

Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

First Meeting of Trinity Term • Minutes of Meeting

9th May 2014

Present: David Abed (President, New College Rep), Alex Homer (Secretary, Oriel College Rep), Ryan Murphy (Treasurer), Rosie Ryan Flinn (Maths and Philosophy Rep, Worcester College Rep), Lewis Morgan (Maths and Computer Science Rep), Michael Holloway (Questionnaire Rep, St Hugh's College Rep), Rachel Ahlquist (Outreach Rep), William Juan (IT Rep, Somerville College Rep), Joel Cawte (Fourth-Year Rep, Jesus College Rep), Thomas Chandler (Lincoln College Rep), Jacob Muller (The Queen's College Rep), Jacob Cable (St Anne's College Rep), Chris Williamson (St Edmund Hall Rep), Haengeun Chi, Kathryn Poole, Koen Rijks, Lung Hei Wong.

Apologies for absence: Stewart Jerrome (Maths and Statistics Rep), Pei Wang (First-Year Rep), Niloy Biswas (St John's College Rep).

The meeting commenced at 1:04 pm.

Minutes and Matters Arising

1. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were **accepted**.

2. BPSC minute sharing

It was noted that Alex had had contact from a representative of the Good Practice Committee with regard to the sharing of minutes; moreover that he had sent the minutes from the two MURC meetings of Hilary Term. He noted that he had not yet received any minutes from the Good Practice Committee.

3. Gender disparity

The issue of gender disparity in results was raised, in order to confirm a position for JCCU. It was restated that the particular problem in Maths was that, while among the sciences it is common for a greater percentage of male students than female students to be classified at both First and Lower Second Class, in Maths a similar percentage in both genders achieve a Lower Second but a greater percentage of male students achieve a First.

It was noted that this issue was being discussed more widely than in MURC, and indeed had been noted in the press over the Easter vacation. It was noted that the University's response to the press was that extensive research has been conducted, with a number of possible reasons for gender disparity in results being noted but no one single conclusion.

It was noted that Rachel is due to leave in the summer; it was suggested that someone should take up this work rather than start afresh. It was also suggested that it might be a good idea to create an Equal Opportunities Rep to pursue this, with the additional benefit that any undergraduate maths student with a related issue would have a clear point of contact on the MURC Executive Committee. (It was suggested that certain formalities in terms of the membership of JCCU might be raised, but

that these could be overcome.) **Action: to be raised at JCCU, specifically regarding the suggestion of the new position on MURC. Alex to draft potential constitutional changes.**

General Business

4. College Rep elections

Joel Cawte and David Abed resigned their positions as Jesus College Rep and New College Rep, respectively (while keeping their other positions).

Nominations were opened for the position of Jesus College Rep. Koen Rijks nominated himself, and an election was duly held.

Result: Koen Rijks was **unanimously elected**. Koen Rijks therefore assumed the position of Jesus College Rep.

Nominations were opened for the position of New College Rep. Haengeun Chi nominated herself, and an election was duly held.

Result: Haengeun Chi was **unanimously elected**. Haengeun Chi therefore assumed the position of New College Rep.

Nominations were opened for the position of Pembroke College Rep. Lung Hei Wong nominated himself, and an election was duly held.

Result: Lung Hei Wong was **unanimously elected**. Lung Hei Wong therefore assumed the position of Pembroke College Rep.

5. By-election

It was noted that Ben Spells had, prior to the meeting, resigned his position as Publicity and Careers Rep. Nominations were opened for this position, Haengeun Chi nominated herself, and an election was duly held.

Result: Haengeun Chi was **unanimously elected**. Haengeun Chi therefore assumed the position of Publicity and Careers Rep.

6. Prelims review

It was noted that David and Alex had been asked by Helen Lowe if MURC could prepare feedback for a report on the new Prelims syllabus, to be presented at JCCU. It was agreed that, as with the issue of fourth-year workload, this could be coordinated through the College Reps, with responses from students being passed through their College Rep to some nominated person on the Executive Committee for collation. It was noted that Pei had been asked prior to the meeting about this proposal and was in agreement that it had merit.

Alex volunteered to collate the responses from College Reps. **Action: Alex to email College Reps with a template to send out to their students, and to collate responses for JCCU. College Reps to email students in colleges and pass responses to Alex.**

Those present who had experienced the new Prelims syllabus were asked for their opinions. It was felt that a number of courses seemed to have new sections that the end that seemed disconnected

from the rest of the course; additionally, some members' belief that some of the new Trinity Term courses felt like filler was noted.

It was noted that, with the exception of Geometry, it was now impossible to choose not to revise a course in the knowledge that one would not have to answer any questions on it in the exam.

7. Report from Teaching Committee

This was covered under other items.

8. Report on lecture questionnaires

Michael gave his termly report on lecture questionnaires, which may be summarised as follows:

- The Prelims course was much improved on last year. Specific issues were raised with Analysis 2 (which had a new lecturer), where it was thought that problem sheets were too difficult, and with Computational Mathematics, where a number of students were put off from using MATLAB again, were unsatisfied with the help given, and/or found the first project in particular too difficult. It was noted in particular that Dynamics was improved significantly on last year.
- In Part A, feedback was generally good, except for Rings and Modules, where feedback on all parts of the lecture questionnaire was negative. In particular, over 80% of students felt the course was too fast.
- In Part B, the only real problem was with the B10b Continuous Martingales and Stochastic Calculus course, where the problem sheets were found by the majority to be too hard).
- In Part C, a number of courses proved problematic, including C3.2b Geometric Group Theory, C6.2b Networks, and C6.5b Mathematical Mechanical Biology. In addition, it was noted that the C7.1b Quantum Theory and Quantum Computers course has been split into two, with the first half causing difficulties.

In general feedback was good for courses not mentioned above.

An enquiry was made as to the overall figure who found problem sheets too difficult in Part C. It was noted in response that 19% of responses were "too hard" or "much too hard", taken as a simple percentage of all responses given.

It was noted that many of the courses with negative feedback are with lecturers who have never lectured before. It was suggested that more lecture training might be useful to avoid this. **Action: raise the issue of lecture training at JCCU.**

9. Website

It was noted that the MURC website was now up-to-date. William was thanked for his work on this.

Any other business

Fourth-Year Workload

The issue of fourth-year workload from the previous meeting was raised again, to confirm the views of MURC in advance of the JCCU meeting next week. It was confirmed that the vast majority of responses from students, as collected by College Reps, stated that they felt the workload to be too great.

It was suggested that the intention of Faculty may have been that the numbers of classes and problem sheets, and consequently the workload of each course, were to be reduced as the number of courses increased. It was also suggested that the results may present evidence of the difficulty, but it was noted that the sample size for each paper is very small, and that it is possible that the increased workload would result in poorer quality of life during term as opposed to poorer results.

It was suggested that it might be difficult to implement change, given that the fourth-year syllabus is due to be changed again after another year. It was noted in response that the change between the old and new first years was much greater than that between the old and new second years, so it is quite possible that the new fourth year will be very similar.

It was resolved to raise the issue at JCCU as an open-ended issue, and to await the response of faculty. **Action: to be raised at JCCU.**

Discussion Group

It was agreed, owing to exams this term, that any further work on this would be postponed to Michaelmas Term.

Specimen papers

It was noted that specimen papers were now available. It was noted that a comment had been received via email from a fourth-year student about specimen papers in new courses, with some lecturers instructing students to look at problem sheets for sample exam questions. **Action: Joel to investigate, with a view to potentially raising at JCCU.**

There being no further business, the meeting was concluded at 1:56 pm.

AH 09/05/2014