Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

Friday, 13th February, 2009

Unconfirmed Minutes of Meeting

Present: Rosie Cretney *(Queen's, MURC Chairperson),* Stephen O'Keeffe *(Hertford, MURC Secretary),* Joe Wales *(St Hugh's, MURC Questionnaire Rep.),* Xiao (Helen) Liu *(Somerville, MURC Open Day Co-ordinator),* Anne-Marie Imafidon *(Keble, MURC Maths and Computer Science Rep.),* Gege (Irene) Huang *(Keble, MURC Maths and Statistics Rep.),* Matt Scroggs *(St Hugh's, MURC I.T. Rep.),* Dr Audrey Curnock *(Mathematics Teaching Committee, Chair),* Dr Neil Laws *(Statistics),* Mr Tony Conway *(MPLS),* Mr Yan-Chee Yu *(Deputy Academic Administrator).*

Apologies: Henry Bradford *(St John's, MURC Treasurer/Bookstall Manager),* Wanfei (Paul) Wu *(St Hugh's, MURC First Year Rep),* Prof Hilary Priestly *(Joint Committee for Maths and Philosophy),* Dr Richard Earl *(Schools Liaison Officer),* Dr Mike Spivey *(Computer Science).*

1.**Meeting held on 31st October 2008**
(a)**Minutes.** These were accepted. Dr Curnock thanked Mr Yu for taking minutes at the previous meeting. This was usually carried out by the Secretary (a Junior Member) but unfortunately these had not been prepared.
(b)**Matters arising.** It was reported the changes to the Part A rubric had now been implemented.

2.Examinations 2008 Outstanding Examiners' Reports
(a)Internal examiners' reports. It was reported that the 2008 Maths and Philosophy report had been received, as well as the 2007 Maths and Philosophy report. Dr Curnock also mentioned there had been a query regarding the rounding of marks. The overall weighted average mark for a Mathematics and Philosophy student are not subject to rounding, whereas this is not the case in the other mathematics degree courses.

(b)External examiners' reports. All external examiners' reports are now available on the web, and can be accessed by students by logging in to a secure website.

3.Reports from the Meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees
(a)Mathematics.
i.Summer Projects.
It was reported there are a number of funding sources available for students wishing to undertake summer vacation projects, including a new scheme offered by OxPDE. Miss Cretney enquired as to whether there were any pure mathematics bursaries available, and Dr Curnock replied that 1 application for an algebra-based project had recently been submitted to the Nuffield Foundation, there were possibly others.
ii.Student Progression Analysis
It was reported that the Mathematical Institute, together with the Statistics Department, have been involved in a longitudinal study of student performance over the course of their degrees, and they hope to be able to report on the findings in the near future.
iii.Institutional Audit
It was reported that three undergraduate students have been selected to meet with auditors in 7th week of Hilary Term as part of an institutional audit. Mr Conway and Dr Curnock briefly described aspects of the audit to junior members.
iv.Teaching Awards
It was reported that this year, for the first time, the Mathematical Institute intends to allow students

to nominate members of teaching staff for departmental awards. A draft nomination form from the Chemistry Department was circulated, and it was suggested that nominations could be accepted through MURC. Dr Laws added that the Statistics Department had used the student nomination system for a number of years, and would continue to do so in the future.

•An extra item was added at this point. Dr Curnock thanked MURC and Mr Yu for their help in organising the Mathematics International Evening, as well as Ms Lowe and Ms Patel for photographing the event. Some of these photos were displayed.

(a)Computer Science.
Nothing to report.

(b)Statistics.
Dr Laws reported that the Statistics Department intends to offer summer vacation studentships and teaching awards, as in previous years. In addition, he reported there had been queries regarding the scaling of exam marks of joint schools students in relation to the marks of mathematics students. Dr Laws confirmed that the scaling functions used for mathematics and statistics students may differ from those used for mathematics students, and this would be at the examiners' discretion.
Finally, he stated that a notice to candidates would be sent out regarding the number of questions available for students to answer on maths and statistics papers, how many responses contribute towards a final mark, and the timings of examinations. Currently, one statistics paper is 2 hours long, but similar changes would be implemented to those in mathematics.
Dr Curnock added that in Part B in mathematics, short option papers are now 1.5 hours long.

