

# FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS

## JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

MEETING OF FRIDAY 15 MAY

### MINUTES

**Present:** Dr Richard Earl (Director of Undergraduate Studies and Joint Committee for Mathematics and Philosophy; chair), Alexander Homer (MURC President, MURC Mathematics and Statistics Rep), Brigitte Stenhouse (MURC Secretary), Michael Holloway (MURC Questionnaire Rep- outgoing), Tim Hosgood (MURC Questionnaire Rep – incoming), James Lau (MURC Outreach Rep), Ben Spells (MURC Diversity and Inclusion Rep- outgoing), Naomi Vides (MURC Diversity and Inclusion Rep- incoming), Rose Ryan Flinn (MURC Fourth Year Rep), Nicholas Williams (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep), Liam Stigant (MURC IT Rep), Dr Neil Laws (Department of Statistics), Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Dr Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor)

**In attendance:** Mrs Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator)

**Apologies for absence:** Haenguen Chi (MURC Treasurer), Ms Bulvinder Gurm (MPLS Division)

#### 1. Meeting held on Friday 6 February 2015

##### (a) Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were **ACCEPTED**.

##### (b) Matters arising

It was noted that all matters arising from the previous meeting would be covered under an agenda item.

#### 2. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

##### (a) Mathematics

###### i. Consultation on feedback for FPE and FHS examinations

Dr Earl reported that the University is holding a consultation about the provision of feedback on examinations sat prior to the final year of FHS. A number of different forms of feedback were under consideration. Alex Homer confirmed that MURC had discussed the proposal and, in particular, the different forms of feedback. MURC had agreed that providing students with a breakdown of marks within papers and written comments (for assessed project work) would be most helpful. MURC did not think that oral discussion of scripts with tutors would be very useful and felt there would be little demand for this type of feedback. It was confirmed that the comments from MURC would be included in the Department's response.

**ACTION: RAE**

###### ii. Changes to regulations governing Part A, Part B and Part C options

Dr Earl confirmed that Teaching Committee had approved the proposed changes to the regulations governing Part A, Part B and Part C options. From next year, Part A students would be able to take a sixth long option, which would be counted for classification purposes. (For candidates taking 6 long options, the two lowest scoring long options papers would be given a weighting of 0.5 to maintain the overall weighting for the long options.)

Teaching Committee had also agreed the proposal to allow students to take four 'other' options at Part B or C, but no more than two options could be taken from each of the categories: statistics options, computer science options, other options.

###### iii. New Part A short option

It was confirmed that a new Part A short option on Mathematical Biology would be taught from Trinity term 2016.

#### **iv. Introduction of Merit Classification**

Dr Earl reported that the University was considering introducing the merit classification as a possible outcome for taught masters degrees. Were this proposal adopted then the Mathematics Teaching Committee, and equivalent bodies in the other departments, would consider changing the classification for the fourth year of the MMath and joint schools degrees to the taught masters model. It was noted that such a change may take a number of years to implement.

##### **(b) Statistics**

Dr Laws confirmed that the change to the regulations governing Part A options would also apply to Mathematics and Statistics students.

#### **3. MURC Business**

##### **(a) Lecture/Class Questionnaire**

It was reported that MURC would like an online version of the questionnaire so that students not attending the final week of lectures can still provide feedback. Mrs Lowe agreed to arrange this. It was noted that one, anonymous submission should be allowed per student per course.

**ACTION: HL**

Two further suggestions were received from MURC. Firstly that the question, 'The Teaching Assistant explained the material well' be added to the classes questionnaire, with N/A available as one of the possible responses. Secondly that the Prelims and Part A questionnaire ask for the respondent's gender. Providing this information would be optional. It was agreed to consult Teaching Committee and the Good Practise Steering Group on these suggestions.

**ACTION: MTC/GPSG**

##### **(b) Diversity and Inclusion Report**

Ben Spells presented the Diversity and Inclusion Report, highlighting the areas which had been considered. The principle recommendation was that the Department should have a group of peer supporters. It was felt that this was needed as students may not be comfortable approaching their college peer supporters who are unlikely to have an understanding of a mathematics degree. The Committee could understand why this would be beneficial but felt that serious thought would need to be given to any proposed scheme. College peer supporters undergo thorough training and are supported by a well-established infrastructure, including college welfare deans. Dr Earl agreed to raise the matter at the Divisional Academic Committee to seek the views of other MPLS departments.

