

Minutes of JCCU, 11 May 2018

Those present were:

- Samuel Banks
- George Cooper
- Dr Richard Earl
(Chair)
- Chris Fitzpatrick
- Matthew Goh
- Edward Hart
- Dr Neil Laws
- Paolo Marimon
- Dr Vicky Neale
- Utsav Popat
- Gemma Proctor
- Liam Stigant
- Charlotte Turner-Smith

Apologies received:

Bulvinder Gurm

1 Previous minutes and matters arising

The minutes were approved without changes. There were no matters arising.

2 Reports from faculty and teaching committees

2.1 Part C dissertations

The teaching committee has agreed on the new format of the Part C dissertations. Students will choose titles from a set list of options; subject panels have now been asked to submit potential options. The dissertation will be at least 7500 words; a 10 000 word dissertation may be considered in the future. The current timetable will be maintained, albeit pushed back a bit. Teaching will be done in groups of *up to* four students and for four hours in total. The reduction in teaching time (currently six hours is allocated) and increase in group size will promote independent working. The more limited set of titles mean that students' problems should be more similar to each other, compensating for the reduced teaching time. Feedback on the new format will be carefully monitored.

The change is mainly motivated by the new OMMS students, which will bring the number of Part C students doing dissertations to between 90 and 100. The change also reflects a general pedagogical desire to move to a different model of dissertation; faculty agreed they want students to be more independent.

The number of options in an area will be proportional to interest in Part B courses, class registrations and areas of interest of incoming OMMS students. The Department will consider asking Part B students next year what they'd like to do a dissertation on in Part C.

In the event of an option being oversubscribed, the allocation decision will be made holistically. Faculty may be happy to run extra groups (particularly if it is an alternative to running a class).

It was noted that dissertation titles will be confirmed in week 5, which is after the date for dropping for courses. If someone takes a course to support their preferred dissertation topic and they do not get that dissertation topic, they may want to drop the course or switch to another one.

Dr Earl said he would email students at the weekend about changes to dissertations.

2.2 Study room

No change from last meeting. It will be kept as a general study room and its use will be monitored going forward.

2.3 Lecture capture

In Michaelmas, lecture capture will take place in L1, L2 and L3 for Prelims and Part A lectures. However, recording issues are still being ironed out and lecture capture should not be relied upon as a substitute for lecture attendance. IT Services will do more testing over the Long Vacation. It should be fully functional by Hilary 2019. But if lecture capture has a significant (negative) impact on lecture attendance, changes will be considered.

2.4 Statistics

Next year, one Part B course will be removed (one of the Actuarial Science modules) and two Part C courses will be added (Foundations of Machine Learning and Interacting Particle Systems). The Institute and Faculty of Actuaries have increased their exam exemption requirements by 50%, so the reduced Actuarial Science course may not provide any exemptions in future.

3 MURC business

3.1 Alternative course prospectus

MURC asked Dr Earl for feedback on their proposed Alternative Prospectus. The idea is to give the same information (e.g. what courses go well together, the importance of a certain course) as an informal chat with someone in the years above you with the same interests as you. Some students (e.g. those in small colleges) may not have an opportunity to have an informative chat with someone who has already done the options. This Alternative Prospectus could be published on an Oxford-only MURC webpage. Negative opinions would not be included.

There were concerns about having personal comments on courses – people's opinions vary wildly and publishing any individual opinions may over-emphasise their perception of the course. The Alternative Prospectus would also have to provide suitable advice – not e.g. “this exam was easy”, “this course had a cool lecturer”. The Department would prefer it if students attended lectures in the first week to find out whether a course is for them.

It was suggested to instead expand the MURC webpage with profiles for the MURC Executive, which would include comments on what courses they'd enjoyed. Or, Part C students could volunteer to have chats with Part B students at the Options Fair.

To take this idea forward, Dr Earl asked for some draft prospectus entries to consider.

3.2 Post-exam survey proposal

Dr Neale presented a draft questionnaire to send to students after exams (but before exam results). It was well received and it was agreed it would provide valuable holistic feedback. Dr Neale emphasised the drafting was made in a hurry, so the wording could be improved (e.g., finding a polite way of asking what people didn't like). Questions which would provide context to a particular person's response were suggested.

Dr Neale hoped to send the finished questionnaire this year. Dr Neale confirmed the MURC Questionnaire Rep would be able to see the results.

3.3 Consultation sessions

Complaints about the large variation on number and time of consultation sessions were raised at the meeting. For example, to meet the suggested consultation hours, one course had had just two sessions of four hours' length; other courses had sessions only a few days apart. Dr Earl said he would require tutors next year to organise consultation sessions at least two weeks apart (where possible).

4 Questionnaires

Dr Neale asked Matthew Goh, the new MURC Questionnaire Rep, to email her to arrange access to the questionnaire results.

5 Open days and induction

The May Open Days were very well-attended (by both prospective students and current students who were volunteering). The meeting expressed its thanks to Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (who has now left the University) for organising the Open Days.

OMMS students will have a slightly earlier induction than other students, where they'll be introduced to Oxford. On the last day, Friday, there will be a joint Part C and OMMS induction. MURC, LGBTQubed, the Mirzakhani Society and the Invariants have been invited to help at the induction.

6 Any other business

It was suggested that the Graduate Studies Committee be consulted on whether a MURC OMMS Rep would be a good idea. (Currently, MSc students sit on the Graduate Studies Committee.)