MSc Staff Student Committee
11th November 2013
CMF.17, 10.00

Attending: Thomas Le Page, CSM  Hamish Taylor, PG director
Marcin Kopacz, IT (SS)
Jonathan Kambaja, IT (Bus)

Apologies: Nida Farooqui, SE
Syed Gillani, AIA
Aimilios Vourliotakis, AI

Admissions and Induction

TLP observed that the induction event on Friday 27th September was a bit late. AV agreed. Pre-enrolment was on Thursday 12th September so it was two weeks after that. The low attendance wasn’t really because of a timetable clash.

MK suggested that next time it might be better to put its date on the MSc events calendar.

Students present were all satisfied with the admissions process in terms of how responsive it was and in terms of handling all their concerns in a reasonable way.

Council Tax

MK observed that as a part-time student he has had to pay council tax. He wasn’t aware of this in advance and he didn’t feel he had been adequately warned that this would happen. He also fell foul of a difference of interpretation between the university and the council as to what constitutes a part-time course when cashed out in terms of hours of study.

HT observed that there is and has been a FAQ on council tax at

http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk/cs/pgcourses/faqs.html#Council_Tax

It repeats the council criterion that defines a course as part-time if it requires attending less than 24 weeks a year or requires less than 21 hours of weekly study during those periods of attendance.

MK did not think this was adequate warning. He has had to pay GBP 1200 council tax this year and will have to pay a similar amount next year. He might have changed his mind about doing the MSc part-time if he had known about council tax.

Other Arrival Issues

TLP observed that he came early but couldn’t get a bank account until he registered and could produce proof of registration.

MK saw a role for a preparation advice leaflet to be distributed to prospective overseas students prior to admissions.

TLP said that it would have helped if he had got a key check list to help sort out what information was important and what was not prior to coming. He got lots of leaflets relating to various bodies
but found it hard to prioritise which was important.

**VLE and Coursework**

MK said that he didn’t have access to courses on the VLE for which he wasn’t enrolled. This made sensible decision making about altering his option choices hard. He would have expected to have had access to all MACS courses.

JK had looked at the schedules of coursework deadlines and was a little concerned about clashes among them. Would it be possible to spread them out more evenly to avoid several deadlines being on the same day?

HT observed that coursework has to assess the material presented in a course so it can’t be started until that material has been covered. This delays starting it. Furthermore students must be given reasonable time to complete it before a deadline. This inevitably means that the majority of the most significant deadlines occur near the end of a course. As a result it is likely that coursework will be scheduled in the last few weeks of the teaching period, and may clash as a consequence.

HT also pointed out that too many students adopt a *just-in-time, serial* approach to doing multiple pieces of coursework. They don’t even start attempting to do work that is scheduled later than another until after they have completed the former and then without leaving themselves much time to do it. In many cases this means that a coursework deadline at the end of week 12 that is after one or more pieces with end of week 11 deadlines is not even begun until the start of week 12. As a result academics are reluctant to schedule their coursework deadline later than their colleagues’ deadlines because they will get less than average effort put into it. As a consequence deadlines get set at the same time as other academics to make students take each piece of coursework seriously.

MK said he felt that the time between material being presented in class and the coursework being required to be done was in some cases too short.

All the students felt that group coursework has been useful in getting to know other students.

**Lectures**

MK also felt that it would be preferable to have lectures rescheduled rather than cancelled.

TLP argued that it isn’t fair that relevant material for exams is only orally presented but not written down and supplied as notes. This is particularly true for non-native English speaking students who may have difficulty catching everything that lecturers say even when they are present in class.

MK said he had the impression that equipment for lecturers in lecture theatres and classrooms often failed or unnecessarily delayed things. It meant that lectures were often intense. However, overall he felt lectures were OK.

JK agreed that lectures were OK and he felt that they were adequately supported by notes. He found lectures challenging and said that they took time to comprehend. He felt they kept him working.

MK felt that lectures would be improved if lecturers asked more questions of students during class.
MSc AI

AV tabled a paper in his absence that reflected the his views and those of his colleagues on the MSc AI. It made the following points regarding the MSc AI programme:

- there was not enough AI specific content in the MSc AI. *Rigorous Methods for Software Engineering* and *3D Modelling and Animation* don’t really connect with AI.
- there was too much content in *Biologically Inspired Computation* which could be split into 2 courses on genetic algorithms and neural networks.
- *3D Modelling and Animation* also has too much content. 3D Modelling could be one course by itself.
- *AI and Intelligent Agents* was too superficial in being shared with undergraduates, should be more analytical and misleadingly invited being taken by virtue of its title’s link with the degree title name.
- Data Mining & Machine Learning could cover more topics.

Overall he and his fellow students felt that the choice of options in semester 1 was rather off target and the only course F29AI, which seemed as if it should be core, was too shallow.

The meeting was adjourned sine die.

Hamish Taylor