

Faculties of Mathematics and Statistics
Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates
Hilary Term Meeting • Minutes of Meeting
Friday 7th February 2014

- Present:** Dr Richard Earl (Director of Undergraduate Studies and Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy), Dr Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor), Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Ms Catherine Goodwin (MPLS Division), David Abed (MURC President), Alexander Homer (MURC Secretary), Ryan Murphy (MURC Treasurer), Rose Ryan Flinn (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep), Stewart Jerrome (MURC Mathematics and Statistics Rep), Michael Holloway (MURC Questionnaire Rep), Ben Spells (MURC Publicity and Careers Rep), Perry Wang (MURC First Year Rep)
- In attendance:** Mrs Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator)
- Apologies for absence:** Dr Neil Laws (Department of Statistics), Lewis Morgan (MURC Mathematics and Computer Science Rep), Rachel Ahlquist (MURC Outreach Rep)

I. Meeting held on Friday 1st November

(a) Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were **accepted**.

(b) Matters arising

It was noted that sample exam solutions were being collected, and that these will hopefully be mostly ready by the end of term.

It was noted that the archive of past institute notes is now online, having previously been available to purchase at reception. The hope that these, although not directly tied to the current courses, could be of use to present students was noted.

2. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

(a) Mathematics

Dr Richard Earl reported from the two meetings of Teaching Committee since the last meeting of JCCU. Starting with the first of these meetings (Michaelmas 2013), he initially noted that discussions have taken place with regard to rationalising the numbering of courses in Parts B and C. He additionally noted the introduction of a departmental lectureship to promote the understanding of mathematics in the UK, who will amongst other responsibilities work with summer school students. He also noted that there have been some concerns about prerequisites for Part B courses following the syllabus changes, especially with regard to Maths and Philosophy, and expressed the hope that his email detailing prerequisites would have helped with this.

Dr Earl next noted that National Student Survey results suggested that students didn't feel there was enough development of their presentation and communication skills. It was raised that some colleges offer seminars in which students give presentations on a piece of mathematics. Dr Earl asked for the views of MURC. Ideas raised were the possibility of the department further promoting the work of the Careers Service in this area, and of spreading the inclusion of student-led presentations of answers in tutorials/classes (something which, it was noted, already takes place). David Abed suggested the idea of a form of discussion group to be held in the Mathematical Institute in which students could discuss mathematics-related matters. It was agreed that further development of the proposal in terms of subjects that could be discussed would need to take place.
Action: MURC to consider suitable topics and compile proposal.

Moving to the second of the meetings of Teaching Committee (earlier in Hilary Term 2014), Dr Earl noted that additional funding has been sourced for Gibbs Prizes, which will be awarded as two new prizes for performance in Part A exams, as prizes for performance in Prelims and Part A for Maths and Philosophy Students, and as prizes for the best two dissertations.

Dr Earl finally noted that Teaching Committee had considered concerns about the new Differential Equations I course in Part A, and that a small working party had been set up to deal with this.

(b) Statistics

It was noted that Dr Neil Laws, who had sent apologies, had sent word that there was nothing to address from Maths and Statistics.

3. MURC Business

(a) Gender disparity

Rachel Ahlquist, who had sent apologies, had passed on figures that showed that, in Part B examinations, a similar proportion of students of each gender had received at least an Upper Second as their classification, but that significantly more male students had gained a First, as a proportion, than female students. It was noted that this appeared to be a trend.

Ms Catherine Goodwin said that the Department and Division are looking at the anomaly in results, and putting together statistics. She noted that this has been looked at in the past, and noted the existence of the Education Committee Gender Panel and its website.

David noted that the MURC meeting that took place on Thursday 30th January had discussed possible reasons for the discrepancy, including whether in some way exam questions, in their style, favoured one gender over the other, or whether the working environment might favour a certain type of learning.

It was noted that it could be illuminating to look at other statistics, including from joint schools (in some of which the ratio of female to male students is higher) and from other universities. It was also noted that a substantial amount of data was looked at for the Athena Swan bid. It was also noted that surveys had previously shown no specific concern, but had had a lot of comments leading in different directions.

The idea was raised of a focus group to ask female students directly whether or not they felt at a disadvantage, which was generally agreed to have merit. Dr Earl noted that steps have been taken to ensure female lecturers are teaching prelims and core courses, and suggested that perhaps more

could be done through the Invariants. Ms Goodwin noted that it could perhaps be considered at a Divisional level.

It was suggested that optional question could be included on lecture questionnaires about gender. Some concerns were raised about whether this would affect responses, and whether it would make students identifiable, but it was agreed that this could be workable in principle.

Action: Dr Earl to raise at Teaching Committee.

(b) Exam entry date for Part B and Part C

David noted that MURC had received contact from a student with regard to the entry date for Parts B and C – it was generally felt by MURC that the deadline set by the Examination Schools of the Friday of Second Week, with college deadlines necessarily being before this date, meant that students did not have sufficient time to experience Hilary Term courses before making their decision on options. It was noted that, owing to the large amount of course choice available, this was a problem that was particular to Maths. It was also noted that Exam Schools have reasons for needing a relatively early deadline in order to timetable exams, but it was suggested that possibly Exam Schools might be persuaded to push the deadline a little later and/or to reduce the fine for post-deadline amendments for maths students. It was also noted that any suggestion of coordinated change to college deadlines would need to go through Senior Tutors' Committee.

Action: to be addressed at Academic Committee

(c) Communication skills (NSS)

It was felt that this item had been sufficiently addressed when raised as part of the report from Teaching Committee (item 2(a)).

(d) Model exemplars of examination questions

Clarification was requested as to which papers were to be available, and it was confirmed that each Part B and Part C course was to provide specimen solutions to six past questions.

4. Questionnaires

(a) Michaelmas Term 2013 statistical summaries

The statistical summaries of lecture questionnaires were noted. It was felt that the responses were generally acceptable. It was noted that there were remarkably few courses with low scores, and that those in this category were being looked into.

5. Open Days and Induction

The open day dates of Saturday 3rd May, Saturday 10th May, Wednesday 2nd July, Thursday 3rd July and Friday 19th September were noted. It was noted that these were specific Mathematics open days; in particular, that all attendees would receive either a session on Statistics or on Philosophy, in order to encourage uptake of the joint schools options, and that there was a slot for the MURC Outreach Rep. It was noted additionally that the maximum capacity of the events (~550) was much greater than previously (~260).

6. Lecture list for Trinity Term 2014

It was noted that the lecture list would be on the Department's website.

7. Any other business

Ben Spells noted the suggestion from the external examiners that there were too many exam questions which involved directly quoting from lecture notes, and enquired as to whether any potential effect on this was to be communicated to students. It was noted that the Department felt that this was not a substantive change, and was akin to the effect on papers when, for example, external examiners noted that a paper was too easy.

Clarification was requested with regard exam entry deadlines (item 3(b)), asking whether Senior Tutors' Committee could make changes. It was noted that there was perhaps more to be gained by going via the Division. It was reiterated that the ideal situation would be for College deadlines to be at the end of Third Week.

Ms Goodwin noted that responses were still needed from finalists to the National Student Survey. She also noted that nominations were open for the MPLS Divisional Teaching Awards and encouraged students to submit nominations.

There being no further business, the meeting was concluded at 3:06pm.

AH 07/02/2014