

Confirmed Minutes for MURC Meeting 22.01.2018

Present: Samuel Banks (Fourth Year Rep), Dominika Bakalarz, Rebecca Burmiston, Marianne Cain (Diversity and Inclusion Rep), Nathaniel Cleland, George Cooper (Outreach Rep), Chris Fitzpatrick (Secretary), Dan Fletcher (Arts Rep), Matthew Goh, Hazam Hassan, Matthew Hillman (Treasurer), Tao Jiang, Sean Liew (Maths and Stats Rep), Jesse Pajwani, Utsav Popat (President, Maths and Comp Rep), Olivia Pricilia, Antonin Schrab (IT Officer), Liam Stigant (Questionnaire Rep), Andrew Twedde.

1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Rosemary Walmsley and Magi Stamatova.

2)

(i) Minutes of the MURC AGM on 14.11.2017

The minutes were APPROVED.

(ii) Matters arising not on the agenda

C3.1 Algebraic Topology:

Following the discussion regarding the Algebraic Topology course materials not being available directly on the Maths Institute website, UP emailed Helen Lowe.

The situation has not yet changed.

Mistakes in the AGM report

These have been corrected by UP.

Undergraduate Study Area

It was reported that there have been suggestions to make the current undergraduate study area exclusively available to Part C and OMMS students. After much discussion it was agreed that this would be useful particularly for OMMS students on account that they will not have existing social groups, they will not be used to working in their colleges and there is currently a lack of space. However, concerns were raised that this would disadvantage those students with no laptops who are currently allowed to use the computers in the study area. It was also noted that it was agreed to put a printer in the room which has not yet happened.

A proposed survey was agreed to send to all students asking about frequency of use of the room and opinions on the suggested change.

Action Point: UP to email Helen Lowe regarding the lack of printer, and to discuss at JCCU.

Action Point: Report back to the department the concerns of disadvantaging those students without laptops.

Action Point: Survey to be sent out to all undergraduates by UP, and feedback to be discussed at JCCU along with questions regarding pastoral support of OMMS students.

3) Elections of Executive Roles

(i) Maths and Stats Rep

Sean Liew of Balliol College stood to be elected.

It was noted that Sean was Maths and Stats Rep last year, attending the Stats Teaching Committee Meeting and will be reporting to MURC later in this meeting.

Sean was elected.

(ii) First Year Rep

Nathaniel Cleland of St Anne's College stood to be elected.
Nathaniel was elected.

(iii) Arts Rep

Dan Fletcher of Oriel College stood to be elected.
It was noted that Dan was Arts Rep last year and wished to continue.
Dan was elected.

4) Elections of College Reps

Wadham College Rep:

Hazam Hassan of Wadham college stood to be college rep and was elected.

5) Amendments to the Constitution (UP)

Utsav proposed changes to the constitution, seconded by Liam.

The key points of these amendments were identified: changes to the description of the roles Diversity and Inclusion Rep and the Joint Schools Reps to include JCMP meetings, Good Practice meetings and Statistics Teaching Committee meetings as well as to no longer include the (no longer existing) UJCF meetings.

It was suggested that Maths and Computer Science Rep stands on the Computer Science Committee meetings, however it was deemed that historically this did not align well with the interests of Maths and Computer Science Rep and so was rejected.

The changes to the constitution were approved by raise of hands.

Action Point: CF to update the website to reflect the new constitution.

6) Part C course concerns (UP/CF on behalf of RW)

(i) C1.1 Model Theory,

A report from RW was shown. This raised the following concerns: it is a popular course but is being placed in rooms too small, the online lecture notes did not resemble the current course which the lecturer explained by suggesting that students ought to be using books etc. and thinking about issues rather than only using one source, and the lecturer working very quickly with bad handwriting making it difficult to take notes.

It was noted that the course feedback is generally good, 23 did classes and 15 gave lecture feedback. However, 25% indicated the notes of the course were not good.

It was agreed that the approach of referring to a specific text book which aligns completely with the notes, e.g. in algebraic topology, can and has worked successfully, however the generic referral to reading text doesn't work with the system of exams where more clarity on the course description, e.g. a list of definitions, is necessary.

Action Point: LS to discuss the lack of course details with Dr Neale and ask for the department to circulate a list of what the course involves.

Action Point: UP to report back to RW.

(ii) C2.7 Category Theory

A report from 2 Maths and Philosophy students, received by RW, was shown. This raised concerns that the problem sheets and lecture notes were mismatched and the problem sheets relied heavily on algebra despite not requiring algebra prerequisites. It suggested that there was a lack of model solutions and not enough emphasis on standard methods of approaching

questions.

CF noted that they had been contacted by a student also stating that the lack of required prerequisites in algebra has been misleading and who was concerned that there will be assumed knowledge from other courses in the exam.

It was noted that the course feedback was good but only 7/28 gave lecture feedback. However, it was generally stated that the problem sheets were too short, and hence may not give enough examples.

After discussion, it was agreed that Part A Rings and Modules has some important points relating to category theory as well as providing useful examples. It was also noted that without this as a requirement, some joint schools students may expect Category Theory to follow the theme of Logic instead. However, it was agreed that Category Theory as a subject is very algebra-heavy and so it is reasonable to have algebra in a Category Theory exam.

Action Point: LS to talk to Dr Neale to discuss making Rings and Modules a required prerequisite.

7) Update on Classes (SB/LS/UP)

Methods of Class Feedback:

It was reported that the class questionnaire has been discussed with the department who have agreed on the new proposed question. It was also suggested that this questionnaire taken in lectures might not be the most appropriate way to get feedback as there are both people who attend lectures who do not do the problem sheets and people who do the problem sheets who do not attend lectures.

Action Point: UP to discuss at Maths Teaching Committee.

