

## JCCU Meeting Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2.15 pm Higman room, Maths Institute

**Present:** Julia Steinberg (*St Hilda's, President of MURC*), Poppy Wyeth (*Worcester, MURC treasurer*), Harry Jackson (*Corpus Christi, MURC Secretary*), Chris Elford (*St. John's College, MURC Maths and Philosophy rep*), Dr Audrey Curnock (*Mathematics Teaching Committee, Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy*), Dr Joel Ouaknine (*Computer Science*), Dr Matthias Winkel (*Statistics*), Dr Richard Earl (*Schools Liaison Officer*), Mr Tony Conway (*MPLS*), Yan-Chee Yu (*Deputy Academic Administrator*).

**Apologies from:** Anne-Marie Imafidon (*Keble, Maths and Computer Science rep*), Dr Brian Stewart (*Mathematics Undergraduate Teaching Advisor*).

### **Minutes (unconfirmed)**

#### **1. Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

- i) Minutes from the last meeting were held as a true representation of the meeting.
- ii) Matters arising:
  - New membership of JCCU

#### **2. Examinations 2007 Examiners reports**

- i) Internal Examiners' Reports: all internal examiners reports are now on the Departmental website with the exception with the exception of the Honour School of Mathematics and Philosophy part C report.
- ii) External Examiners' Reports: Professor Bingham's report for the Honour School of Mathematics and Statistics Part A has now been received.

#### **3. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees:**

- i) It was noted that Part B examiners have asked for clearer guidance on class percentages (e.g. the expected number of firsts). The Teaching Committee has therefore produced percentages of firsts attained in each set of examinations, both from 2007 and as 5-year averages.
- ii) It was reported that the Committee has decided that in each set of examinations the percentage of firsts and 2:1s awarded should be between the percentages for 2007 and the 5-year average
- iii) It was explained that the algorithm used for calculating final marks takes into account the marks in previous sets of exams, so the proportion of firsts and 2:1s is expected to be roughly similar in Part B as in the previous year's Part A. In the past this has led to a very high number of firsts at Part B because of a very high number at Part A.
- iv) The proportion of firsts and 2:1s awarded by the department was examined. It was noted that the vast majority of students achieve firsts and 2:1s. It was pointed out that the proportion of firsts in Mathematics is not out of line with the rest of the mathematical sciences division.

- v) It was asked whether the raw marks from each paper are adjusted. It was explained that they are adjusted using a piecewise continuous algorithm that takes into account the mean mark for Firsts, 2:1s etc. It was noted that this algorithm has recently been improved to prevent there being too much difference between high 2:1 candidates and low First candidates.
- vi) Dr Ouaknine queried whether it was easier to get a first in some years than others because of differing ability levels across the year. Dr Winkel replied that this was not the case as there are qualitative descriptors of what a first-class student must achieve, and firsts were not awarded to those who did not achieve this. It was further pointed out that all borderline candidates are very carefully considered. Dr Earl pointed out that the percentage of questions they had completed was also taken into account.
- vii) It was noted that 50% of Part C students achieve firsts. It was pointed out that this proportion is as expected as Part C students are a self-selected group of the most able. It was suggested that the proportion would be lower if all maths students completed four years, as is the case in subjects such as chemistry and engineering.
- viii) The data were compared to national data on degree classifications. The proportion of firsts awarded at Oxford is higher than the national average, but it was pointed out that the selection process is tougher for Oxford. It was further noted that the proportion of firsts at Oxford is also higher than the Russell Group average, but then noted that our proportion is not dissimilar to that of Cambridge University.

At this point it was agreed to take items 6 and 7 on the agenda next.

## **6. Open Days 2008**

- i) It was noted that the 2008 open days will be on 26 April, 3 May, 25 June, 26 June and 19 September.
- ii) It was noted that at previous April/May open days the MURC open days rep had given a 15-minute talk
- iii) It was asked whether the post of MURC open days rep was currently filled. It was not, but the President of MURC agreed to try to find somebody to fill it. Dr. Earl asked to be informed if a MURC representative was willing to give the talk.

## **7. Schools Liaison Officer matters: Oxbridge Conferences.**

- i) There will be six regional Oxbridge conferences in 2008: 3<sup>rd</sup> March in Leicester, 10<sup>th</sup> March in London, 18<sup>th</sup> March in Edinburgh, 19<sup>th</sup> March in Newcastle, 20<sup>th</sup> March in Manchester and 4<sup>th</sup> April in Cheltenham.
- ii) Volunteers were requested from undergraduates in the department, and told to contact [cat.murdoch@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:cat.murdoch@admin.ox.ac.uk) if interested. The junior members were asked to spread the word about this.
- iii) It was noted that the places for volunteers at the conferences may be full, and that an interview may be required when applying for a place.