4.Course Evaluation Questionnaire Results
(a)Michaelmas Term 2008 statistical summaries.
The results of the faculty lecture and class questionnaires were discussed.
Dr Curnock noted that over for all 4 years 19% of students found problem sheets too hard, and 16% found the pace of the course too fast. This was to be expected. Comparable figures for Mods were 20% and 16%; this may be due to new students settling into the degree course and the fact that two new Mods courses had been introduced this year. These courses had caused slight problems regarding college tutorials in the first two weeks of term.
For Mods lectures it was noted that some students felt there were not enough worked examples and some found lectures uninteresting. Again, Dr Curnock noted this is most likely due the fact that this was their first term at university.
For Part A lectures, it was noted there were a relatively low number of questionnaire responses submitted, particularly for the Complex Analysis course. Dr Curnock suggested this should be checked, and added it was disappointing that 6% of students said lectures were not interesting. Dr Laws replied this figure is not too bad, and Mr Wales agreed, adding that this figure was achieved in spite of a low response rate.
For Part B lectures, it was noted that some students had answered a question relevant only to Mods and Part A students. Miss Imafidon responded that some colleges continue to offer supplementary tutorials to students in addition to intercollegiate classes. Mr Wales remarked that the percentage of students who found courses too hard or fast was higher than at Part A. Dr Curnock suggested this was due to a combination of factors. Some Part B lecture courses had new or different lecturers this term and they had consequently produced new styles of questions, so it would take time for both students and staff to adjust. She also noted thought there was a significant jump in the difficulty of material between Part A and Part B. Dr Laws commented that it was likely students need time to adjust between these years, but added that problem sheets should not be made any harder.
For Part C lectures, some students requested more worked examples. Dr Curnock suggested this may be due to the fact that many Part C courses deal with abstract ideas, so examples would inevitably become more abstract as well.

(b)Oxford Student Course Experience Questionnaire report.
There was some discussion regarding Q18 in the survey, which dealt with communication skills. It was noted that, in general, mathematics students are not required to do presentation work, or extended writing as part of their degree. Dr Laws commented that these are not intended to be a fundamental part of mathematics courses, although there are opportunities for students to undertake project work if they wish.
Both Miss Cretney and Miss Huang added that their colleges offered prizes for mathematics-based essays. Dr Curnock replied that she would be keen to set up a summer project or essay scheme for first and second year students in the near future.
Other information from the survey was noted.

(c)National Student Survey summaries.
The results were noted.

(d)Report from the Director of Undergraduate Studies.
Dr Curnock raised the issue of on-line notes for mathematics lecture courses, and emphasised that their purpose is to complement lecture courses, rather than acting as a substitute for attending lectures. Taking notes is a skill students develop. Junior members raised a number of points:
i.On-line notes can prove a useful resource for college tutors, so notation and definitions used in lectures and tutorials is consistent.
ii.It can be difficult to listen to the lecturer while writing notes in lectures.
iii.Students are more likely to understand more material if they write notes themselves.
iv.Some lecturers use 'Skeleton notes'. That is, they publish on-line notes containing definitions and statements of theorems, with spaces for proofs to be filled in by students in lectures.
v.Some lecturers work through different examples in lectures to those published in their notes.
Dr Laws added that it may be easier for students to annotate notes towards the end of their degree course, but agreed that it is easier to understand material they have written themselves, and writing notes keeps students focused during lectures.

It was also reported some students had experienced difficulty finding some rooms in the Maths Institute. Mr O'Keeffe responded, saying that class tutors used different abbreviations for building names (e.g. 'MI' and 'SG' are both used to refer to the main Mathematical Institute building.). Dr Curnock agreed that building names should be published in lecture lists.

(e)First Destination Statistics.
These were noted.

(f)New survey instrument.
The issue of on-line questionnaires for lecture courses was raised. It was noted that physics already uses this method of evaluation and Mr Wales agreed that it would be a good idea to introduce a pilot scheme, since students who miss lectures are unlikely to fill out questionnaires.
Miss Cretney raised the point that on-line questionnaires may result in a lower response rate.
Dr Curnock also asked whether MURC would be willing to help design an end-of year questionnaire for mathematics students. Miss Cretney agreed this would be a good idea.

5.Student Representation and Items from Junior Members
Mr O'Keeffe commented that in Trinity Term 2008, Part A students were informed very shortly before the exam period began that they would need to choose their Part B options before the end of term. He suggested that more notice could be given in future.
Miss Imafidon raised the point that Part B students are required to submit their exam entries whilst still in the early stages of some courses. Dr Curnock replied that on-line exam entries should shortly

be introduced across the university, so students would have more time to decide on their exam entries in future (likely to be week 4 in MT and HT).

6.Open Days 2009
Mr Yu reported that Dr Earl wished to thank those MURC members who had agreed to help out at the upcoming Mathematical Institute Open Days.

7.Schools Liaison Officer Matters
The dates of the 2009 Oxbridge Regional Conferences were noted.

8.Lecture List for Trinity Term 2009
This was noted.

9.Letter from the Vice-Chancellor
This was noted.

10.AOB
Dr Curnock reported that a reception is to be held in 8th Week for the outgoing and incoming MURC committees.

SO'K, AGC 18/02/09