

Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

Unconfirmed Minutes

Friday 5th February 2010, Mathematical Institute

Present: Henry Bradford (*St John's, MURC Chairperson*), Stephen O'Keeffe (*Hertford, MURC Secretary, MURC Fourth Year Rep*), Rosie Cretney (*Queen's, MURC Open Day Co-ordinator*), Anne-Marie Imafidon (*Keble, Maths & Computer Science Rep*), Petra Staynova (*Pembroke, MURC Maths & Philosophy Rep*), Shu Zhou (*Mansfield, MURC Maths & Statistics Rep*), Ben Hoskin (*Lady Margaret Hall, MURC First Year Rep*), Dr Peter Neumann (*Faculty Teaching Advisor, in the Chair*), Prof. Hilary Priestley (*Joint Committee for Mathematics & Philosophy*), Ms Louise Sumner (*MPLS*)

In Attendance: Helen Lowe (*Deputy Academic Administrator, Mathematical Institute*), Ellie Darlington (*Kellogg, Department of Education*).

Apologies: Alex Harrison (*Keble, MURC Treasurer*), Samiha Ismail (*Keble, MURC IT Officer*), Karyn Cooke (*Keble, MURC Publicity Officer*), Dr Neil Laws (*Statistics*), Dr Richard Earl (*Admissions Co-ordinator*).

1. Meeting held on Friday 30th October 2009

- (a) Minutes. These were accepted.
- (b) Matters arising not covered below.
- Membership of JCCU. Mrs Lowe reported junior members had informed her of their terms of office as promised.
- Hand-in boxes. Henry reported that there have been some 'teething problems' with the new submission system and work still goes missing.
- Options fair. It is still undecided whether or not to host an options fair for Part B courses.
- Class starts. It was noted that moving class start times could cause problems with lecture timetabling, so they are unlikely to change.
- Consultation regarding new building. It was reported that students are able to view plans at the University offices in Wellington Square, but it was also noted that no undergraduates sit on the working committee for the new building.

2. Outstanding Examiners' Reports for 2009 Examinations

- (a) Internal Examiners' Reports. It was noted that all internal examiners' reports are now available on the departmental websites. Additionally, the report for Mathematics & Statistics has now been received and is also available to view online.
- (b) External Examiners' Reports. It was noted these are also available to view online.

3. Reports from the Meetings of Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

- (a) Mathematics. Dr Curnock was not present at the meeting. Therefore this item was not discussed.
- (b) Computer Science. Nothing to report.
- (c) Statistics. Nothing to report.

4. Questionnaires

- (a) Michaelmas Term 2009 statistical summaries.
 - i. Moderations/Part A – Dr Neumann commented the results were not bad overall and

reiterated that individual concerns of students are important and can make a difference to the teaching of a course. He added that well-received lecturers should be noted.

- ii. Part B – Miss Cretney enquired why a significant percentage of students indicated they could not obtain good notes from lectures or online sources. Dr Neumann replied that this number was due to a small number of courses and he and Dr Curnock are investigating the matter. Mr Bradford added that MURC had also received complaints about individual courses, which have been passed on to the department.
 - iii. Part C – The summaries were noted.
- (b) National Student Survey 2009 – The results were noted. Ms Sumner explained that the survey asked students about their degree subject once they had finished their course. However, this year Oxford's results will not be published nationally, due to the low number of students who took part. Overall, students' perceptions of their course have improved upon last year's results, although Dr Neumann commented that it is important for students to take part so that reliable data is published.
- It was agreed to ask for feedback from students regarding marking criteria for problem sheets and other assignments.

5. Admissions Co-ordinator's Business

- (a) Open Days – The dates of the 2010 Open Days were noted. Mrs Lowe requested the help of MURC volunteers to give talks for each programme. Miss Cretney agreed to give talks, or organise an alternative speaker if she is unavailable.
- (b) Oxbridge Conference Dates – The dates of the 2010 Oxbridge Regional Conferences were noted.

