

Minutes of the Student and Staff Liaison Committee Meeting

Department of Statistics, Warwick

15:00-16:00h in C1.06 on 7th April 2016

Students: Pieralberto Guarniero (Chair), Christiane Gorgen (Secretary)

Staff members: Dr Barbel Finkenstadt (Director of Postgraduate Studies), David Kinmond (Programmes Manager)

Agenda item 1: New workspaces

Issue Update on Agenda item 1 of the previous four meetings (November 2015, June 2015, March 2015, October 2014).

Discussion The new *Mathematical Sciences building* will be built on the grass behind Computer Science. The SSLC was allowed to see the blue print of the six-storey building which is now in the planning stage and will be completed for the academic year 2018/19. The complex will be almost entirely taken up by the Statistics Department with some shared space and multi-use areas on floors which are connected via bridges to Computer Science and Mathematics. There will be dedicated teaching rooms and space for up to 100 PhD students in four offices. The upper floors are momentarily planned to be empty and allow for further growth of the Department.

There will be no fourth-floor extension on Zeaman. Statistics will maintain a foothold in this building, e.g. in case the Department needs bigger offices than those in the new building, while the remaining space will be made part of the Mathematics Department.

Ramphal currently houses only very few people and it is likely that those which are now based there will have to move within the building. The OxWaSP cohort which is expected to arrive in term 3 will probably be located there.

Agreed procedure Not needed.

Agenda item 2: Communication of grant requirements

Issue Several PhD students had expressed their unhappiness with how the new ‘researchfish’ platform for students on a Research Councils UK (RCUK) grant had been introduced. The SSLC was asked to enquire whether this could have been avoided and how to avoid similar issues in the future.

Discussion The SSLC outlined that it was hard for students to understand the purpose or importance of this platform from the emails sent out by RCUK. They made clear that students would have appreciated earlier and clearer communication of the new requirements by somebody from within the Department.

The new 'researchfish' platform was set up by RCUK. The University newly required this year that all RCUK-funded research should be submitted to this platform, and communicated this to departments only rather late and without specific guidelines. The Department expects that all PhD students who hold an RCUK grant, especially those who are on an RCUK-funded project together with their supervisors, engage with the platform. It remains unclear as to what the requirements and the consequences of non-compliance are.

Agreed procedure None. Wait for RCUK or the University to communicate further demands.

Agenda item 3: Teaching feedback

Issue A number of PhD students who teach reported that they often hear from their undergraduate students that support classes are too short and not frequent enough to cover the relevant material. This is reflected in the written feedback. The teaching PhD students themselves expressed that, especially for first-year courses, they felt that their impact could be a lot higher if there were less time constraints. They suggested that not having enough time also makes interactive teaching challenging and almost calls for a teacher-centred approach where PhDs almost lecture in order to get through a sufficiently high number of exercises. PhD students proposed that their time would thus be better spent doing more teaching (say, every week or even two hours per week rather than once a fortnight) and, in order to compensate, to make marking less frequent or less extensive.

Discussion This is an issue for the teaching committee which meets twice a term, currently chaired by David Hobson. The next meeting will take place on May 4th with agenda items to be submitted before April 25th.

Agreed procedure Forward the minutes to David Hobson, Ric Crossman and Elke Thönnies. Ask for one of the two PhD representatives to be present during the teaching committee meeting.