

Unconfirmed Minutes for MURC Meeting 08/05/2017

Meeting commenced at 12.09pm.

Present: Rebecca Burmiston (Secretary, LMH Rep.), Liam Stigant (Questionnaire Rep., Jesus College Rep.), Daniel Fletcher (Arts Rep., Oriel Rep), Sam Davies Udina (Maths and Philosophy Rep., Worcester Rep.), Sam Banks, Hannah Merwood (Maths and Stats Rep.), Utsav Popat (President, Maths and Comp Rep.), Andrew Twedde (Somerville Rep.), Marianne Cain (Diversity and Inclusion Rep), Sean Liew, Matthew Hillman (Treasurer), Rosemary Walmsley

Apologies: Michael Fuller, Anthony Landau, Andreea Iorga, Lily Miles

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting
 - a. Minutes approved unanimously
2. Matters Arising
 - a. There were none.
3. Stats Teaching Committee (Hannah)
 - a. Actuarial exemptions
 - i. It was noted that there are currently three modules which can be taken to grant exemptions from actuarial exams, but the board of actuaries is changing its syllabus. This means there will only be modules which grant exemptions from two actuarial exams.
 - ii. This means that the Statistical Lifetimes Model course is not needed anymore for exemptions. Therefore, this course may be changed, or scrapped.
 - b. Change of Progression Hurdle for Part C
 - i. Utsav to talk about this in more depth later.
4. Statistics Questionnaires (Hannah)
 - a. Most courses had generally positive feedback, with only a few exceptions.
 - b. Statistical Machine Learning
 - i. It was noted that this is a new course.
 - ii. There are concerns as about half of sheets and lectures were on material not on the syllabus.
 - iii. Questionnaire feedback reflected that the material was not always easy to understand, but this will be improved in later years.
 - iv. The idea is to make this course at Part B supervised and at Part C unsupervised.
 - v. The syllabus is to stay the same, but the lecturers are to stick to it more.
 - c. A12 Part A Course
 - i. It was noted that as this is a more practical course than previous courses students have taken, so some students found it difficult to take notes for, especially with regard to taking notes on code.
5. Maths Teaching Committee (Utsav)
 - a. Rewording of guidance on problem sheet
 - i. It was noted that the suggestions from the department to students on how they should approach problem sheets has been slightly reworded.
 - b. Large class sizes
 - i. It was noted that the class sizes for communication theory were especially large this year.

- ii. The department clarified they are looking for more TAs for the course.
 - iii. The department may also shift when the Graph Theory and Communication Theory courses are run in order to make more TAs available.
- c. Change of progression hurdle from Part B
 - i. It was noted that, from students taking the 4th year from 2020-21, a 2.1 will be needed both overall and in Part B.
 - ii. It was noted that the question was asked in Stats Committee of whether there is evidence that people who meet the current hurdle but would miss the new hurdle fared worse in Part C. The department said they had not looked at this specific statistic in detail, but that the change would only affect 3 or 4 people per year.
 - 1. The measure was passed through Stats Committee.
 - iii. It was also noted that the current Strong Paper rule means students currently need at least two units from Part B at 2.1 level to gain a 2.1 overall.
- d. Induction events
 - i. It was noted that induction events put on by the department tend to be disproportionately male-dominated.
 - ii. The department resolved to try to make induction events more welcoming to female students, partially by increasing female representation at these events.
- e. Atrium of Maths Institute
 - i. The department plans to increase the number of pictures in the atrium, to make the building more interesting, and appealing to prospective students on open days.
- f. TAs accessing tutor feedback
 - i. It was noted that TAs don't currently have access to all feedback from their classes.
 - ii. Teaching Committee suggested that TAs should be able to access this information.
 - iii. It was noted that this would not mean TAs and tutors having to write reports about one another, just having access to more information.
- g. Tutorial teaching videos
 - i. It was noted that Richard Earl and Janet Dyson have made tutorial teaching videos to give tutors who may not have had experience with the tutorial system how a tutorial could be structured.
 - ii. It was noted that these videos may also be useful to students who haven't had much tutorial experience, to show them what to expect from a tutorial.
 - iii. **Action Point:** Utsav to send link to video to MURC to provide feedback
- 6. Good Practice Meeting (Marianne)
 - a. It was noted that there are two Good Practice meetings per term, one in 4th week and one in 9th week, and Marianne attended the meeting in 4th week, which is more focussed on undergraduate issues.
 - b. Computer Science students at Mirzakhani events
 - i. It was asked whether female and non-binary Computer Science students could attend the Maths Department's Mirzakhani events. No one had any issue with this.
 - c. Gender balance in undergraduate admissions

