

Minutes

Of the 1st Michaelmas MURC meeting, 22 October 2018

Those present were:

- Marianne Cain
(Diversity & Inclusion rep)
- Nathaniel Cleland
(St Anne's rep)
- George Cooper
(Outreach rep, Balliol rep)
- Chris Fitzpatrick
(President, St Peter's rep)
- Matthew Goh
(Questionnaire rep, Maths & Stats rep)
- Edward Hart
(Secretary, Corpus rep)
- Paolo Marimon
(Maths & Phil. rep)
- Christopher McGarry
- Jesse Pajwani
(New rep)
- Gregory Stewart
(Jesus rep)
- Jess Toudic
(Hertford rep)

Apologies received:

- Tao Jiang
- Olivia Pricilia
(Exeter rep)

All action points are in **bold**.

1 Previous minutes and matters arising

The minutes were approved unanimously.

Chris Fitzpatrick noted that no MURC had not updated the MURC Freshers' Guide this year.

It was also noted that the MURC website still had no information about office holders. Short bios and photos should be sent to Edward, Chris or a new IT Officer.

Chris F. said **complaints about options and classes for dissertations would be followed up again at this week's JCCU meeting.**

2 President's report from Teaching Committee

2.1 6 June 2018

- Part A Numerical Analysis will go from 7 problem sheets to 4.
- Course requirements now fully outline the concepts needed, not just a list of Oxford courses.
- Part C History of Mathematics has been exempted from the new dissertation setup.
- The Projects Committee provided 30–35 titles. **More information will be provided later.**

- OMMS students will be required to do 3 written exams.

2.2 17 October 2018

- The exam results appeal process is being changed. This year, some appeals were only able to be filed in October, which is harmful to those applying for grad positions.
- The Department is planning to unify the marking scheme for dissertations.
- Continued technical issues mean lecture capture is still very unsatisfactory. No change from last meeting. Two Prelims lecturers have agreed to having their lectures uploaded immediately, which will be done whenever the lecture capture works.

3 Questionnaire Rep's report from Statistics Teaching Committee

- The committee discussed whether a student could switch from Maths to Maths & Stats at Part C. Such considerations will remain case-by-case for now, but guidelines will be drafted in future.
- A Mathematics & Economics degree is being considered. The Statistics Department is concerned that it will decimate MMathStats applications.
- 2 candidates were docked 5 marks each for plagiarism. The affected students were not informed about the Department's concerns with their work. This should not happen (e.g. if the marks had been docked for late submissions incorrectly due to an administrative error, they would not be able to challenge the error) and **should be mentioned at JCCU**.
- Administration errors lead to some candidates being incorrectly given late work penalties.
- Average MMathStats marks remain lower than MMath marks.
- This year's Part A Simulation and Statistical Programming paper was unusually hard – it is normally harder than other papers, but the average difference this year was 7 UMS, not 2 UMS. The external examiners said a better range of marks was needed in future.
- The Prelims Probability & Statistics paper had a different style this year, which might have caused problems to students when revising. However, the paper did have a better spread of marks than usual.

4 End of year questionnaire results

4.1 Prelims

The main concerns were workload and exams.

The Department does not plan to change the workload, to keep to the degree competitive. There was discussions about whether moving modules would better balance workload, but the Prelims schedule is packed and no solutions were found.

It was suggested that the Department provide more preparatory materials for offer holders.

The meeting acknowledged that the Department is unable to move the exams from Week 9 or from Ewert House.

It was pointed out that mock exams help prepare students well. Prelims students will get a benefit from these when they are compelled to attend them; college tutors can make attendance compulsory, which cannot be done for the University-provided mocks. The meeting agreed **JCCU should consider recommending them to tutors**.

The existing model solutions were praised as also very helpful. It was agreed **sample solutions should be provided for all Prelims modules**.

Other feedback from Prelims students included complaints about errors in lecture notes and the inability to login to the computers in the Undergraduate Study Area.