Structure of new Part C and OMMS:

It was highlighted that the structure to the new Part C course for next year is still unclear. After some discussion, it was agreed that attention needs to be drawn to the spread of the work and classes for OMMS and the new Part C courses and most agreed that the ideal spread of classes would be weeks 3,5,7,1. Further, it would be useful and important to have an additional meeting before the first class to ensure coverage of core material assumed to be background knowledge.

Action Point: SB to discuss with Dr Earl to ensure enough time will be spent on core material.

Action Point: Ask for a concrete proposal on the structure of the OMMS course at JCCU.

8) Report from Mathematics Teaching Committee (CF)

(i) Update on Lecture Capture

It was reported that most courses participating had 50-75% of recordings work, with problems including the camera turning off after 5 minutes and the audio/visual becoming out of sync on some occasions. It was further reported that MTC agreed it would need to be nearly 100% reliable before making recordings available as students' Student Support Plan may rely on the recordings and that Dr Schlackow would meet with the physics department whilst continuing recording in the same 3 rooms.

It was noted that some recordings had been deleted by the lecturer which they are of and was agreed that this needs to be prevented to analyse issues with the recordings.

Action Point: Ask for an update on suggestions from the Physics department and for no more recordings to be deleted at JCCU.

(ii) OMMS grading system

It was reported that in alignment with all MSc's, the OMMS qualification will have a 'merit' grade for marks 65-69, and that this will apply to the new Part C from 2020/21.

It was noted that MURC was unclear on the grading system for marks below 65 for OMMS.

Action Point: Ask the department for the full grading system for OMMS at JCCU.

(iii) Update on Examination Results by Gender

It was reported that despite lengthening exams last year, the large gap at Part A which didn't exist with the previous Mods system continued to exist and fluctuate. It was noted that this gap does not exist for Maths and Stats but there are other factors e.g. fee status. It was also reported that the department has planned the following steps forward: Hold focus groups with students to assess the difference in performance between problem sheets and exams, to liaise with other departments and universities with a similar gap, to email revision guides to all part B students in HT/early TT, to investigate the impact of course choice and to bring in more female post-docs and DPhil students to careers fairs.

It was reported that the Good Practice Committee believed the gap was significantly reduced at Part A as a result of the longer exams.

After some discussion it was agreed that one year does not provide sufficient evidence either way and that the effect of longer exams should be reviewed after at least 3 years of data.

9) Report from Statistics Teaching Committee (SL)

(i) Questionnaire Results

It was reported that the MT questionnaire results were abnormally good for both lectures and classes, however the response rate was low hence the Stats department is currently discussing the possibility of the questionnaires being taken in classes rather than in lectures.

(ii) New Part C course – Interacting Particle Systems

It was reported that there was a push for the new Probability-based course 'Interacting Particle Systems' to be an additional option for Maths students as well as Maths and Stats students.

(iii) Computer Science courses for Part B Maths and Stats students

It was reported that Maths and Stats students cannot currently take the Part B Computer Science Courses 'CoCo' and 'Lambda Calculus', but the Stats department wants these courses to be available to students and they are to be added to the schedule of courses available to Maths and Stats students.

10) Any Other Business

MURC Website (update)

AS reported to have updated the MURC website to have separate tabs for the College Reps and the Executive Committee, and is currently working on uploading old MURC meeting minutes so that the old website will eventually be removed.

Informal Guide to Options

It was suggested that MURC put together an informal guide to options for the new website consisting of a short student-written synopsis to each course. It was noted that this already exists at some colleges e.g. Balliol, but is not consistent and would have a significant impact e.g. in the Category Theory case mentioned above so that students knew it was heavily algebra reliant. It

was also noted that it would have to be monitored so as not to include remarks such as 'this course was terrible' but instead include constructive criticism, and that the information would have to be accurate.

Action Point: UP to begin to ask for course synopses from students, beginning with MURC members, so that such a guide can be assembled on the new website by AS.

Bank Account:

Following the Annual Report, it was noted that MURC has not had a bank account for some time. It was suggested to take the constitution physically to the bank, however was noted that banks usually set up via post which is an issue when colleges do not all forward mail to home addresses during vacations.

Action Point: UP amongst others to send a letter to a bank and to ask whether it would be possible to have all mail sent directly to the maths institute.

MT Questionnaire Feedback:

The questionnaire feedback from MT was summarised. The key points were:

- Prelims: very standard feedback with no issue except being 'too hard'. No action required.
- Part A: Metric spaces and Complex Analysis had bad feedback for the second year running. This was discussed and was agreed that the structure could be improved as it was very rushed at the end. **Action Point:** LS to discuss issues raised with Dr Neale. Despite the report from Queens students at the AGM, it was noted that the Quantum Theory feedback was not bad but as usual was low in responses (around 30), as many drop this option due to timetabling. Other courses had good feedback.
- Part B: Again, very standard in that the applied courses had much better feedback than the pure courses. Some noteworthy courses were: Distribution Theory and Fourier Analysis was considered 'too hard' and there was some disagreement over 'too long' or 'too short' but only had 5 responses, Representation Theory and Geometry of Surfaces had particularly bad feedback. LS has taken Distribution Theory and Fourier Analysis to Dr Neale.
- Part C: There was a very small response rate. The feedback supported a class reform, and suggested that in no cases should TAs and Class Tutors be the same person. It was highlighted that there is an agreement with colleges that students have 2 different tutors (including the TA) in the maths department but not the Stats department which is a newer agreement. It was also noted that a class reform would involve close work with Oxford SU who sit on the committee making the decisions as well as lobbying all colleges and was agreed that there is not enough of an issue for this course of action.

The meeting closed at 14.16pm.

These minutes were confirmed at the MURC meeting on 20th February 2018.