

Department of Computer Science and Technology

Tripes Management Committee

Chairman: Dr Timothy Jones

Secretary: Ms Dinah Pounds

Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Tripes Management Committee
on Monday 25 January 2021 at 14:00 via Teams

Present

Prof Alastair Beresford (*Deputy HoD*)
Marion Cobby (*Student Administrator*)
Dr Hatice Gunes
Dr Robert Harle
Dr Sean Holden
Dr Timothy Jones (*Chairman*)

Helen Neal (*Student Administrator*)
Dinah Pounds (*Secretary*)
Prof Frank Stajano
Caroline Stewart
Dr Ian Wassell (*Chair of Examiners*)
Dr Damon Wischik

1 Apologies for Absence

None.

2 Notification of any other business

Timezones – this was considered in Any Other Business later in the meeting.

3 Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting

With no corrections to be made, the minutes were signed as a correct record of the meeting.

4 Update on pending actions

4.1 Actions from items 3.1, 3.3 and 11.1 from the previous meeting were deferred to the next meeting of TMC.

4.2 Brief document being written on how to improve the process of marking and moderating Part II dissertations (*item 3.2*):

4.2.1 Dr Damon Wischik presented his paper on the grading of Part II dissertations, regarding the consensus grade and calibration divergence which seemed only to occur at the extremities. It was proposed that estimated calibration curves could be added to the discussions in the next project discussion meeting.

4.2.2 It was agreed that examiners would be invited to discuss how they could use this data when they next met and the Marking and Classing Document should be adjusted accordingly.

(Action: IJW)

- 4.3 Discussion with Jon Crowcroft on the future structure of Part II Principles of Communications (*item 7.5*):
- 4.3.1 It was confirmed that this had not yet happened but would do so soon. (Action: TMJ)
- 4.4 It was confirmed that Anjur Dawar would continue to offer oversight and cover for the examinations for Part II Quantum Computing (*item 8.1.2*).
- 4.5 Progress on the future of Part II Computer Vision and Information Theory (*item 8.3.1*):
- 4.5.1 No response had yet been received from Dr Cengiz Oztireli re Computer Vision.
Afternote: Dr R. Harle has agreed to take over Part II Information Theory. (Action: TMJ/DP)
- 4.6 Translation of exam questions from ML to OCaml (*item 11.2*):
- 4.6.1 It was noted that this had already been taking place since 1995 but that they were hidden on last year's course materials page.
- 4.6.2 It was noted that not all solutions had been translated, as they would not all still be relevant given that some of the lecture materials had now changed.
- 4.6.3 It was agreed that Anil Madhavapeddy would be asked to provide solution notes to all parts that were considered relevant. (Action: TMJ to AVSM)
- 4.7 Supervisor match-making site (*item 11.3*):
- 4.7.1 It was confirmed that this was being used and that a good coverage of supervisors for Lent term courses had been identified.
- 4.7.2 It was noted that experiences of the effectiveness of the site had varied and suggested that additional mechanisms for finding supervisors should also be sought.
- 4.7.3 It was agreed that a further message would be circulated in May/June to remind people of the site. (Action: DP)

5 Other Matters Arising

- 5.1 Dr Markus Kuhn's sabbatical request (*item 5.1*):
- 5.1.1 This sabbatical request had been approved subject to satisfactory teaching cover being found.
- 5.1.2 It was confirmed that Prof Frank Stajano would take over 1B Security.
- 5.1.3 It was confirmed that MK was in discussion with Dr Martin Kleppmann regarding Part II Cryptography and with Dr Rafal Mantiuk regarding Part II Digital Signal Processing. There could also be the opportunity for it to be run by PhD students with oversight from RKM.
- 5.1.4 It was noted that confirmation was needed as to whether the Part II units definitely had to run, if cover was not forthcoming.
- 5.1.5 The Committee agreed that they would prefer for these units both to run, but would support the idea of suspending them if no cover could be found.
 (Action: TMJ to MK and RKM to confirm availability of cover)
- 5.1.6 It was noted that support for the Tripos examination pack preparation would also be needed, and that in the absence of MGK another person would need to be identified for this.
- 5.1.7 It was believed that due to the comprehensive work undertaken by MGK on this, it would be an easy task to take on.
- 5.1.8 Malcolm Scott was suggested as a possibility – or another UTO from the systems side of things. (Action: DP)
- 5.2 Report on the start of term briefing lecture (*item 5.2*):
- 5.2.1 Separate talks had been given to all three groups (slide presentation followed by Q&A session) which had yielded a lot of questions and feedback.
- 5.2.2 The students were very appreciative of these briefings and suggested that more might take place over the term.
- 5.2.3 It was confirmed that similar briefings would be held at the beginning of Easter term as the students found them to be reassuring and informative, whether or not people were back in the building or not.