- i. It was noted that the proportion of female students admitted was the highest it had been for 30 years.
 - ii. It was also noted that the department could also gather data on other underrepresented groups, such as students from lower income backgrounds. As this kind of information is given on UCAS forms, it would not be difficult to collect.
 - d. Statistics on career prospects after undergraduate degree
 - i. There was nothing particularly relevant to the interests of MURC or undergraduate students in this section.
 - e. 4th year peer mentors
 - i. It was suggested that guidance about being a 4th year mentor could be given. This could be done by softening language, so that while students would be aware being a peer mentor would be a commitment, a large burden would not be placed on them.
 - ii. There was discussion about peer mentors from new Maths Sciences students, but less discussion on peer mentors for current Part C students.
 - iii. It was noted that there would also be a departmental peer, probably a postdoc, in addition to a tutor in college with similar academic interests (if possible) for each student, so they have options of who to turn to, and to minimise the amount of travel for students.
 - f. Maternity pay and mentors
 - i. This was mainly relevant to DPhil students.
- 7. MURC bank account (Matthew)
 - a. It was noted that MURC currently has £662.86 in its bank account, and £242.63 in cash.
 - b. It was also noted that there is some money in an account MURC is currently unable to access.
 - c. **Action Point:** Utsav to email the last person who had access to this account, to try to regain access in the future.
- 8. Elections
 - a. It was noted that there will be fresh elections in Michaelmas, and elections for all Exec positions in November at the AGM.
 - b. Maths and Stats Rep
 - i. Sean Liew nominated himself for the role.
 - ii. It was noted that Sean is a 2nd year at Balliol who transferred to Maths and Stats last term.
 - iii. Sean was asked why he nominated himself for the role.
 - 1. It was noted that Sean has seen both sides of the Maths/Maths and Stats system, and only discovered he wanted to do Stats in 2nd year Hilary. He also has suggestions for the A12 course.
 - iv. An election was duly held.
 - v. Sean was elected unanimously.
 - c. Worcester Rep
 - i. Rosemary Walmsley nominated herself for the role.
 - ii. An election was duly held.
 - iii. Rosemary was elected unanimously.
 - d. Maths and Phil Rep
 - i. Rosemary Walmsley nominated herself for the role.

- ii. Rosemary was asked why she nominated herself for the role.
 - 1. It was noted that Rosemary enjoys the Maths and Philosophy course, but thinks there are definitely ways to improve it. She wants to gather opinions and represent other students.
 - iii. An election was duly held.
 - iv. Rosemary was elected unanimously.
- 9. Questionnaires (Hannah and Liam)
 - a. It was noted that the Statistics questionnaires were covered earlier.
 - b. Maths Prelims
 - i. It was noted that, for the most part, Prelims courses went well last term, with a few issues with the applied courses.
 - ii. Dynamics
 - 1. It was noted that the section on spinning tops had been removed from the syllabus as it was felt to be too difficult. However, it was replaced with something that students found more difficult.
 - 2. 40% of students said the course was too hard or much too hard, and fewer students than normal attended lectures, although feedback on the lecturer was positive.
 - 3. It was noted that the department will be altering the course and problem sheets for next year.
 - iii. Fourier Series and PDEs
 - 1. The feedback on the lecturer was mainly positive, except that he was felt to go too fast, and not go through examples thoroughly enough.
 - c. The department is worried that the fact that the main issues this term were with two applied courses will put students off taking applied courses in the future.
 - d. Parts A and B
 - i. Feedback on Parts A and B was solid, with several more minor issues highlighted.
 - ii. Hilbert Spaces
 - 1. It was noted that some topics not on the syllabus were covered in detail, while some topics on the syllabus were covered in less detail.
 - 2. Hilary Priestley will write to the lecturer about this. She has also ensured that all questions in the exam will be on topic.
 - 3. It was noted that the current syllabus online is outdated/different from what was taught.
 - 4. **Action Point:** Liam or Utsav to email Helen Lowe asking her to send an email clarifying what is on the syllabus.
 - e. Part C
 - i. Some courses has incredible feedback, with no negative feedback received at all. There were several issues with other courses.
 - 1. 73% of students said Quantum Information was too easy or much too easy.
 - 2. Intro to Schemes and Axiomatic Set Theory were too hard.
 - 3. All students said the problem sheets for Geometric Group Theory were too long or much too long.
 - 4. Most negative feedback was received by courses which were in their first year, so these can be changed more easily.

