

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE WITH UNDERGRADUATES

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 7th February 2025 at 12.30pm in N4.01, Mathematical Institute.

Present: Benham Cobb (MURC Mathematics & Statistics Representative), Alessandro Danovaro (MURC Questionnaire Representative), Dr Chris Hollings (Faculty Teaching Advisor), Andrew Kangmin Kim (MURC First Year Representative), Dr Neil Laws (Statistics Representative), Ashley Leung (MURC IT Officer), Yizhi Li (MURC Secretary), Akhila Natarajan (MURC Third Year Representative), Prof. James Newton (Chair), Agniv Sarkar (MURC Mathematics & Computer Science Representative), Grace Yongqing Yu (MURC President), Tommy Tianyang Zou (MURC Second Year Representative, MURC Mathematics & Philosophy Representative)

In attendance: Rosalind Mitchell (Secretariat), Prof. Melanie Rupflin (Academic Lead – Prelims & Part A)

Apologies: Ben Gould (MURC Fourth Year Representative), Josh Mead (MURC Diversity and Inclusion Representative)

1. Introductions

The 2024-25 members of the Committee introduced themselves.

2. Meeting held on Friday, 1st November 2024

(a) Minutes

The minutes were approved.

(b) Matters arising

The Chair confirmed that students could sign up for surplus exam options and withdraw without being penalised.

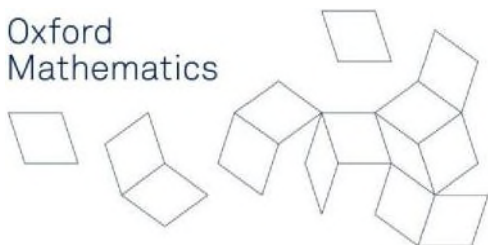
3. Chair's Business

The Chair did not have any business.

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

(a) Mathematics

The possibility of Mathematics & Statistics Part C students offering a Mathematics dissertation had been raised at Teaching Committee. It was noted that Maths students would have priority on such topics but agreed that Maths & Stats students could express their interest via the free text box on the dissertation form.



(b) Statistics

The Teaching Committee noted concern over Maths & Stats students taking Computer Science courses due to potential overlap in course content. Applications to take CS courses will be considered on a case by case basis.

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

There were no such items.

5. Student fees exercise

Those present were reminded that this item was confidential and that the accompanying paper was not to be circulated.

The MURC President (MP) expressed concern at the increase in fees, noting that they had almost doubled in recent years. The MP informed the meeting of her intention to form a MURC subcommittee to research fees at Oxford and other universities. This subcommittee would send a report to the University's Planning and Resource Allocation Committee. The Chair suggested that the MP spoke to the Head of Department and noted the JCCU was not in a position to support such a subcommittee - it would be a subcommittee of MURC, not of the JCCU.

The Committee discussed fees at Cambridge and other institutions. The need for Oxford to make itself attractive to top international students was noted. Provision of undergraduate scholarships by the MI was raised and the Chair informed the Committee that such discussions were ongoing. The Chair suggested that MURC discuss such scholarships with the colleges.

6. MURC Business

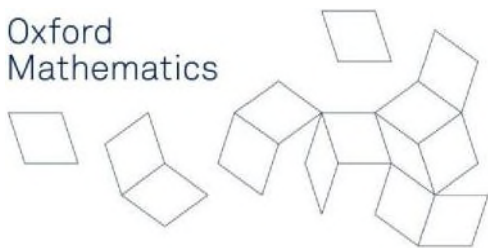
(a) Changes to Part A problem sheets

The MP informed the meeting that students were opposed to a change in marking. There was a concern that students wouldn't attempt those questions which weren't to be marked.

The Academic Lead (Prelims & Part A) [AL-PPA] reported that feedback from college tutors implied that problem sheets were too long and required too much marking. The AL-PPA observed that whilst 1st year students aren't ready to self-mark, 2nd year students would find doing so a valuable learning tool and good preparation for 3rd year, when college tutors aren't available. Tutors struggled to cover 9 questions in a tutorial, particularly whilst supporting students requiring additional help.

The AL-PPA noted that it was not possible, nor right, to impose marking rules upon college tutors and the provision of solutions should be at tutors' discretion.

