

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE & STATISTICS

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

A meeting of this committee will be held on **Friday 28 October at 1pm in S1.37**, Mathematical Institute.

Present: Dr Richard Earl (Director of Undergraduate Studies and Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy; chair), Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator), Rebecca Burmiston (MURC Secretary), Charlie Hutchings (MURC president), Liam (MURC Questionnaire Rep), Sam Davies (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep, MURC 4th Year Rep), Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Dr Neil Laws (Department of Statistics), Dr Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor), Utsav Popat (MURC Treasurer), Hannah Merwood (Maths and Stats Rep)

1. Meeting held on Friday 13 May 2016

(a) Minutes (attached, JCCU-3-13.05.16 (1a), page 1)

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

(b) Matters arising

Mid term Questionnaires: These will be standard for every term. As of the meeting, there had been 10 responses, which was around the expected level.

Online lecture capture: The Education Committee was positive on lecture capture, and wanted to encourage but not mandate departments to implement it. The Maths IT team thought it was practical and doable to some extent this academic year. The department hopes to have L1, L4, C1 set up for trials in Hilary, depending on which lecturers volunteer. This might be straight for student use or just for teaching committee use. OUSU has a budget for lecture capture, but in the maths department lecture capture seemed to fit in with the general IT budget. The Statistics Department is also to pilot lecture capture if time allows. The department is to pay for the hardware needed for lecture capture. Replay is the software for lecture capture and is costed on how much it gets used. Lectures will be behind single sign-on, so not publicly accessible.

Printing facilities: It is possible to provide printing facilities in the Computer Science department, but less possible in the Maths department due to different security arrangements. This has been considered but is on hold at the moment until the new print server arrives.

2. Membership of JCCU (*for information*)

(a) Senior Members

Dr Richard Earl (Director of Undergraduate Studies and Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy; chair), Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator), Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Dr Neil Laws (Department of Statistics), Dr Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor)

(b) Junior Members

Rebecca Burmiston (MURC Secretary), Charlie Hutchings (MURC president), Liam (MURC Questionnaire Rep), Sam Davies (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep, MURC 4th Year Rep), Utsav Popat (MURC Treasurer), Hannah Merwood (Maths and Stats Rep)

3. Report on matters raised in Examiners Reports (*oral report*)

[All examiners reports will be available on the Mathematical Institute's website, <https://www.maths.ox.ac.uk/members/students/undergraduate-courses/examinations-assessments/examiners-reports.>]

Generally, it was a very quiet year for exams, and external examiners didn't have anything particular to report. The gender gap in performance, particularly at part B, was noted this year, but a change to exam timings at the end of the current year is hoped to mitigate this somewhat. The examiners reports are online, on the Maths Department website.

4. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees (*for discussion*)

(a) Mathematics

(i) Timing of Registration for Part B and Part C

This was discussed at Teaching Committee and not seen departmentally as a problem. At one college, a tutor reported students were uncomfortable registering for Part B and C options without knowing their results from Part A/B. It was resolved to make it clearer in the email sent out this year that registration is not binding. Operationally, it would be difficult to push registration any later as students may not reply to emails during the summer, and the department needs to have a sense of how many classes to arrange per subject. In addition, it was noted that students need not be put off by a single exam result if they enjoy a subject.

(ii) New webpages for course materials and synopses options (attached, JCCU-4-28.10.16 (4aii), page 7)

The new website was generally liked. There was some confusion among students as to whether problem sheets would be put under the 'assignments' or 'course materials' tab, also this was seen as a non-issue as students could check both tabs. Regarding the previous course materials page, an archive was seen as useful but the page currently just directs to the new page. This will be taken to IT committee, as it needs to be clear which notes are for current courses. It was suggested that there could be a way to filter courses by year or subject, or the website could give more information about which term courses run in. The double click to access files was seen as an annoyance, but a very minor one.

(iii) Proposal for a standalone fourth year: MSc in Mathematical Sciences

The Maths and Statistics departments would like to have a standalone 4th year, similar to Part III at Cambridge. Students would come in and do a 4th year MSc alongside students doing 4th of their MMath year. This would be run with 50 students in the first year and grow to about 90 students, but the department would be happy to run the year with 50 students if this is not possible. The University is looking at agreeing the year formally but this may not happen; it will also be discussed in week 5 with the Computer Science department. This could imply several changes/issues for the current fourth year:

Whether or not/how to run projects like dissertations or if they could become obligatory. The current system would have to change as many students do work on dissertations in summer/September, and the project application at the end of 0th week would disadvantage MSc students. The decision has not made firmly but could be ~7500 word dissertations could be made obligatory, and to count for 25% of 4th year. It was noted that dissertations could not continue to be run as they are currently if they were made compulsory. With a larger cohort, there would be less 1-1 dissertations, but a panel would produce dissertations for students to sign up to, and then groups of students doing the same dissertation would meet together.

