



Draft Minutes

DEPARTMENTAL STAFF STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (DSSCC)

Undergraduate Programmes (Term 3)

27 May 2020, at 13:00, 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 1)
Kevin Bryson	KB	Chair of DSSCC; Programme Director: BSc/MEng Computer Science; Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 1)
Rajesh Goyal	RG	Course Rep for MEng Computer Science (Year 2)
Lewis Griffin	LG	Departmental Tutor
Steve Hailes	SH	ENGF0002 - Module Lead (for CS); Head of Department
Mark Handley	MH	Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 3)
Dinesh Kalamegam	DK	Course Rep for MEng Mathematical Computation (Year 4)
Giacomo Livan	GL	(Incoming) Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 2)
Celeste Manenc	CM	Course Rep for BSc Computer Science (Year 2)
Konrad Niedzielski	KN	Course Rep for MEng Mathematical Computation (Year 3)
Simone Righi	SR	(Outgoing) Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 2)
Graham Roberts	GR	Departmental Welfare Tutor / Undergraduate Year Coordinator (Year 4)
Nicholas Smith	NS	Teaching and Learning Administrator (Undergraduate)
Jo Stiles	JS	Teaching and Learning Manager (Interim)
Terry Williams	TW	Course Rep MEng Computer Science (Year 3)

In attendance:

Name	Abbrev.	Role
Louisa Ball	LB	Secretary to DSSCC

Apologies:

Name	Abbrev.	Role
Vajeeha Farooq	VF	Computer Science Communications Team
Robin Hirsch	RH	Programme Director: MEng Mathematical Computation

1. Welcome and Apologies

Kevin Bryson (KB) welcomed everyone to the final Undergraduate DSSCC meeting of the 2019/20 academic year, and the only meeting of Term 3. The meeting was being conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams as a result of the ongoing closure of the UCL Campus, itself as a result of the Covid19 pandemic.

KB welcomed Giacomo Livan (GL) as the incoming Year 2 coordinator and thanked the outgoing Year 2 coordinator, Simone Righi (SR), for his work in the role.

KB introduced the Student Reps by their name and their role in the committee.

2. Introduction from Computer Science Communications Team

Vajeeha Farooq (VF), the Communications and Marketing Manager within the Department of Computer Science (CS) Communications team, was due to attend the meeting to provide an introduction to the CS Communications team and to gather feedback from Student Representatives on the Communications strategy within CS, however she was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting as planned.

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer feedback related to communications within CS.

Zvezdin Besarabov (ZB) noted that the regular circulation of student opportunities by the Communications Team were very helpful to receive.

Rajesh Goyal (RG) noted that the students may have benefitted, and may yet still benefit, from more regular communication from the department specifically related to the Covid19 pandemic. Unitu could be utilised for this purpose, as well as daily communication via email. This would be helpful and appreciated even in cases where

the only update the department were able to provide was that they were continuing to liaise with the college regarding a pending an institution-wide announcement.

Action – Lewis Griffin (LG) to pursue the use of Unitu to provide important and regular updates to students related to the Covid19 pandemic.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Received: The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020.

The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

i) Minute 4 – Module Reading Lists.

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that Module Leads would be reminded to update the Reading Lists for their respective modules. This had been done via email on 07 May.

ii) Minute 5.2 – MPEB Lab Cleanliness

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that Louisa Ball (LB) would investigate whether the department could prevent catered events taking place in MPEB Lab Rooms in order to prevent further or worsened mice infestation, and also to investigate whether the computer keyboards in the rooms were cleaned as part of regular building maintenance. LB was still making enquiries as regards to these matters.

iii) Minute 5.4 – COMP0005 Algorithms

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that he would provide the student feedback that was received via the SSCC and Unitu for Coursework 2 in COMP0005 Algorithms directly to the Module Lead, so that changes could be implemented ahead of 2020/21. KB confirmed this had been done.

iv) Minute 5.5 – Anonymous marking

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that Module Leads would be reminded to conduct marking anonymously. An email had been sent to Module Leads on 07 May to remind them not to request that student names be added to coursework assignments prior to submission, and to use the anonymous marking function on Moodle.

v) Minute 5.6 Applied Cryptography and Cryptanalysis

KB noted that concerns were raised at the previous meeting regarding COMP0058 Applied Cryptography and Cryptanalysis, and in parallel with the same concerns being raised to Unitu. The concerns regarded the assessments, content and the delivery of content.