- 5.2.4 There was concern about the interaction with SSCoF but as this does not meet very frequently it was not seen to be an issue.
- 5.2.5 There was a suggestion that on-line 'office hours' should be introduced, possibly every two weeks, with questions submitted beforehand. *(Action: RKH)*
- 5.3 Report on guidance for lecture videos *(item 5.3)*:
 - 5.3.1 It was confirmed that the document which was circulated to staff had been turned into a webpage.
 - 5.3.2 It was agreed for this to be a standing item on future meetings of TMC, in order to review on an ongoing basis and to provide timely advice for the coming academic year. *(Action: DP)*
- 5.4 Part IA supervision norms *(item 5.4)*:
 - 5.4.1 This had been discussed at the DoS Forum, as there had been concern that students were having a supervision for every three lectures in their Mathematics units and every four for Computer Science.
 - 5.4.2 It was noted that although the hours in general varied between different years this was in line with the supervision norms documentation and that at times not all recommended supervisions were actually taking place.
 - 5.4.3 It was also noted that the number of supervisions was no longer specified on the website and this needed updating. *(Action: ARB)*
 - 5.4.4 It was confirmed that if supervisors wished to add another supervision this would need prior approval from the Director of Studies.

6 Reports from other committees

- 6.1 Directors of Studies Forum, 15 January 2021:
 - 6.1.1 All action points from this had been covered on the agenda already.
- 6.2 SSCoF, 25 November 2020:
 - 6.2.1 There had been quite a strong feeling of dissatisfaction from Part II regarding supervisions being held for some courses but not all, and that it varied from college to college.
 - 6.2.2 There was a suggestion that example classes may be added, to make up for this.
 - 6.2.3 Principles of Communication: students had expressed concern that the videos covering 16 hours of lectures were only 6 hours in total, although the lecturer had confirmed that all the material had been covered.
 - 6.2.4 It was recognised that an hour's (ie 50 minutes' in reality) face-to-face lecture would be shorter on a video, as there was no interaction, discussion or questions being raised.

7 Sabbatical requests

- 7.1 Professor Jon Crowcroft's request for sabbatical during the Lent and Easter terms 2022 was agreed, as it would not impact on his teaching as he was only teaching in Michaelmas term.

8 Correspondence

- 8.1 It was reported that Professor Ted Briscoe would not be delivering Part II Datascience after 2020 and that another lecturer would be needed to take over the course.
- 8.2 It was noted that there were a lot of new lecturers and UTOs and that one could be identified to take over this unit.
- 8.3 It was agreed to compile a spreadsheet of the new lecturers and their interests to inform any future teaching allocation planning. *(Action: DP/TMJ)*

9 Michaelmas term 2020 student feedback

- 9.1 1B Graphics: students expressed some concerns but a substantial amount of reworking of the course had been done this year and the Committee believed these were just teething problems.
- 9.2 Part 2 Bioinformatics: students voiced some difficulties with the slides. It had previously been suggested that the tutor should have some help in ordering slides and the Committee agreed to mandate that this should definitely happen for next year. *(Action: DP)*
- 9.3 Part II Principles of Communications: the students voiced concerns about insufficient videos and no supervisions. It was agreed to discuss this with the lecturer, as there had been concerns about the lectures in previous years and the move this year to videos had exacerbated it. *(Action: TMJ)*
- 9.4 Part II Datascience: students felt that the tutor had been unresponsive to questions and that there was not enough clarity about what they were being expected to produce in their assignment with the data that they had; the tutor had been talked to and confirmed that it was deliberately ambiguous, in order to reflect the real world, but the students were clearly unhappy with this.
- 9.4.1 It was noted that with a different tutor from Michaelmas 2021 this should be resolved.
- 9.5 Part 1A OCaml: students had encountered issues with the notebooks crashing, which was a feature of downloading all the data at one time; however, it was agreed that some work on the infrastructure was needed and would be greatly welcomed. *(Action: RKH)*
- 9.6 It was agreed that positive feedback should also be minuted, rather than focussing only on the negatives and that these would be reported at the next meeting of TMC. This was fully supported. *(Action: TMJ)*
- 9.7 It was agreed that a weblink to the feedback page would be added to the agenda next time, for ease of reference. *(Action: DP)*