External examiners have said there should be obligatory project work but reducing dissertation word-count and giving students less choice is not ideal. In the statistics department, there is a menu of dissertation subjects to choose from, with 3-5 choosing their own different, and the rest (20) choosing from the menu, but only one person can do each project, not which possible for the Maths department.

Do MMath and MSc students have to do the same thing, especially with regards to a dissertation? This might be impractical, as MSc students may not know they are coming until quite late on, whereas MMath students often do dissertation work in the summer. A possible solution could be that MMath students could choose whether to submit a dissertation in the same format as MSc students, however, the department wants to treat MMath and MSc students the same, and would have to get topics out at some point. It is also beneficial for students to have meetings before dissertations but the Maths Department can't continue to run projects this way with such a high number of students doing dissertations, and would have to encourage most students to choose from menu. This means the department needs a standard which involves less work for supervisors unless both student and supervisor are very keen to work more. MSc students should have option of a dissertation/project as important for doing DPhil afterwards.

Support for MSc students from outside who aren't used to arrangements: changing the timing of the intercollegiate classes. Having the 1st class in 3rd week is too late for some students, and 4th years should be encouraged to be more independent, but they need to have the relevant mathematical background before starting the course. The main two concerns would be to encourage cohesion and independence, and to make sure students feel able to ask questions early on. MSc students will have 0th week to acclimatise to Oxford, but there will still be students sampling courses at this point, (who will have a lot of preliminary problem sheets with short deadlines) and therefore may go to classes without having completed sheets.

Can the document on the MSc year be sent to MURC? No, as it is still a draft and there is a lot left to be finalised. A revised version would be provided in time for the next MURC meeting.

(b) Statistics

The notice to Part B students about calculators will be revised, with an updated list of calculators to be added

The Statistics courses for Part B are currently stable but will not remain this way forever. Changes to actuarial exams may affect courses offered, as the current Actuarial Science course does not align with what is required for exemptions.

(c) Items to refer to Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

Online lecture capture, amongst other items already noted to be referred to these committees.

5. MURC Business

Examiners present for whole exam rather than the first half hour. It was noted students might not be able to find issues with questions until after the examiner has left. Although students can still ask questions, it will take longer for these questions to be answered. Examiners can stay longer, but it is a university rule that examiners only have to be there for half an hour. The department could encourage but not mandate that examiners stay for longer, and this will be brought to Teaching Committee. With a large exam, there are enough people trying each question for most things to be found within. However, it was noted that due to a miscommunication with an examiner (who was not present) after the first half an hour of an exam, an error in a question was missed.

Some colleges offer tutorials for Parts B and C for some topics. It was felt that this undermined the fact that each student should get same level of education at each college. The department has no power to stop or ask colleges to stop doing this, as additional tutorials are arranged at the academic judgement of tutors, and preference of tutors/students.

Marking for the short options part A exam. Questions for this exam are not individually scaled even though some questions could be easy and some hard. It was noted that Part A examiners make an effort to mark harder questions more leniently, and that there is latitude in what examiners do to get a reasonable spread of marks. In addition, it is impossible to know whether lower marks for one question are not related to students' ability. The department used to have more papers in this format, and got rid of them for this reason, but this exam was kept in order for students to still be able to cover short options.

Ways to complain about teaching at classes at department, or to change classes. Changing classes is commonly possible up to 4th week if there is room in another class. It's best to complain through a college tutor for arrogant/offensive behaviour of a class teacher; the department has acted on this in the past but it is highly infrequent. The onus is on class members to ask class teachers about smaller problems, such as if the teacher assumes they have covered a topic they have not. A mid-term questionnaire for classes (in the same way as lectures) was brought up, but it was felt unlikely to work for the class system as it has smaller groups.

6. Ask an Intern (*for discussion*)

Due to time constraints, this will be discussed at the next JCCU meeting.

7. Questionnaires (*for report and discussion*)

(a) Trinity Term 2016 statistical summaries (attached, JCCU-4-28.10.16 (7a), page 9)

(b) NSS Results 2016 (attached, JCCU-4-28.10.16 (7b), page 11)

Due to time constraints, this will be discussed at the next JCCU meeting.

8. Open Days in 2016-17 (*for report*)

The next Maths department open days are on 22 April and 29 April. An Outreach MURC rep for Trinity has not been elected yet. The first departmental open day would take place one week before Cambridge's first open.

9. AOB

The course planner mentioned in the previous minutes is currently in Beta, although students are not able to access it yet.