KB confirmed that the MCQ marks had been re-graded following identification of technical problem within Moodle, and were released to Moodle Gradebook. Coursework marks for the module were also released. The feedback on the teaching and assessment of this module this year and the last had also been considered by the Departmental Tutor, and the Head of Department, and an action plan was being drawn up to ensure that those were addressed in the delivery of the module in 2020/21.

vi) Minute 5.8 Lecture cancellations in COMP0141 Security

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that LG would further investigate the reason for the cancellation of lectures in COMP0141 Security late in Term 2. This had been done and it was confirmed to Unitu that lecture cancellations late in Term 2 were as a result of strike action, and that as such content not taught in person (as a result of that strike action) would not be assessed.

vii) Minute 11. Broken lights in MPEB 1.05

KB noted that it was agreed at the previous meeting that LB would contact the Technical Support Group (TSG) to request that the lights in Computer Lab 1.05 in MPEB be fixed. This was done and a response was pending.

Other issues raised/discussed and actions agreed at the previous meeting were summarized on Unitu, and had either been actioned or were in progress. Issues discussed and actions agreed at the current meeting would also be summarized to Unitu following the meeting.

5. Student Feedback and Actions

Received: A summary of issues as raised on Unitu since the previous meeting (11 March 2020).

5.1 Marking criteria of COMP0010 (and marking descriptors more widely)

Celeste Manenc (CM) and RG noted that feedback was returned to students on COMP0010 one week prior to the meeting, which was some 4 months after the work was submitted in January. Some students in the cohort were unhappy with the marks received, as there was a perceived inconsistency between the marks given and the marking criteria published for the assessment. In particular, most students received positive feedback but no indication of where the work might have been improved upon, leaving students to wonder why their marks were not higher. When the Module Lead was asked for more detailed feedback it was not given. In addition, marks were revised and then re-released, however marks were only increased for around half of the cohort.

LG issued an apology that feedback was delivered late for this module and reassured Student Reps that it had been investigated and deemed to be as a result of the specific format of the coursework, which was revised ahead of 2019/20, having taken longer to mark than was first anticipated. Students could be reassured that plans were in place ahead of 2020/21 to ensure this was not repeated and this would include more PGTA support for the module.

LG clarified that indicative marks had been released to students and subsequently revised following thorough second marking. During the second marking process the two first markers (who had first marked half of the assessments each) ensured careful

calibration of their assessment of high and low academic standards. The marks had been thoroughly checked and second marked, and were final, pending approval by the Board of Examiners. There were no grounds to revisit the marks, but where there remained any concerns regarding this, Student Reps could discuss them directly with the Chair of the Board of Examiners, Dr James Brotherston.

It was agreed through discussion that students feel assessment feedback is most helpful where it contains clear and detailed indication of how the work and mark could be improved upon. LG thanked the Student Reps for this feedback, and would pass this to the Module Lead.

5.2 COMP0019 Computer Systems

Terry Williams (TW) reported that he had received a large volume of negative feedback, both directly and privately, and via shared social media channels, regarding the module COMP0019 Computer Systems. There was additionally a ‘straw poll’ taken where three quarters of responders (in the Year 3 cohort) agreed that the module should be raised as a concern at the current DSSCC meeting. Some of the concerns expressed had been discussed at a meeting between Year 3 reps, the Departmental Tutor and the Year 3 Coordinator in February. Concerns relating specifically to the Alternative Assessment included that it was too time consuming; students felt that it took a long period of time to develop understanding of the task before work could begin, and that it relied on work carried out for the Programming Courseworks set throughout the module, which many students found very challenging or too difficult.

Mark Handley (MH) reassured the Student Reps that he had reviewed the assessment and was in agreement that it was challenging but felt it had been set at the appropriate level. The open-book nature of the assessment necessitated open-style questions that went beyond the material in the course, and needed to be designed to generate a reasonable mark distribution.

Steve Hailes (SH) reassured the Student Reps that he had also reviewed the assessment and agreed it was challenging but that it was a good assessment, and noted that whilst there were some reference to previous coursework assignments was

made, it was done so to help to guide students' answers; it did not require or rely on intimate knowledge of the answers to the courseworks themselves.

KB reassured the Student Reps that the module was currently being reviewed ahead of 2020/21 in light of student feedback. Additionally, students should be reassured that the Board of Examiners and the External Examiners for Undergraduate programmes would review all assessments and outcomes to ensure that assessments had been set at an appropriate level, and that there had been good discrimination of ability. There was no further action that could be taken but for the department to continue to take student feedback regarding the module into account going forward.

5.3 Plans for next year online teaching

LG noted that UCL had not yet made a public announcement regarding its planned mode of delivery for taught courses in Academic Year 2020/21, however such an announcement was expected to be made shortly. There would be a unified framework for the delivery of taught content across the college, within which individual departments would navigate the delivery of its individual degree programmes. Once there was a clear direction from the college, LG would invite input from students regarding the delivery of programmes in Computer Science and their content. Tuition fees would not be reduced in the event of teaching being made partially or fully remote, which was in line with Government guidance and advice.

