

Confirmed Minutes for MURC Meeting 27/02/17

Present: Liam Stigant (Questionnaire Rep., Jesus College Rep.), Andreea Jorga (IT Rep.), Samuel Banks, Rebecca Burmiston (Lady Margaret Hall Rep., Secretary), Emily Flicos (Merton Rep.), Sam Davies Udina (Maths and Philosophy Rep., Worcester Rep.), Sam Barnett, Dan Fletcher (Oriel Rep., Arts Rep.), Andrew Tweddle (Somerville Rep.), Matthew Hillman (Treasurer), Utsav Popat (President, Maths and Comp Rep.)

Apologies: Lily Miles, Anthony Landau, Hannah Merwood, Michael Fuller

The meeting began at 1.07pm.

1. Minutes of previous meeting
 - a. Minutes amended to include apologies and approved unanimously
2. Matters arising
 - a. Classes survey (Liam Stigant)
 - i. MURC was shown the survey that will be sent to Part B and C students on classes.
 - ii. Several changes will be made from this survey to the survey which will be sent to students – mainly to correct spelling errors, and to change the wording of some questions.
 - iii. It was noted that students are glad that classes are offered by Oxford.
 - iv. **Action Point:** To send out the revised survey and gather feedback in time for the next JCCU meeting.
3. MSc Mathematical Sciences
 - a. Richard Earl addressed the meeting, giving an outline of the proposal.
 - i. This is something the department has been wanting to introduce for a long time, but it is possible now the new Vice Chancellor has removed the student number cap. The department has put in a bid for a standalone 4th year MSc which is being looked on favourably by the university.
 - ii. This MSc will give students from other universities the opportunity to come to Oxford to take the MMath 4th year.
 - iii. This will also be a good way to encourage some of the best graduates to do PhDs in Oxford.
 - iv. 2018-19 has been proposed as the first year of the new course, to which around 50 students are expected to be admitted.
 - v. The department have learnt some lessons from the MMathPhys.
 - vi. Students on the MSc year and students doing the integrated 4th year will be treated the same.
 - b. This 4th year would mean changes would be made to the current dissertation arrangement.
 - i. A dissertation would be mandatory for MSc students. As the department would want to treat MSc and MMath students the same, a dissertation would also be made compulsory for MMath students.
 1. It was noted that half of current 4th year students are taking dissertations and this number grows each year.
 - ii. This means changes would need to be made to the current dissertation timetable and length.

1. Arrangements for the dissertation would need to happen during Michaelmas term, when MSc students are at the university.
 - a. However, it was noted that few students use the long vac to work on their dissertations.
 - b. Most MSc students will know whether they are taking the course by the end of August.
2. A shorter length of time in which to write the dissertation means the length of the dissertation would be reduced to around 7500 words.
 - a. There were concerns a 7500 word dissertation could be short or restrictive.
 - b. A longer “dissertation-plus” option was suggested, although this could complicate marking.
- iii. There were concerns from students that a change to the dissertation timetable could mean students no longer view a dissertation as a way to spread out work and therefore reduce stress.
 1. It was suggested that the dissertation deadline could be pushed back from 10th week of Hilary term, possibly to cover the Easter vacation.
- iv. There will be a large menu of projects for students to choose from (around 25 options) but students would have the opportunity to write a more individual dissertation if they wished to.
 1. This list would likely be circulated from the start of Michaelmas term.
- c. The MSc would be a joint Maths and Statistics venture.
 - i. This means MSc students would be able to do the Maths 4th year, the Maths and Stats 4th year, or a combination of modules from both.
 - ii. The dissertation currently counts differently for Maths students and Maths and Stats students – the department would want to align this.
- d. Changes would also be made to the class system, although not to the lecture system.
 - i. There would be changed made to the class timetable; classes would be held earlier in the term so problems don’t drag out.
 - ii. Additional classes (to reduce the number of students in each class) could be offered depending on the interests of the MSc students.
 1. MSc students would bring in more funding, but also require more teaching, so it is likely new staff would be hired.
 2. Already in the intercollegiate class system there can be large number of students in some classes, so this could help stop bottlenecks.
 - iii. Due to economies of scale, the number of lectures offered/size of lectures is unlikely to be greatly affected.
- e. The department hopes from the welfare/support side there will be natural support systems in place for MSc students.
 - i. It is hoped that, in general, MSc students will feel more like 4th year undergraduate students than graduates.
 - ii. It was noted that MSc students could find it hard to integrate without adequate support from colleges.

- iii. In addition, the peer support system for undergraduates may not always be helpful for MSc students, as most peer supporters will be 2nd/3rd years, who will not have had the experience of doing a Masters degree.
 - iv. It was suggested MSc students could be given the opportunity to be part of the college JCR and MCR.
 - f. There may also be changes to the number of units students can take.
 - i. Currently, students take 8 units in 4th year. The department would like to make it possible for students to do more units in a similar way to in Part A.
 - ii. It was asked if these units could be Part B courses.
 - 1. This is not parts of the proposal. QAA, the accreditation board wants what is in a Masters degree to be of Masters level, so this is unlikely to be possible.
 - 2. In addition, this would be very hard to timetable to avoid clashes.
 - 3. However, there is nothing to stop students from going to Part B lectures if they would find them useful.
 - g. Admissions and grading for MSc students would be different to MMath students.
 - i. The modules an MSc student would like to take would not have any affect on whether they are admitted, but they would be asked which areas they are interested in, to help streamline the admissions process. There would not be any quotas involving module choices.
 - ii. It is also possible that a small change (which would not affect current students) could be made to progression from Part B to Part C, where students would need to receive a 2.1 in Part B to progress to Part C.
 - 1. It was noted this measure would only affect a few students each year.
 - iii. MSc students would be given a distinction/pass/fail grade.
 - 1. It is hoped that a merit grade would also be able to be added into the system.
 - h. It was noted that many other universities currently have the equivalent of this MSc.
 - i. Cambridge has had Part 3 for a long time, and Warwick introduced an MSc last year.
 - ii. It was noted that there is no teaching for Part 3 students at Cambridge; the class system would be a significant selling point for the Oxford MSc.
 - i. There is no official name for the MSc yet, although 'Mathematical Sciences' is its working name.
 - i. It was noted that MURC would prefer for the MSc to be called 'Mathematics', as 'Mathematical Sciences' could sound more applied.
 - ii. However, it was noted that many prestigious universities have Maths departments which are named 'Mathematical Sciences'.
 - iii. It was also noted that student will have the option to take Statistics modules, so 'Mathematics' as a name may not include these.
- 4. Good Practice Committee Report (Marianne)
 - a. This was moved to the next MURC meeting.
- 5. JCCU Report (Rebecca)
 - a. A summary was given of the points MURC brought up at the JCCU.
 - b. It was noted that MURC would like to know more about the specifics of what the TA agreement is.

- i. Currently, students expect a lot from TAs – do we hold unfair expectations of them?

6. AOB

- a. Sam Davies Udina said he would be standing down at the next MURC meeting, so an election would need to be held for his replacement and Maths and Philosophy and Worcester Rep.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.19pm.