

# Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2009

## Unconfirmed Minutes of Meeting

**Present:** Rosie Cretney (*Queen's, President (Chair)*), Stephen O'Keeffe (*Hertford, Secretary*), Henry Bradford (*St John's, Treasurer/Bookstall Manager*), Matt Scroggs (*St Hugh's, I.T. Rep.*), Penelope Quek (*Jesus, Publicity Officer*), Gege (Irene) Huang (*Keble, Maths and Statistics Rep.*), Joe Wales (*St Hugh's, Questionnaire Rep.*), Ben Hoskin (*Lady Margaret Hall*), Kirsti Biggs (*Magdalen*), Petra Staynova (*Pembroke*), .

**Apologies:** Anne-Marie Imafidon (*Keble, Maths and Computer Science Rep.*), Wanfei (Paul) Wu (*St Hugh's, First Year Rep.*), Eamon McMurray (*Lincoln*), Zubin Siganporia (*St Catherine's*), Paul Carter (*Mansfield*).

### 1. Meeting held in Trinity Term 2009

- (a) Minutes. These were accepted.
- (b) Matters Arising. See item 9.

### 2. Vacant Committee Positions

- (a) Maths and Philosophy Rep. Petra Staynova was unopposed and therefore elected.
- (b) Fourth Year Rep. Stephen O'Keeffe was unopposed and therefore elected.
- (c) College Reps. Since the last meeting many colleges now have active representatives, although some positions continue to remain vacant.

### 3. MURC Website and Mailing Lists

Rosie thanked Matt for his excellent work on the MURC website, which includes a new on-line reservation system for the Bookstall. Matt also reported that he now had control over the mailing lists [murc@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc@maths.ox.ac.uk), [murc-members@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc-members@maths.ox.ac.uk), and [murc-announce@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc-announce@maths.ox.ac.uk). He asked what these should be used for, and the following decisions were made:

- [murc@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc@maths.ox.ac.uk) will forward to the President, Secretary and I.T. Officer
- [murc-members@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc-members@maths.ox.ac.uk) will forward to the Executive committee and college representatives.
- [murc-announce@maths.ox.ac.uk](mailto:murc-announce@maths.ox.ac.uk) will (depending upon the agreement of the Maths Institute) forward to all undergraduate students.

Petra also suggested that it may be useful for maths students if pictures of the executive committee were made available online, and also on the MURC noticeboard in the Institute basement.

### 4. JCCU Membership

Rosie explained the present guidelines for the membership of the JCCU. In particular, she mentioned that the I.T. Officer is not invited to JCCU meetings and that a maximum number of 13 undergraduate students are granted membership. Since the MURC Executive committee comprises 12 students it was agreed that it would be a good idea if all members were invited, and that this should be requested at the next JCCU meeting.

### 5. Freshers' Event Feedback

Rosie expressed thanks on behalf of MURC to Dr Curnock, Charlotte Rigdon, the

caretaking staff, and all who had helped out at the recent Freshers' Event for making it very successful. Henry reported that the Bookstall had made a profit of £495 during the evening, but added that it would now be necessary for the Bookstall to increase its stock in order to continue being of use to students. He also mentioned that in future, it would be a good idea to use receipts for Bookstall transactions.

It was also agreed that it would be a good idea to hold a Bookstall event each term, and Joe added that the end of Trinity Term would be a good time for MURC to acquire books to sell the following year.

## **6. Graduate Representation**

Prior to the meeting, Stephen and Rosie received an e-mail from a graduate student who was interested in being involved with MURC. It was noted that there is some overlap with the taught graduate courses and parts B and C of the undergraduate course, and it therefore may be beneficial to have a graduate representative in MURC.

However, it was also noted that graduate students are represented by the Consultative Committee for Graduates (CCG) and it was agreed not to appoint a graduate representative, although Joe suggested that alternatively, a 4<sup>th</sup> year student could attend CCG meetings.

