

Mathematics Undergraduate Representation Committee

Friday 2nd May 2012

Confirmed minutes of meeting

Attending: Bryn Horsfield-Schonhut(*St. Hugh's*), David Hagger (University), Matthew Saxton (Jesus), Seung Jai Lee (Wadham), Ben Spells (Lincoln), Nimish Telang (Christ Church), Elena Sizikova (St. Anne's), Tom Roger (Worcester), Philip Garner (Magdalen), Anne Meiburg (Lincoln), David Abed (New College), Joel Cawte (Jesus), Edward Grant (St. Peter's), Samiha Ismail (Keble), Chan-Young Song (Balliol)
Absent: Young Hyun Choi (St Hilda's)

1) Introduction

- a. With the secretary absent, and no eager candidates for the task, Ben Spells agreed to take the minutes.
- b. The minutes of the previous meeting (*Wk 7, HT12*) were accepted with some grammatical mistakes and omissions being corrected. Exec. Committee members were reminded to send Samiha their pictures for the website.

2) Constitutional Amendment

- a. A constitutional amendment proposed by Chan following last meeting's discussion on removing college reps was briefly read out and an additional amendment affecting statement 51 in the Constitution was also noted. Both amendments were unanimously passed.
- b. The following addition will therefore be made to the Constitution:
"52. Before the Annual General Election, the Secretary shall ask by email all college representatives of their intention to stay on the committee at least 2 weeks in advance. If the Secretary receives a reply from a college representative that he or she no longer wishes to stay on the committee, then the college representative position will become vacant. In the case that the Secretary does not receive any response within one week after having sent out the email, then the college representative will be removed from the committee and the position will become vacant."
- c. In addition, 51 will now read: "No member of the Committee shall be removed from office except by the approving votes of two-thirds of those present in person, by proxy at a General Meeting or if paragraph 52 comes into effect."

3) Termly College Tea Parties

- a. These events had been suggested in order to give any members of the mathematical community in a college the opportunity to raise any queries they may have with their MURC Rep.
- b. Nimish had looked into possible sponsorship for these events but the Faculty had expressed unease with the idea of sponsorship as MURC is a committee, not a society.
- c. In addition, it was suggested that the sort of people who would turn up to these events would also be the sort to email their Rep anyway, thus rendering the Tea Parties in question redundant.
- d. Once again, it was agreed that MURC should be advertised at the start of the year to Freshers, once more to them before the General Election meeting (*Wk7, MT12*), and also through the Invariants (and Bookstall), with the

emphasis on pointing out MURC's work, particularly in relation to questionnaire feedback.

- e. The Bookstall list, updated by Nimish, will be sent to the tutors via Chan.

4) Department Website

- a. As the department is seeking to update its website, MURC was asked for any suggestions. It was generally agreed that the website is good, although a few areas of improvement were suggested:
- b. Consultation hours are currently in an illogical place and should be made more easily accessible, as should the page on IT help.
- c. Some pages with lecture notes are not kept up to date, requiring students to go to the lecturer's own page to get these. Also, the lecturer sometimes does not clearly state online what he/she is intending to cover in the course.
- d. The log-in system returns the user to the home page, rather than the page the user had wanted to visit.
- e. A sidebar with popular links such as lecture notes, past papers etc. was requested.

5) Teaching Award Scheme

- a. A reminder was issued to nominate candidates for the Awards by Week 3 of this term (*TT12*).

