



**IGS SSLC Meeting
2022/23 (Semester 1)
Monday 21st November 2022
IF-1.15**

Present:

Staff representatives

Dr Mary Cryan – Deputy Director of Informatics Graduate School
Dr Lindsey Fox – Informatics Graduate School Manager
Joy Candlish – Director of Professional Services – School of Informatics
Dr Frank Keller – Deputy Head – School of Informatics
Neil Heatley – Head of Informatics Student Services
Patrick Hudson – IGS Senior Graduate School Coordinator

Student (Institute) representatives

Zhonglin Li (AIAI)
Vidminas Mikucionis (ILCC)
Kim Stonehouse (ICSA)
Ben Jourdan (EUSA student rep)

Student (CDT) representatives

Dan Wells (NLP)
Leonardo Castorina (BMAI)
Adrian Salazar Gomez (RAS)

Apologies:

Prof Nigel Topham – Director of Informatics Graduate School

This meeting was conducted as an open forum and representatives were asked in advance to highlight what issues or discussion points they wished to be raised at the meeting. Prior to the meeting, the reps submitted a formal letter to the staff members of the SSLC committee, which raised a number of issues and concerns related to the University's implementation of the new People & Money (P&M) system (which was subsequently the primary focus of the meeting).

Summary of actions from previous meeting and status

Action	Allocated to	Status of completion
The DD-IGS was asked to discuss with the Head of Computing (Informatics) the request for more GPU support	Mary Cryan	Ongoing

SSLC student preps were sent Venture Builder Incubator information to distribute to their cohorts.	Student Reps	Complete
MC contacted students regarding the potential of a student society.	Mary Cryan	Complete There was insufficient interest in this initiative so this was not progressed further.
IGS to communicate issues surrounding T&D payments with the Informatics T&D admin team.	Mary Cryan	Complete

SSLC Class Representatives Response to P&M implementation

The SSLC members received a letter from the SSLC student reps on the 14th November 2022. The letter was in relation to various issues relating to the new People and Money (P&M) system, which came into operation across the University from 01 September 2022. This letter and the points included in it were the primary points of discussion.

Stipend Payments

It was confirmed that the Oct-22 stipends payments were the first to be made through P&M system. At the end of October, the IGS had been contacted by four students whose October stipend payment was not made on 28 October, as expected. It was confirmed that these four payments were escalated via the College Implementation Group as soon as the IGS were contacted by the students. Two of these payments were paid within one working day of escalation. One student was required to confirm their bank details with the Finance Operations team, and once this had happened, the payment was made two days later. One student didn't contact the IGS until 7 November; their payment had been processed on 24 October but the sort code in P&M was incorrect and so the payment bounced back. This fourth student received their payment on 16 November.

It was highlighted to the reps that Schools no longer had the ability to process urgent / missing payments. Previously, it was possible for the IGS to raise a same day payment via the (old) FPM system and this meant that missing stipend payments could be resolved and paid on the same day the payment was confirmed as missed. However, with the University's new ways of working, Schools no longer have payment making powers, and the only way to get a payment raised is via the Central Finance (Accounts Payable) team. This has made it harder to resolve missing stipend payments, and is ultimately slower as the IGS gets caught in the mass of requests being submitted to the Finance Helpline.

The student reps were also advised that, going forward, an exact stipend payment date could not be guaranteed. This was because all PGR student stipends were now being paid by BACS transfer, and not Payroll, and different banks had different crediting timescales. However,

Schools had been advised that all PGRs can expect to receive their payments by 28th of each month (but some payments would ultimately arrive earlier).

Student reps were reassured that all information relating to November payments was being thoroughly checked to ensure the Central Finance has the correct information. They were also advised that a new student payment escalation process was being finalised by the University, and it was expected that it would become easier to escalate missing payments and get them resolved quicker. This would be in place for the November payments (onwards) and exact details would be shared with the student reps once finalised and confirmed to the School.

Schools had been reassured that the University had contingency plans in place, in consideration of the Christmas closure period in December, and that the Accounts Payable team were arranging stipend payments to be paid by 19th December. This would allow 3 working days before the closure period to resolve any missing payments, if they occurred.