10 Tripos Course Planning

- 10.1 Part II Mobile Robot Systems: a paper outlining syllabus revisions was considered:
- 10.1.1 It was noted that the intention would be to encourage collaboration with students from Engineering and that interest in doing this had already been shown by students. This would be achieved by merging Mobile Robot Systems (CST) with Robotics (ENG) to create a Part II Introduction to Robotics unit.
- 10.1.2 It was fully agreed that the unit could move to the Michaelmas term to accommodate a new follow-on Lent term course in Advanced Robotics.
- 10.1.3 The introduction of Advanced Robotics would be aimed at MPhil students as well as Part II. This was seen as a definite advantage, bringing opportunities up to PhD level in Computer Science for Part II Engineers.
- 10.1.4 It was noted that there could be some content overlap between Introduction to Robotics and Data Sensor Systems and that this would need to be taken into account.
- 10.2 An additional lecturer outside the AI group for the Part IA MLRD course:
- 10.2.1 A request had been made for a co-lecturer, outside of the NLP group, to be involved in the delivery of this unit.
- 10.2.2 It was agreed that cover would be sought from one of the new UTOs. *(Action: TMJ)*

11 Student workload

- 11.1 Directors of Studies had raised concerns about the high workload for Part II units and expressed a preference for more of the assessment to take place nearer to the start of the units to overcome this.
- 11.2 It was noted that this could cause problems if not all the material had been covered.

- 11.3 It was acknowledged that wherever the assessment took place it inevitably took students away from work on their projects, which in turn could cause anxiety.
- 11.4 It was agreed that the amount of work should be reduced rather than moved, if this was really the problem.
- 11.5 It was noted that this was a time management issue which would recur in 'real life' and that students should learn to deal with it from this stage in their lives.
- 11.6 It was suggested that project details could be finalised before the end of term so that students would be able to work on them over the summer and start Michaelmas term with a clearer idea of what they were going to be doing. A dedicated week could be designated for students to identify their project supervisor, with whom they could discuss their project proposal before leaving for the summer vacation.
- 11.7 It was acknowledged that this could not be introduced this year, as dates had already been published,
- 11.8 It was agreed that a more concrete proposal should be prepared for consideration by the Committee. *(Action: RKH)*
- 11.9 It was reported that lecturers had been asked to give an estimate of how much work would be expected of students for each unit from the start – it was agreed that all units of assessment should be scrutinised to ensure that expectations of the students were not too high. *(Action: TMJ)*
- 11.10 It was noted that, for one Lent term unit, lectures later in the term would contain material for further information only, so that the material for the assessments was covered earlier in term. Students would be able to work towards a starred tick in these extended areas of interest, if they wished, knowing that this would not count towards the final mark.

12 **Tripos examinations**

- 12.1 The Directors of Studies forum had formally requested that Examiners and TMC should give students some guidance on answering open book questions and to provide some question examples.
- 12.2 More specifically, the request was for guidance and clarity as to the meaning of 'open book' – and even though the University was planning to circulate guidance later in the term, very little was known at this stage as to any of the detail. Once specifics were known, the Department could inform the students of the detail.
- 12.3 It was agreed that the Chair of Examiners would provide some guidance from the Department, in parallel with anything produced by the University. *(Action: JW, ARB)*
- 12.4 It was suggested that students should be advised that answering examination questions successfully would be achieved by approaching them as a problem-solving process rather than providing large amounts of data found in books and on-line, which would not always be manageable within the allotted time.

13 **Teaching Assistants (TAs) for ticking**

- 13.1 Prof Frank Stajano had submitted a paper to the Head of Department requesting the introduction of Teaching Assistants (TAs), who had said that it would need the endorsement of TMC to be taken further.

- 13.2 In response to directives from the Head of Department about reducing unnecessary workload, it was felt that the introduction of TAs to be shared amongst all the tickable courses would be of benefit. The lecturers would design and build the tick questions and machinery but the TAs would have responsibility for the ticking year on year.
- 13.3 It was felt that the role of TA could be built into the job descriptions of Research Assistants, with the funding for the work being provided by the department to avoid the idea of the research funding being used for this purpose.
- 13.4 It was noted that some tickers had also been involved in Helpdesk work in the past so it could be a natural extension of that work.
- 13.5 The Committee expressed its support for having TAs or other people to run the ticks in order to remove repetitive workload and to alleviate unnecessary workload on UTOs and agreed to submit this proposal to the Head of Department. *(Action: DP, CS)*

14 Any Other Business

14.1 Timezones:

- 14.1.1 Everyone was acutely aware of the difference in timezones for students studying from their home countries during lockdown and acknowledged that this could be problematic at times.
- 14.1.2 It was agreed that students would be assured that the department would make reasonable adjustment to accommodate any issues, but that there would, inevitably, be occasions when working unsociable hours may be unavoidable.

15 Date and time of next meeting

Monday 1 March 2021, 1400.