:

- a. Some reps discussed the on-going issue of students using computing resources selfishly. Often students will run long jobs which will affect other student's ability to work. AL stated that if this is happening then students should send a support ticket to our computing support team to kill these jobs.
- b. As mentioned previously in this meeting there has been some movement on the improvement of the clusters. ILCC have provided some new clusters along with the commitment from the school to put 200k towards this issue.
- c. The computing environment has not kept pace with the growing numbers within the school. This has affected the performance of the clusters.
- d. It was also mentioned that students felt computing support could be more reactive when responding to issues raised by students. Increasing numbers within the school have also affected the computing support team and their ability to deal with large numbers of issues.

Action – Add 'Computing Resources' to the PPR discussion points

3. General feedback from Student reps based on email correspondence

a) Office Environment:

- a. The reps wanted to discuss the cleanliness of their office space.
- b. It appears that offices are often not cleaned by the forum cleaning staff. Many offices are not being hoovered often and some carpets in need a being cleaned.
- c. A PGR office space audit is to be completed by the graduate school. This comes off the back of some student complaints regarding their working environment.
- d. The ventilation within the offices is not great. The fixing of the ventilation units has been approved, though this is a lengthy process.
- e. No proper storage is available in the offices which can cause clutter which then leads to more issues of uncleanliness. It is unlikely storage could be added to PGR offices due to space constraints. Reps were reminded that there are lockers, located in the forum, available for students if required.
- f. One rep mentioned that the configuration of their office was not ideal and asked if this could be rearranged. It was discussed that if all office users are happy with changes these could be made if this resulted in a better working environment.
- g. Some reps also raised concerns that building issues are not dealt with very swiftly. There has been a broken sink on level two for example for months that has not been fixed. Unfortunately all students and staff can do is raise tickets for these problems and hope they are resolved quickly by the university estates team.

- b) PGR student conference travel:
 - a. Some students have raised concerns that having to use Key Travel to book their flights and accommodation for trips is not always the quickest or cheapest option. Often if a student's finds a cheaper flight on their own for example this price can be lost by the time a quote from Key Travel is obtained. Students would like to see the relaxing of rules meaning Key Travel must be used but this is unlikely to happen any time soon due to the universities guidelines on procurement.

- c) MScR Student Feedback
 - a. It was brought to the attention of AL and the graduate school that CDT/ MScR/ MSc students from previous years have not automatically received the feedback for their MScR dissertations, only their final mark. AL has contacted Gillian Bell (ITO Manager) about this. In future years this feedback will be sent automatically to students. Also all students who have not received their feedback will be informed of how to request this.

Action – AL to speak with Dave Hamilton and Carol Marini regarding the cleanliness of PGR office space and how this can be improved from the school side

Next meeting TBA