MSc Student Staff Committee
5th December 2014
CMF.17, 10.00

Attending: Olamide Adesanya - MSc BIM   Hamish Taylor, PG director
Assem Madikenova - MSc CSM
Francoise Tith - MSc IT(SS)
Boris Mocialov - MSc MSc SE

Apologies:

1. Assessment

1.1 Coursework Feedback

BM asked where he should look to get feedback on assessed coursework. He looked on Vision but didn’t find it.

HT explained that it is Computer Science department policy to provide feedback on assessed coursework individually within 20 days. The UK Data Protection Act and HWU’s policies mean that information on marks is only provided directly to the students concerned. Many Computer Science department academics provide feedback by email to students. Some provide it in a written form either on marksheets or written on submitted coursework, which students collect from the academic’s office. General feedback on exam performance is provided on Vision (VLE) after the exams are marked.

1.2 Coursework Weighting

BM suggested that many students have complaints about the distribution of marks for coursework. The amount of effort required to get 100% varied a lot from course to course for equivalent amounts of marks e.g. between F21BC and F21DL. BM suggested that the assumed effort hours to do coursework should be reflected in the proportional contribution to the overall course mark.

AM agreed and said that some students such as those on the MSc CSM were given 11 pieces of coursework to do in semester 1. This is too much overall. One course F21IF Information Systems Methodologies alone required students to do 5 pieces of coursework. This is too much for an individual course especially when the coursework contributed to less than half the marks for the course. FT expressed the contrasting view that she felt that doing significant amounts of coursework is helpful to learning new material.

HT said that Computer Science academics usually kept a substantial proportion of the marks for most courses to assessment by exams, because they had more assurance with exams as to who had actually done the work on them. Computer Science department policy was to administer orals to all students on courses assessed 100% by coursework to provide that assurance.

1.3 Coursework Deadline Scheduling

Those present didn’t feel that the scheduling of deadlines this year was a particular problem. However, BM did note that on F21BC the last bit of coursework was due on Sunday December 7 while the exam was on the following Wednesday December 10.
1.4 Coursework Specifications

HT said that it was policy for all students on a course to get all the coursework specifications for the course at the start. MSc representatives present said that that hadn’t happened in all cases. Quite a few had coursework specifications issued after the start and some had them updated after they had been issued, sometimes several times.

1.5 Exam Scheduling

AM and OA appreciated being able to do the semester 1 exams before Christmas rather than waiting until after the New Year.

FT noted that the exam timetable changed even after the final version was published. She noticed this on the date stamp on it. This concerned her. She had waited to book her flight home to France for Christmas until the supposed final version was published. She had then noticed that it had subsequently changed. She asked for reassurance that the timetable wouldn’t change once more.

2. MSc Progression and Award

FT and AM asked about the criteria for awarding MSc degrees and about the rules on doing resits.

HT explained that to get an MSc, a Computer Science taught postgraduate student had to

a) get at least a D (40% or more) on 7 taught courses and 45% or more on F21RP Research Methods and Project Planning

b) get an average over these 8 taught courses of 50% or more

c) get at least a C (50% or more) on their MSc project

Students are allowed to do up to 3 resits at the first opportunity on courses on which they have got an E or an F. They can also do resits on courses with D grades if they need to improve their 8 course average to get over the 50% hurdle.

Usually students, who do resits to meet the MSc award criteria a) and b), are not allowed to progress to the final 15 week full-time study period on their MSc project until they have met a) and b). That means that such students, who pass their resits in August, start the final 15 week phase of their MSc project after the exam board in early September.

3. MSc Projects

3.1 Internships

FT asked about the possibility of doing their MSc project as an internship with a company.

HT clarified that while a scheme to introduce 12 week internships from early May with local companies was almost introduced this year, its introduction was delayed until next year to ensure HWU’s recent policy on project placements was complied with and to give companies the opportunity to provide feedback on the scheme before it started.
Students with existing relationships with companies who are offered internships with them can still do them this year. They just need to follow the procedure for a self-proposed MSc topic and the department will appoint an academic supervisor for their project and liaise with the company contact to ensure the internship meets university and department requirements.

3.2 Self-Proposed Projects

BM didn’t feel that adequate information had been provided on relevant issues involved in self-proposed projects such as who is the owner of the attained results (software/research/etc.) at the end of the project, under which licence the project must be developed, and whether there were any restrictions in the re-use of the results (by the author) in future commercial applications.

4. Arrival and Induction Issues

All present were happy with the speed of response to their application and to queries in the admissions process. However, AM noted that while her queries were responded to rapidly early in the year, over the summer she had one query for which she had to wait several weeks for a reply.

HT suggested that that may have been because he or June was away on holiday at that time.

FT suggested that it might be useful if former MSc students could be present at the pre-registration meeting when students make their MSc option choices or at least could agree to give some feedback or answer questions (by email or social media for instance) from students of the following year. That way the new MSc students could get a student’s perspective on the relative merits of these choices to contrast with the academic advice given.

Students had no problems to report in relation to communication with the Finance Office about paying student fees or in getting a local RBS bank account.

While the MSc representatives present found the MSc Induction event on 1st October was useful and informative, they felt that it should have been held earlier. The semester started on 15 September.

5. Accommodation

All the students present lived in university supplied accommodation. OA had problems with the size of accommodation and was seeking a transfer. FT had issues with where to go on arrival to obtain access to her accommodation. She felt that the information supplied to her hadn’t been clear.

All the students felt themselves to be safe on the Edinburgh campus bar needing to be wary about the swans. BM asked whether it was true that a beaver was present on the campus.

6. F21BC nd F21DL

BM noted that F21BC Biologically Inspired Computation and F21DL Data Mining and Machine Learning presupposed material taught in the other course but not mentioned in the course descriptor as prerequisite knowledge. Some students on the MSc Software Engineering were taking F21BC but not F21DL while others on the MSc Data Science were taking F21DL but not F21BC. Suggesting to students that they swat up privately what they missed by not taking both wasn’t reasonable.
7. Building Access

FT and AM said they would like access to the Earl Mountbatten building at weekends but were not able to obtain it. FT said she was told by A.Houston that he had run out of access cards. BM said that he knew of a MSc student who had obtained such a card yesterday (4 December) so it was still possible to get them.

HT observed that the new building access devices, that would be activated by MSc student cards, were expected to be installed imminently. However, a succession of delays had stopped getting them up and running. When they are eventually installed, the problem of building access between 8am and 7pm on Saturdays and Sundays through the north exit to the Earl Mountbatten building should be solved.

8. BCS Visit

BM asked about the the BCS being given sight of student coursework.

HT explained that the British Computer Society, the professional body for Computer Scientists, were visiting the department in February 2015. They would be deciding whether to accredit various undergraduate and postgraduate degrees offered here. Letting them view student coursework was something they needed to do to satisfy themselves that the teaching and learning offered on our degree programmes was of a sufficient standard.

9. Mid Semester

There were mixed views about introducing a mid semester break.

The meeting was adjourned sine die.

Hamish Taylor