



Unconfirmed Minutes

DEPARTMENTAL STAFF STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (DSSCC)

Undergraduate Programmes (Term 1.1)

04 November 2020, at 15:00, via Microsoft Teams

Committee Secretary:

Ms Louisa Ball

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Present:

| Name | Abbrev. | Role |
|--------------------|---------|---|
| Zvezdin Besarabov | ZB | Course Rep for MEng Computer Science (Year 2) |
| Kevin Bryson | KB | Chair of DSSCC; Programme Director: BSc/MEng Computer Science |
| Rajesh Goyal | RG | Course Rep for MEng Computer Science (Year 3); Lead Department Representative |
| Lewis Griffin | LG | Departmental Tutor |
| Steve Hailes | SH | Head of Department |
| Robin Hirsch | RH | Programme Director: MEng Mathematical Computation |
| Bangti Jin | BJ | Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 4) |
| Minyi Lei | ML | Course Rep for BSc Computer Science (Year 1) |
| Giacamo Livan | GL | Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 2) |
| Suhail Merali | SM | Course Rep for MEng Mathematical Computation (Year 1) |
| Raghib Mirza | RM | Course Rep for BSc Computer Science (Year 3) |
| Zak Morgan | ZM | Course Rep for MEng Computer Science (Year 4) |
| Ali Reyazat | AR | Course Rep for BSc Computer Science (Year 2) |
| Graham Roberts | GR | Departmental Welfare Tutor / Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 1) |
| Clarissa Sandejas | CS | Course Rep for BSc Computer Science (Year 1) |
| Abhiram Sasitharan | AS | Course Rep for MEng Mathematical Computation (Year 2) |

In attendance:

| Name | Abbrev. | Role |
|-------------|---------|--|
| Louisa Ball | LB | Secretary to DSSCC; Senior Teaching and Learning Administrator (Undergraduate) |
| Jo Stiles | JS | Teaching and Learning Manager (Interim) |

Apologies:

| Name | Abbrev. | Role |
|-----------------|---------|--|
| David Howells | DH | Senior Teaching & Learning Administrator (QA and Projects) |
| Sergey Mechtaev | SM | Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 3) |
| Nicholas Smith | NS | Teaching and Learning Administrator (Undergraduate) |

1. Welcome and Apologies

KB welcomed everyone to the first Undergraduate Departmental Staff Student Consultative Committee (DSSCC) meeting of the 2020/21 academic year, and the first meeting of Term 1.

Attendees introduced themselves by name and their role in the committee.

2. Terms of Reference and Constitution

Received: The Terms of Reference for Departmental Staff Student Consultative Committees in 2020/21.

The committee agreed to the Terms of Reference.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Received: The minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2020.

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

i) Minute 5.1 - Marking criteria of COMP0010

KB noted that at the previous meeting concerns had been raised by the Year 2 Student Reps regarding the assessment marking in COMP0010 Software Engineering. Following the meeting Student Reps had raised the issue directly with the Exam Board Chair, Dr James Brotherston, who subsequently provided a formal statement in

response. This was provided to the Student Reps for dissemination to the wider student cohort.

ii) Minute 5.4 – Inadequate online teaching for Year 1 Undergraduate students

KB noted that it was raised via Unitu and at the previous DSSCC meeting that Year 1 students felt there had been inadequate online teaching provision in Year 1 modules in the final two weeks of Term 2 in 2019/20. This was following all in-person teaching having been cancelled.

The Departmental Tutor and Year 1 coordinator (at that time) reviewed the issues raised carefully. LG provided a full formal response to all Year 1 students directly by email.

iii) Minute 10 – Personal Tutoring

KB noted that at the previous meeting that LG had reported that the Personal Tutoring process within the department would undergo heavy revisions ahead of 2020/21. This had been done and significant amendments made ahead of the start of the 2020/21 Academic Year.

