

Graduate Students' Forum Minutes

16th June 2016

A meeting of the Graduate Students' Forum took place on Thursday 16th June at 12:00 h in FW09 in the Computer Laboratory, William Gates Building.

Attendance:

AR Andrew Rice (GEC) [Chair]
PL Pietro Lio (B)
LG Lise Gough (Graduate Education Manager)
EW Erroll Wood (Rainbow, minute taker)
SB Sandro Bauer (NLIP) [Secretary]
IT Ivo Timoteo (AI & B)
HH Heidi Howard (SRG)
SK Stephan Kollman (DTG)
DV Diana Vasile (Women@CL)

1. Apologies

None.

2. Membership of the Forum

Ivo (IT) and Sandro Bauer (SB) will be leaving the forum. New members from their research group will be recruited. EW will become the secretary until the next meeting. Pietro Lio (PL) was welcomed as the incoming Researcher Development Coordinator. PL will chair the following meeting.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th October 2015 were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

a) Supervision problems in some colleges

HH noticed different colleges have different standards of supervising. How can we improve the standard of the supervisors? HH suggested that being more selective would help. PL suggested positive supervisor feedback in the form of "best supervisor" prizes, with nominees being put forwards by students. However, as colleges organize 1A and 1B supervisions, it is hard to regulate supervisors. PL: some courses are barely supervised at the moment, so we do not want to scare supervisors off with overly negative feedback.

HH also noticed that it seems some supervisors seem to be teaching without having done the training course. AR: unfortunately, as 1A and 1B supervisions are organized by colleges, this is their responsibility to check; part 2 students are checked by Megan.

DV wanted access to more information and support for supervisors – perhaps there should be a list of who supervises for which courses, so a community of supervisors could be established. LG suggested setting up an online forum for this, as this way people aren't forced into it. AR suggested nominating a principal supervisor for each course.

ACTION ITEMS

- Potentially set up an optional [Slack](#) or forum (e.g. [Discourse](#)) for supervisors
- AR to take these suggestions to the graduate education committee.

b) Policy regarding expense claims

AR followed up on this. It seems the policy is unlikely to change.

c) Food

Issues with the quality and quantity of food still remain. Members reported that the café ran out of vegetarian options often.

d) Accounting department: Problems wrt. approved sellers

AR followed up on this. The issue of Amazon not being on the list of approved sellers is still outstanding.

e) Door to SC corridor

This issue has been resolved: the door is no longer too heavy.

5. New Researcher Development courses

This year, all 1st year PhD students have had to complete 12 units as parts of their CGPS. There was some confusion, as some students thought they only had to do 8 units, and some students that had done the MPhil did not understand that they had to still do other units.

Members of the forum requested an easy way to see what you could do, and how many units this would amount to. Ideally: a mapping of what you can complete → the number of units.

From next year, 2nd year PhD students must do 8 units. The idea is to establish a culture where people are keen on doing development courses to improve themselves beyond their research. In particular, AR noted that courses that build upon each-other would be ideal for this, e.g. supervising; advanced supervising; lecturing. AR suggested a syllabus design course where students will re-design a lecture course as a project, and present this to the current lecturer.

It was noted that current 2nd year PhD students will not be forced to complete units next year.

Is there demand for a course that isn't covered by the CPD already? This should be requested early on if possible.

SB did the mindfulness course and liked it. Wanted more similar courses in the department.

6. Student feedback

SB: There are issues with locked windows in offices. PL: this is a measure to save energy, as open windows make it less clear how energy will be saved in the building. It was suggested that the building manager give a lecture on the energy saving policies and software that he uses, as this could inspire some energy-saving behaviour.

SB: Some students are becoming concerned about Brexit. They would be grateful if the lab could promise a smooth transition and support for those who have just started. Unfortunately, no one really knows what would happen to students in the event of Brexit.

IT: Requests a feedback channel from students to supervisors. While this exists for Part 2 students, it is unfortunately hard to arrange for 1A and 1B as they are college organized. AR suggested talking to the DOSes and requesting feedback, or just polling the students for specific positive & negative feedback.

HH: SRG requests more free chocolate. SRG and other members also reported issues with milk supply / running out. Milk can be purchased from the West Café.

HH: The poplar printer is often jammed – this seems to be a sensitive printer.

ACTION ITEMS

- AR to raise a ticket with sysadmin to see if this printer can be replaced or swapped out

7. Any other business

We would like to thank IT and SB for their years of service to the forum.

The scales for postage are being appreciated.

Cash machine issues: The nearby cash machine has been out of cash for 3 days. This is the only place in West Cambridge to get cash. It is unclear who to go to about such matters.

Departmental Report by LG:

CamSIS is being upgraded. LG is on steering committee of CamSIS upgrade, it seems to be under control, will make it easier to use.

Graduate application form will be revised. There will be some user training and testing in UIS. People are satisfied with the new system. Submitters will be able to apply for up to 5 courses at once for the same fee. New application form going online from 5th September.

PTES & PRES 14/15. CPGS and PhD students seem happy in general.

Are low scores for supervisor assistance with training and development an issue?
Most agree not, as training & development is generally provided by the department, while the supervisor focusses on research. SB did raise concerns that 1 in 4 students were not happy with how their supervisor supports their research. Members of the

forum did note that they were under a lot of guidance up to the first year report, but from then on were left autonomous. IT suggested that error bars would help us analyse the data.

It was noted that the workload for the MPhil courses has improved, though it is a shame that they do not feel like they are challenged to produce their best work.

Departmental Summer BBQ:

It was suggested that we organize a BBQ since the weather is improving. DV and EW have the necessary certificates. DV agreed to take the lead in organizing it. GSF funds will be used to keep the BBQ free, to avoid administrative difficulties.

ACTION ITEMS

- EW to share details of previous Dept. BBQ with DV
- DV and EW to meet regarding planning the BBQ

8. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be arranged in Michaelmas.