4.2 Part A

Part A feedback focused on the rammed exam schedule and Metric Spaces & Complex Analysis.

Part A students complained about having 9 exams in 10 days. The meeting agreed this was unacceptable. Suggested mitigations included having exams in Week 7 (though this might be unrealistic) and having one mid-week day without any exams.

For Metric Spaces & Complex Analysis, no solution could be found. The material is all necessary, is too difficult to move into Prelims (which is already packed) and students need to be given as much time as possible to revise it. So, the only place it can go is Michaelmas.

4.3 Part B

The class system was the subject of most feedback.

The meeting noted it is difficult to run classes well. There are two models for running classes: a question-by-question walk through the sheet or a question-driven session. The question-by-question walk-through wastes time for people who didn't struggle with the early questions; the question-driven session can mean the class never gets to the question you care about. It was suggested that department tutors and TA's organise consultative sessions in Michaelmas and Hilary, somewhat like office hours in other universities.

The meeting agreed that **the Department should encourage lecturers or tutors to release answers for problem sheets**. For some modules, answers for problem sheets exist, but are not widely distributed, giving some students an unfair advantage. These answers may be handed down from students from the same college. At Part B, students should be trusted to work independently, and not to "cheat" by peeking at answers too soon. It was suggested that

answers be given out immediately after classes; or if not that, at the end of term; or if not that, the end of Hilary.

4.4 Part C

Part C feedback again mentioned difficulties choosing options which fit well with dissertation title.

5 Elections of representatives

- Gregory Stewart was unanimously elected as 4th Year Rep.
- Christopher McGarry was unanimously elected as IT Officer.
- Gregory Stewart was unanimously elected as Jesus College Rep.
- Christopher McGarry was unanimously elected Merton College Rep.
- Olivia Pricilia resigned as Exeter College Rep.

The other roles received no candidates and remain vacant.

6 Amendment to 4th Year Rep role

Chris Fitzpatrick moved to amend the constitution to require the 4th Year Rep to attend the OMMS Committee meeting. The motion was approved unanimously.

7 Alternative prospectus

JCCU agreed to review draft pages for a MURC alternative prospectus (information on what options MURC members took and why). **Chris F. asked attendees to send information to include in the draft.**

8 Information about College Rep roles

Chris F. noted a number of emails asking about what the College Rep role involved. The Department has offered to email undergrads about participating in MURC and would also like to know what the College Rep role involves. Chris F. asked how they should describe the role.

The meeting thought the role involved: conveying the results of MURC meetings and reporting college members' issues/suggestions to the department.

9 Discussion of changes to Part C course

Jesse Pajwani told the meeting of the new Part C class format, where each class was split into two work groups who would meet for 45 minutes. This experimental format has been received poorly by both students and tutors.

It was agreed that this should be fixed by next term. It was noted OMMS students also disliked this class format. The class format was meant to promote mingling of students, but is unworkable because no tutors have shortened problem sheets.

It was also noted that an optional class for Problem Sheet 0 would familiarise OMMS students with Oxford-style marking and sort out issues with their prerequisites.

10 Any other business

Edward Hart argued that the Introductions to Manifolds short option for Part A was misleadingly named, suggesting closed combinatorial surfaces, not multivariate analysis. The meeting agreed that **reverting the name to Multivariate Differentiation should be suggested at JCCU.**

11 Things to bring to JCCU

- **Enquire why Maths & Stats students punished for plagiarism were not informed about the Department's concerns at the first instance.**
- **Ask the Department to suggest that college tutors organise mock exams.**
- **Ask the Department to improve the exam schedule for Part A exams. Point out that 9 exams in 10 days is unacceptable.**
- **Suggest that the department introduce optional Problem Sheet 0 classes for Part C courses.**
- **Suggest renaming the "Introduction to Manifolds" short option to "Multivariate Differentiation".**