Currently the college, and the department, were preparing for a multitude of possible eventualities as regards to the delivery of taught content.

SH noted that he had communicated clearly to the Dean of Engineering, Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker, that the department regarded the matter as being in urgent need of clarification.

CM reported that there was a clear concern among continuing students regarding the as-yet unknown implications of any pending announcement, such as whether students should renew contracts for student accommodation.

LG acknowledged and echoed the concerns and reassured students that this was also being fed back by the department.

5.4. Other matters relating to Student Feedback and Actions

Inadequate online teaching for Year 1 Undergraduate students (as raised on Unitu)

ZB noted that Year 1 students had raised to Unitu that online teaching provision in five Undergraduate Year 1 modules (following the suspension of face-to-face teaching on 13 March 2020) had been inadequate.

LG reported that the department were aware of the post, which had been escalated for staff attention in the days prior to the meeting, and work was beginning to take place to investigate the matters raised. Further clarity was required from students as regards to the specific concerns per individual module that had been queried, to allow for the department to take the matter forward.

Action – Year 1 reps to communicate to LG specific concerns at the module level relating to inadequate online teaching provision in Year 1 modules.

Penultimate Year students at advantage in internship applications

RG noted that there was a concern among students in the Year 2 cohort that some students would exploit the option to transfer from BSc to MEng Computer Science after Year 2 specifically to be able to hold the advantage of being a penultimate-year student in any given internship application pool for two separate academic years (i.e. by applying as a Year 2 BSc student, and then again the following year after having switched to being a Year 3 MEng student).

LG clarified that there was not a mechanism or any regulation within which the department could prevent transfers being made for this specific reason. Students should be reassured however that in a wide pool of applications from students across multiple (worldwide) institutions that individual students were unlikely to be specifically disadvantaged in their likelihood of making a successful application by this conduct.

Clarification of process for switching IEP Minor (between Year 2 and 3)

RG noted that it was not clear for students completing their Year 2 studies whether they were permitted to switch their IEP Minor stream prior to re-enrolling in Year 3.

LG clarified that switching minor stream after Year 2 was possible but not guaranteed, and was determined on a case-by-case basis. Requests should be sent to cs.undergraduate@ucl.ac.uk.

Clarification of process for requesting to switch between BSc/MEng Computer Science

RG noted that it was not clear to students how they should submit a request to switch between BSc and MEng Computer Science.

SR clarified that such requests should be submitted directly to the Year 2 Coordinator (GL going forward). Requests must be accompanied with a description of the motivation to switch programmes for the Year 2 Coordinator's consideration. Requests given approval by the Year 2 coordinator can then proceed to the formal application stage and students should follow the advice then given. In addition, Tier 4 students should seek the advice of the UCL Visa Compliance team in respect of visa implications.

Extenuating Circumstances

DK queried whether the implementation of an extended deadline due to Extenuating Circumstances for an individual student would cause a delay to the release of their marks and award.

LG clarified that extensions due to Extenuating Circumstances would not cause a delay to the release of marks. Were a request submitted for an extension which was approved would cause the revised date of submission for the work to fall outside of the academic session (i.e. unable to be considered by the Board of Examiners), the claim would be automatically considered as a request to defer the assessment to the next assessment period (i.e. Late Summer).

6. Departmental Teaching Committee

No matters raised.

7. Report from Faculty-level Meetings

LG reported that the Faculty Teaching Committee were currently meeting on a regular basis, and that ZB was also in regular attendance in as the Faculty Student Representative within Engineering. LG noted that ZB was doing excellent work in the role.

8. Programme and Module Feedback

8.1 Proposed changes to Year 1 Programme diets (for 2020/21)

Received: Proposed changes to Year 1 Programme diets (for 2020/21)

BSc/MEng Computer Science

KB noted that a proposal was circulated to committee members to amend the Year 1 Programme diet on the BSc/MEng Computer Science degree programme, such that COMP0147 Discrete Mathematics for Computer Scientists would be moved to Term 1 and COMP0003 Theory of Computation would be moved to Term 2. Academic justification for the proposal was contained in the supporting documentation for the meeting. The proposal was driven in part by feedback received from current and former Year 1 students.

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer feedback on the proposed changes.

ZB noted that the proposed change was positive and well received.

MEng Mathematical Computation

KB noted that the supporting documentation also contained a proposal of changes to the Year 1 Programme diet on the MEng Mathematical Computation programme, such that MATH0003 Analysis 1 would be added to the diet and delivered in Term 1, COMP0003 Theory of Computation would be moved to Term 2, and COMP0012 Compilers would be removed from the programme.

