

Amended draft minutes

Of the 1st Hilary MURC meeting, 31 January 2019

Those present were:

- Marianne Cain (Diversity and Inclusion rep)
- Nathaniel Cleland (Maths & CS rep, St Anne's rep)
- George Cooper (Outreach rep, Balliol rep)
- Chris Fitzpatrick (President, St Peter's rep)
- Matthew Goh (Maths & Stats rep, Questionnaire rep, Queen's rep)
- Edward Hart (Secretary, Corpus rep)
- Matthew Hillman (Treasurer)
- Rachel Laing
- Paolo Marimon (Maths & Phil. rep)
- Christopher McGarry (IT officer, Merton rep)
- Jesse Pajwani (Art rep, New rep)
- Gregory Stewart (4th year rep, Jesus rep)
- Jess Toudic (Hertford rep)

Apologies received:

- Tao Jiang

All action points are in **bold**.

1 Previous minutes and matters arising

The minutes were approved with the replacement of an ambiguous “Chris” with “Chris F.”.

Matters arising:

- The Department has published course deadlines.
- Matt has not yet looked into re-gaining access to the MURC bank account. He promised to do so before the next meeting.
- No bios for the website have been received by Christopher McGarry or Chris Fitzpatrick.

2 President's report from Teaching Committee

2.1 Using history of maths to diversify curriculum

The Department is starting a new project called “Using history of maths to diversify curriculum”, where a workshop in June will investigate non-Western mathematicians students should be made aware of. MURC was generally supportive of the idea of broadening the range of mathematicians referenced, but were unsure about the scope and outcomes of the scheme.

- Would lecturers be required to change nomenclature?
- Would this affect the historical interludes some lecturers have in their lectures?
- What courses would this affect?
- How would the Department avoid just “shoehorning” in references to non-Western mathematicians?

It was agreed these concerns would be taken to JCCU.

2.2 Failed Prelims students viewing papers

The Department, following University directions, will begin allowing students who fail Prelims to view their marked papers. So as not to disadvantage students who cannot easily return to Oxford, the Department was considering allowing tutors to view papers and then | Skype students with their views on how things went. **MURC agreed this was a good idea and that both options (viewing the paper themselves or a tutor viewing then skyping) should be available to all students.**

MURC also suggested that there should be the option of having an independent faculty member/College tutor skype with the student, since students may be too embarrassed after failing to want to talk to their usual tutor.

2.3 Maths & Economics degree

The Department is working on a new Maths & Economics degree, which could start in the next few years. The degree is currently under consideration by the University, which means it has overcome its biggest hurdle. The new degree will bring Oxford into line with the many other Russell Group universities which offer Maths & Economics and will complement Oxford’s current, less quantitative economics offerings. However, the Statistics Department has some concerns about the impact it will have on the number of Maths & Stats applicants.

2.4 Part C low-dimensional topology course

This was meant to be introduced next year, however the proposed lecturer has now been assigned to lecture Part A Topology. The Department is now looking for a replacement.

2.5 Part A Metric Spaces & Complex Analysis

Metric Spaces & Complex Analysis has once again had poor feedback. MURC’s view on the module are unchanged from the last meeting (viz. that the course content and structure cannot be changed). The Department will be more careful with setting exam questions after one question last year turned out to be accessible only to students who had done the Projective Geometry short option.

Matthew Goh reported that one Part A course had received an unusually low level of feedback, suggesting low lecture attendance. The meeting discussed factors which could affect attendance levels, namely the style of lecturing (like a professional mathematician vs. a

simpler, more calculation-focused “recognise then solve” approach) and the number of worked examples. **This feedback will be shared with Dr Neale.**

3 Maths & Stats rep’s report from Statistics Teaching Committee

- Matthew G. raised the issue of lecture notes/slides not being available before lectures. Dr Laws said he would encourage lecturers to upload stuff at least 2 to 3 days in advance.
- Part B courses had a lower than expected survey response rate due to one lecturer not distributing the survey sheets, but instead leaving them in a pile at the back of the lecture theatre. The Stats Department Administrators will remind lecturers to actively distribute survey sheets.
- This year’s Maths & Stats offer rate was just 5% (12 out of 224). The Statistics Department believes this is only due to a lower standard of applicants this year and not due to there being any difference in how Maths and Maths & Stats applicants are evaluated. The Stats Department would therefore like to publish a joint Maths–Maths & Stats acceptance rate in the prospectus to avoid misleading prospective students as to their chances of success. However, the prospectus office has objected to this because the Maths & Stats degree has a separate spread to the Maths degree. **MURC agreed the prospectus office was right: either have separate acceptance rates and separate pages, or have a joint rate and a joint maths degree page. Also, MURC has no objection to the Stats Department clarifying that they have the same application process as the Maths Department.**

4 Informal guide to options

Chris F. presented a draft of the MURC *Informal Guide to Options*. MURC liked the inclusion of “leads onto” sections, a more approachable tone than <https://courses.maths.ox.ac.uk/> and how it described the feel of a module’s mathematics. **Chris F. agreed to email the draft to MURC members and asked for MURC to contribute more content in time for the next day’s JCCU meeting.**

5 Elections

None.

6 Any other business

6.1 OxCORT and Minerva

Gregory Stewart asked for 3rd and 4th years to be allowed to see their OxCORT and Minerva reports by TA’s. These reports do exist and some tutors do share them with their students. **The Department should tell tutors to share these reports with all their 3rd and 4th years.**

Paolo Marimon asked for **second year Maths & Phil. students to be given access to Minerva so that they can see what tutors teach what class** (since Maths & Phil. Students can take Part B Set Theory in their second year) **and/or for tutors' names to be included on the class sign-up.** MURC agreed this was a good idea.

6.2 Part C final classes

Paolo reported that many final classes for Michaelmas Part C modules had been very poorly attended. For example, one final Algebraic Geometry class had just one person and another class had just three or four. Low attendance was probably due to work not needing to be handed in, with answers to the final sheet released over the vacation. **MURC agreed to ask the Department for more information on the attendance of the last classes of the Part C Michaelmas modules.**

MURC also agreed to ask the Department for clarification on whether the 45-minute-workshop-style classes were still happening.

7 Items to take to JCCU

The next meeting is the day after this meeting (Friday 2nd February).

- **Ask for clarification about the scope and actions of the “Using history of maths to diversify curriculum” project.**
- **Support idea of letting tutors see failed Prelims students' papers and skype feedback to them. Suggest both options (students viewing the paper themselves or a tutor viewing then skyping) should be available to all students.**
- **Support the prospectus office's stance that either the Maths and Maths & Stats degrees have separate pages and separate acceptance rates, or they have maths degree page and a joint rate.**
- **The Department should tell tutors to share Minerva/OxCORT reports with all their 3rd and 4th years.**
- **Ask for 2nd year Maths & Phil. Students to be given access to Minerva to see who is tutoring the classes they are applying for and/or for tutors' names to be included on the class sign-up form.**
- **Ask for more information on the attendance of the last classes of the Part C Michaelmas modules.**
- **Ask for clarification on whether the 45-minute-workshop-style classes were still happening.**