The BMAI student rep advised that data collected from a student survey suggested that there a number of new students reported receiving their first stipend payment after 28 September. The IGS Manager advised that the first payment for all new PGR students is paid as a one-off, bulk three month payment (covering the months of Sept/Oct/Nov) and this was not linked to a specific payment date. The reps were advised that the IGS can only raise the request for the initial stipend payment once a number of admin steps were completed and this varies between students. The payment timescale information had been clearly communicated to all new PGR students via the IGS Getting Started Guidance and was clearly communicated via the IGS webpages. All new September students had been advised that their first bulk stipend payment might take up to 20 working days from the date IGS were able to submit the payment request to the Finance Helpline, and were advised to plan on the basis that the initial payment may not be paid until 21 October 2022. It was considered likely that the new students had not paid attention to the pre-start information provided to them and the IGS would make this clearer / more obvious in the future.

Action – DoPS to send information to the student reps which details the University’s new escalation processes for delayed / missing payments (for stipends, expenses and T&D payments). **(COMPLETE)**

Action – IGS Manager to create new IGS webpage clearly explaining the process involved in organising stipend payments and the timescales involved in each step. **(COMPLETE)**

PGR Expenses

The DoPS spoke clearly of the difficulties that Schools are now facing with the processing of PGR expense claims.

With the withdrawal of the eExpense system, PGR students were no longer able to submit their expenses online and this had had to revert back to a manual process of completing a form and submitting it to the relevant team via email. The receiving admin team then has to review the claim and supporting documents, gain local level approval from the budget holder via email, before submitting it to the Finance Helpline for processing / payment. Because of

the downtime over the summer, where no expense claims could be submitted, there was now a significant and large backlog of claims waiting to be processed by the Central Finance teams.

It was also highlighted that another delay in the process was having to wait for central Finance to create a unique P&M supplier number for every PGR student. Without a supplier number, no payments can be made.

Another delay was the approval route; once Central Finance actually processed an expense invoice in the P&M system, it goes into the line manager approver queue (who is not necessarily the budget holder). The new way of working requires each approver (and there may be more than one in the process queue) to manually approve each claim but the details of the claim are not included in the P&M submission. So approvers are sometimes having to find out via various routes what the claim relates to and if it is appropriate to approve. And once the approvals have been given, the approver is then not able to see the progress of the claim and there is no confirmation received of when the payment is successfully paid/concluded.

Unfortunately, there is no current KPI from the Central Finance team as to how quickly they will process an expense claim once it is submitted to the Finance Helpline. And there seems to be no logic to the way in which expenses are being processed.

The student reps expressed ongoing concern, not only because of the financial difficulties delayed expenses may cause, but because slow expense reimbursement is restricting PGRs from then signing up to future conferences. Unfortunately, there is no funding the School can provide as an interim 'loan' while students wait for reimbursed expenses and students are being advised to submit claims as soon as they can, even if it means submitting multiple expense claims for the same trip.

It was reaffirmed that Diversity Travel should always be used to book travel and accommodation because this avoids PGR students being out of pocket for these costs. It was acknowledged that conference registration fees can (in most circumstances) have to be paid online with a credit/debit card payment, and that these registration costs could be very expensive. All DoPS across the College are working with the University to find ways of speeding up the process of reimbursing PGR expenses.

There was a discussion about whether the students could claim for late payment fees or fines as a result of delayed payments. Sympathy was expressed for this situation, and a discussion was had about how this might be managed administratively, but overall the School couldn't advise if the University was going to offer to compensate students for such fees.

Secretary's Note: Since the SSLC meeting, the University offered £300 compensation to any PGR student whose September or October stipends were paid late. This was being dealt with centrally, with an expectation that legitimate claims would receive their £300 in January.

The Head of ISS advised the reps that students can give landlords his contact details and as a last option, he would advise them of any financial issues that had arisen that were not the

students fault. This would be with a view of seeking landlords to cancel any late fees they may have issued to a student.

The rep for ICSA brought to the attention of the group a situation that just didn't seem fair; students living in UoE accommodation had been chased for rent payments and when students had advised that they were facing financial difficulties because the UoE had not paid them monies owed via expenses, they were still reminding them to make their rent payment. It seemed ludicrous for the landlord (UoE) to be causing stress to a student over late rent payment, when the financial difficulty was being caused by the University itself. It was requested if the University could be more sympathetic to students caught up in this situation.

Action – DoPS to send information to the student reps which details the University's new escalation processes for delayed / missing payments (for stipends, expenses and T&D payments). **(COMPLETE)**

Teaching Support Payments (T&D)

The DoPS discussed issues related with teaching support payments and apologised for late payments caused by the School. The School was working through a list of twenty students who had not been paid for their T&D work; 18 of those issues had been resolved and only two were outstanding.

