

# Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

## Minutes

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009, Mathematical Institute**

**Present:** Rosie Cretney (*Queen's, MURC Chairperson*), Stephen O'Keeffe (*Hertford, MURC Secretary, MURC Fourth Year Rep*), Henry Bradford (*St John's, MURC Treasurer*), Gege (Irene) Huang (*Keble, MURC Mathematics and Statistics Rep*), Dr Audrey Curnock (*Mathematics Teaching Committee, Chair*), Prof. Hilary Priestley (*Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy*), Dr Peter Neumann (*Faculty Teaching Advisor*), Dr Neil Laws (*Statistics*).

**In Attendance:** Mrs Helen Lowe (*Deputy Academic Administrator, Mathematical Institute*).

**Apologies:** Matthew Scroggs (*St Hugh's, MURC IT Officer*), Joseph Wales (*St Hugh's, MURC Questionnaire Rep*), Petra Staynova (*Pembroke, MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep*), Dr Richard Earl (*Admissions Co-ordinator*).

### 1. Meeting held on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009.

- a. Minutes. In item 13 Dr Neumann advised that the name of a faculty member should be removed before they are published on the website. This was agreed, and the minutes were otherwise accepted.
- b. Matters Arising. See 1(a).

### 2. Membership of the JCCU

- a. Senior Members. The senior membership was noted.
- b. Junior Members. Junior members agreed to notify Mrs Lowe when their terms of office expire.

### 3. MURC Constitution

Miss Cretney reported that MURC had recently updated its constitution and wished to have it approved by JCCU. Although no copies were circulated, Mrs Lowe agreed to circulate a copy by e-mail to all members, and if no objections arise, then it will be approved.

Note after the meeting: Dr Neumann circulated a list of suggested changes to the MURC Constitution, all of which seemed very sensible, and subject to these the constitution was approved as no objections had been received.

### 4. Examinations 2009

Dr Curnock reported on the examinations of Trinity Term 2009.

- a. Moderations.

- i. Honour Moderations in Mathematics. A problem which arose during the exams was that students were not given enough answer booklets at the beginning of the exam. In future it will be made more clear to Exam Schools which materials should be provided to candidates for each paper. It was also noted that the classification rule for candidates to achieve a second class result has been altered for the 2010 period onwards.
  - ii. Honour Moderations in Mathematics & Computer Science. Noted.
  - iii. Honour Moderations in Mathematics & Philosophy. Noted.
- b. Part A
  - i. Honour School of Mathematics. It was noted that the 2009 results are more in-keeping with the results of previous years than the 2008 set. The external examiner has suggested simplifying the algebra syllabus in order to improve results in this area. Dr Curnock also explained that the same mapping algorithm was used for different schools sitting the same paper if there was little difference between their results.
  - ii. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science and Computer Science. A new paper, AO1, has been introduced for Mathematics & Computer Science.
  - iii. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy. Students may now choose to answer questions on Graph Theory, or Probability if they wish. A new paper AO1 was also introduced for Mathematics and Philosophy candidates.
  - iv. Honour School of Mathematics and Statistics. Noted
- c. Part B
  - i. Honour School of Mathematics. It was suggested that too many changes were made this year to the examination regulations. These have resulted in a drop in mean raw marks. No changes will be made to the regulations this year to allow the new system to settle in.
  - ii. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science and Computer Science. It was noted a large proportion of candidates achieved first class results, though the cohort is small, and performed well at Part A. There were also some communication problems between the two examination boards, which will be addressed this year.
  - iii. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy. It was suggested that in the future, Mathematics & Philosophy candidates' scores should be considered together with other Mathematics students. At present they are considered separately.
  - iv. Honour School of Mathematics and Statistics. Dr Laws reported that Dr Nicholls worked closely with the Mathematical Institute during the examinations process. Dr Curnock added that external examiners were involved earlier in the Examination Board this year than in previous years, and that all adjustments applied to the Mathematics examination regulations in 2009 were also applied to Mathematics & Statistics regulations.
- d. Part C
  - i. Honour School of Mathematics. A larger proportion of students receive higher classes of degrees at Part C than in Part B, although Dr Curnock noted that those students who proceed to Part C must achieve at least a 2:2 at Part B, so the cohort is self-selecting.