6) Mods MuPAD Projects and Teaching with Maple, Matlab, MuPAD and LaTeX:

- a. It was requested that in future any errors in the MuPAD Project Manual be brought immediately and clearly to the attention of those doing MuPAD, as oppose to putting up a list of errata on the website two days before the deadline.
- b. Although the lecturer was praised by those who attended the lectures for making them enjoyable, there were a few problems in subsequent contact. Some feedback from 1st years seemed to indicate that the Hilary Term demonstrators and lecturer were not particularly helpful in addressing questions emailed to them.
- c. Feedback from questionnaires seemed to confirm this view, with the additional comment that a not insignificant number of replies indicated that little was learnt from the experience.
- d. The committee agreed that a 1st year computer course (in this case MuPAD) was a good idea, but it should be made as relevant as possible, with a few suggestions for doing the project in Matlab, as this would prove to be more useful in future courses.
- e. Efforts to highlight the usefulness of doing calculations on a computer were noted in the Fourier Problem Sheets.
- f. It was suggested that a Working Group be set up to examine how best to teach this course in subsequent years. This suggestion and the above comments will be relayed to the Faculty at the upcoming JCCU meeting.

7) Project Questionnaires

- a. The Draft Project Questionnaire was discussed. Some debate arose over the similarity of Q7 and Q8, but it was generally approved by those present.
- b. Once again, the issue of giving direct feedback about the supervisors was raised, but this was not thought to be possible without breaching anonymity.

Suggestions were made to talk to the supervisors directly, although it was accepted that this may not be easier either.

- c. The Questionnaire will be presented to the JCCU at the upcoming meeting, and in the meantime any questions/suggestions should be directed to Anne Meiburg (annekathrin.meiburg@lincoln.ox.ac.uk).

8) Lecture Questionnaire feedback from Hilary

- a. No real problems were reported for the Mods lectures.
- b. Part A Probability was noted to have improved from previous years, although some problems (very difficult problem sheets) were still apparent.
- c. There were some individual problems with elements of the Part B course, in particular with examinable and non-examinable material.
- d. The committee unanimously agreed that by the time revision starts, students must have been clearly told what material is examinable and what material is not.
- e. The committee was generally of the opinion that non-examinable material is not a problem, but too much non-examinable material in some courses has sometimes led to the examinable sections being rushed, which has made them difficult to understand.
- f. Some lecturers complete all of the examinable material first and then spend some time in the last few lectures going over additional areas of interest, which was generally agreed to be a good strategy.

9) Part C Perturbations and Other Courses

- a. It was suggested that the course should be in Part B as it is reasonably straightforward, and also because by the fourth year it has already been mostly covered in Part B.
- b. Elements of B5a were noted not to be useful in any other course.
- c. B568a was thought to be far too short a course given the material covered, and it was requested that more time was taken in teaching it.

10) Types of Paper for Exams

- a. Many members of the committee questioned the continued use of blank paper in exams, and suggested that square blocks would be better, although alternative suggestions for hexagonal blocks and Penrose tiling were also noted.
- b. It was pointed out that Maths and Computer Science students get lined paper in their exams.
- c. It was unanimously agreed that it really shouldn't be difficult for there to be a variety of paper on offer in the exam.

11) Careers page of the MURC website

- a. The IT Rep requested that the Careers Rep send her the updates for the website.

12) AOB – Online Lecture Notes

- a. Dr Earl is aiming to produce an agreed statement on why online notes are helpful, what students are looking for from online notes, and also explaining why, in some situations, notes might not be appropriate.

- b. The committee believed that attending lectures where the lecturer is reading verbatim from the lecture notes is a waste of time, although it was suggested that this may be more the fault of the lecturer.
- c. It was unanimously agreed that handwritten notes were invariably less legible than typed notes.
- d. It was suggested that online notes which offered only theorems with gaps for the proofs were only suitable if the lecturer following the notes actually completed the proof in the lectures, otherwise by the end of the course, the students still may not know what they need to.

13) AOB – Revision Consultation

- a. It was asked that these revision classes be scheduled well ahead of time, and that classes should not clash with each other.
- b. An updated list of classes was suggested to be put online (eg. on Google Calendar).
- c. A minimum standard of what's expected to happen in these classes was requested. In addition, at least one past paper session was generally agreed to be useful and necessary.

14) AOB – New members

- a. The committee welcomed Edward Grant (*St Peter's College Rep*), Joel Cawte (*Jesus College Rep*) and David Abed (*New College Rep*) to the committee.