LG noted that a feedback form would be issued to all students during Reading Week (9 November – 13 November) relating to the Personal Tutoring process and how it was operating. A great deal of change was made to the process ahead of the 2020/21 Academic Year, however the monitoring of how well it was being implemented would be ongoing. Concerns regarding Personal Tutoring should be directed to KB.

iv) Minute 11 - Academic Representation

KB noted that at the previous meeting Student Reps had fed back that a Computer Science specific handover between the 2019/20 Student Reps and the newly elected 2020/21 Student Reps would be constructive and better facilitate new reps learning how to conduct their new roles more quickly.

It was previously agreed that the Student Reps would create a handover document for this purpose; this action was since revised, such that the agreed action was for the

2019/20 Student Reps to meet with the 2020/21 Student Reps to carry out this handover.

RG noted that this meeting would be scheduled to take place during Reading Week (9 November – 13 November).

v) Minute 12.1 - Allocation of Prize Money received to department for reaching 70% response rate (National Student Survey (NSS))

KB noted that at the previous meeting it was confirmed that the Computer Science department had exceeded a 70% response rate in the 2019/20 NSS, and so had been awarded a reward £650 to spend on students. In previous years this had been spent on a celebratory event for finalist students; this was not possible in 2019/20 due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student Reps elected to donate the prize money to charity. The department nominated Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) on behalf of students to receive the donation. A request had been made to the Computer Science Finance Team to donate the monies directly to GOSH.

5. Student Feedback and Actions

5.1 Concerns regarding ENGF0001: Engineering Challenges

ML reported that a large number of concerns had been reported to them regarding the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges module. These views appeared to be widespread within the cohort; they could be summarised into four key areas.

i. Teaching arrangements

ML reported that there did not appear to be any clear teaching arrangements or indication to students regarding what they should learn throughout the module. In addition, individual students and groups were not able to access sufficient academic support. Many students reported feelings of hopelessness as regards to being able to perform well in the corresponding assessments.

CS noted that many students were experiencing a great deal of stress as a result of a perceived lack of clear of information regarding the module and its assessments. A clear schedule for the module and its corresponding assessments would be very beneficial and would allow students to plan effectively.

Stress and distress felt by students on the module was compounded by the support sessions that were available being in high demand. CS was aware from their own experience that bookable slots to meet with Teaching Assistants (TA) tended to be booked very far in advance and this meant that many students were not able to access academic support in a timely way. The discussion forums on the Moodle page were well used and were useful to students; but were not appropriate for the discussion of non-engagement of individuals in group work or of personal concerns relating to the module. A dedicated office hour with the Module Lead, such as those implemented on Computer Science modules, would be very helpful.

SH thanked ML and CS for their valuable feedback. SH noted that they were part of the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges teaching team and taught some of the content with the module and set and marked some of the module assessments. SH clarified for the committee that the module was primarily grounded in problem-based learning. Student would not be closely guided through how to complete their work and instead would be provided with academic support as they navigated problem-solving exercises. However, the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges module comprised a great deal of course and taught content and SH acknowledged that students would benefit from a synthesis of the information contained on the Moodle page; SH would feed this back to the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges teaching team. SH reassured the Student Reps that they would also feed back to the teaching team the reported difficulties in accessing support from TAs; SH would investigate the viability of conducting a weekly drop-in for ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges themselves.

Action: SH to feed back to the teaching team for ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges that course content on Moodle should be synthesised to help students understand and navigate it better.

Action: SH to investigate whether it is possible for them to conduct a weekly office hour for ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges.

ii. Insufficient time given to complete assessment

Assessed work was sometimes set very close to the submission deadline. One recent example of this was an exercise set on Monday 2 November that was due to be submitted on Wednesday 4 November.

SH thanked ML for providing this feedback. SH was aware of this issue and confirmed that some assessments had been issued by the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges teaching team very close to the deadline; students should have been provided with more time to carry out this work. SH had fed this back to Fiona Truscott within the ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges teaching team.

SH reassured the committee that the assignments that they set for the module had been and would continue to be issued one week prior to the submission deadline.

iii. Non-engagement of students within groups

ML reported that a significant portion of module assessment was completed in groups and in the current academic year many students were studying in different time zones. Some student groups found it very difficult to be able to hold group meetings due to members residing in significantly different time zones. Additionally, there was a widespread issue of non-engagement of students in their allocated groups, which placed significant burden on the remaining group members that were engaging.

