

MC2 PhD Student Council

Minutes for council meeting on February 12, 2019

Present: Filip Hjort, Stavros Giannakopoulos, Andreas Ask, Nooshien Laderian, Hafid Zehri, Md. Anamul Hoque, Martí Gutierrez Latorre

Opening the meeting

The meeting started at 12:06 in room A604 of MC2

Election of meeting officials

Due to the absence of the chair (Josef) and vice-chair (Andreas), Filip was elected as the chair for the meeting. Stavros was the regular secretary. Martí was appointed to seal the minutes.

Approval of agenda

Agenda was approved with the addition of a suggestion made by Agin Vyas regarding the specific details that we need from the PhD student survey. Due to Agin being absent the point was eventually pushed to the next meeting.

Meeting notice in due order

Meeting notice was determined to be sent out in due order.

Updates from other boards and committees

The executive board (Ledningsgruppen, LG)

Ewa was not present to provide updates. Martí, who is going to replace Ewa in the executive board, said that he will start participating in their meetings in the following 2-4 weeks.

The department advisory board (Institutionsrådet)

Andreas was absent so we had no updates from the department advisory board.

Chalmers PhD student guild (Doktorandsektionen, DS)

Agin was missing to give us updates.

The union of research student in physics (Foreningen för Forskarstuderande i Fysik, FFF)

Filip informed the council that the FFF winter event went well. Furthermore, FFF has made progress with their statutes and they intend to make one General assembly to vote on their statutes prior to their annual assembly to finalise them.

Issues to focus the council's efforts this year.

- Migration and exchange support by Chalmers.
- Assess/observe situation on gender equality issues.
- FFF is handing out a welcome letter to any new student. This is something we should also do.
- Suggestions for events and PhD activities which we can relay to FFF via Filip.
- Easy/fast and anonymous way to report issues as they appear.
- Supervisor Student Dynamic.
- Possibility of PhD studies evaluation towards the examiner.
- Assess/observe the possibility shift from Licentiate seminar to interim seminar.

Easy/fast and anonymous way to report issues as they appear

Ewa suggested, in a prior communication, to have a fast and straightforward way to report issues in the work and study environment directly to the council.

The idea is that students can immediately report a problem, anonymously to a box where the council can read it. Even though students should be able to do that via email, there is a substantial difference in the perceived anonymity. The council should then strive to aggregate those comments in order to apply pressure instead of trying to address them on an individual level. Such a collection of data could help the council convince any relevant board about the reality and multitude of issues. This should work in conjunction with the PhD student survey which we feel that only captures an averaged general feel of the student's work and study situation.

During following meetings we should discuss the possibility to implement such a tool.

Supervisor student dynamic

We should look into the central guidelines and the grey areas in the rules. Push forward the Chalmers directive for separation of Examiner/Supervisor/Manager role. At least two people should be involved. Some people or departments will resist this due to status quo. A possible solution will be to make the 2-people rule the default and allow for exceptions only with valid motivation. That of course requires an arbiter to manage it and enforce the rules. It seems that the Director of Doctoral studies does not have that authority.

Since the Director and vice chair of Doctoral studies are not valid ways for us to push this we should find a proper way. That could be through DS, HR or LG.

Equality issues

We discussed the need to examine the gender/ethnicity equality situation within MC2 in regards to students. There are ample ways to catch serious issues (employee survey, DOMB, Equality contact). However, all these methods are targeted towards serious transgressions and they are immediately acted upon and may escalate situations.

Contacts with the DOMB are usually daunting experiences and they seem to tend towards suggesting to employ lawyers (see escalation). The employee survey tends to be prompting additional escalating questions when discrimination is mentioned, which raise concerns about anonymity.

Examiners could exploit that by hiring female and/or visa-holding students to allow better control over them.

Therefore, we concluded that this issue requires our attention and efforts.

PhD Studies evaluation

There is a lack of Chalmers rules regarding what an examiner/supervisor/manager can and cannot do. This leads to the aforementioned issues, so we discussed the possibility of Doctoral studies evaluation similar to the Master's and Bachelor's studies evaluation that is mandatory in Chalmers. That means, the student evaluates the examiner in the same grounds that they would evaluate a course. This conforms with the rest of the education and gives a possibility for the student to provide feedback on their education.

The main issue is that while in courses the evaluation results are aggregated and are generally anonymous, this is not possible in case of a single student. Therefore, an evaluation during the studies bears the risk of escalating bad situations. One possible solution we discussed was to aggregate student evaluations over time, and keep them hidden until a valid statistic can be drawn. That remains to be further discussed in a following meeting.

Introduction to new students

Josef was not there to comment on the progress with that issue.

Teaching

Josef was not there to comment on the progress with that issue.

Other issues

- International Staff Mobility Office (ISMO) that helps with international staff and supporting them will come next meeting to talk to us on what they do and how we can promote their work.
- Agin had a request to forward to him the specific details that we need from the PhD student survey. The discussion was postponed for the next meeting.

Closing of the meeting

The meeting closed at 12:56.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be arranged via DOODLE

Sealing the minutes

Martí Gutierrez Latorre seals the minutes 2019-02-23.