

Unconfirmed Minutes

Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

Hilary Term, 05 February 2021

The meeting commenced at 12:32 pm and concluded at 2:02 pm.

In Attendance: Dr Richard Earl (Chair), Tessa Finlayson Gray, Dr Neil Laws, Dr James Munro, Dr Vicky Neale, Prof Stuart White, Rodrigo Marlasca Aparicio, Amirul Adil (Minutes), Abel Ayettey, Thomas Feerick, Rachel Laing, Giulia Lanzafame, Cameron Lee, Abhinav Mukerjee, Ryan Salter, Jingjie Yang.

1 Apologies

None received.

2 Meeting held on Friday 30th October 2020

Minutes were confirmed. Dr Earl commented on how exams for Prelims and Part A being kept online would be the safest option during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also discussed releasing some Problem B sheet solutions if there is an issue getting more TAs and class tutors. Part B project deadlines were delayed due to the delaying of Part A exams.

3 Report on matters raised in Examiners Reports

Dr Neale noted that the 2020 reports were not yet on the department website for staff and students to see. Dr Richard Earl will make sure that they are put up soon.

The ASO (Part A Short Option) paper raised concerns with examiners due to the difficulty of scaling questions. However, because students may choose their questions to answer, it is not a great issue. Alternative solutions to this may remove the freedom of choice for students. Dr Richard Earl advised that Teaching Committee will be reviewing Part A to see what is working and what is not. Rachel Laing asked about the possibility of scaling the questions individually. Dr Earl answered that there is no simple solution to how to scale marks, which Neil Laws confirmed.

Dr Earl explained that Part B students who are unable to move on to Part C are contacted individually and that colleges are responsible for changing the status of students on eVision. Ryan Salter requested that all students be individually contacted about their status with respect to moving on to Part C. Dr Earl said he will enquire about this request.

ACTION: Dr Earl to discuss the possibility of contacting all Part B students about their status for moving to Part C with Academic Admin.

There is more Gibbs Prize money to award this year. The top exam prizes for Part B and Part C have been increased from £250 to £500.

Rachel Laing asked Dr Earl what the current requirements for Part B students to move on to Part C were. Dr Earl clarified that the system for moving on will revert back to the old criteria present before the pandemic. Part B students are required to earn a 2.1 overall for Part A

and Part B as well as a 2.1 for Part B alone. This does not apply to Maths and Philosophy students as they have fewer Part A exams. Rachel asked about the strong paper rule, with Dr Earl stating that it is still in place.

4 Reports from the meetings of the Faculty and Teaching Committees

(a) (i) Dr Earl announced that this will be his last meeting as Chair of the JCCU, but will still be participating in meetings. He introduced Professor Stuart White as his successor.

ii) Dr Earl has said that there is a working group on intercollegiate classes. They are trying to think of better ways to resource intercollegiate classes. Dr Earl believes that bringing in departmental lecturers would be one improvement.

(iii) Part A and Prelims exams will be held online. The University clarified that there will be no safety net in place for exams. However, examiners will have more freedom to apply mitigating circumstances to their marking.

(b) Neil Laws reported that in the last Statistics Teaching Committee meeting, they looked at examiners' reports and examiners' conventions. They discussed the Department's future AV plans. Gibbs Prizes for statistics for Part C exams have been increased and there are plans to extend this to Part B exams.

(c) Nothing further to add

5 MURC Business

(a) Review of the recent MURC questionnaire:

Rodrigo (MURC President) talked through the results of the questionnaire. It shows that many students are having trouble adjusting to the new format of exams. Understandably, the first exams had some issues such as varying difficulty. It is unclear what adjustments have been made. Rodrigo brought up the option of sending out a document explaining the changes to exams. Dr Earl said that the main change was the transition to the open-book format. He agreed that the changes should be made publicly clear. The first-year and second-year exams were adjusted to the open-book format. He explained that some questions from existing exams are chosen based on how well they work with these changes.