SH reassured the committee that the teaching team were aware of issues with student engagement in assessment groups. There was a formal process outlined in the Moodle page for managing non-engagement of group members, and students were encouraged to follow this.

LG noted that non-engagement of students was a concern to the department; group working was a very important part of undergraduate level study and as such the department were vested in seeking to resolve this issue. The Year 1 Student Reps were scheduled to meet with the Year 1 Coordinator for undergraduate programmes in

Reading Week (9 November – 13 November), where this issue and possible resolutions would be discussed.

iv. Linux as the required operating system for assigned work

One particular assessment within the module that concerned bioreactors required the use of a simulator that was supported only by Linux. The user experience when carrying out this work was poor and many students were not familiar with Linux.

SH clarified for the committee that they had helped produce the simulator for the bioreactor assessment. The particular simulator that supported the assessment could only be used within Linux. To assist students in navigating this, students had been provided with Azure connections and a virtual machine was made available for download. SH reassured the Student Reps that this work relied on the same basic environment as that which GR utilised in COMP0002 Principles of Programming.

5.2 Course Rep Moodle pages

RG noted that in the previous academic cycle Student Reps had requested a bespoke Moodle page that would allow Student Reps to communicate announcements and important updates from the Academic Representation process to the wider student cohort. This was raised on Unitu at that time and was recently closed; the resolution given was that Student Reps should make use of the recently published Virtual Common Rooms (VCRs) for these purposes.

LG clarified that they had approved the use of Moodle for this purpose and apologised for any confusion caused by the resolution offered on Unitu. LG had made a request for a member of the Teaching and Learning team set up a Moodle page for Student Rep use as soon as possible. This would be made available to Student Reps as soon as this was completed.

Action: Teaching and Learning team to create a Moodle page for Student Rep use and enrol Student Reps onto the page as soon as this is done.

5.3 Coursework Deadline lists

RG noted that in the previous academic cycle the department had made available to the Undergraduate cohort a full list of coursework deadlines, separated by year group. This

resource was useful to students and would be helpful again in the current academic year.

LB noted that in the 2020/21 Academic Year the Teaching and Learning team would add a table of assessment information per individual module to the corresponding Moodle page. This information would be contained under the heading 'Assessment' and appear in a standardised format across all modules. This work had begun and would be completed as soon as possible. The information provided would include assessment titles, assessment weightings and submission deadlines (as soon as they were known).

5.4 Student workload in Term 1 (2020/21)

AR noted that feedback was posted to Unitu regarding a perceived heavy assessment load for Year 2 students in Term 1. Specifically, assignments in COMP0016 Systems Engineering, COMP0011 Mathematics and Statistics and COMP0009 Logic and Database Theory were due on dates that were very close together.

LG noted that ahead of the 2020/21 Academic Year much work had been undertaken within the department to ensure that deadlines for assessments were spaced as far as possible apart within each teaching term; where this was difficult to achieve due to there being a large number of assessments for a specific cohort action was taken to ensure that assessment deadlines did not fall on the same date. Deadline "clustering" was much improved in the current academic year as compared to previous years and improvements would continue to be made in this way year-on-year.

KB thanked the Student Reps for their feedback.

5.5 Request to open the Computer Science lab rooms in Malet Place Engineering Building (MPEB)

ZB queried whether it was possible to open the Computer Science lab rooms in Malet Place Engineering Building (MPEB) for student use. This matter had also been raised to Unitu.

LG advised that the Computer Science lab rooms in Malet Place Engineering Building (MPEB) were not included in the small subset of rooms that had been approved at the college level for use and the department could unfortunately take no action until such time that they were added to that list. All departments within UCL were required to work within these rules, including for the use of departmentally managed spaces.

LG reassured the committee that the re-opening of space on campus for student-to-student interaction was considered as a high priority and was currently being reviewed at the college level.

5.6 General student feedback

KB invited Student Reps to raise any further feedback or issues that had not already been discussed.