6. Provision of Study Skills and Finals Forums

The report produced by OUSU regarding the provision of study skills and Finals Forums was noted. Mrs Lowe reported Finals Forums will be introduced for Part A students in week 1 of Trinity Term. Miss Staynova added that she had received some feedback from students in her college. Most third years were unaware of the existence of Finals Forums and added they would be unwilling to attend, since they have not needed them in their two previous years. However second years would be keen to attend and this was noted. It was agreed that this feedback would be passed on to Teaching Committee.

Dr Neumann added that revision tutorials are the major source of exam support offered by the department. Professor Priestley agreed, but also stated that provision of tutorials varied among colleges.

7. Weblearn – Intercollegiate Class Sign-up

Mrs Lowe reported that the Part B courses B6b and B8b are currently being used to trial Weblearn as a means of signing up for intercollegiate classes. The Mathematical Institute would be keen to receive feedback from students using this system. Dr Neumann also stated that the department is investigating the use of Weblearn for the submission of projects and dissertations and a working party has been set up to identify the possible benefits and drawbacks of transferring to it. Mrs Lowe commented that the Proctors have not yet approved a new submission system, but if it is granted, new instructions on submitting projects will be communicated to students.

Professor Priestley added that Weblearn could also be used to take over administration roles within the Institute too. This was noted.

8. Odd/Even Week Allocation

Mrs Lowe reported that at the start of each term, all Part B students are e-mailed with advice concerning which weeks to sign up for intercollegiate classes. She asked whether junior members could gain feedback from their peers on how useful they found this advice. Miss Cretney replied that not all students choose to follow this advice, but it can still be useful in helping many students balance their workload throughout each term. Mr Bradford added that some colleges continue to provide tutorials, which these recommendations do not take into account. However, he agreed that this information is still useful for most students to have.

Mr O'Keeffe commented that courses offered by the Statistics Department and Computing Laboratory, as well as all Part C classes, are each an hour long and held every week, rather than every fortnight. He questioned why this was not the case for Part B Mathematical Institute classes. Professor Priestley replied that the current system came into effect when the latest Part B course was introduced and agreed that four 90-minute classes per term may be too large. She suggested that the current system could be reviewed in order to help students balance their workload during the term.

9. Online Questionnaires

Mrs Lowe asked junior members to give feedback on the use of online questionnaires for lecture courses and added that this system is currently being trialled by the Computing Laboratory. Miss Staynova raised the point that students who feel negatively about a course may stop attending lectures and therefore do not fill out questionnaires. She added that the Philosophy Faculty does use online questionnaires, but was unaware of the response rates. Mr Bradford commented that online questionnaires could generate a high proportion of responses from students with strong opinions about a course, but suggested using an end of year questionnaire, which is currently being developed by MURC, as a trial.

Professor Priestley warned that response rates may fall if students are asked to answer too many questionnaires. Ms Sumner responded that MPLS has stopped using a number of questionnaires to avoid the duplication of results.

10. Careers

The date of the forthcoming careers event was noted.

11. Lecture List for Trinity Term 2010

This was noted.

12. AOB

•Mr Bradford reported he will contact Dr Curnock regarding concerns he has received about a Part B course.

•Mr Bradford informed those present that some students would like the quota for 'Other' Mathematical courses to be increased. Professor Priestley replied that the current categorisation could be examined, although she believed some limit should exist in order to guarantee a minimum number of Mathematical options all single honours students should take. Miss Cretney suggested that the existing 'O' category could be split into subcategories, with a limit imposed on each. She added that the current rules regarding the number of 'other' options could be made more clear to students before they make their course choices.

•Miss Darlington explained that she is a member of the Mathematics Education Research Group and is interested in undergraduate maths teaching. She added that she would be keen to contact as many first year students as possible and ask them to complete a questionnaire about their course. Mr Hoskin suggested contacting the lecturer of a first-year pure course, since these have the largest attendance, or alternatively making use of the college system. The latter would also be useful for possibly obtaining copies of students' collection scripts.

Miss Darlington agreed to contact Mr Hoskin in the near future to discuss potential lecturers and

tutors to liaise with.

SO'K, 17/02/10