



MPhil/PhD SSLC Meeting Friday 20 November 2015 (NAB 8.02)

Minutes of meeting

Attended: Victory Idowu (VI)
Yan Qu (YQ)
Ragvir Sabharwal (RS)
Tayfun Terzi (TT)
Georgios Vichos (GV)
Diego Zabaljauregui (DG)
Xiaolin Zhu (XZ)
Yajing Zhu (YZ)

Chair: Angelos Dassios (AD) Doctoral Programme Director

Minutes: Ian Marshall (IMar)

01.Minutes of the last SSLC meeting (10/02/2015)

It was agreed that the minutes should be formally accepted as an accurate record of that meeting.

02.Matters arising

Action point from last meeting: AH (Ali Habibnia) requested a mailing list for PhD students with details of forthcoming events. IMar will instigate this.

IM has not had time to deal with this to any great extent and the Events page on the PhD website is also not as regularly updated as it was in the past. However, he does continue to pass on any information about seminars, workshops and conferences that might interest students.

Action point from last meeting: IMar to send an email to PhD students on the second floor of Columbia House to ask them to notify him if any students from other programmes are seen using the PhD study area.

This was done. There is no known serious problem, although queries have been received about Maths MSc students using the kitchen. This kitchen is available for use by all occupants of the second floor. Provided that the MSc students are quiet and use the kitchen appropriately, this should be allowed.

Action point from last meeting: IMar to report the faulty printer on the second floor to the IT service desk.

This was done. Both Statistics printers on the second floor of Columbia House should be working.

Action point from, last meeting: IMar will investigate possible solutions [regarding access to Bloomberg terminals] within the department.

The cost of installing Bloomberg terminals in the department prohibits that possibility, but the PhD student who raised this issue (Ali Habibnia) now has access to a Bloomberg terminal in the Systemic Risk Centre.

Action point from the last meeting: IMar will discuss ideas [regarding links with other UoL colleges] with members of the Social Statistics group.

IM discussed this with members of the Social Statistics group and was told there are links in place. For example, the next UK Causal Inference Meeting (April 2016) is being organised by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in collaboration with Sara Geneletti.

Action point from the last meeting: IMar will report the concerns [regarding access to the badminton court] to the LSESU.

This is a LSE Students' Union matter and there is very little the department can do.

Action point from the last meeting: IMar will explore possible ideas for a summer event/party.

A badminton event took place in the summer. Winter ice skating has been booked at Somerset House and a Christmas lunch at Rocket restaurant (Kingsway).

Action point from the last meeting: IMar will collate some information [regarding visits to other universities] to send out to students.

The department and School have Erasmus agreements with some universities.

Department: Athens University of Economics and Business; Universita Degli Studi di Bologna; Universita Degli di Perugia; Uppsala University

School-wide: Sciences Po

There is also a PhD Student Exchange Programme:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/academicPartnerships/phdStudentExchanges.aspx>

Action point from the last meeting: IMar will send out some information to students [regarding Summer School teaching].

This was done.

Action point from the last meeting: IMar to arrange [to have a white board installed in Lincoln Chambers] with Estates.

This was done.

03.Requirement for LSE PhD Scholarship recipients to undertake work within the department

Part of the requirement placed by the School on students in receipt of an LSE PhD Scholarship is to undertake some unpaid work within their academic department. The guidelines issued by the School are as follows:

For guidance the percentage of the stipend which is intended to include work is 14% over the overall period of 4 years. This would put LSE PhD Studentship students on a par with Research Council students, in terms of having an additional amount of stipend and an expectation of work, whereas Research Council students receive a lower stipend and would be paid for any work. For further guidance the expectation is that the level of work would amount at least to teaching one undergraduate course; one department which has previously paid a higher stipend on the basis of work done has set a level of teaching as four one hour classes a week, holding a weekly office hour, and providing additional support for students in the two weeks leading up to exams, plus marking and administration, including brief end of term reports, attendance recording etc.

It is also assumed that students will not work within the department in the first year of their programme, but again this will be down to the department. If they do not, then a higher percentage of work can be expected in the later years (equating to 14% over the whole four years).

It was proposed that students in receipt of an LSE PhD Scholarship should typically work 1 hour per week in term time in the Maths & Stats Support Centre in years 2 and 3 of registration. In some cases students may choose to undertake some of this work in year 1. Other examples of work that would count towards the requirement are programming and other research assistance for supervisors, helping at conferences (for example, dealing with registration), volunteering at Cumberland Lodge residential weekends for postgraduate taught students.

It was agreed by those present at the meeting that this proposal was reasonable. It also applies to students in receipt of the Statistics PhD Scholarship, which is modelled on the LSE PhD Scholarship.

04.Funding for PhD students

Concerns were expressed about the number of PhD students in the department who do not have funding. It was noted that there is also a higher percentage of overseas students without funding. It was explained that generally speaking the ERSC studentships the department can nominate students for are only available to UK and EU students. There are some exceptions to this rule for Advanced Quantitative Methods studentships, but if the department nominated an overseas student for one of these it would have to pay the difference in fees. If the department did agree to pay the difference in fees it would mean that other financial assistance it provides to PhD students would be affected. This includes financial support to allow students to attend conferences and workshops and, in some cases where appropriate, the provision of high performance desktop computers.

It was asked if the School would waive the difference in fees between UK/EU students and overseas students or even have one set fee for all. It was explained that the School has a strict policy regarding fees and it is the understanding of the department from past experience that fees are never waived.

It was explained that the department tries to nominate all offer holders for funding, but there are a limited number of studentships available and we compete with all other academic departments for these. It was also mentioned that the department has awarded its own Statistics PhD Scholarship in the last two years and has recently secured a studentship from Citibank and there is the possibility of more PhD funding from this source in the future.

There was discussion about the difference in the financial value of LSE PhD Scholarships and ESRC Studentships and the fact that ESRC Studentships do not provide a stipend in year 4. A proposal was put forward that instead of making a Statistics PhD Scholarship award the funds for this should be used to fund existing students in the department, for example students with ESRC funding who are entering the fourth and final year of registration. It was agreed to make this request known to the Head of Department.

It was mentioned that the School does operate an in-course financial support for final stage PhD students scheme.

It was asked if students who receive an ESRC studentship are also nominated for an LSE PhD Scholarship, which has a greater monetary value. It was explained that when nominating students the department looks at the best

options to receive as many funding awards as possible. Therefore, a student with the best chance of receiving an ESRC Studentship would be nominated for that award rather than an LSE PhD Scholarship. If the department did not do this there would be occasions when it would not be able to nominate anyone for an ESRC Studentship.

A question was asked about industry internships, something that is particularly relevant to a student in receipt of an EPSRC Studentship. It was suggested that LSE Careers would be a good starting place for help to secure an internship. It was stated that care must be taken to ensure there are no issues of proprietary rights affecting the PhD thesis. It was also mentioned that students with Tier4 visas must take care when accepting internships that they are not in breach of the terms of the visa. ISIS can help with any enquiries about visas.

It was agreed that funding available for PhD students is a very serious issue and one that will continue to require discussion. However, there is only a finite amount of funding available and unless the department was to place quite severe restrictions on the number of offers made each year, there will continue to be students who are not in receipt of funding from within the School.

Action point: IMar to bring the concerns of students to the attention of the Head of Department, in particular the concerns raised about ESRC studentships not paying a stipend in year 4.

The next PhD SSLC meeting will take place on a date to be confirmed in the Lent term of 2015-16.