**ACTION: RAE**

##### **(c) Collaborative revision sessions**

Alex Homer reported that the revision sessions had not been as well attended as hoped. There had been difficulty in advertising the subjects to be covered at each session due to problems with the online forum. Mrs Lowe agreed to raise these problems with IT.

The Committee discussed advertising of undergraduate events more generally. It was suggested that the MURC noticeboard could be moved to a more prominent location and that a facebook page (or similar) could be used to advertise events.

**ACTION: HL**

##### **(d) Format of classes/office hours**

Alex Homer reported that students had requested that class tutors be asked to focus on the harder problems in classes. It was confirmed that class tutors are asked to do this but this guidance would be reiterated at the start of the next academic year.

**ACTION: JD**

It was asked if students could be given model solutions to the problem sheets. Dr Earl outlined his concerns about doing this; it was agreed to refer this to Teaching Committee and Departmental/Faculty Meeting.

**ACTION: MTC/DFM**

Alex Homer reported on a further request from MURC that lecturers be asked to remain for 15 minutes at the end of lectures to answer questions on the course, or alternatively have office hours throughout the year rather than just in Trinity. It was felt that this would be a significant extra time commitment for lecturers. Dr Earl suggested instead that students could raise questions with lecturers via email or ask their class tutor. It was noted that sometimes there is not much time in classes for students to raise questions.

#### **(e) Part A Review**

Alex Homer tabled a summary of the feedback MURC had received from the Part A students. In general less feedback had been received than for the Prelims survey last year which MURC took to be indicative of a greater level of satisfaction. The meeting discussed the main points raised by MURC and the Part A students.

- The strongest negative feedback had been about the short option courses. Students were particularly concerned that, as these courses are examined by a cross-sectional paper, students could be disadvantaged by variation in the difficulty of questions. Dr Earl confirmed that the examiners are aware of this and monitor the difficulty of the short option question carefully.
- Some students felt that there was too much content in some of the courses and they struggled to learn it all for the exams. Dr Earl explained that lecturers have different approaches to preparing lecture notes. Some lecturers provide very detailed notes which cover both the material in the course and extension material.
- A number of students felt that 1.5 hour exams were too short. It was noted that the Department's strategic review had recommended that Teaching Committee consider increasing the duration of exams to 2 hours and this suggestion was welcomed by MURC.

#### **(f) Specimen Papers**

It had been asked at MURC whether specimen papers would be made available at Part B. Dr Earl explained that there were not significant changes to any of the Part B courses so past papers would still be relevant.

### **4. Strategic Review**

The draft Strategic Plan for Teaching and report from MURC were considered. The Committee considered the recommendation that lecturers of Part C courses be allowed to base their lecture course on a set text rather than providing lecture notes. Students at the MURC meeting had raised concerns about not being provided with lectures notes. Dr Earl explained that that by Part C students are expected to have developed as independent learners and lecturers are seeking to encourage them to use other resources.

### **5. Questionnaires**

#### **(a) Hilary Term 2015 statistical summaries**

The statistical summaries were noted. Teaching Committee had discussed the analysis of the perceived pace and difficulty if Part B courses compared to Part C courses and appropriate follow-up action would be taken.

### **6. Open Days and Induction**

The dates of the remaining open days were noted.

### **7. Part B and C Options**

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

It was noted that draft synopses would be published shortly and students would be asked to register for courses by Friday 26<sup>th</sup> June for Part C options and Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July for Part B options.

**(b) Mathematics Part B Options Fair**

It was noted that the Options Fair would take place on Friday of Week 4 from 2pm to 3.30pm under the South Crystal on the Mezzanine Level.

**(c) Mathematics Part C Options Fair**

It was noted that the Options Fair would take place on Friday of Week 4 from 3.30pm to 5pm under the South Crystal on the Mezzanine Level.

**(d) Projects lecture**

This would be given by Dr Earl on Friday of Week 4 from 3pm to 3.30pm in L2.

**8. Induction of First Year Students in MT 2015**

It was noted that the Undergraduate Induction would be on Friday of Week 0, Michaelmas Term.

**9. A.O.B.**

There was none.