

**Minutes**

**1pm to 2pm, Monday 28 November 2022, Room 611**

**Committee members:**

<b>Staff</b>	
Pier Luigi Dragotti	Director of Postgraduate Studies (Chair)
Lina Brazinskaite	Postgraduate Manager
Christos Bouganis	Director of Undergraduate Studies (in attendance)
Balarko Chaudhuri	Course Director (MSc Future Power Networks)
David Angeli	Course Director (Control Systems)
Imad Jaimoukha	Postgraduate Tutor
Krystian Mikolajczyk	Course Director (MSc Applied Machine Learning)
Pantelis Georgiou	Course Director (MSc Analogue and Digital Integrated Circuit Design)
Tania Stathaki	Course Director (MSc Communications and Signal Processing)
Hashi Chowdhury	Education Support Administrator (Committee Secretary)

<b>Students</b>	
Cédric Goubard	Department overall Postgraduate Rep (MSc + PhD)
Nicholas Sanchez Flores	MSc Rep (Analogue and Digital Integrated Circuit Design)
Eva Sanchez Montiel	MSc Rep (Future Power Networks)
Naveen Antony Ananth	MSc Reps (Control and Optimisation)
Tasya Christnantasari	MSc Reps (Control and Optimisation)
Kate Zhao	MSc Rep (Communications and Signal Processing)
Vinayak Unnithan	MSc Rep (Applied Machine Learning)
Eduardo Vila and Jemima Graham	PhD Rep (Control and Power)
Costanza Gulli	PhD Rep (Circuits and Systems Research Group)
Dimitra Tsakona	PhD Rep (Intelligent Systems and Networks)
Yongqi Zhang	PhD Rep (Optical and Semiconductor Devices)
Emilie D'Olne	PhD Rep (Communications and Signal Processing)

**Agenda**

1. *Welcome and introduction (PLD)*
2. *Personal tutorials (PhD & MSc) – group and MSc reps to get feedback from their student cohorts (MSc and PhD Reps)*
3. *Feedback on MSc industry talks (PLD, LB)*
4. *GTA rates – continue the conversation as requested by PhD reps (PhD Reps)*
5. *Feedback from each MSc Rep (MSc Reps)*
6. *AOB*

## **1. Welcome and introduction**

The Chair welcomed the attendees and asked them to introduce themselves.

Apologies/Absences:

Tania Stathaki	Course Director (MSc Communications and Signal Processing)
Yongqi Zhang	PhD Rep (Optical and Semiconductor Devices)
Naveen Antony Ananth	MSc Reps (Control and Optimisation)
Dimitra Tsakona	PhD Rep (Intelligent Systems and Networks)

## **2. Personal tutorials (PhD & MSc) – group and MSc reps to get feedback from their student cohorts**

MSc and PhD reps provided feedback from their cohorts on how useful they find personal tutorials, what support they expect from their tutors, and whether they see their tutors as expected.

The Chair informed the Committee that the personal tutorial scheme for MSc students was introduced in academic year 2021/22 and briefly explained the objectives of the tutorials and how frequently they should occur.

The Chair then asked MSc reps for their feedback on the scheme and whether everyone in their cohorts had the opportunity to meet their tutors. Below are the comments from the MSc reps.

- Initially, the general answer from the reps was that students had the opportunity to meet their tutor.
- One rep reported that a number of students in their cohort have not had a chance yet to meet their tutors.
- One rep said that everyone in their cohort attended their personal tutorials, although some of the other MSc groups had technical issues for which they contacted their Senior Course Administrators.
- Another rep clarified that those in their cohort who did not attend the meetings did not do so due to personal reasons and not due to technical issues.

The Chair asked the rep if they knew what those reasons were, but the rep did not know.

- It was mentioned that the tutorials were too short and that students wish to meet their tutors more often.

The Chair recommended the reps to clarify to their cohorts that students should feel free to contact their tutors and meet them more often and that the idea is that students should write to their tutors if they have any issues.