It was explained that staffing gaps in the ISS team over the past two plus years had had an impact on the team and provided a partial explanation for delays in processing T&D payments correctly. The School's HR team had been drafted in to assist the ISS team and had now permanently taken over responsibility for key elements of the admin process (e.g. issuing T&D contracts and resolving issues in P&M).

To overcome some of the administrative issues caused by the implementation of P&M, the School has reverted back to a non P&M system to gather T&D timesheet data as it is easier and more efficient for all involved.

Another problem that was highlighted, as the PGR students were taking on extra hours without this being formally approved via contract amendments. In this situation, when students subsequently submitted their timesheets, the contracted works and the hours worked would not match. This resulted in whole payments being delayed whilst the situation was investigated. Going forward, the DoPS explained that the original hours would now be paid, and additional hour's dealt with separately.

It was highlighted to reps that late payments were not always the fault of the ISS admin team. Students often missed the timesheet submission deadline but still expected to have their payments processed in the upcoming payroll. Reps were reminded that it is the student's responsibility to make sure they submit their timesheets by the required deadlines, which are well publicised.

The ICSA student rep advised there now seemed to be a requirement for T&D contracts to be renewed each year, which previously wasn't the case. This means that students needs to be

issued with new contract and complete a Right to Work contract each year. There was still some confusion amongst the PGR community about this, especially those that had been doing T&D work for some time.

Concerns were also raised about delayed payments resulting in NI payments and auto-enrolment in the USS scheme when payments were grouped together into one large payment. This could be the result of delayed payments by the School but also students choosing to submit timesheets in bulk.

There was some concern over potential implications for international students on visas, who were restricted to working 20 hours a week as it may look like a student was violating that restriction if someone was to review their payslips. The Head of ISS reassured the group that this was not an issue, and if there was any query over a student's working hours, the ISS would be able to provide evidence of actual hours worked over a particular timescale.

The DoPS advised that the escalation process for late payment of T&D payments would be communicated with the reps so that they could share this with their peers.

Action – Student reps to ask their students to report any issues/no payments as soon as possible.

Action – DoPS to send information to the student reps which details the University's new escalation processes for delayed / missing payments (for stipends, expenses and T&D payments). **(COMPLETE)**

Action – ISS Teaching Support team to send out regular communications to students reminding them of the need to renew / refresh annual T&C contracts and repeat right to work checks.

Investigation Letter

The letter advised the group that a student who had submitted a complaint about a late T&D payment was sent a letter by College HR advising them their conduct was under investigation. The DoPS advised that she had received a copy of the letter and advised that this is not what the letter had been advising, but the wording in the letter had been misinterpreted. The student had been contacted and reassured they were not under investigation.

Any Other Business

An opportunity was available for students to raise anything else that was not covered in the letter.

There was an enquiry as to whether the Forum would return to 24 hour access in the near future. The DoPS advised that the School Exec had consulted on this and the decision was to extend opening hours but not to return them to 24 hours. The main driver for this decision was linked to Health and Safety considerations, as well as Security requirements. The

communication of the new opening hours would be sent to all Informatics staff and students in due course.

The issue of road safety around the forum was also raised because main roads around campus had opened up following local closures for COVID and the Festival and pedestrians and bicycles were at greater risk from local traffic. It was felt that this was a wider Estates issue and not one that could be improved by School level action, however, the issue would be raised at the School's next H&S Committee meeting.

An enquiry regarding if the School could introduce food waste bins. Unfortunately, this service is not provided as part of the current central facilities service and Schools had been advised that they could make their own arrangements, but the logistics of managing the bins was unachievable at the current time. There was also H&S concerns about this initiative as the Forum has previously had problems with mice which was exacerbated by food waste being left in offices.

Action – IGS Senior Coordinator to raise the issue of road safety at the next school H&S meeting.

Next Meeting
2022/23 (Semester 2)
Exact date/time TBC

Summary of actions from this meeting / action status

Action	Allocated to	Status of completion
DoPS to send information to the student reps which details the University's new escalation processes for delayed / missing payments (for stipends, expenses and T&D payments).	Joy Candlish	Complete
IGS Manager to create new IGS webpage clearly explaining the process involved in organising stipend payments and the timescales involved in each step.	Lindsey Fox	Complete
Student reps to ask their students to report any issues/no payments as soon as possible.	Student reps	
ISS Teaching Support team to send out regular communications to students reminding them of the need to renew / refresh annual T&C contracts and repeat right to work checks.	Vicky Mactaggart	
IGS Senior Coordinator to raise the issue of road safety at the next school H&S meeting.	Patrick Hudson	