Year 1

ML noted that students had fed back that within COMP0147 Discrete Mathematics for Computer Scientists the Module Lead's accent and lecture style made it difficult for students to follow and understand lecture content live. However, in the main the Module Lead also provided very good, helpful and clear notes which allowed students to grasp and understand the material outside of lectures.

The main concern for Year 1 students in Term 1 were the concerns regarding ENGF0001 Engineering Challenges already addressed.

Year 2

AR noted that Year 2 students were keen to receive updated information from the department regarding arrangements for Face-to-Face enrichment in Term 2.

LG reassured Student Reps that an announcement regarding Face-to-Face enrichment in Term 2 would be issued by the college shortly.

Year 3

Online Learning

RG noted that overall they had received positive feedback from students regarding online learning in Term 1; students enjoyed being able to review course content at their own pace, view content again and take notes. RG had observed that attendance to live lectures and classes was high. Students felt better able to ask questions within live sessions than they would normally do in face-to-face lectures. Students benefitted from not having to commute to campus. Recorded synchronous content and asynchronous content was usually uploaded in a timely way.

RG felt that the use of Microsoft Teams for tutorials sessions would be functionally better and emulate in-person tutorials more closely than Zoom, which was currently used.

RH noted that they had polled students on the module COMP0009 Logic and Database Theory regarding their preference for allocation of break-out groupings and a clear preference for self-selected groupings, as opposed to Module Lead allocated groupings, had emerged. RH was concerned however that where students opted to create very large study groups individuals may not contribute to discussion and therefore lose the benefit of forming smaller groups as compared to main lectures; one method to prevent this may be to implement participant caps on virtual break-out rooms.

Individual Project Supervision

RM noted that some students had been unable to contact their allocated Individual Project Supervisor to date and as such had not yet made any meaningful progress in their respective projects.

LG noted that students who had not received a response from their Project Supervisor should attend the Departmental Tutor office hour, which took place at 8:00am (UK time) every Monday (within term time), to raise this for the Departmental Tutor's attention.

Year 4

ZM noted that they had received positive feedback overall from students regarding online learning in Term 1; students particularly enjoyed consuming synchronous content (i.e. live lectures/classes) at the same time as other students.

ZM fed back that there was a consistent trend across modules that the first few minutes of each online lecture was spent resolving technical issues and for some modules the cumulative time lost over several sessions had meant the module was slightly behind schedule.

Overall, students valued the flexibility that the utilisation of both asynchronous and synchronous content across modules afforded, particularly for students based in different timezones and who were unable to attend some live lectures for this reason.

6. Departmental Teaching Committee

KB noted that as the Lead Department Rep for Undergraduate programmes, RG would be invited to attend all plenary Departmental Teaching Committee (DTC) meetings that took place in Computer Science in the 2020/21 Academic Year. These would usually take place once per teaching term. This would be a standing item on the agenda for DSSCC meetings and the Lead Department Rep would provide a report on the most recent DTC meeting to the committee.

The secretary to the DTC was JS, who would ensure that RG was issued with formal invitations to all plenary meetings in the 2020/21 Academic Year; the next DTC meeting would take place on Wednesday 25 November. RG would report on this meeting at the next DSSCC meeting. RG would nominate another rep to attend in their place should they be unable to attend any individual meeting.

KB clarified for the committee that the Departmental Teaching Committee comprised all teaching staff in Computer Science and presided over all decisions related to teaching and learning matters within Undergraduate and Postgraduate taught degree programmes, including amendments to modules, degree programmes and administrative processes.

7. Report from Faculty-level Meetings

KB noted that the reporting of matters or issues raised and discussed at any relevant Faculty-level meetings attended by Student Reps would be a standing item on the agenda for DSSCC meetings. This would include the event 'Ideas with the Dean', that

was organised by the Faculty Communications team and attended by Student Reps across the Faculty and the Dean of Engineering, Prof Nigel Titchener-Hooker.

LG would report on any relevant matters or issue raised at the most recent Faculty Teaching Committee (FTC) meeting.