## **3. Reports from meetings of Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees (continued)**

- ix) Rubric change. From 2009 the rubric on part B and C exams will be changed so that undergraduates attempt two questions on each section rather than at least 1. Also there will now be 3 questions in total on each section rather than 4. It was explained that Teaching Committee wanted to know that undergraduates have a wide knowledge of each course they take.
- x) The MURC maths and philosophy rep asked whether splitting the papers up into individual options had been discussed. It had.
- xi) It was clarified that these changes will not affect students taking exams in 2008.
- xii) Maths and Computer Science students will now take probability in mods
- xiii) Maths and Statistics students will have the option of taking B21 from next year.

#### **4. Course Evaluation Questionnaire Results**

- i) It was noted that there is currently no MURC Questionnaire rep. A MURC member is required to discuss the results of the questionnaire with Dr. Curnock – it was agreed that if no questionnaire rep is found then it was agreed that a member of MURC would do this.
- ii) The new report given to Mods lecturers was presented. This is designed to give a summary of the feedback from undergraduates to the lecturers. It was noted that some students stated that they did not see the point in lectures when there were online notes for courses – it was agreed that undergraduates should be encouraged to go to their lectures.
- iii) The statistical summaries of questionnaires were examined. It was noted that the majority of Mods students found the problem sheets and pace of the course about right. It was further noted that Part A students were less happy about problem sheets, and had said that some college tutors did not use the online problem sheets. It was noted that Part B and C students generally had no complaint about pace of lectures or problem sheets. The main complaint across the board was that there were not enough worked examples in lectures.
- iv) The detailed SCEQ report was examined. There were poor responses to questions about group work – it was agreed that this was because there is very little group work in the course. Many students also felt that the workload was too heavy. A poor response to a question about written work was also noted: Dr. Curnock suggested that more undergraduates should be encouraged to undertake project work, as currently very few do. Overall 85% of undergraduates were happy with the course.
- v) The results of the National Student Survey were examined – this was the first year that the Department participated. It was noted that many students requested clearer marking – it was pointed out that Teaching Assistants are now trained to give comments rather than just grades, and that there has been a positive response to this. It was further noted that few students felt that the course increased their confidence – Chris Elford pointed out that there was no real presentation involved in the course, and that it was possible to be quiet in tutorials, with no real focus on improving confidence. It was also noted that the examiners' report referred to a difficulty in using English. Dr. Curnock replied that this varies between colleges, but that more project work and oral presentation would be a good thing.

## **5. Student Representation and items from Junior Members**

- i) It was noted that there has been no MURC meeting so far this term
- ii) A question about the classification of a Part B paper was raised by the Maths and Philosophy rep. Dr. Curnock replied that this was one of two anomalous papers last year: Set Theory and Quantum. It was appreciated that the requirements for getting into the upper segment were too steep. It was also noted that guidance had been given to the examiners to make the questions harder, specifically the last few marks in each question, to prevent this.
- iii) It was asked whether the problem with this paper coincided with material being removed from the set theory course. Dr Curnock agreed to check this.
- iv) It was asked by the president of MURC whether Part A results were scaled to break down roughly the same as Mods results of the previous year, as is the case with Parts B and C being scaled to Parts A and B respectively. Dr Curnock replied that this was not the case. Dr Winkel added that Part A results are calibrated but not as much as Parts B and C.
- v) It was asked whether differing ability levels between courses skewed the results, e.g. making it harder to get a first in a course taken by lots of high-performing students. Dr Curnock replied that this is all taken into account when marking.
- vi) The Maths and Philosophy rep asked whether the matters raised last time regarding maths and philosophy marking had been addressed, and whether the marks for maths and philosophy students would be scaled differently as a result. Dr. Curnock replied that a move to a different exam format had been suggested, with 1.5-2 hour papers containing short and long questions. This has not been confirmed, and a concern is that there will not be enough options for maths and philosophy students.

## **8. Lecture List for Trinity Term 2008**

- i) This will be on the Departmental website before the end of term.

## **9. Option choices for Part B and C 2008/2009**

- i) A new system of online registration for options in Parts B and C was discussed. It has been designed to avoid clashes between lectures, and to get more people to register for options. It was pointed out that undergraduates often change courses at the beginning of term after going to the first few lectures – it was replied that students may be able to choose 3 definite options and 2 tentative options, allowing them to choose between the two. It was asked whether people doing 5 courses in a term would be allowed to pick 6 options, but this was deemed too difficult. It was pointed out that the data did not have to be perfect, just good enough to avoid most clashes and be manageable. It was noted that there have been clashes in the past.
- ii) It was noted that the Institute publishes a list of classes that may clash and a list of classes that won't, but that not everybody is aware of this list. It was agreed that students should be reminded of the existence of this list.
- iii) Dr Ouaknine asked how much variation there is in class numbers between years; Yan-Chee Yu replied that the numbers are roughly constant but that sometimes courses are shared between departments (e.g. the Statistics

department offering an undergraduate maths course to M.Sc. students) causing a large change in numbers.

**10. Other Matters raised by Junior Members**

i) None.

**11. AOB**

i) None.

HJ 15/2/08