

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE & STATISTICS

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

MEETING OF FRIDAY 30 OCTOBER

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), Haengeun Chi (MURC Treasurer), Tim Hosgood (MURC Questionnaire Rep), James Lau (MURC Outreach Rep), Naomi Vines (MURC Diversity and Inclusion Rep), Nicholas Williams (MURC Mathematics and Philosophy Rep), Liam Stigant (MURC IT Rep), Natasha Davey (MURC Fourth Year rep), Charlie Hutchings (MURC First Year rep), Dr Neil Laws (Department of Statistics), Dr Janet Dyson (Faculty Teaching Advisor)

In attendance: Mrs Helen Lowe (Deputy Academic Administrator)

Apologies for absence: Dr Rebecca Cotton-Barratt (Admissions Co-ordinator), Ms Bulvinder Gurm (MPLS Division)

1. Meeting held on Friday 15 May 2015

(a) Minutes

The minutes were **APPROVED**.

(b) Matters arising

The following matters arising were discussed.

Consultation on feedback for FPE and FHS examinations: Dr Earl had passed the department's feedback to the division. Education Committee were still considering the matter.

Lecture questionnaires: the online questionnaire was now available and students would be informed. It was noted that the Good Practice Committee would be discussing at its next meeting whether students should be asked (optionally) to state their gender on the questionnaire.

It was confirmed that for courses where students indicated on the lecture questionnaire that the course was too hard, Dr Dyson and Dr Earl had written to the lecturer to ask them to make reasonable changes.

Action: HL

Intercollegiate Classes: it was noted that there had been some problems with the teaching of intercollegiate classes at the start of term. Dr Dyson reported that she had circulated a short guide on best practice when teaching an intercollegiate class and it was hoped that this would prove beneficial. Helen Lowe agreed to send a copy of the guidance to Alex Homer.

Action: HL

Dr Laws reported that it would not be possible to make the statistics class lists available outside of the Oxford network.

Model solutions: Dr Earl reported that the request for students to be provided with model solutions to Parts B and C problems sheets would be considered by the Faculty Meeting at the start of Hilary term.

Specimen Papers for Part C: Dr Earl agreed to contact the lecturers of new Part C courses regarding the provision of specimen papers.

Action: RAE

2. Membership of JCCU

(a) Senior Members

The names of the senior members were noted.

(b) Junior Members

It was noted that there was currently no MURC Mathematics and Computer Science rep and it was thought that this might be because the Computer Science department has its own consultative committee. It was agreed that it would be preferable if MURC could continue to have representatives for all schools where possible.

3. Report on Matters Raised in Examiners Reports

Dr Earl reported on the discussions which had taken place at the Mathematics Teaching Committee and the Examinations Committee. The following points from the examiners' reports were highlighted.

Part C Dissertations: the Part C external examiners had expressed concerns that the strongest candidates were being discouraged from offering a dissertation because of the perception that they would not be able to attain the highest marks for it. However, this was found not to be the case when looking at data from recent years. Nevertheless, Projects Committee would be reviewing the qualitative criteria for the band of marks 90-100 as it was felt that its current requirement for work of potentially publishable standard was too demanding.

Examination length: it was noted that the department was considering increasing the length of Part B and Part C examinations to 1 hour and 45 minutes. Dr Earl was liaising with the Departments of Statistics and Computer Science regarding the proposal. Dr Laws reported that the Department of Statistics would be in favour of the proposal. Alex Homer noted that it would be important for examiners to ensure that questions did not become longer or more difficult.

Sharing of papers between parts: Dr Earl reported that the problems caused by sharing papers between Part B and Part C had been addressed. The practice would be avoided except for special cases, such as transitional years when a course is moving from one part to another.

4. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

(a) Mathematics

(i) Performance of Undergraduate Students

Dr Earl reported that the department had undertaken a detailed study on undergraduate exam performance. As a result, the department would be introducing a number of measures to assist students making the transition from school to university mathematics. This included providing supplementary problem sheets for the Michaelmas term courses, with questions which are better scaffolded, to help students understand how to tackle problems. Some of the committee expressed concerns that this would increase students' workloads. However it was explained that tutors would only set supplementary questions when appropriate. It was also hoped that the

supplementary questions would help students make faster progress with the main problem sheets.

It was noted that some students find the transition between the different years of the course difficult and it was asked that Teaching Committee consider possible ways to support such students.

(ii) Old Regulations Papers

Dr Earl explained the background to the proposal to have a standard procedure for dealing with requests for old regulations papers and the committee considered the proposal. It was asked whether the course synopses could indicate where a course had changed. Dr Earl agreed that a list of major changes would be compiled and included as an appendix to the course synopses for each part.

(b) Statistics

Dr Laws reported that the MSc in Applied Statistics would be changing. The MSc course would be sharing more of the Part B and Part C lecture courses and there may be some new MSc lecture courses which would also be open to undergraduates.

5. MURC Business

Alex Homer reported on the following matters.

Revision sessions: these had not been as well attended as hoped. The web forum was now working and MURC would like to use this in future.

History of mathematics discussion group: the committee was supportive of the proposal to start a history of mathematics discussion group. Brigitte Stenhouse agreed to speak to Chris Hollings and Peter Neumann to ask for their advice and input.

Lecturers taking intercollegiate classes: concerns had been raised that course lecturers do not always take intercollegiate classes. It was noted that the department cannot insist that a lecturer takes a set of classes but does recommend this as good practice. Lecturers and class tutors are encouraged to communicate throughout term to ensure that classes run smoothly.

Options flow chart: it had been requested that the department produce an options flow chart. Dr Earl reported that this had been attempted in the past but proved to be too complicated to be useful. It was recommended that students use the list of course pre-requisites to help guide their decisions.

Examination questionnaire: MURC had asked that the department consider introducing a questionnaire on examinations so that students could provide feedback. Dr Earl responded that the department was happy to receive feedback on examinations from students via MURC and JCCU but did not feel that systematically requesting such feedback via a questionnaire was appropriate. It was noted that the department monitors examinations very closely through its consideration of examiners reports. The Teaching Committee communicates decisions on any matters arising from these reports to the examiners and assessors.

Peer supporters: it was noted that the division was still considering the possibility of having departmental peer supporters.

Feedback box: Helen Lowe agreed to email all students regarding the new feedback box at reception.

Action: HL

6. Policy & Guidance on Student Engagement and Representation

It was agreed to consider this at the Hilary term meeting.

7. Questionnaires

(a) Trinity Term 2015 statistical summaries

The statistical summaries were noted.

(b) NSS Results 2015

It was agreed to consider the NSS results at the Hilary term meeting.

8. Open Days in 2015-16

It was noted that the departmental open days would be earlier in 2016 (Saturday of week 0 and week 1, Trinity term).

Dr Earl reported that the department had received a very healthy number of applications for 2016 with a substantial increase for the main course.

9. Time of JCCU Meetings

This item was discussed by email circulation.

10. AOB

Dr Earl reported that an event for Part B students highlighting options in the fourth year would be held on Wednesday of week 4. Any MURC reps in the fourth year were invited to attend.