Dr Vicky Neale said that she, as a tutor, had not received any email about exam conventions being published. It should be checked if this has been communicated to students and tutors. Some students raised concerns about how their answers should be structured. Students have also had issues with the practical aspects of the open book format such as how to properly scan their papers.

ACTION: Dr Earl to check if students/tutors receive notification of Exam Conventions being available

Dr Earl advised that there is a page for notices for candidates. He believes it would be a good idea to highlight the extra questions and concerns that students have on that page. He stated that at the initial stage, mitigating circumstances are not a departmental matter. However, having a link on how to raise mitigating circumstances would make it easier for students to access this information. The notices will also display information about the new open-book format.

ACTION: Dr Earl to follow up on including a paragraph within existing page which addresses concerns including, e.g. a link to the Mitigating Circumstances page and ensure links included are useful

Rodrigo explained that many students do not read through the exam conventions so it may be better to email students about any major changes to exams. Dr Earl argued that emails may be difficult to find. Neil Laws advised that information about mitigating circumstances can be found in the exam conventions.

Rodrigo asked about the clear distinctions regarding bookwork. Previous Part A students were told that there would be a lot of weight taken away from bookwork due to the new open-book format. However, there were many instances where answers could be directly copied from lecture notes. This could cause issues with scaling. Dr Earl responded that many questions from previous years still work in the new format. However, examiners should be told about the new normal of exams when setting questions.

Ryan Salter clarified that on the mitigating circumstances section of the exam conventions, there is only a link to a different page. This is unclear communication to students and does not give all the information for students. Ryan also suggested that there could be a video on Panopto of the process of scanning documents. Dr Earl thought that this was a good idea to discuss further.

ACTION: Dr Richard Earl and Dr Vicky Neale to meet to discuss the practicalities of setting up a video guide on scanning documents which will be uploaded to Panopto.

Dr Richard Earl clarified that mitigating circumstances are a University matter. Ryan explained that the url found in the exam conventions links to a page where information about mitigating circumstances is difficult to find. Neil Laws said that most information for examiners about this is under University policy.

ACTION: Dr Earl to follow up on ensuring existing links provided to signpost students are clear and useful i.e. the destination is relevant

Rachel Laing asked for clarification about what the “new normal” for exams is. Dr Earl answered that questions may be altered to better suit the new format. For example, questions testing memorisation may be changed to computational questions. Giulia Lanzafame said that many of the questions in her Hilary collections were heavily reliant on bookwork. There seemed to be confusion between which exams were sent by tutors and which were sent by the Department. Stuart White believes that this may have been caused by tutors prematurely downloading exam papers from online. Dr Earl said that this is something that needs to be looked into.

ACTION: Dr Earl to email Giulia Lanzafame the question he set for Collections

Dr Neale explained that in previous years, she and Dr Earl had some exam preparation sessions during early trinity term. For the online open-book format, the time allocated for these sessions could be repurposed to preparing videos to go on Panopto. A Q&A session during Trinity term could also take place. Dr Neale stated that caution needs to be taken as the University is planning to introduce a new computer system for handling some material.

(b) Releasing model solutions to past papers:

Rodrigo told the Committee that because of tutors having different teaching styles, students are receiving varying amounts of support when using past papers as study material. Some tutors go through all past papers while others only go through a select few. Model solutions would allow any student to have access to past paper solutions. They would also help students understand where marks are allocated. Rodrigo talked about how the Department was cautious about uploading model answers because questions usually have multiple methods for reaching the solution. Rodrigo argued that students may be unable to find any of the solutions in which case having at least one method solution would be a valuable resource.

Dr Earl proposed that a selection of past paper solutions be made available. For example, the distribution of solutions for every other year's papers. This way, tutors still are able to exam students without concern that students will be relying on the model solutions. Cameron Lee said that students understand that they are in charge of their own studies and that using model solutions inappropriately would be a waste of time and resources.

Dr Earl explained that there is a large divide in the department regarding this issue. Dr Earl also raised the issue that many students may feel tempted by the solutions.

