OXFORD UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR GRADUATES

Meeting held on Tuesday, 8th May 2012 at 2.00 p.m, Room 105

MINUTES

Present: Prof. Luke Ong (Chair), Alex Merry, Jim Whitehead, Nathan Hale, Julie Sheppard, Shoshannah Holdom

Apologies were received from Katie Leonard.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 14th November, 2011

The minutes were accepted.

It was noted that Dr Mehrnoosh Sadrzadeh was now organising the Cakes Talks.

At the previous meeting, there had been a request to create a universal mailing list to use for COGS announcements. JW reported that there was now a list in use but that it needed a little refinement. There was some discussion about how to ensure the COGS announcement reached postdoctoral researchers and it was felt that cs-research was perhaps too generic given that COGS would prefer to cater for individuals who are in their first research post, having just made the transfer from DPhil, rather than those who are experienced researchers. Prof. Ong asked whether COGS should also target visitors but it was felt that they are already well-catered for within their research groups.

JW agreed to follow up the issue of the mailing list with IT support. It was also agreed to ask IT about the possibility of setting up a sub-list of cs-research of solely postdocs and it was suggested that the cs-research list be updated at the same time as keys are handed out to people joining the department.

**ACTION: JW/SH**

2. Matters raised by Graduate Representatives

**COGS membership:** The Committee discussed the difficulty of recruiting members to the COGS committee and noted that JW, who has shouldered the responsibility for organising events, was no longer able to do so. It was suggested that the Department’s JCCG could emulate that of Materials, which has three representatives elected in induction week each year who sit on the committee for the period of their DPhil. Committee attendance, event organisation, and other responsibilities are therefore shared out broadly.

It was agreed to merge the JCCG and COGS and elect two MSc and two DPhil reps each year in order to have a steady state of about ten representatives. It was envisaged that the Committee would then elect its President and Secretary: the former would represent students at the various departmental committees while the latter would be in charge of organising rotas and potentially managing the budget (rather than have a Treasurer).

It was agreed to put together a proposal outlining the above, to include a list of the basic functions of the Committee and the roles that need to be fulfilled. It may be worth offering Committee members a monetary incentive (dual monitors had been suggested previously) but there was concern about how this would serve to sustain Committee involvement once the incentive had been received. AM and JW
agreed to draft the proposal with JS’s assistance. The proposal would then be circulated to the graduate body with a view to electing the first four representatives and holding a meeting with them by the end of term.

ACTION: AM/JW/JS

Paying for events: As the organiser of many graduate events, such as the weekly coffee meetings, JW told the Committee that he is often out-of-pocket, having paid for food and drink up-front and being reimbursed by Finance some time later. It was suggested that alternatives be explored – for example, JS volunteered to place orders on behalf of the students so that no money need change hands.

ACTION: AM/JW/JS

**MPLS JCC:** AM reported that he recently attended the MPLS JCC meeting where the results of a recent OUSU student survey were discussed. He drew attention to a number of the points raised. Of relevance to the department was the issue of variability of supervision and to whom students should turn if they have a problem with their supervisor. All students are allocated a departmental advisor (as well as a College advisor), whom they consult first, and the DGS is also always available to speak to any student in this situation. It was also noted that guidance the Graduate Student Handbook gives advice on what to do if problems arise with between a student and supervisor.

A second issue of note was student finance. Students feel that the amount awarded in a grant is simply not enough to cover the high cost of living in Oxford. Financial problems are exacerbated by the fact that grants do not include college fees. MPLS are pursuing this and may lobby for an increase in grants, along the lines of London weighting.

3. Director of Graduate Studies Report (verbal)

Prof. Ong presented a digest of the report he gave recently at the departmental Staff meeting, highlighting points of relevance to the JCC. He reported that the number of applications received this year had been similar to last year and that 30 offers had been made (there were 36 offers in total but 6 have withdrawn). It is therefore likely that the department will exceed its cap on student numbers. Prof. Ong explained that the cap derived from Oxford City Council’s efforts to contain the size of the University and stressed the importance of completing a DPhil within 4 years so as not to encroach upon the department’s quota for new students.

Prof. Ong reported that he had been pleased with the quality of scholarship applications. While there had originally been disappointment with the number of University scholarships awarded to Computer Science, the Department has since won two full-cost Man Institute scholarships, one Merton, and one Scatcherd scholarship. Some progress is therefore being made but the Department’s ability to fund students, and therefore compete with some North American institutions, remains a cause for concern.

Prof. Ong noted that Professor Mike Wooldridge, formerly Dean of Science at the University of Liverpool, and expert in multi-agent systems and the interface between AI and game theory, would be joining the department on 1st June.

4. Any Other Business

There was none.