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer feedback on the proposed changes.

Dinesh Kalamegam (DK) noted that students in the MEng Mathematical Computation cohort felt that the addition of MATH0003 Analysis 1 would be a positive change, and agreed that the inclusion of the module would be beneficial preparatory work for Mathematics modules taken in later years. However, they felt that the loss of COMP0012 Compilers would not be a positive change, as this was seen as important and core computer science content. Students on the programme would welcome the addition of MATH0003 Analysis 1, but not if it would be at the expense of the inclusion of COMP0012 Compilers.

DK noted that students would favour the implementation of more options for students on MEng Mathematical Computation early in the programme, such that they could amend the proportion of Computer Science to Mathematics modules they took according to their preference.

LG thanked DK for his comments and noted that their feedback would feed into the process as the proposal was taken forward.

9. Programme Delivery

Implementation of Alternative Assessments in Main Summer 2019/20 (to replace Main Examinations)

LG summarised for the committee the action that was taken by the department in respect of the recently implemented Alternative Assessments, which replaced cancelled Main Summer Examinations. LG reported that following the cancellation of all in-person teaching and assessments, the department had fed into consultation that took place at all levels within the college in respect of assessment and was provided, ultimately, with a set of assessment method options to select from at the module level. Most examinations were replaced with a coursework assessment, with a small minority having been replaced with a 24-hour open book examination. Assessments were constructed in a necessarily short period of time and peer-checked prior to their publication on 27 April. The deadline for some of the Alternative Assessments had already passed to date and so work toward marking the assessments was beginning to take place.

10. Personal Tutoring and Student Support

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer feedback on the Personal Tutoring and Student Support systems within Computer Science.

It was agreed through discussion that the student experience of the personal tutoring system across the undergraduate cohort was mixed, such that some students developed good and mutually beneficial relationships with their Personal Tutors whilst others had not met them or made contact and had not utilised this route of support.

LG thanked the reps for their valuable feedback and noted that the Personal Tutoring system would be heavily revised ahead of the 2020/21 Academic Year, such that there would be a dedicated timeslot in students' weekly timetables for meeting with Personal Tutors. It was hoped that this would greatly increase engagement.

11. Academic Representation

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer feedback on the Academic Representation process within Computer Science.

ZB noted that a system of 'handing over' between incoming and outgoing Student Reps would be really helpful. Student Reps were provided a high-level overview of the role of Student Representative, such as that provided by the Students' Union, but a practical guide to carrying out the role within the department was lacking and would be helpful. It would also be beneficial to make this available to students prior to Student Rep elections taking place at the start of the year.

Action – Current Student Reps to create a ‘Computer Science Student Representative’ role description.

DK noted that the recent utilisation of Microsoft Teams to foster communication between the Departmental Tutor/DSSCC Chair and the Student Reps was beneficial, and should be implemented from the beginning of the academic year.

It was agreed that the frequency with which full committee meetings were held in 2019/20 (i.e. two full meetings per term in Terms 1 and 2, and one full meeting in Term 3) was constructive, and would therefore continue into 2020/21.

KB expressed thanks to all the Student Reps in 2019/20, who he noted had done a really good job in their respective roles, including to help bring about important procedural changes and awareness of certain issues. KB noted his hope that the department had resolved concerns and issues raised wherever it could.

LG also expressed thanks to all the Student Reps in 2019/20 and noted that he had enjoyed working with them throughout the current academic year and wished them well in their future studies and endeavours. LG added that they had performed a very important and useful function within the department with a great deal of care and effort.

12. Any Other Business

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

KB noted that the department had surpassed a 70% response rate in the National Student Survey (NSS) prior to the survey closing on 30 April. As a result the department would receive a £650 cash prize to spend on students.

KB invited the Student Reps to proffer suggestions and ideas of how the money should be spent.

Ideas discussed included the postage of hoodies previously purchased by the department to all finalist students, a contribution toward an additional summer internship for an undergraduate student, and a donation to charity.

An agreement was reached that the money would be donated toward research into the treatment of Covid19.

Action – LG to make arrangements for the £650 prize money received to the department for reaching a 70% response rate in the National Student Survey (NSS) to be donated toward the treatment of Covid19.

13. Dates of Next Meetings

The current meeting would be the final meeting of the 2019/20 academic year. Academic Reps for each year group would be elected via Unitu at the commencement of the next academic year; with the date, time and location of the first DSSCC meeting of 2020/21 to be confirmed.

The committee would retain the current format of holding two full committee meetings per team (with only one in Term 3).