

**MATHEMATICAL INSTITUTE
CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR GRADUATES**

Unconfirmed Minutes of the Consultative Committee for Graduates meeting
held on Tuesday 30 January 2024 at 1.00pm

Present: Dave Borthwick (Secretary), Edward Tao Du, Leo Gitin, Samriddhi Mishra, Patrick Nairne, Gabriel Berk Pereira, Shyam Popat, Tom Sanders (Chair).

In attendance: Ali Goodall.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from Christoph Reisinger and Tassilo Schwarz.

2. Minutes of the Consultative Committee for Graduates meeting held on 24 October 2023

The minutes were approved by the Committee.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the following:

- a. Historic DPhil travel funding usage:
It is not currently possible to evaluate the percentage of travel funding used by students, either on an individual or aggregate basis.
- b. CCG webpage ownership and advertising:
No-one has yet volunteered to curate the CCG webpage.
- c. Lecture clashes with other departments:
Maths lecture timetables are circulated to Statistics, Philosophy, Computer Science and Physics for comparison, however due to the number of lecture courses offered it is extremely difficult to avoid clashes. In the event of significant clashes then there is often enough flexibility in the system to make changes.

4. Chair's Business

The Chair had no business.

5. Athena SWAN and Race Equality update

The Committee were updated about the immense amount of work going on across the department and its various committees relating to the Athena SWAN and Race Equality projects. AG mentioned that two papers will shortly be presented at Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee: the first looking at ways of diversifying the department's recruitment processes, and the second related to maintaining good workplace relationships and the necessary resolutions required if these relationships begin to deteriorate. The Committee were informed about initiatives looking at wellbeing and the setting up of a local BME network, as well as plans to launch an EDI library. The department are also currently supporting other divisional and central university projects and initiatives.

In response to a query about point 2 contained within Annex A of the Athena SWAN update paper AG explained that the attainment gap can be viewed as a progression differential and that Teaching Committee will be looking at ways of reducing this.

The Committee thanked AG and her team for all of the work they are currently doing. AG made it clear that she is always happy to answer any questions relating to the Athena SWAN and Race Equality charters.

6. Student Fees Exercise 2023/24

The Chair reminded student representatives about the need to keep the contents of the paper confidential while summarising that all fees would be subject to the university uplift of 6.7%.

Committee members expressed their desire to see an increase PGT scholarships to help with the issue of increasing fees, especially given that course fees are more than the government's Master's Loan. The issue of high MSc fees acting as a disincentive to subsequently applying for a DPhil, owing to existing debt, was also raised.

7. DPhil Teaching Requirements for 2024 entry and beyond

The Chair updated the Committee that teaching requirements for new DPhil students starting from October 2024 onwards would be increasing from three sets of classes in total (one before transfer of status and then a further two) to five sets of classes in total (two before transfer of status and then a further three). It was noted that the expectation that DPhil students should be teaching two sets of classes per year is not being met, hence the need to increase the requirement. Post-covid, DPhil students have been teaching as per the requirement rather than the expectation, resulting in students graduating with less teaching experience and with a consequent knock-on effect for the intercollegiate class system. The Chair emphasised the value and importance of engaging with the teaching requirement and is keen to help communicate this better going forward.

LG raised the issue of the poll of all research students that was undertaken towards the end of MT23 regarding the change in teaching requirements. Feelings amongst current DPhil students are that they are generally happy to teach three sets of classes for the department despite college tutoring being more satisfying and having better financial benefits. It was noted that the greatest source of frustration amongst current DPhil students is the teaching situation at present. PN echoed the sentiment that college teaching has more advantages and didn't recognise any pedagogical advantage in teaching an extra two sets of classes. The Chair emphasised the mutual advantages to the department and the DPhil programme of the teaching experience offered and noted it is a core component of the DPhil.

PN raised concerns about the amount of preparation required to teach across a variety of different lecture courses, especially if one didn't do one's undergraduate degree at Oxford. LG raised the issue that some DPhil students are constrained in the courses they need to teach as there may only be a small number of DPhil students able to offer certain classes. SP raised the department's aim to reduce workload, and questioned how this sat with that.

