

# School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

## Cognitive Science MA and BSc

### Staff Student Liaison Committee Meeting

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015 at 1pm

Room G.32, 7 George Square

#### Present

**Staff:** Dr Alex Doumas (Chair Psychology), Dr Richard Shillcock (Chair Informatics), Professor Andy Clark (Philosophy/Cognitive Science Coordinator) Dr Hannah Rohde (Language Science/Cognitive Science Coordinator), Alistair Mowbray (Year 1 Rep) Alex Greenwald (Year 3 Rep), Simka Senyak (Year 4 Rep)

**In attendance:** Mrs Tamsin Taylor-Welch (Minute Taker)

**Apologies/Non-attendance:** Emma Jones (Year 2 Rep), Claudia Libbi (Year 1 Rep)

Drs Doumas and Shillcock welcomed all present to the first Cognitive Science SSLC, commencing with the introductions. Feedback and Reports from students and staff then followed.

#### **Year 1 Feedback**, presented by Alistair Mowbray

AM informed the meeting that in the main the feedback had been very positive, as the new students explore the field of Cognitive Sciences and get to know staff and fellow students.

#### *Misinformation in Prospectus*

However, it had been noted that the prospectus states that there students can choose two to three introductory courses, which is not the case.

**Action Point:** Academic staff to have the text in the prospectus amended accordingly.

### *Imbalance in Timetable*

Timetable commitments are balanced towards Semester 1, with four courses involving a mixture of labs tutorials, lectures etc. In semester 2 there are just two in semester 2 courses.. Can this imbalance be rectified?

AD stated that this imbalance is largely due to Psychology 1 and Psychology 2 being 40-credit full year courses.(which is currently a 40 credit course) has dictated this imbalance; however, plans are afoot to have both Psychology 1 and Psychology 2 (currently full-year 40 credit courses) split. This will mean Psychology 1 is offered in two 20-credit parts, one in each semester, as will Psychology 2.

HR reported that now that the semester 1 course *Introduction to Cognitive Science* exists, Cognitive Science students could potentially go into the 2nd semester section of LEL1.

**Year 2 Feedback**, not given as EJ was not present on this occasion.

**Year 3 Feedback**, presented by Alex Greenwald

#### *Academic Progression*

AG reported that students were satisfied in general but that it was very unclear to them (and seemingly Personal Tutors) as to how the academic progression works in Cognitive Science. AG had figured it out, but the DPT is very unclear.

**Action Point:** AD, RS and Coordinators to draw up sample pathways for students and then liaise with the current Class Reps to ensure that they are clear and workable before passing them onto the Undergraduate Administrator Moira Avraam.

SS asked about the feasibility of students then presenting their pathway to future employers, explaining why they followed a certain frame. After some discussion, the meeting agreed that the need for an explanation of a pathway would not be as relevant as it appeared because the field of Cognitive Science is one that's beneficial to so many fields of work.

SS made the meeting aware that the DPT's cite courses for which Cognitive Science students do not have the opportunity to obtain the necessary pre-requisites. SS had only been able to follow her desired pathway through liaising with the relevant Schools who owned courses of her choosing and obtaining concessions. Students who hadn't taken the initiative to do this may have missed out.

Staff present agreed that when drawing up the sample paths it will therefore be made clear that it is still possible to select courses and follow a certain path, by means of requesting a concession.

### *Student numbers in Cognitive Science*

AG reported the need for all Class Reps to know who was in their cohort. Cognitive Science is a small community and so it's vitally important that they know who everyone is, both on the MA and the BSc. As it currently stands they have received just the generic email address for the year, rather than figures and names.

The staff at the meeting agreed that this information would be provided to the Class Reps.

### **Year 4 Feedback**, presented by Simka Senyak

#### *Careers Talks*

SS reported that in general students were happy. However, one of the issues they'd like to raise are the lack of dedicated careers talks. There are Cognitive Science careers that they just don't know about.

**Action point:** RC and AD to pull together the Cognitive Science alumni with a view to having former students speak to current students.

#### *DRPS*

A lot of the courses that student have taken aren't on DRPS and should be. Students need a better idea as to what's relevant to the degree. The difficulty is that Cognitive Science is much less specified.

How staff perceives the Cognitive Science degrees.

When asked how they saw Cognitive Science (as either a Union of all fields or a sub-field of those) AC stated that it's an integrated degree, hence the difficulty of obtaining a specified careers talk.

Similarly, finding the courses that are considered the most Cognitive Science-appropriate is a case of finding the academic staff and asking them.

HR has asked staff whether they have Cognitive Science-appropriate courses on offer.

The meeting informed the students that with Cognitive Science, students a rare opportunity to select their own degree path, with RS stating that the Cognitive Science degree is not constrained by accreditation, which makes this fluid course possible to an extent. There's flexibility and the right way to do it.

AD reminded the meeting that staff must be aware of the consequences of the flexibility of the programme. Students don't necessarily know what is best long-term, and as a result could make course selections that they regret. So, staff have a responsibility to make students aware which courses have greater employability, when students are about to make their course selection

SS provided a case in point: Some students have realised that they need to undertake an extra coding course due to the need for programming knowledge. Students initially feel intimidated by the word programming and unfortunately have been allowed to avoid it.

AD reported that they have a new course coming onto the books called *Introduction to Cognitive Science*. It will have a language component, and a Stats Cat class that's in R (so command-line and functions are used), which is an improvement to past years.

AG asked for an additional bi-weekly seminar. AD reported that something similar is already being created for credit; it will mean a limitation on outside courses, but it's perceived as necessary by both staff and students. However the meeting agreed that the idea of a bi-weekly seminar would be practical.

SS voiced her concern that this would not allow for students to study in-depth courses of their choosing and the concepts of their choosing.

The meeting agreed that bi-weekly seminars would be created with Year 3 and Year 4 Cognitive Science students meeting together to discuss what they'd learned and how it works in the bigger picture. A guest speaker would be invited to speak in Week 6.

In addition, the Hons students could also then meet the pre-hons students once a semester to feedback. That would be down to the students themselves, however.

SS informed the meeting that a Cognitive Science Peer Support Team is in fact in the process of being formed and that the students involved are applying for funding for this. Feedback about the seminars would be provided through this Peer Support mechanism.

#### *Essays and the different stylistic requirements by subject*

Consistent frustration from students due to the different essay expectations as each field is different. (E.g. in Psychology you're not encouraged to present an in-depth argument (1000 word limitation), whereas in Philosophy and Language Science it's a requirement and clearly stated as such.)

AD stated that Psychology staff can make their requirements a little clearer. AD requested that the societies pull together what they think's a good essay in Psychology, Philosophy Language Science.

**Action point:** Students can then get together and review the essay.

Code-switching and the ability to write in a series of styles could be a strong gambling mark for employers.

Ambiguity over the need to have covered all fields within PPLS:

The meeting confirmed to the students that the requirement to have covered at the end of each Honours year 40 credits in Language Science, Psychology and Philosophy respectively ideal only.

**Action point:** RS, HR, MS become Cognitive Science Advisers, i.e. the go-to for academics who are Personal Tutors, as well as the students themselves. An official PPLS page for Cognitive Science students can then be drawn up with (on the back of HR's email to staff) a list of staff who have identified themselves as offering Cognitive Science-friendly courses.

### **Any Other Business**

AC reported a successful film night for the Cognitive Science students, in which they saw Ex-Machina. Future events will be advertised.

**Next meeting: 1pm Thursday 3 December, G.32, 7 George Square**