

# Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

## Second Meeting of Hilary Term • Minutes of Meeting

### 7<sup>th</sup> March 2014

**Present:** David Abed (President, New College Rep), Alex Homer (Secretary, Oriel College Rep), Ryan Murphy (Treasurer), Rosie Ryan Flinn (Maths and Philosophy Rep, Worcester College Rep), Lewis Morgan (Maths and Computer Science Rep), Michael Holloway (Questionnaire Rep, St Hugh's College Rep), Ben Spells (Careers and Publicity Rep), Rachel Ahlquist (Outreach Rep), William Juan (IT Rep, Somerville College Rep), Pei Wang (First-Year Rep), Joel Cawte (Fourth-Year Rep, Jesus College Rep), Jacob Muller (The Queen's College Rep), John Fernley.

**Apologies for absence:** Stewart Jerrome (Maths and Statistics Rep), Thomas Chandler (Lincoln College Rep), Jacob Cable (St. Anne's College Rep), Chris Williamson (St. Edmund Hall Rep), Niloy Biswas (St. John's College Rep), Raaghav Ramani (Trinity College Rep), Eng Hng (University College Rep).

The meeting commenced at 1:10pm.

## Minutes and Matters Arising

### 1. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were **accepted**.

### 2. College Rep elections

Nominations were opened for the position of Corpus Christi College Rep. John Fernley nominated himself, and an election was duly held.

Result: John Fernley was **unanimously elected**. John Fernley therefore assumed the position of Corpus Christi College Rep.

### 3. Election of a President-Elect and other constitutional changes

Alex presented a number of proposed constitutional changes. One change was to resolve a contradiction in the constitution concerning how far in advance of a meeting the Secretary should provide an agenda; the others were concerned with moving the election date for President to the first meeting of Michaelmas term. This introduces a new title of "President-Elect", which will be assumed by the elected candidate for President immediately upon election.

The responsibilities of this title were discussed; it was agreed that the President-Elect shall attend meetings of JCCU. It was also discussed whether the President-Elect should have any responsibilities for deputing for the President; it was agreed that the title-holder should be fourth in line for the Chair at meetings, after the President, Secretary and Treasurer (in that order), as the Secretary and Treasurer may have more relevant experience allowing them to depute.

The constitutional changes were approved unanimously (see Appendix A for details of changes).

#### 4. Gender disparity

It was noted that the issue of gender disparity had been raised at JCCU in the meeting earlier in Hilary Term; it was noted further the issue had been considered many times before. It was suggested that the issue was so broad that it would be helpful to consider one particular area on which to focus the efforts of MURC, these potential areas being (in no particular order):

- Admissions and outreach
- Teaching
- Exams and coursework
- Female representation in Faculty
- Recruitment

It was agreed that those present should consider which of these would be the most appropriate, in preparation for a discussion in the next meeting.

It was noted that the Department's Best Practice Steering Committee (BPSC) is also considering the issue; it was suggested that it might be useful if MURC and the BPSC shared minutes. **Action: Ben and Alex to liaise with BPSC with regard to sharing minutes.**

It was noted that there was potential in looking at colleges that were formerly women's colleges (such as Somerville and St. Anne's) to see if there had been any change over time. It was also noted that the numbers of girls taking Further Maths at A-level might be relevant, although it was suggested that this might be beyond MURC's reach.

### Presidential Business

#### 5. Reports from JCCU and teaching committee

David discussed a number of issues that had been raised at the two committees.

David noted that, as was already planned but had been postponed, the next academic year would see the raising of the unit quota for the Maths and Philosophy fourth year from six units to eight; this will bring it in line with that in the single-subject Maths fourth-year.

David noted that the Department was changing some individual courses (for example, opening the third-year Philosophy logic course to single-subject Maths students).

He further noted, with regard to the exam entry issue discussed in the previous meeting, that the Division was taking up the issue with exam schools; he additionally noted that the Department was proposing to introduce a web-based exam entry system which would reduce the time needed for processing of entries by around two weeks.

David noted that the issue of communication skills had been raised at Teaching Committee, it being noted there that some colleges offer possibilities for giving presentations as part of tutorials. David noted that at Teaching Committee those present wanted to share experiences from across the university, and that it was important to stress that tutors should not consider this compulsory – it was being considered how to facilitate this.

Finally, David noted that consideration was being given to the introduction of Fail/Pass/Distinction grades in Part C to replace the present system (Fail/Pass/III/IIi/IIi/I); it was noted that this would reduce confusion caused by the double-classification of the MMath. It was agreed among MURC members present that this idea could have some merit, with it being noted that the current system

can cause complications with employers and on CVs, especially if the student achieves a lower classification in Part C than in Parts A and B. It was noted that tutors do in some cases write reference letters to explain the circumstances.

## Executive Committee Business

### 6. Careers noticeboard

Ben noted that there was now a MURC noticeboard in the Undergraduate Study Room on the Mezzanine floor of the Andrew Wiles Building. Ben noted that he was planning to place on the board the name of the committee, a sheet of Executive Committee members along with photos, a list of College Reps, and, with the approval of the Treasurer, the bookstall list. He noted that the Invariants have a board in the room as well.