8. Programme and Module Development

KB noted that at the previous meeting a number of changes to the programme diets of Undergraduate Programmes had been proposed. The proposed changes had come into effect at the start of the current academic year.

Year 1 – BSc/MEng Computer Science

Within the Year 1 programme diet on the BSc and MEng Computer Science degree programmes, COMP0147 Discrete Mathematics for Computer Scientists was moved from Term 2 to Term 1 delivery, and COMP0003 Theory of Computation was moved from Term 1 to Term 2 delivery.

Year 1 – MEng Mathematical Computation

Within the Year 1 programme diet on the MEng Mathematical Computation degree programme, MATH0003 Analysis 1 was introduced as a compulsory Term 1 module, COMP0003 Theory of Computation was moved from Term 1 to Term 2 delivery. COMP0012 Compilers was also removed from the Year 1 programme diet on the MEng Mathematical Computation degree programme and had become an optional module within the Year 2 programme diet.

Year 3 – BSc Computer Science

Within the Year 3 programme diet on the BSc Computer Science degree programme COMP0019 Computer Systems was changed from a compulsory module to an optional module.

Year 3 – MEng Mathematical Computation

Within the Year 3 programme diet on the MEng Mathematical Computation degree programme COMP0025 Introduction to Cryptography was changed from a compulsory module to an optional module.

RG fed back to the committee that they were concerned that the change from compulsory to optional status of the modules COMP0012 Compilers and COMP0019 Computer Systems modules posed a risk to the overall academic rigour of the Undergraduate degree programmes within the department. This was because they regarded these subjects as critical to the field of Computer Science study more generally. In particular, there was a concern that because COMP0019 Computer Systems was a very challenging module students would be inclined not to select it in favour of a less challenging optional module.

LG clarified that COMP0012 Compilers had remained compulsory for students in Year 1 of BSc and MEng Computer Science; the module had become optional for MEng Mathematical Computation students only. COMP0019 Computer Systems had become optional for BSc Computer Science students only. LG reminded the committee that students who regarded this subject area as very important were free to select it as one of their optional modules.

KB thanked the Student Reps for their feedback on the changes.

9. Programme Delivery

9.1 Teaching and Learning

CS noted that students find it very helpful when recorded lectures or classes feature captioning. Students viewed this as a supplementary resource and currently this practice was being implemented for the majority of recordings, but not all. CS queried whether it would be possible for this to become standard practice across all modules.

LG noted that automated captioning was highly prone to errors in transcription of speech and was aware that some teaching staff held concerns that unreviewed automated captioning posed a risk of offensive or problematic erroneously transcribed speech being published online. Where staff took the decision to manually correct automated captioning before publishing recordings to students, this would take around four to five hours per one hour of recorded content to carry out.

It was agreed via discussion that errors in automatic captioning were not overly disruptive to students; in most cases it was reasonable to infer what had actually been

said. Overall, automated captioning in all recordings with spurious errors would be preferred to there being only partial implementation of captioning.

Action: LG to encourage Module Leads to implement captioning on recorded module content; to feed back that automated captioning with occasional errors is preferred to no captioning.

9.2 Assessment and Feedback

No matters raised.

9.3 Organisation and Management

No matters raised.

9.4 Learning Resources

No matters raised.

10. Inclusivity

KB noted that the topic of inclusivity was a mandatory item for the DSSCC to discuss within the academic year. In the DSSCC for Undergraduate programmes in Computer Science this would be a standing item on the agenda in all meetings in 2020/21. KB invited committee members to propose topics for discussion related to matters of inclusivity in the current meeting as well as any future DSSCC meetings.

GR noted that they were currently the temporary Chair of the Athena Swan group within Computer Science (covering a period of sabbatical leave). GR clarified for the committee that the Athena Swan Charter was primarily related to good practice within Higher Education institutions specifically relating to career progression and opportunities for women in STEM subjects. Currently UCL as an institution held a Silver Athena Swan award. The Department of Computer Science also held a Silver award. Within UCL Computer Science around 20% of Undergraduate students were female.

