Question 2

As ”moral standards are only important because human welfare is important” (Christopher Benett 2015, p69), my goal will be to form ethical guidelines of computer science that try to maximise human welfare by considering the use of act and rule utilitarianism.

The ethical guidelines that use act utilitarianism could be more general but more directly targeting the core goal - maximise human welfare, while the ethical guidelines that follow rule utilitarianism may be more specific as the rule maker evaluates which “world” will be the best under the overall circumstance. As act utilitarianism defines “An act is right if and only if it results in at least as much overall well-being as any act the agent could have performed” (Ben Eggleston 2017, p2), whether an action is right or the person can get the licence or not is a case by case decision. So my guidelines by using act utilitarianism will be general, like being beneficial for society, not harming human beings and so on. I will leave decision making to the staff to judge actions or whether a person can get the licence case by case. However for rule utilitarianism, an action is right if and only if it follows a guideline “the general following of which would result in greater utility than an alternative available rule”(Christopher Benett 2015, p65). So if the guidelines use rule utilitarianism, every guideline will be well concerned and more specific to determine which world will be better, with this guideline or without this guideline, like be honest, respect user privacy, and so on. Following these guidelines will be better for human welfare than obeying under general circumstances, but in some special cases, the statement can be false. Hence, guidelines formed by using act utilitarianism will be more general to leave more possibilities to judge the action or people. In other wise, guidelines formed by using rule utilitarianism will be more concerned and be beneficial to humans in most cases.

Both act and rule utilitarianism have shortages and advantages, so I think they are equally good. By using act utilitarianism, we can maximise overall benefit by evaluating each case, but it’s time consuming and the decision can be inconsistent. Imagine if there is a small number of cases that need to be judged and each case has a huge impact on the human welfare, then making decisions case by case can be valuable and the best result can be achieved. But as a computer science association, it is normal that a lot of cases waiting for dealling, and each one may has limited impact on the goal, then following act utilitarianism would not only be intricate but also inconsistent, as different people may have different decisions on similar cases whose effect on human welfare is not obviously enough. In order to avoid these issues, I am considering introducing rule utilitarianism to the computer science guideline formation. Rule utilitarianism lets judgement be consistent. In any situation judged by any person who follows my guidelines will get the same result at the end. It also reduces staff’s consideration time, because under general situations, following these guidelines will be beneficial and staff no need to spend extra time to judge by themselves. However, rule utilitarianism also has some shortages. Benett states that “rule-utilitarianism is too insulated from the outcomes of particular cases” (Christopher Benett 2015, p69). To some edge cases a specific rule may not lead to the best result anymore. For example, a hacker gets the terrorists' personal information without terrorists' consent to assist police prevent terrorists from attacking a city. The hacker can’t get the licence because he violates respecting people’s privacy rule according to the guideline using rule utilitarianism. But the

hacker's action saves human society, considering from act utilitarianism perspective, the hacker still can get the licence, because he did not do anything wrong. In my opinion, both act and rule utilitarianism have their advantages and disadvantages, they are equally good, best result may be produced by combining these two theories. Under normal circumstances, rule utilitarianism plays a major role in the decision, while for some important edge cases, we can decide case by case. As such when deciding majority cases it would be more consistant and time saving, but we also keep decision making authority on these important edge cases.

Therefore computer science ethical guideline formation using act utilitarianism may have different results compared to rule utilitarianism. It can be more general using act utilitarianism compared to rule utilitarianism, because act utilitarianism focuses on case by case decision as long as the result is good, while rule utilitarianism states the guideline needs to have positive effect under general circumstance. So I would say these two forms of utilitarianism are equally good, as they can achieve good results at specific situations, but they also have flaws at different aspects. So as the person who form the guideline for the computer science association, I would like to combine these two forms of utilitarianism to maximise human welfare.

Reference List:

Bennett, C. (2015). *What is this thing called ethics?* second ed. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Eggleston, Ben (2014). *Act Utilitarianism*. In Ben Eggleston & Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 125-145.