School of Informatics – Teaching Committee – Distance Education Initiative Update

Austin Tate and Michael Rovatsos, 12-Mar-2014

As discussed at the Teaching Committee meeting in February 2013 the initial plan for the School to grow its future distance education offerings was to encourage the production of quality on-line materials to support a range of on-campus courses, gradually package some of those to offer in joint programmes with other schools engaged in distance education, and then when sufficient mass was available propose our own full distance education programmes to be offered as (mostly part-time) Masters with associated PGDipl. and PGCert. opportunities.

There has been some good progress by various staff members in producing on-line materials to support their on-campus courses, and experiments with "flipped" courses mostly using on-line materials with most class time engaged in tutorials or discussions. Recent enthusiasm by some staff members indicates that we are close to being able to define potentially attractive Masters programmes that could be delivered by distance education means within the next 3 years. The final opportunity to obtain development funds to assist the school to achieve such an aim will arise in April this year, and if that is not taken all development and experimentation costs must be fully borne by the School.

Given this, a small group has been preparing a potential bid to the University Distance Education Initiative (DEI) fund to provide resources to assist in the accelerated development of quality on-line and distance education materials for a number of modules that could be used on-campus as well as in emerging distance education courses. The funding might also allow for the trial of suitable methods, virtual learning environments and social platforms to support student engagement and staff/student interactions and packages for supporting programming assignments, assessments and project/practical/dissertation related work by distance means.

A more detailed proposal for the specific programmes to be made available and the specific modules which could benefit from development funds for on-line materials will itself be created as part of the DEI funded project and be refined later in 2014. However, as an initial approach, the DEI bid will propose the development of two MSC level programmes available by distance education:

- Masters in Data Science by Distance Education (by 2016)
- Masters in Robotics and Autonomous Systems by Distance Education (by 2017)
- Additional offerings will be made via module level contributions to courses with other schools, e.g., Digital Design, Digital Education and Business Informatics (ASAP)

These fee income distance education offerings would run alongside other on-line activities such as freely available pre-University skills and programming courses, MOOCs and the possible growth of Continuing Professional Development for business and industry in some of the areas in which we are active.

Teaching Committee is invited to comment on and input to the discussion.

DEI Bid Group:

- Austin Tate, Coordinator for Distance Education
- Michael Rovatsos, Director of Teaching
- Dave Robertson, champion for MSc in Data Science by Distance Education
- Bob Fisher, champion for MSc in Robotics and Autonomous Systems by Distance Education
- David Richardson, Distance Education Business Planning and Market Insight