

Minutes of JCCU, 26 October 2018

Those attending:

- George Cooper
- Edward Hart
- Gregory Stewart
- Dr Richard Earl
- Dr Neil Laws
- Chris Fitzpatrick
- Chris McGarry
- Charlotte Turner-Smith
- Matthew Goh
- Dr Vicky Neale

Apologies:

- James Munro
- Gemma Proctor

1 Previous minutes and matters arising

MURC's draft Alternative Course Prospectus has not yet been made. It will be discussed at the next meeting.

Everyone remains happy with the 12:30 start time of the meeting.

A joint Maths Institute–Stats Department working group has been formed to analyse data on different genders' exam performance.

2 MURC business

2.1 Renaming Introduction to Manifolds

MURC suggested renaming the Introduction to Manifolds Part A short option to another name, such as Multivariate Differentiation (which it was called formerly). The “Manifolds” in the name suggests a course focused on topological surfaces, not its actual focus of differentiation in \mathbf{R}^n . In response, it was pointed out that this course has varied a lot with the lecturer, so some of variation from the name is to be expected. Dr Earl asked MURC to email him a paragraph clearly explaining objections to the current name which he could bring to Teaching Committee.

2.2 Plagiarism by MMathStats students

A penalty was applied to some MMathStats students due to plagiarism, but students were not informed. This is in line with University guidelines, which do not require departments to tell final-year students when this happens (although they are required to tell non-finalists). The Department is currently enquiring whether they can tell final-year students about issues in future.

2.3 Problem sheet solutions

MURC asked if the Department could release problem sheet solutions. Classes do not have the time to answer all questions, especially in the increasing number of large classes. Also, in later years, it is important to be able to solve problem sheet questions, since questions very often reappear in exams.

The faculty recommended that solutions should not be generally released, but tutors may choose to do this. Battling with questions is the most valuable part of problem sheets – knowing the solution is secondary. If solutions were released, stressed students (i.e. almost all Oxford students) will be very tempted to peek and skip the struggle.

The related issues with large classes are recognised by the Department, which is working to reduce the number of large classes.

Dr Earl agreed to consider the alternative suggestion of providing Part A specimen solutions and maybe bring it to Teaching Committee.

2.4 Consultation sessions in Michaelmas and Hilary

MURC suggested that tutors organise consultation sessions in Michaelmas and Hilary terms, not just in Trinity. This would let students ask questions which could not fit into classes.

Dr Neale thought it was a nice idea, but wanted to support students better in getting the most out of classes. The Department is improving training and guidelines for tutors and TA's, which should reduce the number of classes which run out of time. Many students also know what questions they want to ask ahead of time and can write them on their sheets (to be answered by the TA marking it) or email them to tutors or TA's. Doing so increases the likelihood of their question being answered and lets tutors and TA's better plan classes.

Another objection was the additional costs that this teaching would incur and the additional teaching space that this would require.

3 End of year questionnaire

It was noted that were many positive comments which would let the Department institutionalise good practice.

3.1 Prelims mocks

There were many comments about the lack of exam preparation. MURC suggested that tutors should be asked to organise mock exams for Prelims students to help. Dr Neale said Teaching Committee could survey tutors about this and maybe add mock exams as a best practice guideline.

3.2 Part A exam schedule

There were many complaints from Part A students who had 9 exams in 10 days. Regrettably, the Department cannot fix this. Exams are organised centrally and it is very difficult to change the schedule. This issue is worsened by the fact that Part A Mathematics is a large cohort, who must therefore be examined at Ewert House, and the many maths joint schools.

3.3 Part C class structure

Part C classes have a new format this year, with class one being split into two 45-minute sessions. Several of these classes had difficulties and students and tutors had concerns.

MURC reported that these concerns were related to: problem sheets not being shortened, all students showing up at the start and asking for a full 90 minute session; in one case, a TA not showing up and sheets being due in Week 2. Dr Earl reported that he had informed lecturers of the changes; however, not all had managed to follow the new guidance. He thanked MURC for bringing these instances to his attention as he was not aware of the extent of the difficulties before this meeting. These issues are due to tutors and TA's. Departmental training sessions should prevent these issues, but not all tutors and TA's have attended.

It was emphatically stated that all students could report problems with classes directly to Dr Earl, Dr Neale or Dr Laws. There is no need to wait for JCCU. Chris Fitzpatrick said they would tell MURC College Reps at the next MURC meeting.

There are no plans to change Part C classes in Hilary.

3.4 Part C classes for problem sheets 0

The Department and MURC agree that problem sheets 0 are very useful, especially for OMMS students. The Department continues to encourage lecturers to create problem sheets 0.

MURC suggested classes should be organised for problem sheet 0. They would help OMMS students to integrate with Oxford undergrads and prepare them better for the Oxford-style problem sheets, which Part C students are already used to. However, this idea was dismissed because of issues with logistics and the lack of funding.

4 Student Barometer

Discussion of Student Barometer results (and also of the National Student Survey results) was postponed to the next meeting.

5 Report from Statistics Teaching Committee

The Statistics Department will revisit the process for signing up for classes. This year's class interest survey was *way* out, meaning even more large classes and misallocation of tutors.

6 Lecture capture

Although progress was made over the summer to rectify the issues that occurred in the last academic year, it was reported that we are now experiencing different issues with the software. Only L3's lecture capture works. Dr Earl will discuss these issues at the MPLS Education Committee.

7 Fridays@2 feedback

MURC had no feedback to give. Dr Earl observed that Fridays@2 seemed to be going well.

8 MURC college reps

Dr Earl asked for a list of vacant MURC College Rep positions so that he could email the respective colleges' senior maths fellows and ask them to promote the role to their students.