The Chair asked for feedback from PhD students and below are the comments from the reps.

- One rep reported that most students don't know they have personal tutors, stating that figures are not available to substantiate this comment as no survey was conducted, rather it is based on general comments from students and word of mouth. The rep said that only a few students in their research group met their tutors. Another rep reported that no one in their group met their personal tutors.
- One rep disclosed that they were contacted only six months after they started their course.
- The Chair informed the reps that an agreed time should be fixed for tutors to meet their tutees at least once per year.
- It was recommended that the Department should clarify to students that they are supposed to get to know their tutors.
- One of the reps reported that their tutor did not seem to be interested to support them, so they looked for pastoral support elsewhere.

The Chair asked the rep if this support from elsewhere came from someone inside or outside the Department. The rep responded that it came from both, including the College counselling service.

- The Chair asked the reps if pairing a female student to a female tutor is appropriate. It was agreed that it is a good decision as there are issues that a male supervisors would not necessarily understand or advise on.

- It was mentioned that some tutors say that they don't believe in fixed meetings and suggested the Chair to speak with tutors regarding this matter.

The Chair informed the Committee that similar feedback was received two years ago, and that updated feedback would be required.

The Chair explained that historically Imad was the Senior Tutor for all students in the Department and used to meet all PhD students once a year, however, due to his workload, an alternative had to be found which led to the introduction of the personal tutorials scheme.

The Chair said that there was not enough time to clarify expectations with tutors and that he is aware of the issue, and that this will be looked into, and that student expectations will be clarified with tutors.

Christos asked the PhD reps how crucial the first meeting is for the reps to establish a relationships with their tutors and if they see any other way to establish the connection, and how personal the tutorial should be.

The reps agreed that the first meeting is important to establish the connection and that building up the relationship with their tutors is crucial and that tutors must have a friendly and welcoming approach.

The Chair asked if the students would prefer one-to-one tutorial and the answer from the reps was affirmative. It was suggested that regular 15 minutes one-to-one tutorials would be appropriate.

Emilie asked how the tutors are assigned.

The Chair mentioned that the two criteria are gender and research group – to make sure that the tutor is from a different research group than that of the student.

The Chair asked the reps if they are sufficiently aware of the other forms of support available within the College. The general answer was affirmative. The Chair recommended the reps to advise their research groups on the support available.

One PhD rep explained that if they go to the wellbeing team, they are worried that any issues raised might be taken too seriously and treated as a complaint, where they only just need someone to talk to for pastoral support – for which a personal tutor might be more appropriate.

Imad advised the PhD reps to tell students that, as a Senior Tutor, he is available to be contacted via email and that student can also speak with him in person when he is in the office.

### **3. Feedback on MSc industry talks**

The Chair asked MSc reps for feedback on industry talks.

It was agreed that having attendance compulsory for all five industry talks is excessive and that some of the talks related to industries for other MSc courses were not particularly appealing.

It was mentioned that students who are interested in going into academia don't find the talks useful.

The reps agreed that refreshments should not be removed as it is an opportunity to make new friends.

### **4. GTA rates – continue the conversation as requested by PhD reps**

Cedric explained the issue briefly and the reason why the survey was conducted and then emphasised that, according to the survey, 70% of postgraduate students don't have enough to live with.

The Chair asked the reps if they knew why the rates were changed.

The reps replied that it was due to the covid pandemic, which made it difficult for students to work and make side income.

The Chair confirmed but also added that the rates were raised because tasks set were more challenging online, but now the complexity of the tasks has reverted to pre-covid.

Christos said that both reasons are correct i.e., difficulty to find a part-time job and the challenge of supporting teaching through Teams.

Christos explained that once covid restrictions were removed last spring, the Department considered going back to the original rates, however, after discussion, the rates during covid have been kept until the end of 2021-22 academic year for simplicity. From November 2023, the Department will revert back to the pre-covid rates.