Rachel Laing agreed that the release of solutions from every other year is a good compromise. It may also encourage students to attempt more past papers for practice. Rachel asked for Part B and Part C papers to not be excluded from this treatment.

Giulia Lanzafame commented that students come from many different backgrounds and may be unfamiliar with some approaches, leading to a lack of clarity about what is expected. Model solutions would help those students understand what the examiners want from an answer.

Thomas Feerick also agreed to the compromise of distributing a selection of paper solutions. He asked about the Department's thoughts on releasing the mark schemes of past exams to help students get an idea of how to better structure their answers. Dr Earl responded that marks are usually shuffled around. Mark schemes are usually found within the model solutions.

Rachel Laing asked if this system of submitting half of the exam solutions would be the same for Maths and Statistics exams. Neil Laws said that it would make sense so to keep things consistent.

ACTION: Dr Earl will take the proposal to the Teaching Committee.

(c) Making information accessible about the new format of exams:

Rodrigo commented that enough had been discussed during this meeting regarding this matter. Students should be informed about the changes made to exams.

(d) Concerns regarding the Prelims Computational Mathematics course:

Thomas Feerick explained that there is a lack of assessment criteria for how the projects are marked. It should be clarified if marks are allocated per section or if projects are just given an overall mark. Dr Earl stated that this is not something he could answer. He asked if the lecturer had been asked about this. Thomas said that the lecturer had not been contacted, to

which Dr Earl explained that this issue is most appropriately directed towards the lecturer in the first instance and additionally invited Thomas to set out his concerns in an email to Dr Earl in his capacity of DUS. Dr Neale added that this feedback would help lecturers improve their teaching.

6 Questionnaires

Dr Neale spoke to this item. The data from the questionnaires mainly focuses on Prelims and Part A students due to the lack of Part B and Part C student participation. However, the feedback received was still sent to lecturers.

Dr Neale stated that she wants the questionnaires for this term to be sent out earlier than the last term. She asked for any ideas to encourage students to complete questionnaires. She suggested class tutors provide a link to the questionnaires in the final lesson in the term. Abel Ayettey agreed with Dr Neale that it is important to encourage more students to send in their feedback. Rodrigo suggested students should receive reminders on Panopto to fill in questionnaires. Dr Neale said that she was unsure if that would be within the Department's control but that it might be possible to add course page announcements on Canvas.

ACTION: Dr Neale to talk to the IT Team about the possibility of adding links to Panopto and/or course pages.

7 Open Days

Dr Munro advised that the open days will be online again this year. There was nothing further to add. Information about open days can be found in this meeting's agenda.

8 Lecture list for Trinity Term 2021

Dr Earl advised that Teaching Committee had decided that Trinity Term lectures will be online. The decision for consultation meetings to be in-person has yet to be made.

9 Any Other Business

(a) Date and Time for the next JCCU Meeting:

Dr Earl asked if anyone wanted to change the time and date for the next JCCU meeting from the current proposed date and time of Week 3 Friday of Trinity Term at 12:30pm. No one raised this as an issue in the meeting but Prof White and Rodrigo will have a discussion offline.

ACTION: Prof White and Rodrigo Marlasca Aparicio to discuss possible alternative meetings times and feedback to JCCU organisers in time for the next meeting.

(b) Maths Education Part B Module:

Rachel Laing asked if the Maths Education module for Part B students would be returning for next year. She suggested having it open for both Part B and Part C students just for a single year for those who could not take it due to it being cancelled this year. Dr Earl stated that this module is not run by the Maths Department but the Education Department. The undergraduate ambassador scheme used to be run under the Department but has since been handed over to a different department. The person who ran the module has since left the Education Department which is a further complication to bringing the module back. Dr Earl also clarified that since Part C is masters level so a Part B module would need to be adjusted to be taken by Part C students such as adding an extended essay aspect to it.

ACTION: Dr Earl is to look into this further and bring it up in the next JCCU meeting.