Ben asked for suggestions for other items that should go on the board; it was suggested that a plastic folder with spare lecture questionnaires might be useful.

**Action: Ben to post the above on noticeboard.**

Ben additionally noted that it would be necessary in the next MURC meeting to have a discussion on careers, in advance of the JCCU meeting.

## General Business

### 7. Creation of a maths discussion group

David raised the idea of a Maths Discussion Group, as had been discussed at the previous meeting. He noted that he had spoken to a representative of the Invariants, and that they were interested in the proposal as a potential joint endeavour. He clarified that topics for discussion would need to be those without a known “correct” answer, but also sufficiently non-technical to allow discussion at an undergraduate level. He suggested as a potential topic: “Was maths responsible for the financial crisis?”.

It was queried as to whether there would be sufficient audience for such an event, especially given the additional discomfort inherent in presenting to an unfamiliar audience (unlike a similar discussion within one’s college, where the audience are likely to be known to the speaker); Alex noted in response that he had received communication independently from one of the College Reps suggesting the idea. It was also suggested that the benefit to students’ communication skills might be limited, given the possibility that those willing to speak at such an event would be those already happy with their communication skills.

It was suggested that MURC try out the idea next term; this was agreed to be a good idea in principle, although it was noted that, given that next term is Trinity, it might be difficult for people to commit.

### 8. Fourth-year syllabus

Joel presented a list of comments made by fourth-years on the current syllabus and workload; these had been collated from responses by College Reps, who had in turn been asked to consult fourth years in their respective colleges. It was noted that in general students were unhappy with the workload. It was suggested that compulsory dissertations may also be in the pipeline.

It was noted that it was now too late to change the number of exams sat by students next year; however, it was noted that smaller changes, such as reducing the content of courses or reducing the number of questions on each problem sheet, may be possible. It was noted that it might be difficult to get lecturers to reduce the length of their courses; it was suggested in response that the head of each subject panel could ask their lecturers to reduce the content within that subject.

It was queried how the new and old fourth year syllabi compared with the fourth year at Cambridge; it was suggested in response that the degrees were certainly different, and that there was a feeling that the old Oxford fourth year at least was “easier” than that at Cambridge.

It was noted that exam results from the new fourth year may provide strong evidence on the success or otherwise of the changes.

**Action: to be raised at JCCU.**

## **12. Any other business**

There was no other business, and the meeting concluded at 2:00pm.

AH 10/03/2014

# Appendix A

## Details of changes to MURC Constitution:

### Paragraph 4

Indentation changed.

### Paragraph 9

Part(c):“elect Members of the Executive Committee, except for the Fourth Year Rep, in accordance with paragraph 18 below: nominations can be made to the secretary before the meeting or nominations may be taken from the floor of the meeting” removed and replaced by “elect Members of the Executive Committee, except for the Fourth Year Rep, in accordance with paragraph 38 below, and the President, in accordance with paragraph 39 below. Nominations can be made to the secretary before the meeting or nominations may be taken from the floor of the meeting”.

### Paragraph 11

Removed in its entirety.

### Paragraphs 12–21

Moved to Paragraphs 11–20; otherwise unchanged.

### Paragraph 22

Moved to Paragraph 21.

“or in the case of the Secretary’ absence or standing for the same post, the Treasurer” removed and replaced by “or in the case of the Secretary’s absence or standing for the same post, the Treasurer, or in the case of the Treasurer’s absence or standing for the same post, the President-Elect (if applicable)”.

“the Secretary or Treasurer must yield the chair to the President” removed and replaced by “the Secretary, Treasurer, or President-Elect must yield the chair to the President”.

### Paragraph 23

Moved to Paragraph 22.

“If the President, Secretary and Treasurer all wish to stand for election to a particular post” removed and replaced by “If the President, Secretary, Treasurer and President-Elect all wish to stand for election to a particular post”.

### Paragraphs 24–37

Moved to Paragraphs 23–36; otherwise unchanged.

### Paragraph 38

Moved to Paragraph 37.

“All elected MURC Executive Officers” removed and replaced by “With the exception of the Fourth Year Rep, all elected MURC Executive Officers”.

“; except for the Fourth Year Rep, who shall serve from 0<sup>th</sup> week Michaelmas Term to 0<sup>th</sup> week Michaelmas Term of the following academic year” removed.

### **Paragraph 39**

Moved to Paragraph 40; otherwise unchanged.

In its place is inserted “Elections for the office of President shall be held in the first meeting of Michaelmas Term. The elected candidate shall be known as the President-Elect. This title shall entail no formal responsibilities other than to attend JCCU meetings. In accordance with Paragraph 37 above, the President-Elect shall not take office as President until the first meeting of Hilary Term.”

### **Paragraph 40**

Moved to Paragraph 38.

“Their term of office will end in the first meeting of Michaelmas Term of the following academic year.” appended to end.

All other paragraphs are unchanged.