

Unconfirmed Minutes

Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

Michaelmas Term, 30 October 2020

The meeting commenced at 12:30 pm and concluded at 2:04 pm

In Attendance: Dr Richard Earl (Chair), Dr Vicky Neale, James Munro, Nicole Collins, Prof Neil Laws, Rodrigo Marlasca Aparicio, Rachel Laing, Amirul Adil, Ryan Salter, Beth Thomas.

Not present: Heidi Fang, George Yu, Emma Abou-Haidar Ventura, Bulvinder Gurm

1 Apologies

Emma Abou-Haidar Ventura and Bulvinder Gurm sent their apologies.

2 Minutes from 15/05/2020

Minutes were confirmed. There had been no Trinity Term meeting. There were no issues/matters regarding the previous meeting.

3 Introductions

Dr Richard Earl asked for all those present to introduce themselves.

4 College Representatives

Rodrigo (MURC President) discussed the decision to remove the positions of college representatives as the current committee is very cluttered. The empty seats also reflect negatively on how the current committee looks. Rodrigo suggested that the positions could be replaced with volunteers who want to get involved but do not have to commit to attending every meeting. Dr Richard Earl suggested contacting college tutors to recruit for college MURC Reps and the Department could prompt tutors if need be. No action was decided on.

5 Oral Report on Examinations for 2020 and 2021

Dr Earl summarized the situation re exams from 2020. Prelim exams were cancelled for 2020 and were instead replaced by mock exams, so colleges could still give out scholarships. All students were deemed to have passed prelims. Part A exams were postponed for Week 0 and Week 1 of Michaelmas 2020. Part B and Part C exams were taken online with the introduction of safety nets as well as a reduction in units from 8 to 6 units.

For 2021 exams, it has been requested that Part B and Part C exams will be online while Part A and Prelims would be in-person. However, this is currently agreed in principle and may change. Dates of exams may also differ from previous years. Department to confirm to students at the end of term/early Hilary.

[Post-meeting note: the department has since decided that it would be more advisable to have Prelims and Part A exams online. This is currently being discussed with Division and it is hoped the department can confirm this soon with affected students.]

6 MURC Discussions

Deadlines for Part B students:

Rodrigo provided a summary of the Part B deadlines for Michaelmas term 2020 and the issues faced by Part B students. Due to deadlines for problem sheets and classes being established so soon after exams, many students have been struggling to keep up with the workload. It was suggested that their current timetable did not provide enough time for students to prepare for classes. It was suggested that a rearranged timetable in a more manageable layout may have been a solution.

Dr Richard Earl confirmed that classes were delayed by 1 week, starting Week 3 instead of Week 2 (except for one class). If this had been delayed by a further week then this would have meant the term would have been extended. It was acknowledged that there was difficulty to find an alternative for teaching.

The committee highlighted that flexible deadlines could help to reduce stress on students. It was suggested by MURC that the problem sheets could be handed in later in the term.

Various suggestions were provided by the student representatives such as:-

- Later deadlines for the problem sheets
- Provide problem sheet solutions to students after classes

The department acknowledged the concerns from MURC but highlighted that there would be extra strain on TAs by delaying submission of problem sheets. It was suggested that a reasonable compromise might be for students to raise with TAs any issues/feedback with problem sheets after the class. Students could also approach TAs requesting flexibility with deadlines.

Action: Dr Earl to discuss with department/relevant people regarding whether to exceptionally publish Part B problems sheet solutions. Nicole Collins to draft an email to students regarding problem sheets and that they can talk to TAs after class.

[Dr Earl had to leave the meeting at this point and Dr Neale kindly chaired the remainder of the meeting.]

Part B Project Deadlines:

MURC highlighted the issues students were facing with projects deadlines and that students were unable to give their full focus onto these projects. It was requested that an extension to the deadlines would give students more time for their projects, which was taken instead by reading in the summer.

ACTION: To be discussed with the examiners/Projects committee.

[Post-meeting note: this will be an item for Week 7 Teaching Committee]

Moving Content to Canvas:

It was discussed that Canvas course notes should be open to the public. The Department had previously allowed public access to course materials. Students were very proud of this

stance. Canvas is currently being piloted and the department will look in to the issue of open access.

Issues Relating to Examination Papers: It was highlighted that there was an issue faced with several exam papers in Trinity term 2020, where it was stated by a student representative that there was non-examinable content within the exams that could not be found within the lecture notes or other resources. It was suggested that one paper was significantly harder than previous exams on the same topic. The secretary requested that a summary of the issue should be provided to the exam board administrator. It was confirmed that there is a process in place for checking content and adjustments were made for open book exams. It was confirmed that the feedback will be passed on to the relevant people. It was also confirmed that there will be a working group in place to discuss changes needed for exams. Students will be given information on how to prepare for material at the end of the term/early Hilary.

7 Questionnaires

The Prelims and Part A questionnaires from Hilary Term were processed by academic admin during Trinity Term. The number of responses were much lower than expected due to them being submitted in the last week of March. There was also an online questionnaire, which did not have many responses. Responses have been sent to lecturers. Part B and Part C class questionnaires have yet to be processed as the rooms they were in were inaccessible due to the Pandemic.

The end of year questionnaires for all years are currently being reviewed, however feedback from Part B and C revision sessions and Prelims and Part A lectures have been compiled to see the response to remote online teaching. This feedback fed into the guidance to lecturers. Students who sat rescheduled Part A exams have yet to be asked to submit feedback. However, this is currently being looked into by Academic Admin.

8 Open Days in 2020-21

James Munro thanked the students who helped with the open day online Q&A sessions and live streams. This has been from the result of students signing up for the Maths student ambassador program. Open days for 2021 will all be online with technology being used more as the department becomes more comfortable with it.

9 AOB

The MAT will be happening as normal in schools with some being taken remotely and invigilated by Oxford students. All interviews will be online. Schools will be working with the University to host the interviews within schools rather than students being interviewed from home. However, the admissions process would otherwise continue as normal. There had been little change to the number of deferred entries compared to previous years.

Part B students should expect their Part A results mid-December.