

Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

Wednesday 27 November 1996

Present

- [Tom Chothia](#) (Chair), Musab Bora, [Mark Colman](#), Jonathan Emberson, Neil Gillespie, Katie Golding, [Stephen Gower](#), Philip Hannay, [Jim Hanson](#), [Claire Jones](#), [Juliet Kemp](#), Janet Lucke, Erica Neely, Stephen Nichols, [Christine Nix](#), Louise Pickwell, Emma Pointon, Anthony Rustell, [Chris Tebbet](#), [Brigitte Worth](#), and [Terry Boon](#) (Secretary).

Apologies

- Received from Camilla Metz and Julius Ross.

Introduction

- This was the first MURC meeting for many representatives, as the committee had just changed over. Hence [Tom Chothia](#) began the meeting by giving a brief introduction to the function of the committee.
- At the twice-termly meetings, reps had the opportunity to raise and discuss matters of concern to undergraduate mathematicians. Agendas were circulated before these meetings, and it was hoped that reps would speak to other mathematicians at their college so as to better represent their opinions. MURC could then raise matters at the JCC, which representatives of the Faculty attended, and at the meetings of the full Mathematics Sub-Faculty.
- MURC managed a bookstall for second-hand maths textbooks, which was currently running on Wednesday mornings in the Maths Institute. It was responsible, along with the Sub-Faculty, for organising the annual Open Day in Trinity Term for potential sixth-form applicants. It maintained a World Wide Web site and e-mail mailing list for undergraduate mathematicians. To raise awareness of its activities, it also distributed occasional mailshots to all undergraduate mathematicians in the university.

[Minutes](#) of the meeting of 23 October 1996

- These minutes were approved.

Election of various officers

- The position of Chairperson was contested: [Tom Chothia](#) asked to speak to the two candidates at the end of the meeting. The other positions were uncontested, and were filled as follows:
 - Secretary: [Claire Jones](#)
 - Treasurer: [Jim Hanson](#)
 - Publicity Officer: [Chris Tebbet](#)
 - Internet Officer: [Stephen Gower](#)
 - Open Day Co-ordinators: [Mark Colman](#), [Christine Nix](#)
 - JCC [Representatives](#): Katie Golding, Erica Neely, Stephen Nichols

Bookstall

- [Brigitte Worth](#) spoke about the second-hand bookstall; she had got the bookstall running again and managed it the previous year, and it was considered to be one of MURC's major recent successes. She appealed for volunteers to become signatories on the account and help at the stall: Neil Gillespie, [Juliet Kemp](#), Emma Pointon, and [Chris Tebbet](#) agreed to do so.

Calculators in Mods

- It was noted that the Moderators were considering prohibiting the use of calculators in Mods, perhaps starting in June 1997.
- The reason for this was the increasing power of calculators. Some models were now capable of sophisticated symbolic manipulations, being able to find roots of equations and integrate functions algebraically. By using such methods, candidates could solve exam questions without having the understanding which the question was supposed to be testing. It might be possible to increase the difficulty of questions to compensate for this, but that could be unfair on candidates who did not use such powerful calculators. Another reason for the prohibition was the impracticality of checking that candidates had, as required by the regulations, cleared their calculators' memories before entering the exam.
- The meeting had sympathy with the examiners' concerns. However, a number of reps felt that the banning of calculators altogether was an unnecessarily drastic step. Their use for simple arithmetical calculations (which were often needed in probability questions and in demonstrations of iterative methods) was thought to be entirely reasonable: Mods were not supposed to be a test of arithmetical skill. It was suggested that candidates be restricted to single-line calculators, which restriction would (it was thought) exclude the calculators which were causing concern while still being a straightforward rule to enforce.
- A vote on whether reps would support a total prohibition found 8 in favour and 8 opposed.

Mods - June 1996

- It was noted that the preceding summer's results in Mods had been particularly poor. Many reps present at the meeting had sat these exams, but there was disagreement over whether they had been significantly harder.
- It was noted that the latter part of the continuity course was rather cramped (having four lectures per week). It was suggested that some of those lectures be moved into the early part of Trinity Term if that were feasible.

Section c courses

- There had been concern about the lack of physical applied courses on the draft list of section c courses.
- It was reported that that the Sub-faculty was aware of the problem and doing what it could to alleviate it. Appropriate courses from the MSc would be proposed for addition to the list, thus avoiding the restrictions applying to borrowed courses.
- However, upon examination of the courses on the MSc, the meeting noted that this did not make many new courses available.

Any other business

- Hope was expressed that revision classes would be provided for section b courses. These were being taught in inter-collegiate classes, and not all colleges had tutors with the necessary specialisms to provide revision tutorials in all papers. If revision classes were not available, students at those colleges may be disadvantaged.
- It was noted that, in the old syllabus, questions in section B were thought to be easier in style than those in section C. Under the revised syllabus, some section b papers were similar to section B papers, and some had significant amounts of material from section C. It was hoped that the style of questions would be adjusted so that they would be comparable.
- There were traditional complaints about certain lecturers whose lectures undergraduates found unsatisfactory. It was pointed out that MURC had little influence over such problems, and that the only effective channel was the end-of-term questionnaire.

Christmas Greetings

- [Tom Chothia](#) wished the committee a happy Christmas and New Year.