MSc representatives made it known that students find classes more enjoyable when lecturers do the teaching, as they have better knowledge of what students do and do not know. There are also feelings that office hours could be increased to help make up for any perceived shortfalls in teaching.

[ACTION: Chair to contact DPhil student representatives.]

8. DPhil Travel Funding update

The Committee were updated that all DPhil students, both funded and self-funded, will be able to access the department's DPhil Travel Funding allowance of £2000 per student.

9. MPLS Committee update

PN reported on the most recent meeting of the MPLS Graduate Joint Consultative Forum. The new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Irene Tracey, was in attendance and was keen to listen to students' views as well as talk about the issues that are important to her.

The Committee heard that four main issues were discussed at the meeting: travel funding and the varying levels of support from different departments, cost of living issues relating to DPhil students and the desire for Oxford to be included amongst the universities that receive London-weighted stipends, initiatives to promote environmentally friendly travel, and the variation in teaching requirements for DPhils in different departments.

10. Items from student representatives

- a. Update on train fare allowance for CDT students:

SP updated the Committee that the train fare allowance has been increased from £25 to £31.80 in order to allow students to travel to London during peak times.

- b. Webpage for external postdoctoral vacancies:

SP noted the desire to create a place where external postdoctoral vacancies could be collated. PN mentioned that there is a Topology bulletin where all relevant job adverts are grouped together.

[**ACTION:** SP to contact the Random Systems administrator to discuss setting up a suitable bulletin for CDT students]

- c. DPhil travel funding poll MT23:

PN summarised the key findings of the travel poll sent to all DPhil students towards the end of MT23. In light of the results two proposals were suggested to the Committee:

1. There should be an increase to the £2000 per student allowance due to the fact there are now fewer DPhil students than there were in previous years.
2. There should be a pot of money that students can apply to if they need to exceed the current allowance.

[**ACTION:** The Chair invited DPhil student representatives to present a paper at the TT24 CCG meeting]

- d. Incentivising environmental travel to and from Europe:

PN raised the issue that although it is extremely easy to fly to conferences and meetings this is not in line with current University travel policy, especially when travelling to and from Europe. The idea of a subsidy for European rail travel, with an associated cap, was proposed, as well as a pot of money that could be applied to if environmentally friendly travel was being used.

[**ACTION:** PN to present a paper at the TT24 CCG meeting]

- e. Provision of past exam and problem sheet solutions for MSc courses:

GP raised the issue of some tutors not giving out solutions to problem sheets. The rationale for giving these out before the class is that students will then be able to follow along rather than being forced to copy the solutions down. There is a similar issue with solutions to past exam papers, although the Chair noted that sometimes

certain exam papers are held back for college collections (although this is rare for Part B and beyond).

[**ACTION:** DHAA to contact AHoE]

- f. Exam durations in the Exam Schools:
GP raised the issue of exams within the Exam Schools finishing at different times and the disturbance this causes.
- g. Missing lecture recordings
SM raised the issue of missing lecture recordings for the Deep Learning MCF lectures and whether there is a reason for this.

[**ACTION:** DHAA to contact the MCF Course Director]

11. Any Other Business

- a. LG queried why the final DPhil stipend payment is the one immediately prior to submission, even if submission happens only a week or so afterwards. The issue of saving money by altering the way stipend payments are disbursed was thought to be something worth considering. The Chair and DHAA explained that this is down to the UKRI Terms and Conditions.
- b. LG raised the issue of reduced futsal hours and the possibility of introducing a 12.30-1.30pm slot during the lunch period.

[**ACTION:** DHAA to contact the Head of IT and Physical Resources]

- c. SN raised the issue of missing audio for lecture recordings at the beginning of term. As lecture recording are extremely important for students where there are definite lecture conflicts it would be good to know that IT are able to check on the status of AV equipment at the beginning of each term to identify any issues.

[**ACTION:** DHAA to contact IT]

- d. SN raised the issue of changing the way students sign up for classes on TMS so that it is easier to withdraw from the classes that won't be attended. The HAA is already investigating possible changes to TMS that will simplify this process.

Date of Next Meeting – Tuesday 07 May 2024, 1pm