- ii. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science and Computer Science. 2008-09 was the second year that a Part C course has been offered. Presently a large proportion of the course is assessed by coursework, and in future there may be a move back towards examination-based assessment.
  - iii. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy. Noted
  - iv. Honour School of Mathematics and Statistics. Dr Laws reported that, as in Part B, Dr Nicholls had worked closely with the Mathematical Institute throughout the examination process, and added that the Statistics Department will continue to offer a small number of project-assessed options at Part C.
- e. External examiners' reports (Parts A/B/C)
- i. Honour School of Mathematics Part A [Körner]. Miss Cretney commented that in general, Part A students feel that the algebra questions are not straightforward enough and that she agreed with Professor Körner's comments. However, Professor Priestley disagreed, and explained that she felt there is too much variation between the standards of questions between different years. Dr Curnock replied that there had been a change of examiner this year, and agreed that examiners need to be advised to maintain the same standards each year. She also added that any decision regarding the publishing of examiners' reports would be made by the Divisional Board .
  - ii. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science/Computer Science Part A [Schneider]. Noted.
  - iii. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy Part A [Körner]. Noted.
  - iv. Honour School of Mathematics & Statistics Part A [Körner, Bingham]. Noted. (NB – Bingham's report was not received before the meeting.)
  - v. Honour School of Mathematics Part B [Rees, Clarkson]. Dr Curnock noted Dr Rees's suggestion to apply the strong paper rule to half-unit papers rather than whole-unit papers, and also commented that at present, students are not required to write dissertations as part of their degrees, but that there are plans to encourage more students to undertake project work in the future.
  - vi. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science/Computer Science Part B [Schneider, Clarkson]. Noted.
  - vii. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy Part B [Rees, Frigg]. Noted.
  - viii. Honour School of Mathematics & Statistics Part B [Rees, Bowman]. Dr Curnock thanked Dr Rees for acting as external examiner for Part B Mathematics & Statistics in addition to her other duties, and also thanked Professor Budd for acting as Part C Mathematics & Statistics examiner, instead of Part B.
  - ix. Honour School of Mathematics Part C [Budd, Giblin]. It was noted that a paper had been potentially compromised due to the use of the University internal post system, and in future, a 'By Hand Only' folder scheme will operate to avoid any more problems of this nature. Dr Curnock also added that in future, examiners will work through the questions they set again shortly before the exams are sat in order to spot mistakes or typing errors. Professor Priestley commented that she would have expected fewer errors this year than previously, due to the

number of questions on each paper being reduced. It was also agreed that model solutions should be made more thorough in future in order to make papers easier to mark.

- x. Honour School of Mathematics & Computer Science/Computer Science Part C [Budd, Cohen]. Noted.
- xi. Honour School of Mathematics & Philosophy Part C [Giblin, Frigg]. Noted.
- xii. Honour School of Mathematics & Statistics Part C [Penrose, Budd]. Noted.

#### **5. Reports for the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic committees**

- a. Mathematics. Dr Curnock thanked MURC for organising the Freshers' social event at the beginning of term, and for writing the new Freshers' Guide for incoming undergraduate students. Miss Cretney thanked Dr Curnock for helping to organise the event, and thanked Mr O'Keeffe for coordinating the production of the guide. She added that the Bookstall now has capital available to purchase books from students wishing to sell them. Mr O'Keeffe thanked everyone who had helped to produce the guide, as well as those in the Mathematical Institute who had checked and corrected it.

Dr Curnock reported that the Moderations and Part A syllabuses are currently under review, and that new projects are being developed by Dr Wilkins and Dr Stedall. These are intended to complement the third year courses B5,B6 and B8 and it is hoped they will encourage more students to undertake mathematical essays and dissertations. She added that the prizewinners of the recent summer essay competition will be announced shortly.

- i. Hand in of class problem sheets. Miss Cretney mentioned that there have been some teething problems with the new envelope submission system. In particular, the basement can become crowded around deadlines, and some students are taking envelopes away from the shelves in order to write on them. Dr Curnock replied that Miss Patel has recently reorganised the submission boxes and labelled the shelves so that students have less difficulty finding the relevant box and corresponding envelope.

Some extra items were discussed at this point.

- Miss Cretney raised the issue that at present, there is limited information available to Part A students regarding third-year options, and there seems to be a difference in the amount of information students at different colleges receive. She suggested that some lectures are given early in second year on which options are available to students on each course, and that students are given more time between the end of Part A exams and the options submission deadline than in previous years. Dr Laws mentioned that the Statistics Department already offers options information lectures. These consist of a 30 minute talk and a Q&A session, although students on other courses are welcome to attend, so long as the capacity of the theatre is not exceeded. Professor Priestley commented that there are currently many new tutors, who are likely to be unsure of

the options system. She added that options advice is probably best given on a collegiate level, and it may prove useful to remind new tutors to give as much advice as possible to their students. Mr O'Keeffe commented that Part B students are invited to a Part C options fair at the end of Trinity Term, and this could be extended to Part A as well.

- Some students have reported that it can be difficult to timetable their classes, particularly those which do not take place in the Institute, as it can be difficult to travel from a lecture to a class in just 5 minutes. It was suggested to MURC members that classes timetabled in a venue outside the Institute could start at a quarter past the hour, to allow sufficient travelling time. This problem has also been experienced by Mathematics & Philosophy students travelling between the University Museum and Philosophy Faculty.
- Miss Cretney reported she had received a query from a student, who wanted to know if any student consultation had taken place regarding the new Mathematical Institute building on the Radcliffe Infirmary site. Dr Curnock replied that the plans had recently been on public display, and Dr Neumann added that they are currently available to view in the University Offices.

- a. Computer Science. Nothing to report.
- b. Statistics. Nothing to report.

#### 1. **Questionnaires**

- a. Trinity Term 2009 statistical summaries. Noted.

#### 2. **Open Days and Inductions**

Dr Curnock reported that Dr Earl wished to thank MURC and the undergraduate students who helped out at the Institute Open Days in May and September.

#### 8. **Lecture List for Hilary Term 2010**

Noted

#### 9. **AOB**

- Dr Curnock circulated a flyer regarding an Undergraduate Mathematical Conference at the University of Greenwich on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2010. She added that she would be happy to accompany any interested students who wished to attend or give a presentation.
- The Mathematics and Joint Schools admission figures for 2009 were circulated and noted.
- Following a suggestion from Professor Priestley, it was agreed to change the time of all future JCCU meetings to 2:00pm from 2:15pm.
- Dr Curnock hoped that a careers initiative would soon commence in the Mathematics Institute.

SO'K, 05/11/09

Edits HSL 16/11/09