

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

Friday 4th February 12:30pm-2:00pm via Teams

Present: Prof Stuart White (Chair), Dr Richard Earl, Prof Mike Giles, Dr Neil Laws, Dr Vicky Neale, Dr James Munro, Giulia Lanzafame (MURC President and Diversity and Inclusion Rep), Cameron Lee (MURC Access Rep), Ivan Vasenov (MURC Treasurer), Andy Jung (MURC Maths and CompSci Rep), Zhe Ooi (Publicity and Careers Rep), Phillipp Wiedemann (MURC IT Officer and Secretary), and Clare Sheppard

In attendance: Anwen Amos

1. Apologies

Prof Jan Kristensen and Charlotte Turner-Smith sent their apologies.

2. Meeting held on 29th October 2021

(a) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were approved.

(b) Matters arising

No matters were raised.

3. Consultation on Student Fee Exercise

Having received the paperwork 5 working days in advance and discussed it internally at a meeting of student representatives, the student representatives raised questions about why a fee increase is needed, and why it follows a significant increase a couple of years ago, as well as precise questions about comparative data in the supporting paperwork. Concerns were also expressed about how it might affect the diversity of the cohort in the subject. These were answered by the Head of Department in an amicable discussion of 25 minutes which helped student representatives understand why these proposals are being made, though they do not support an increase in these fees as a matter of principle.

4. Examiners Reports from 2021

The MURC President detailed that a substantial proportion of the current Part B cohort have shared their dissatisfaction with the Part A 2021 examinations, and that an open letter was shared with the department in 2021 signed by over 100 students expressing the feeling that the Part A examinations were overly difficult.

MURC consequently raised two concerns with the Part A Examiners Report:

1. The gender gap in results, which had been steadily decreasing over the previous years, worsened in 2021. MURC suggested that the format of the exams may have been detrimental to female students.
2. The examiners checklist states that open-book papers should not include questions that can be 'googled' or searched for online. Student representatives reported that they felt that this was not the case for several papers in 2021, including A0 and A4, and noted that this could have allowed students to lose out on raw marks should their peers take advantage of Google.

MURC representatives noted that student's perception of the difficulty level of the exams have led to feelings of loss of confidence and enthusiasm.

MURC proposed that both in response to student concerns, and noting how the gender gap is smaller in part B and part C, the Department should consider relaxing the Part C progression requirements for the current part B cohort.

In response to MURC's concerns, Dr Earl noted that these issues were different from those in the Part A open letter and so it was difficult to respond on the spot. He agreed that setters were expected to avoid 'googleable' questions, and encouraged MURC members present to provide examples of particular questions they were concerned about. Noting that rules about progression may require University level approval (in addition to approval at teaching and faculty committees), Dr Earl agreed that it may be appropriate to look at Part C progression requirements for the current cohort, should the concerns about googleable questions in the part A exams be confirmed.

Dr Neale explained that the Department shares student concerns regarding the gender gap, and has examined this through working groups, most recently immediately before the pandemic. The committee agreed that it is important for this work to resume.

The MURC President thanked the Committee for their input and offered to take part in any future discussion regarding these matters.

In regards to the searchable content, Prof White suggested that MURC could supply a precise list of papers containing it for the Department to investigate. It was agreed that Prof Jan Kristensen, the Head of Department and MPLS need to be involved to advance discussions regarding the Part C entry requirements.

ACTION: *MURC to share evidence of 'googleable' papers. This issue will be raised with Teaching Committee in their week 7 meeting.*

5. MURC Business

(a) Quality of lecture capture for live in person lectures

The MURC President reported that the quality and volume of livestream/recordings of lectures is a cause for discontent for students, particularly those who are not able to attend in person. Whilst Teaching Committee has suggested that students make use of previous years lecture recordings as a supplement, MURC do not feel that this is a suitable replacement. It was noted that Dr Earl encouraged lecturers to review the quality of their lecture recordings in week 2, and MURC thanked Dr Earl for this. Dr Neale suggested that students should utilise the anonymous student hotline and bi-termly questionnaires to raise these issues directly to lecturers.

It was noted that the current AV system was not designed for the sort of use it is now getting the department are in discussions regarding upgrading the system. The MURC representatives welcomed this, but and asked that improvements were made in the mean time. It was suggested that lecturers could make use of a mobile microphone, rather than the stationary mike typically used, however Dr Neale noted that this mike is not able to provide audio for livestreams into Panopto. Dr Laws suggested that students could also use

the previous years presentation slides as a reference point to address the issue of poor visibility of the whiteboards.

The Committee concluded that students should be encouraged to submit any concerns regarding the quality of the audio/visual aspects of livestreams through the student hotline email, so that the department can act directly with the lecturers in question or coordinate other solutions with the IT team.

ACTION: *MURC to write to students advertising the student hotline and questionnaires*

The Committee also agreed to circulate further guidance to lecturers on reviewing their past lectures and improving the quality of future recordings.

ACTION: *Prof White to circulate an email to lecturers in conjunction with Prof Giles and Dr Earl.*

6. Consultations from the meetings of the Faculty and Teaching Committees

(a) Mathematics:

i. Format of part B and C consultation sessions in TT 2022

Prof White asked the MURC representatives for their feedback on the format of consultation sessions in the upcoming Trinity Term. MURC voiced their support for in person sessions, with the option to join online. MURC suggested that the sessions should be structured and have agendas but allow time for students to raise their own questions.

ACTION: *Student feedback to be reported to Teaching Committee*

ii. Proposals from the Computational Maths working group

The MURC representatives shared their joint views on the proposal, and more specifically the switch to a Python focussed approach. Overall, MURC agreed that Python is considered more useful and helps with employability. MURC raised concerns that they did not know whether such a switch would have negative impact on student's research skills and welcomed the committee's thoughts on whether MATLAB is preferred in research, pure mathematics in particular. Members of the committee supported this proposal as the aim of the course is to introduce students to programming and provide important transferable skills which could be adapted to different programmes and languages in the future.

(b) Statistics: Merging of admissions for mathematics, and mathematics and statistics

The Committee considered the paper on merging admissions for the UG Mathematics, and Mathematics and Statistics courses, with students declaring during their second year which of these two courses they wished to study. It was noted that this merge would not affect the distinction between the two courses, but it would provide more useful information to applicants. The Committee was in favour of this proposal.

(c) Items to refer to Faculty or Teaching Committees

No other items were discussed.

7. Open Days

Dr Munro shared his report in writing. It was noted that the Department is planning on holding open days in person this year and all Student Ambassadors will be paid for their involvement.

8. Lecture list for Trinity Term 2022

These were noted and not discussed.

9. AOB

No other business was brought forward.

10. Date of next meeting: Friday Week 3 Trinity Term, 13 May, 12:30

This was noted.