There was further robust discussion concerning the merits of having all questions marked.



(b) Parts B & C class timings and problem sheet deadlines

It was noted that some tutors and TAs were scheduling classes and problem sheet deadlines before the relevant lecture had taken place. Tutors and TAs have access to the lecture timetable when arranging their class times so should coordinate appropriately.

ACTION: Academic Administration (AA) to add a note about class scheduling to the Intercollegiate Classes guidance document.

(c) Part C progression hurdle

The MP raised concern that borderline students might spend time looking for jobs, due to uncertainty of progression, instead of focussing on exams and thus undo themselves further. The MP queried if students close to a 2.1 could ask their tutors to advocate for them. The Chair noted that the progression hurdle was currently clear and transparent and that advocacy would undermine it. The Statistics Representative reminded the meeting that the University was very clear about the requirement for a mechanistic rule for progression.

(d) Part C students taking Computer Science options for exams

It was noted that the MI would exceptionally pay change of exam entry fees for those Maths students who had not been accepted onto Maths & Computer Science courses this academic year.

(e) Course fees for international students

It was agreed that this had been covered under item 5.

(f) Releasing lecture notes before lectures

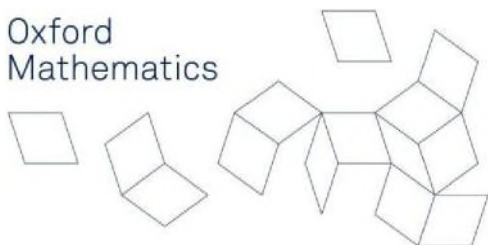
The meeting was informed that the Non-linear Dynamics lecturer released notes after the lecture. This caused stress to neurodivergent students who felt overwhelmed at the thought of an unknown lecture and might struggle to keep up due to lack of opportunity to prepare.

ACTION: The Associate Head of Department (Education) [AHoD(E)] to write to lecturers reminding them to publish lecture notes before lectures and to use a font suitable for dyslexic students.

(g) L2 recording issue

Persistent problems with recording and recording quality in L2 were noted.

ACTION: AA to raise with the Head of IT.



(h) Mezzanine as a study space

MURC requested an update on the portable charger suggestion raised at the MT 2024 meeting. AA reported that this would not be possible due to the health and safety risks implicit with using power banks to charge devices. The University is very concerned about lithium ion batteries following the iPad incident at the MI and another elsewhere.

MURC had received a student request for whiteboards in the mezzanine. The Admissions and Outreach Coordinator noted that it was possible to write on the glass walls of the mezzanine.

ACTION: AA to investigate and supply suitable markers and erasers as appropriate.

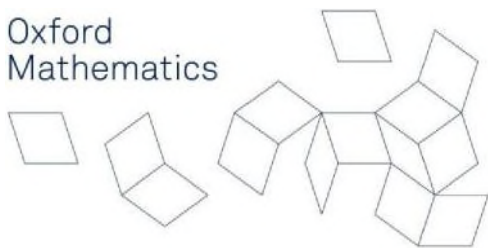
MURC raised an issue about lighting and ventilation in the study room. Further information is required before action can be taken.

(i) Follow ups from last JCCU

- Lecture schedule conflicts
 It was agreed at the MT24 meeting of the JCCU that AA would try to avoid this issue in future.
- Official communication on exam scaling
 MURC noted that official communication from the department regarding the new exam scaling algorithm has yet to be sent out. Last term, MURC informally shared an excerpt with the student body via WhatsApp group chats.
ACTION: AHoD(E) to send an official communication to students about exam scaling.
- Transparency about likelihood of registration for CompSci options
 This matter is currently being discussed by Teaching Committee.
- Departmental questionnaire participation
 MURC had suggested an inter-collegiate competition for questionnaire completion at the MT24 meeting. AA was looking into the feasibility of this.

7. Questionnaires

- a. MT Lecture questionnaires
 Not discussed.
- b. MURC questionnaires
 Not discussed.



c. NSS 2024 results
Not discussed.

8. AOB

There was no other business.

Note: the allocated meeting time was used up before all the agenda items could be addressed in person. The following items were handled via correspondence after the meeting:

- 6 (b)
- 6 (g)
- 6 (h)
- 6 (i)