- f. There was also a more general issue of students/class tutors knowing about a problem but nothing being done about it. This is already being addressed by the department, and specific courses are too specific to bring up here.

10. Department website

- a. Website archiving
 - i. It was noted that the website archive is on track and almost completed.
 - ii. This year's notes are on the website, and last year's will be soon.
 - iii. There is also a notice on the website now.
- b. Lecture capture
 - i. It was noting this is moving forward more slowly than expected.
 - ii. The department has said this will definitely be implemented by Michaelmas of next year.
- c. Visiting student mailing list
 - i. It was noted that visiting students are not on the departmental mailing list. This can lead to issues, e.g. students turning up to lectures which have been cancelled.
 - ii. It was noted this is on the JCCU agenda.

11. Class report

- a. It was noted that Liam and Sam have worked extensively on the report, which is a very comprehensive document. The report was approved of and several items were discussed in more detail
- b. Suggestion for 5 rather than 4 problem sheets when Part C course changes
 - i. There are concerns the sheets are too easy to begin with, so not all material is covered in depth.
 - ii. It was noted that some students prefer to have extended discussions on topics, while other students would prefer to study the exam material in more depth. MURC would like students who want to do extension material to be facilitated.
 - iii. The department would like at minimum 60% of the course to be covered by the third sheet.
 - iv. Therefore, the best solution may be to have an optional final sheet with extension material.
 - 1. This could reduce pressure on TAs if the sheet is looked at briefly by them but the answers are mainly discussed in a class.
 - 2. The lecturer could also issue guidance on these problems.
 - v. The department suggested having the most difficult questions on the final part of the course only, but it was felt by students that difficult questions on all parts of the course would be more helpful.
 - vi. It was noted this would be especially useful as third years do not have collections, and as material covered at the end of course is covered during the next term, it makes sense for the final sheet to be longer.
 - 1. It was suggested there could be a couple of shorter questions on the end of course material at the start of the longer, more difficult sheet.
 - vii. The proposed timings for sheets were: mini sheet – week 2, other sheets – weeks 3, 5, 7 or 4, 6, 8
 - 1. This would mean students would have to read ahead, or have two classes in the next term.

- viii. Week 9 tutorials were suggested, but this was not feasible as some students, especially those who live in college, may have to leave at the end of 8th week.
- c. Summary of report
 - i. It was suggested a summary of the main ideas and aims of report could be added to the end.
- d. Conclusion of report
 - i. It was asked whether MURC wanted the conclusion of the report to highlight anything in particular, or to be left more open for discussion.
 - ii. It was noted that a comment near the start of the report about the relative importance and universality of problems covers this, and that the report makes some things obvious.
- e. JCCU
 - i. It was noted that the report would be discussed in depth at the JCCU on Thursday.
 - ii. **Action Point:** MURC members attending JCCU to read the introduction and solutions section of the report before the JCCU meeting.
- f. Sending report to students
 - i. It was noted that it could be beneficial to send the report, or a version of the report, to students at some point, in order to show that their views are being listened to and to help with holding the department accountable for implementing the solutions they agree to.
 - ii. It was resolved that nothing would be sent out before the JCCU meeting.

12. AOB

- a. Class feedback
 - i. It was noted that often class feedback is not particularly helpful, and questions can be vague or non-specific.
 - ii. It was also noted that questions about problem sheets are part of lecture rather than class questionnaires. Therefore, it may be beneficial to move questions about problem sheets to class feedback forms, as not all students attending lectures will complete problem sheets, and not all students doing problem sheets will attend lectures.
 - 1. Feedback in questionnaires could be sent to lecturers.
 - iii. Liam has discussed this with Janet Dyson and a rewrite of the questionnaire itself was proposed, to make questions more specific and guidance to TAs and class tutors available to students so students can judge if they are getting what they should be getting out of the class.
 - iv. It was noted this information is not included on the class report as it is a more specific problem.
 - v. **Action Point:** Mention this at JCCU if there is enough time.
- b. Arts Committee
 - i. Arts Committee met and looked at applications from people who wanted to display art in the atrium.

The meeting was concluded at 13.01pm.