

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

MEETING OF 11 MAY 2017

Present: Sam Banks (MURC college rep), Rebecca Burmiston (MURC Secretary), Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Sam Davies (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep, MURC 4th Year Rep), Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor), Richard Earl (Director of Undergraduate Studies and Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy; chair), Daniel Fletcher (MURC Arts Rep), Matthew Hillman (MURC Treasurer, MURC First Year Rep), Neil Laws (Director of Studies Statistics), Vicky Neale (Incoming Faculty Teaching Advisor), Utsav Papat (MURC President, MURC Maths and Computer Science Rep), Liam Stigant (MURC Questionnaire Rep).

In attendance: Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator)

1. Meeting held on Friday 3rd February 2017

(a) Minutes

The minutes were **APPROVED**.

(b) Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

2. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty and Teaching Committees

(a) Mathematics

(i) MSc in Mathematical Science: response to feedback

The response to the feedback provided by MURC was noted.

Richard Earl reported that the department is considering changing the undergraduate study room to a masters study room, which would be open to Part C students, Mathematical & Theoretical Physics Part C/MSc students and, in due course, MSc Mathematical Science students. Prelims, Part A and Part B students would be welcome to continue working in the mezzanine area. MURC was asked to consult students about this proposed change at its next meeting.

(b) Statistics

Neil Laws confirmed that from 2017-18 the weighting of the Statistics dissertation would be reduced from 3 units to 2 units.

3. MURC Business

(a) Report on survey on intercollegiate classes

Richard Earl opened the discussion of the report on intercollegiate classes by recapping the remit of JCCU and noting that recommendations relating to substantive matters would need to be passed to Teaching Committee, who would make a final decision.

Utsav Papat, Liam Stigant and Sam Banks presented the report, noting why MURC had undertaken the survey, and highlighting the key findings and recommendations.

It was noted that the survey had been completed by 86 students, approximately one third of the number eligible to complete the survey. This was a much lower response rate than that usually obtained for the termly class questionnaires, with a considerably different satisfaction rate, and as such Richard Earl voiced some concerns about the pie chart on page 1 of the report being made public, since this may not be truly representative. Nevertheless, the committee agreed that the views of those who had completed the survey were valuable. It was also noted that students felt that the class questionnaires did not allow them to provide general feedback on the class scheme.

The committee then discussed a number of the recommendations in detail. The comments made regarding these recommendations are noted below.

2.1 Varying order in which questions are presented and 2.3 change in approach to covering every question

This was clarified to mean that class tutors should not necessarily go through questions in numerical order. It was noted that presenting the solutions to easier questions before the more difficult questions is the natural way to teach. There may also be educational reasons why a tutor chooses to go through the questions in a particular order. However, a question which all students have completed correctly should normally be skipped over. It was **AGREED** to stress in the guidance that class tutors should plan the class well so that the time is used effectively and the class addresses the educational needs of as many of the students as possible.

ACTION: RAE, JD/VN

2.2 Students should highlight areas of difficulty on their script and 2.13 student access to guidance for TAs and Tutors

Richard Earl informed the meeting that he was planning to hold an induction session introducing the class scheme in week 1 of Michaelmas term for Part B students. This session would be an opportunity to explain how the class scheme works, highlight the advantages of classes and encourage students to be proactive to get the most out of classes. The suggestion that students highlight areas of difficulty on their script was noted and members of MURC were asked to share any other tips they had on making the most of classes. The introductory session would also be an opportunity to explain what students should expect from classes and could include a brief summary of the guidance given to TAs and tutors.

2.5 Standardisation of marking aims and best practices

A number of instances had been reported of students being unsure why they had received the marks they had or of incorrect work being marked correctly. It suggested that if students had a query about the marking of their work, they should raise this with the TA. If a student still felt their work had been marked incorrectly then this could be brought to the attention of the class tutor. If students encountered serious or persistent problems with the marking of their work then they should speak to their college tutor. It was **AGREED** to explain this in the induction session.

ACTION: RAE

A further problem experienced was that some TAs marked work as incorrect and put a note to say that the student should see the explanation in class. However, the problem was not then covered in class. It was agreed that in such cases better communication between TAs and tutors may be needed. It was **AGREED** to stress this in the guidance.

