Student Support Coordination

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TUTORIALS

The effectiveness of our tutorials has been questionable for some time. In most cases the effectiveness is hindered by poor turnout, a lack of preparation by students, and students feeling lost and not keeping up. This can result in tutorials where there is little student contribution.

Though many of these issues are not addressable by tutors preparation, some can be. The beginning of the semester involved a tutor training event ran by me and Neil Lent (Institute for Academic Development), which allowed discussion and suggestions to tutors. We will be following up with tutors at the end of the semester.

One of the suggestions in the teacher training event is that students should meet in small groups ahead of the tutor group meetings. Such peer meetings can be very valuable. We will hope to make more formal arrangements for peer meetings next year.

The biggest challenge to our tutorials is, however, the assignment system. Once assignments hit in students no longer work on tutorial questions. This makes the tutorials significantly less useful. However the time delay from work to feedback on assignments is much higher than for tutorials, and usually less personal. However while we still continue to have assessed work in parallel with tutorials, I see no obvious solution to this.

InfBASE

InfBASE take up had increased in Semester 1, so the improved advertising seemed to be paying off. Those who use InfBASE seem to value it highly, especially in earlier years. It is hard for InfBASE to cover the more specialist support needed for MSc students.

PEER SUPPORT

The Cascaders system set up in Sem 1 is still in operation but I am told is not used as much as in Semester 1. This is unsurprising as it is mainly targeted at helping people in computing labs in terms of using both general computing and specific help on particular course-related software. Next year, we will continue Cascaders, but I wish to put in a better method of monitoring its use.

EXAMS

I will be running an exam preparation and exam technique session at the end of this semester for 1st year and MSc students. Many students, especially MSc students appear to be let down by the wrong sort of exam preparation (e.g. a focus on rote learning), and poor exam technique (failure to answer all parts of a question, even when they know what they are talking about, balancing time-effort to knowledge rather than marks, etc.). This session will introduce some basic advice on facing exams in Informatics. I will do this, but would welcome any other contributors.

FUTURE

Plans are starting now for next year. In the next year I will set up formal peer support arrangements, starting with a student focus group to discuss this matter.