The PhD reps said that due to the cost-of-living increase, the current higher rates should be kept.

The Chair stated that message from the Department has been consistent.

The Chair stated that GTA rates are the same as employee rates, so they change as employee rates change and that there was a 3.3% increase.

The Chair explained that the Department increased the rates for bursaries, and that GTAs got an increase in line with inflation which is high within the sector and that it would be difficult for the Department to make a case to further increase the bursary rates.

One PhD rep said that some students were led to believe they would be paid more: some of the students were paid £30 for October-November, but others were paid less for the same tasks.

Lina clarified that the mistake will be communicated to the GTAs confirming that they will be paid the same for the same level of tasks up to 10 November. Christos explained that this was due to incorrect contracts being sent out by Casual Workers Team, which contradicted earlier departmental messages and caused confusion. Lina confirmed that the Casual Worker Team will look into this, but it might take some time.

The PhD reps requested a separate meeting to discuss GTA rates and Christos agreed to organise a separate meeting with the reps to have a detailed discussion.

One of the reps asked that GTA work is categorised better, and that prep work is taken into consideration.

The Chair said that this is a separate issue and agreed to discuss it at a separate meeting.

The Chair mentioned that other forms of support are available, such as hardship funds.

One of the reps pointed out that hardship funds are extremely hard to get.

The Chair said that the amount of money the Department invests is possibly not the largest within the College but is among the largest which makes it difficult to justify any further increases.

The reps emphasised that they appreciate the effort made by the Department and that they would like that PhD reps are more involved so that they can better understand how the money is spent.

It was suggested that a detailed written policy surrounding GTA work and GTA rates is produced by the Department.

Christos agreed to prepare a more detailed policy.

It was suggested that the hardship fund is advertised more within the Department.

## **5. Feedback from each MSc Rep**

Nicholas said that students would like to know how to apply for PhD and attend more career talks.

The Chair stated that the Department organises events for those who are interested in doing a PhD and that the talk was run in November.

Kate said that more career advice is needed from tutors.

Vinayak said that MSc students require something more catered to them instead of generic departmental level advice.

The Chair said that for the interest of time, this is something that would be explored offline, and that career-related events across the MSc courses will be looked into.

Kate said that a preliminary survey of her cohort has raised a point concerning the MSc project selection process – most students think having more time for project selection would've been helpful, especially when projects were added on a continuous basis. Some also expressed concern over the variety/topics of projects.

Kate said that two weeks is not enough and that too many of the projects were machine learning related and not CSP.

Nicholas expressed that his cohort had similar issue.

Eva said that it was difficult to find future power projects on the list.

She also raised the issue that a lot of the students said that some of the lectures were not recorded and requested that PDFs of the slides are made available before the lectures.

The Chair agreed to remind lecturer to make the notes/slides available to students prior to the lectures.

**6. AOB**

The Chair asked for AOB, there was none so concluded the meeting.

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**Action tracker**

Action Items	Person responsible	Status
The Chair recommended MSc to clarify to their cohorts that students should feel free to contact their tutors and meet them more often and that the idea is that students should write to their tutors if they have any issues.	MSc reps	
Look into how to improve the personal tutorials scheme for PhD students based on the feedback from the reps and clarify student expectations with tutors.	Chair	
The Chair recommended PhD reps to advise their research groups on the pastoral support available.	PhD	
Clarify the confusion and rectify issue with GTAs rates.	Chair, Lina/ Casual Working Team	
Organise a meeting with PhD reps and Christos to discuss GTA rates in detail, including categorisation of GTA work, consideration of preparation work, and how funding for bursary is spent withing the Department.	Chair, Christos, Avery	
Produce a detailed written policy surrounding GTA work and GTA rates.	Christos	
Look into organising career events catered to each MSc course.	Chair	
Look into how to improve the MSc project selection process and list of projects.	Chair	
Remind lecturer to make the notes/slides available to students prior to the lectures.	Chair/ MSc Course Directors	

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