ACTION: RAE

2.7 Lecturer should include with the solution the motivation behind the questions and 2.14 continuous feedback

It was noted that students have encountered situations where class tutors have thought a question was irrelevant or not well structured. It was explained that lecturers are already encouraged to provide some brief notes to explain why questions have been set and that lecturers are asked to liaise with the class tutors throughout the term. However, it would appear that better communication between class tutors and lecturers needs to be encouraged. It was suggested that class tutors could be provided with a more formal mechanism for providing feedback on the problem sheets. However, it was noted that it may be difficult to make substantial changes to a course during term.

2.9 Extension questions

It was agreed that having extension questions on problem sheets can be a good thing. However, there were concerns that having students working on these during classes could

result in them missing some of the teaching, such as the class tutor providing context to the problems

2.10 Short paragraph on teaching philosophy of each tutor made available

It was noted that this suggestion arose from students feeling unsure of how a class was going to be structured or when they could ask questions. It was agreed that it would be difficult to require all tutors to write a paragraph on their teaching philosophy, not least because this is quite a challenging thing to do. However, it was **AGREED** that tutors should be asked to explain at the start of the classes how the classes will be structured; this would be included in the guidance.

ACTION: RAE, JD/VN

2.12 Better training and more actively stressing importance of guidance

Concerns were expressed that, whilst good guidance exists, it is not always being put into practise. It was **AGREED** that the termly circulars would be accompanied by a covering email containing a summary of the most important points. It was suggested that these should be:

- 1) Classes should be more than just a problems class. To be worthwhile a class should give context and purpose to the problem sheet.
- 2) It is important that all of the students present at the class get something out of the class.
- 3) Pre-class planning is essential. Please talk to your TA before the class to decide which questions you should prioritise. It is not necessary to go through every question.

It was also **AGREED** that the guidance to TAs should include a section on presenting.

ACTION: RAE, JD/VN

It was noted that in future TAs would be receiving a fuller report on the feedback received for their classes. MURC had a number of changes to propose to the class questionnaire and were asked to send these to Helen Lowe for Teaching Committee to consider.

ACTION: MURC

2.15 Standard mechanism for seeking help in place and clear guidance made available to the students

It was noted that many students are unsure where to go to seek help when they encounter a problem. Richard Earl indicated that the Directors of Study (he and Neil Laws) and the Faculty Teaching Advisor (Janet Dyson/Vicky Neale) can always be contacted regarding problems. In addition, college tutors are responsible for monitoring their students' progress and supporting them in their third and fourth year. A student who is struggling with a course can ask the class tutor or lecturer for further reading or suggestions of exercises which may help. Alternatively students can contact their college tutor. Some colleges may be willing to arrange extra teaching in certain situations. These points would all be mentioned at the induction session.

4. Mailing list for visiting students

Richard Earl reported that the department would set up a mailing list for visiting undergraduate students. Notices about changes to lecture or class arrangements would be sent to this mailing list so that visiting students were kept informed. It would be the responsibility of colleges to let the department know the names of visiting students so that they could be added to the list.

5. Questionnaires

(a) Hilary Term 2017 statistical summaries

This item was noted.

6. Open Days and Induction

Rebecca Cotton-Barratt thanked all of the students who had helped with the open days in April. The feedback received from the attendees had been very positive and they had particularly appreciated being able to speak to current students. It was noted that the remaining open days in 2017 are on Wednesday 28th June, Thursday 29th June and Friday 15th September.

7. Part B and C Options

(a) Registration for mathematics Part B and Part C courses

It was noted that draft synopses have been published and students will be asked to register for courses by Friday 30th June.

(b) Mathematics Part B/C options fair

It was noted that the options fair will take place on Monday of week 4 from 2.30pm to 3.30pm (Part C) and from 3.30pm to 5pm (Part B) under the South Crystal on the Mezzanine Level. The options fair would be followed by a drinks reception from 5-6pm.

(c) Projects lecture

It was noted that the projects lecture will be given by Richard Earl on Monday of week 4 from 3.30pm to 4pm in L2. The lecture will cover all of the projects options available in Parts B and C.

8. Induction of First Year Students in MT 2017

It was noted that representatives of MURC and the Invariants Society are invited to participate at the Undergraduate Induction on Friday of week 0, Michaelmas Term.

9. A.O.B.

There was none.