Additionally, work and action was being carried out on a continual basis within the Faculty of Engineering Sciences, the Computer Science Department and the Computer Science Athena Swan group to address issues relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) more generally. Student involvement in the reporting of, consulting on and addressing of these issues was vital to this work and valued extremely highly.

Student Reps and any other students interested in these areas of work should contact GR.

CS noted that there they were not aware of there being any initiatives within the department or wider UCL aimed specifically towards supporting students who were Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) and particularly for very underrepresented groups. CS had observed that there was a particularly low number enrolled on Computer Science Undergraduate programmes who were Black.

GR noted that the department was undertaking work in conjunction with the UCL Admissions team to improve the representation of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups within Undergraduate programmes, and regularly conducted outreach activities in the local community. This included increasing awareness among school children in schools local to UCL about the opportunity of university-level study. GR thanked CS for their valuable feedback that there were few initiatives aimed at supporting enrolled students who belonged to underrepresented groups.

11. Learning Community

KB noted that the topic of learning community was a mandatory item for the DSSCC to discuss within the academic year. KB noted that the existence of an effective and supportive learning community that was accessible to all students was vital in the current academic year as Connected Learning was implemented in all course across UCL, where a large amount of course content was online based and where students were based all over the world. This item would also include discussion and feedback on the Computer Science Programming Tutor scheme for Year 1 students and the UCL Transition Mentor scheme for Year 1 students.

KB invited committee members to raise issues or feedback relating to the learning community.

Programming Tutor Scheme

CS noted that the Programming Tutor scheme was working well in Term 1; Programming Tutors were consistent and reliable in respect of setting up tutorial meetings. Overall, engagement with the scheme was not very high, however students

who were new to programming when they joined UCL benefitted greatly from the support provided within the scheme.

Transition Mentor Scheme

CS reported that the Transition Mentor scheme was working well in Term 1, however engagement across the cohort was not very high.

Personal Tutoring

RG noted that they intended to survey the student body during Reading Week (9 November – 13 November) regarding their experience with their Personal Tutors in Term 1. Several students had fed back to them they had not received any communication from their Personal Tutor to date.

LG clarified that Personal Tutors had been instructed to ensure they conducted meaningful contact with their tutees who were in Year 1 twice per half-term, their tutees who were returning students (non-finalist) once per term and their tutees who were finalist students twice per half term. Engagement with Personal Tutors would not necessarily comprise a one-to-one meeting in all cases; Personal Tutors may carry out group tutorials with some or all of their tutees. Students who had not received contact from their Personal Tutor were encouraged to attend the Departmental Tutor office hour, which took place at 8:00am (UK time) every Monday (within term time), to raise this for the Departmental Tutor's attention. Students who had not been contacted by their Personal Tutor and wished to contact or meet with them were encouraged to contact them directly in the first instance, and flag to the Departmental Tutor as a matter of urgency if no response was received. Students who received contact from their Personal Tutor but did not require a meeting were encouraged to respond to confirm this with them.

ZM noted that the function and purpose of the Personal Tutoring relationship was not very clear to Undergraduate students; many students may not be engaging with the process for this reason.

Action – LG to send detailed guidance on what to expect from Personal Tutor meetings to all students.

12. Good practice

KB noted that the topic of good practice was a mandatory item for the DSSCC to discuss within the academic year. In the DSSCC for Undergraduate programmes in Computer Science this would be a standing item on the agenda in all meetings in 2020/21.

KB noted that the highlighting of good practice currently taking place with the department was a fundamental part of the student feedback and academic representation process and would ensure the department could work to disseminate identified good practice further and more widely. KB invited committee members to raise examples of good practice within the department.

CS noted that a timetable resource provided in the ENGF0002 Design and Professional Skills module was very useful to students. Specifically, the schedule for the module throughout the whole of Term 1 was provided in a single table, which included links to join live online sessions. Students enrolled on the module benefitted greatly from knowing that they would need only to access a single resource to find links to course content.

13. Any other business

No matters raised.

14. Dates of Next Meetings

The second Term 1 DSSCC meeting in 2020/21 would take place on Wednesday 2 December via Microsoft Teams. The time for the meeting to take place was to be confirmed.