

Memo for First Full SSLC Meeting 24/25

Date and Time: 6rd Nov 2024

1. Actions for Our Data Science Community

A. Modifying Data Science Course Rep Webpage

This year, we will continue to maintain the course representatives' webpage at <https://www.bristol-ds-studentreps.co.uk>, which includes details about our vision, plans and concerns raised during meetings. We are pleased that the Student Union has recognized our webpage content and included our site in one of their training modules which will train 700+ course reps.

B. Building a Course Rep WhatsApp Group

Following the successful experience from 2023/24, we created a Year 2 course reps WhatsApp group platform last month. To ensure that all School of Math reps have a platform to discuss policies and share information about academic events, we hope to create an additional WhatsApp group if reps from other cohorts agree with this idea in this Full SSLC.

C. Consolidation the BDSS Community with Year 1 Freshers

To help Year 1 freshers integrate into university life, we have launched several initiatives to support them, including creating a WhatsApp group for their cohort, providing guidance and support during the welcoming week, and offering our first voluntary coding support session during consolidation week. We are pleased that at least 70% of students have joined the WhatsApp group, and we look forward to further coordination with them to foster a supportive and connected Data Science community.

2. Comments on Course Arrangements:

A. Statistics 2:

Students generally agree that the lectures are taught well, and the discussion board on Blackboard serves as an effective channel between the lecturer and students to discuss questions related to taught concepts and course arrangements.

B. Algorithms and Machine Learning:

- Compared to last year, teaching quality appears to have significantly improved, with the lecturer providing sufficient instructions for completing the coursework. However, we have noticed that some of the lecture recordings are incomplete. For example, at least three lectures last week were not properly captured on the replay system. We suggest checking to ensure the recording system functions properly for future sessions.
- We are also aware of an issue raised about this course in the 2024 Jan exam: there was an exam incident where the marks distribution did not align with the exam rubric. To ensure expectations are met, we would like to confirm that the exam format is clearly clarified this year.

C. Programming and Data Analysis for Scientists 2024:

This year, we will follow up on the complaints made by Year 2 students who took this course last year. These concerns include that the final coursework requires too much in-depth knowledge of Physics and Chemistry for Data Science students, which detracts from the focus on coding, and that the course content heavily overlaps with material covered in Year 1.

We have addressed these issues with the Faculty Rep with a brief report [\(link\)](#), hopefully it will be addressed in upcoming Faculty meetings, with feedback on whether adjustment on assessment would be made.

3. Concerns on School Policies

A. Calculator Policies:

In early September, our school had modified the calculator policy, specifying that only non-programmable calculators—i.e., those without graphing capability—are permitted in exam centers. After making inquiries about whether certain calculators are still approved for exams, we estimated that around 20-30% of students may be affected by this policy, as their A-Level calculators (e.g., CASIO fx-CG50) are no longer permitted.

Since many students are unaware that they may risk being penalized if they bring previously approved calculators to exams, we strongly advise the School to remind students of this change through email and the upcoming Exam Talks. Additionally, as calculators do not provide a significant advantage in Year 2 exams, and students should not spend extra money to purchase new ones, we hope the School will ensure that sufficient calculators are available in examination centers for students who need to borrow one.

B. Discussion about Major School Policies Changes in Jan Full SSLC

In this academic year, the University and our School have implemented several school policy changes, including the introduction of new term dates and December exam period, the implementation of consolidation week, and the cancellation of the exam notes policy. We believe it is crucial to discuss the impacts of these policies on students' learning experiences during the next full SSLC meeting, so that we can make improvements and further modify these policies and benefit us.

C. Access to Hot Water and Microwaves in the Fry Building

During the last Full SSLC meeting in April 2024, a couple of reps raised concerns on behalf of undergraduate students, expressing a desire for access to hot water and microwaves, similar to the facilities available in the Merchant Ventures Building and Senate House. We would like to know if there are any updates on this issue.

4. Concerns on School Policies

A. Opportunities and Awards for Data Science Students

Considering Data Science is a rapidly expanding subject in our School, with 227 students in 2024/25 and a fast-growing enrollment rate each year, we believe the School should provide more opportunities and awards for active and outstanding students in our programme.

For example, the School could consider establishing a prize to recognize the student(s) with the highest program mark in their final year, or introducing paid TSR roles, such as lab assistants for the Year 1 “Algorithm and Machine Learning in C(++) and R” courses. We believe this could help students enrich their profiles for future career opportunities.

B. About the arrangements for the Data Science Orientation Talk

Each year, in addition to attending the orientation talk hosted by the School of Maths, Year 1 Data Science freshers are also required to attend an orientation talk specifically for the programme. We were concerned about the arrangements for the Data Science Orientation Talk held on 12th September 2024, as the School had allocated a seminar room with a maximum capacity of 40 students for a cohort of nearly 100 students. This led to new freshers having to bring in chairs from other tutorial rooms, which seriously disrupted the flow of the talk.

We hope that next year’s arrangements will be improved to give incoming students a better first impression of our programme. Additionally, we recommend that the School consider providing refreshments after the talk, as this would create a great opportunity for senior students to chat with freshers and for new students to ask questions.