## **7. Part B 'Other Mathematical' Options**

Rosie reported a Part B student had recently contacted her regarding the rule that Part B students are only allowed to choose one whole 'other mathematical' option. The student felt that *'...the other mathematical options are still very maths orientated. It simply forces students to do options they do not want to do and therefore enjoy their career at Oxford much less and not get the most out of their course.'* and added he thought the rule should be dropped in future years.

Some discussion followed, and points raised included the fact that most 'other' options are computer science, statistics and philosophy courses, and it is therefore important to keep the rule, so as to preserve the distinction between the mathematics and joint schools degrees. Stephen commented that it would be better to examine different 'other' courses and possibly reclassify them as mathematical options, rather than abandoning the rule altogether. Joe suggested that it would be beneficial to make more students aware of the rules regarding Part B options at the beginning of Part A, and Rosie agreed that the level of options advice given to students varies significantly between colleges. It was decided to raise this at the next JCCU meeting. Matt also requested that Part A students be given more warning in advance of the deadline for choosing courses as it is very close to the exams in Trinity Term.

## **8. B568a Course**

Stephen reported that some students are finding aspects of the B568a Introduction to Applied Mathematics course unhelpful. In particular, they are confused by the associated problem sheet, and have said that the problems do not correspond very well to the lecture notes. Additionally it was noted that much of the material introduced in the course is repeated one or more of B5, B6 and B8, which seems unnecessary. Kirsti added that some students who are not taking all 3 courses may experience lecture clashes in the first week, due to them being required to attend all 6 lectures.

It was agreed to raise this issue at JCCU so that the course may be adjusted to avoid these problems in future.

## **9. Parts B and C Homework Submission Envelopes**

Since the last MURC meeting, when the problem of students' work going missing from the submission boxes in the basement, the Maths Institute has introduced an envelope submission system, whereby students are required to place their work in the relevant envelope before signing and dating the front.

This new system was discussed, and Rosie made the point that the basement is now rather busy around deadlines, and she has noticed students taking the envelopes away from the shelves (in some cases into lecture theatres) in order to write on them, leaving other students unable to find them. Joe also commented that some envelopes are missing, and in a few cases, have missing or incorrect information on the front.. He added that it would be useful if the institute produced standard labels, or used information from Minerva to make the labels.

Alternatives to the envelope submission system were discussed, and Stephen noted that at other universities, an electronic date-stamp machine is used as proof that a student's work has been completed on time. Penelope added that a secure post-box system would most likely be the best solution, and although this may be expensive, it would hopefully be a one-off investment.

Ben enquired as to whether other departments had experienced problems with work going missing, and Rosie replied that she would raise this at the next UJCF meeting. It was also agreed that an additional question could be added to the class questionnaires in order to gain wider feedback about the system.

## 10. AOB

(a) B7.2a. Joe raised the issue that the Special Relativity Course is taken by both maths and physics students, but physics students receive tutorials for the problem sheets, whereas maths students attend a class. He added that this could prove to be a disadvantage for maths students, who receive tuition in larger groups. Henry replied that some colleges do offer tutorials for maths students, and that it may indeed be possible for maths students to attend tutorials with physics students. Rosie added that students should check with their college tutor to see if such arrangements can be made.

(b) Matt reported that some students have problems with their class arrangements. In particular, for those classes that do not take place in the Maths Institute students who have lectures beforehand have only 5 minutes to reach the venue. He suggested that problem classes that do not take place in the institute could be made to commence at quarter past the hour so that students have adequate time to reach them.

Most of those present also added that many lecturers are not finishing their lectures at 5 minutes to the hour, and it was agreed that this should be raised at JCCU. Additionally, Petra pointed out that this is a common problem for maths and philosophy students, who don't generally have enough time to travel between the Institute (or Museum) and the Philosophy Faculty. Penelope added that there are sometimes direct clashes between maths lectures and philosophy lectures. Rosie acknowledged this and replied that it is often due to the availability of lecturers and venues which causes such problems, but agreed to raise this at JCCU as well.

(c) Joe enquired as to whether any consultation with undergraduate maths and joint schools students had taken place regarding the building of the new Mathematical Institute. Rosie agreed to raise this question at the next Teaching Committee meeting.

SO'K 28/10/09