

Minutes of JCCU, 1 February 2018

Those attending:

- Marianne Cain
- Nathaniel Cleland
- George Cooper
- Dr Richard Earl
- Chris Fitzpatrick
- Matthew Goh
- Edward Hart
- Dr Neil Laws
- Christopher McGarry
- James Munro
- Dr Vicky Neale
- Gemma Proctor
- Charlotte Turner-Smith

Apologies:

- Gregory Stewart

1 Previous minutes and matters arising

The previous minutes were amended to clarify that only *some* issues with the Part C new classes were due to tutors and TAs.

Dr Earl reported that the Introduction to Manifolds Part A short option will be re-named to “Multivariate Geometry and Analysis”, as suggested at the last meeting.

2 Reports from the Faculty and Teaching Committees

2.1 Mathematics

2.1.1 Intercollegiate classes

In response to feedback, the Department will revert Part C classes back to the 90-minute session format and allow the first class to be scheduled for week 3, not just in week 2. MURC reported that the last classes of Michaelmas Part C part modules had been poorly attended. This was likely due to students not seeing them as worthwhile because they were expected to mark their final problem sheet themselves.

There was more trouble assigning people to classes this term than previous years. Reasons include the shocking inaccuracy of the Michaelmas module intention survey and the inherent problems of student demand (e.g. the largest ever Part B financial mathematics cohort). The Department is seeking a way forward. Some classes have over 15 students – the Department knows 15 is barely tolerable as-is. Many Department members are very kindly putting in extra work, with some tutors being their own TAs. Dr Laws reported that the Statistics Department was having similar issues.

2.1.2 Failed Prelims student's access to exam scripts

The Department is deciding how to implement the University's new policy of allowing students who fail Prelims to see their exam scripts before re-sitting. In particular, the Department is considering allowing tutors to view scripts on behalf of students and then report back to students with their impressions. This would allow students who can't come back to Oxford during the Long Vacation to still review their scripts. The Department wants to be liberal as practicable.

MURC approved of the Department's idea. MURC suggested having the option of an independent faculty member review the script, in case the student was too embarrassed to talk to their tutor. However, as a teaching responsibility, it was agreed that it should be left to colleges to sort out who reviews the script.

This policy will not apply to MMathCompSci students, since their scripts are held by the Computer Science Department. The Department agreed to share their views (once decided) with the CS Department to avoid MMathCompSci getting less help than other students. (The Department's policy will apply to MMathPhil students, since the Department holds their scripts.)

3 MURC business

3.1 Class reports

TAs write reports on all their 3rd and 4th year students, but some colleges do not share these reports with their students. MURC suggested the Department suggest tutors share these reports. It was agreed that this is a good idea and could be included as a recommendation in the pre-term letters to tutors. However, the release of reports is up to colleges, so students should speak to Senior Tutors to get policies changed. Also, the sharing of reports is currently a very manual process in Minerva.

MURC also requested that 2nd year MMathPhil students be given access to Minerva so that they could see what tutors are teaching what classes when they sign up for, say, Set Theory classes. The Department does not know ahead of time who will be using intercollegiate classes, so it was agreed to include a reminder in Michaelmas pre-term letter to tutors.

3.2 MURC informal guide to options

A draft of MURC's proposed guide was presented. The guide aims to give a friendly introduction to courses and to relate a course's syllabus to the courses that come after it. The meeting approved of the friendly tone, but was concerned about the effort it would take to maintain and the overlap with the course descriptions provided by faculty (of which many are being rewritten with a friendly tone).

4 Questionnaires

4.1 Michaelmas term 2018 statistical summaries

One Part A course had a much lower response rate than comparable courses, something which Dr Neale has discussed with the lecturer concerned.

Lecturers have been reminded to leave time in the lecture for students to complete the survey.

MURC suggested that surveys should always be available, e.g. through an online form or through a box of forms left at the reception. It was agreed to investigate this.

4.2 Student Barometer

The meeting noted the good feedback on the faculty's teaching expertise and promising improvements in some areas. One poor result was on the Department's advice and guide on careers (separate from that of the Careers Service), but the meeting was unsure what more the Department could reasonably do.

4.3 National Student Survey

Due to the boycott, the results were not statistically significant.

5 Open days

James Munro said he was looking for more students to get involved in open days, particularly in mingling with prospective students at lunchtime. The number of students is particularly bad at the September open day, when most undergrads are away. This has forced DPhil students to volunteer instead, which is not ideal because many of them were undergrads at Cambridge. Sign ups have been boosted a little by James persistently advertising it to Student Ambassadors. It would be nice to move the open day closer to the start of Michaelmas (i.e. from Week -2 to Week -1), but this would clash with the Oxford-wide Alumni Week.

In contrast, UNIQ has been lengthened to 4 weeks and has plenty of volunteers.