



**IGS SSLC Meeting
2022/23 (Semester 3)
Monday 15th May 2023
IF-1.15**

Present:

Staff representatives

Dr Mary Cryan – Deputy Director of Informatics Graduate School
Dr Lindsey Fox – Informatics Graduate School Manager
Pippa Ward – Head of Informatics Student Services
Patrick Hudson – IGS Senior Graduate School Coordinator

Student (Institute) representatives

Zhonglin Li (AIAI)
Vidminas Mikucionis (ILCC)
Henrique Reis Aguiar (ANC)
Steiner Laenen (LFCS)
Ben Jourdan (EUSA student rep)

Student (CDT) representatives

Leonardo Castorina (BMAI)
Adrian Salazar Gomez (RAS)

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 PH received some issues which the reps wished to raise and then there was an open forum for any other issues.

Summary of actions from previous meeting and 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	Lindsey Fox	Complete

stipend payments and the timescales involved in each step.		
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
Student reps to ask their students to report any issues/no payments as soon as possible.	Student Reps	Complete
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
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.	Update from Pippa Ward	This is on-going and discussed in this meeting.
IGS Senior Coordinator to raise the issue of road safety at the next school H&S meeting.	Patrick Hudson	Complete – spoken to the school H&S manager about this.

Stipend Payments Update

LF started the session by updating the group on how the current stipend payment process stands. The process itself is taking longer for IGS to process and confirm payments each month but the results of this are now that there have been no non-payments escalated to finance so far this year. The tracking and oversight of payment within IGS is better now so there will hopefully be no issues going forward.

The updated amount for stipend payments has also been confirmed for 2023/24. Stipends will rise by 5.4% and the first payment at this increased amount will be on the 28th August 2023 for September payment.

Teaching Support Update

Before the meeting PH received some comments/ questions relating to teaching contracts and some issues relating to being a teaching assistant. PW was present at this meeting to discuss these issues and give an overall update relating to teaching support.

Overall the backlog of outstanding T&D payments has been cleared. Also any student who incurred additional expenses as a result of not receiving their T&D payments have been compensated. PW and the teaching support team have implemented new measures to ensure there are no problems with future payments.

Adverts for teaching posts have been advertised three months earlier this year than they have been done in previous years. The hope is that all students who sign up to these posts will have a contract signed by the beginning of semester 1, 23/24, and this will help prevent any delays in payments. Also the school has created 'umbrella' contract which cover the full period of a student's program, until their max end date. This means that students no longer need to complete a right to work check each year and it makes the issuing of contracts more straightforward.

Guidance from the teaching support team will be sent out to students once they have signed up to do a teaching support role.

One of the questions the group received prior to the meeting was in relation to students being auto-enrolled in the university pension scheme. When a student reaches the 40 hours a month threshold they will then auto-enrol in the pension scheme and then only have three months to opt out. If students fail to opt out in time then any payments made into the pension scheme will not be able to be retracted. The legality of why this happens can be found on the University pensions webpages ([Pensions | The University of Edinburgh](#)). Unfortunately the emails relating to this process are sent, by College HR, to staff accounts so these are often missed by students. Students should be encouraged to redirect their staff emails to their student account or vice versa. The teaching support team will, going forward, email any student who has reached the threshold to auto enrol and warn them of this so they have time to opt out of the scheme. PW had received some very useful feedback from some of our students relating to this matter and has forwarded this to the College HR for consideration.

Another area which was raised was how to engage students more with teaching opportunities in the school. It was identified that the guidance on the ISS webpages needs to be tidied up. Also there were comments from the students that there are often too many emails sent to students in relation to teaching support and that these could easily be more focussed and less frequent as a result. Also there was a suggestion that at the beginning of the year there could be some sort of gathering for students who take on teaching support. This might be for training purposes but also for community building.

Action – MC to ask Aurora Constantin to add the pension's information to her teaching training session.

Diversity Travel

PH received some comments prior to the meeting relating to problems students have had with Diversity travel.

The first comment related to restrictions around students booking in smaller groups (less than 10). There are some circumstances where alternatives to Diversity travel can be used and therefore this issue can be avoided. However these circumstances relate to a student's funding source and therefore will not be appropriate for all PGRs.

Secondly there has been comments made that booking Airbnb accommodation is not advised and sometimes refused, usually on safety grounds. The reason for this is that in most cases the university travel insurance will not cover Airbnb accommodation as it often will not meet certain criteria to be eligible for insurance. PW suggested that she speaks to Eilidh Guild, the school Health and Safety manager, to see if there are situations where could be paid for Airbnb bookings.

More information on both of the above points can be found at the following link for the University Sustainable Travel Policy (section 3.3 and 3.5).

https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/sustainable_travel_policy_v2.2.pdf

Action – PW to discuss the Airbnb restrictions with Eilidh Guild.

Procurement of Prolific Payments

Some students have recently experienced delays in procurement, specifically for prolific credits for recruiting and paying experiment participants. Unfortunately the root of these issues stems from the fact that the procurement team, and more widely the schools computing support team, are currently under staffed. They are not only in the process of recruiting frontline staff but also a new Head of IT and User Support Manager are required. This department are trying their best to facilitate all requests that come their way but delays are inevitable at this point and should be expected so please plan accordingly.

IGS Sense of Community Survey

PH recently conducted a survey within the PGR community to see how the students felt in relation to being part of a community in informatics. Results of the survey and an overview of the comments were sent to the SSLC members for comment and discussion.

- a) Overall a lot of the comments were positive. There was a lot of positive feedback in relation to the opportunity for students to meet with their office mates and use school funding (£15 pp) for an office meet up. This was expensive but the school would like to try this again next year if we can. IGS acknowledges this did not work for all offices and in future will look at potential alternatives if there is an opportunity to run this again next academic year.

- b) Students seem to want some more variety with the events/ trips on offer and also some larger events too. IGS are planning a Summer BBQ for this summer and also are thinking about introducing an annual school conference for later in 2023. The plans for the annual conference would be in correspondence with SSLC reps as student input for this would be key to ensure it is successful.
- c) There were some serious comments made in the survey in relation to posts made on social media by staff and students in relation to trans rights. In both cases these issues have been dealt with by the school, as much as they can be. Chris Heunen, Director of the Informatics People and Culture committee, has lead on dealing with these. If anyone in the school has concerns about anything related to equality, diversity and inclusion within the school should contact Chris for advice or IGS.
- d) Off the back of one of the comments in the survey one of our reps thought more clarity could be provided to students in relation to the student conduct process. PW addressed these questions as best she could and directed student to The Code of Student Conduct (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/staff/discipline/code-discipline>) Students are encouraged to speak to IGS or any of the other support channels within the school if they have any questions or concerns about colleagues conduct (<https://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/student-services/igs/phd/student-support/summary>)

Action – MC to follow up with Chris Heunen in relation to the comments made about trans issues in the survey and ensure the school is dealing with these appropriately.

Any Other Business

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

- a) Academic / Student relationship expectations.
 - a. Students are encouraged to complete the 'PGR Expectations Questionnaire' when they first begin their program. This set of questions is to help students and supervisors to ensure they are working towards the same goals and can work on the same objectives and principals. The feedback from our reps was that in some cases supervisory relationships were strained a year or so into the student programs. If this is the case students are encouraged to contact IGS and/ or MC or the other PGR tutors for advice on how to handle a potentially problematic supervisor relationship. Ultimately supervisor changes can be accommodated but this should be thoroughly discussed before this happens.
- b) Student rep on interview panel
 - a. With the recent appointment of head of school it was suggested by the reps that in future there could be a permanent student rep on the panel for this process. Although the students had the opportunity to meet with candidates throughout it was thought that a constant student presence on the panel would be very useful.
- c) Mail list etiquette
 - a. Ben, who is our EUSA student rep, recently had issues with an email he had sent to the main Informatics research students email address. This was blocked

while the school reviews the email but this was later approved for distribution. Ben wanted to see if there was anywhere reps, or other PGRs, could refer to when drafting such emails to ensure what they are drafting meets with informatics criteria.

d) Office temperatures

- a. Many students, particularly on the 5th floor of the forum, have been complaining of high temperatures and stuffy offices. The chill beams, which were installed last summer, do not appear to be working to the extent it was hoped. This had been previously reported to the school facilities team and the central university estates team have been looking into this. Any on-going issues should be reported to building-issues@inf.ed.ac.uk

e) Cold showers

- a. Some students reported issues with cold showers in the forum. PH advised any issues like this should always be reported to building-issues@inf.ed.ac.uk . PH is happy for students to speak to him directly if they are having issues with the building and he can advise who is best to speak to.

f) Event Waste Recycling/ General building recycling

- a. One of the comments we received was that two of the main catering companies the school uses do not provide the school with equipment that the school can appropriately dispose of. One provider uses biodegradable plates and cutlery etc though these cannot be placed in normal recycling bins. Also when larger events are creating a lot of waste this does not seem to be a consideration when organising such events. More sustainable options should be considered by event organisers and responsibility needs to be taken when organising an event. It was also raised that the school could offer provisions for food recycling and also soft plastics recycling.

Action – PH to pass on thoughts regarding interview panels to HR.

Action – PH to look into email guidance for students when sending to mailing lists.

Action – PH to contact appropriate departments in the school relating to recycling issues.

**Next Meeting
Exact date/time TBC**

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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	