

# Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

Wednesday June 1996

## Present

- Tom Chothia (Chair), Sukhjeet Atwal, Jacquie Ashmore (Oriel), Ailsa Burkimsher, Mark Colman, Chris Dickson, Richard Harrison, Helen Haworth, Anthony Henley, Andrew Huddleston, Alison Ingoe (Brasenose), Janet Lucke, Owen Massey, James Mushin, Erica Neely, Jim Oliver, Francis Tang, Russell Taylor, Salim Tharani, Beth Turner, Ben Woolley, Bob Wilton, Brigitte Worth, and Terry Boon (Secretary).

## Apologies

- Received from Penny Burnham and Helen Poole.

## Minutes of the meeting of 1 May 1996

- These were approved.

## Matters arising

- There were none.

## Mailshot

- Tom checked that everybody had distributed their copies of the mailshot for undergraduate mathematicians. It was asked what would happen about those reps who were not present and who had not replied to Tom's earlier messages; Tom said that he would distribute the letters at those colleges himself.

## MAPLE

- The following criticisms of the MAPLE course for first-years were made:
  - The teaching provided was poor: some of the demonstrators were thought unhelpful and obstructive, and the course book contained a number of errors. It was suggested that lectures or formal classes be given.
  - The difficulty of projects varied greatly. One of the projects in Hilary Term 1995 exposed a serious bug in MAPLE, suggesting that it had not been properly checked before being set.
  - The results were considered only for borderline candidates, so many candidates felt that their time would be better spent on other work. Increasing the credit given for MAPLE would counter this, but the meeting did not want

the significance of MAPLE results to increase if there was not a commensurate improvement in teaching provided.

- It was wondered why MAPLE was used, rather than Mathematica (which appeared to be the standard mathematical software used in the "real world").
- During this item, it was proposed that the meeting adjourn to the University Parks, the weather being very fine, but the meeting voted against moving.

## Section c courses in the four-year MMath

- It was noted that the draft list contained very few physical applied courses. The meeting was extremely unhappy about this.
- The existence of the MSc in Mathematical Modelling and Numerical Analysis was noted, but this was not thought to compensate for the lack of applied courses in section c. It was pointed out that taking the three-year course followed by the MSc would involve applying for a place on the MSc and finding a source of funding. Undergraduates were expected to make a decision between courses early in their second year. For those who did wish to study for four years, this was now a decision between pure and applied mathematics, at a time when they had little experience on which to base a decision.
- [Tom Chothia](#) agreed to write to the Sub-Faculty about the problem and setting out MURC's desire for more physical applied courses to be available in section c.

## Open Day

- [Russell Taylor](#) made available a copy of the report and visitor questionnaire results which had gone to the Standing Committee two days previously.
- He thanked [Ann Warland](#) in her absence, whose talk on mathematics at Oxford had received particular praise in the questionnaires returned, and Jacque Ashmore for her help, including the coordinating work at the administration desk on the day.
- It was noted that the period 9.30-10.30am (between visitors' checking-in and the first formal session) had many visitors standing around in the common room with little to do.
- It was also noted that there had been some problems with the division of responsibilities between the Sub-Faculty and the MURC Open Day representatives in organising the event. It had seemed that the Sub-Faculty had made and changed some arrangements without consulting or informing the MURC Open Day representatives, which led to problems. One possible solution would be for the Sub-Faculty to assume total responsibility for organising the Open Day in future years, but the meeting did not think that this was desirable. Feedback from visitors on the day suggested that they appreciated its being a *student-run* event.
- The time at which new Open Day representatives should be elected was also discussed. The standing orders of MURC stated that "members of the committee shall hold office for one year from the date of the special MURC meeting early in Hilary Term". It was agreed that work for the event needs to start well before Hilary Term. This had not been a problem in recent years because MURC had drifted from its standing orders: the new committee and elections taking place in Seventh Week of Michaelmas Term. However, this had led to problems with MURC's interactions with other committees who expected MURC to be operating in accordance with their standing orders. It had

therefore been intended that MURC would revert to following them this year - but then the problem with Open Day reps would arise again.

- Three possibilities were considered.
  - The Open Day reps could take office in Hilary Term and take over the organisation from the previous Open Day reps. However, this would lead to discontinuity and possible confusion.
  - Or at least one Open Day rep could be elected from the existing committee in Michaelmas Term, who would continue to serve after the new committee took office in Hilary Term.
  - Or a second-year could be co-opted in Michaelmas Term to act as Open Day rep for the following year (and a second rep would be elected as usual in Hilary Term).
- It was also suggested that the standing orders be amended so that the committee would take office in Michaelmas Term in accordance with current practice.

## Induction Day

- [Tom Chothia](#) appealed for volunteers to come to the induction day and speak with the freshers at an informal session (including refreshments) which would follow the official talks. Some wondered how useful this would actually be. They pointed out that freshers would already have met mathematicians at their college, to whom they could address any questions. However, it was found that this did not happen at all colleges.
- It was agreed that the bookstall would run at the Induction Day.

## Course Handbook

- It was noted that this was written by members of the Sub-Faculty, with nothing by undergraduates. It was suggested that freshers may find guidance written by students helpful. It was also suggested that MURC might be better placed to write about its own functions and activities than members of the Sub-Faculty.

## Bookstall

- A motion authorising the opening of a bank account at NatWest for the bookstall was passed unanimously. (A copy of the motion is attached.)
- Brigitte asked for more volunteers to help at the stall, which would be running for the first time on Friday Seventh Week and Friday Eighth Week.

## Any other business

- Modern Language option
  - It was suggested that an option to study a modern language in the fourth-year be made available, but it was pointed out that the four-year course was intended for those specialising in mathematics. It was agreed that it *would* be desirable for modern languages to be as o-options for those on the three-year course.
- Social events

- [Chris Dickson](#) proposed that a MURC punting party be arranged, saying that something like that "can't go wrong". He asked which colleges could get free punts, and found that a fair number could do so.
- Beer at MURC meetings
  - [Tom Chothia](#) proposed that beer be provided for reps at MURC meetings, and offered to supply it for the remaining meetings of the current committee. Potential problems were pointed out. A vote was taken, and the proposal was defeated by 10 votes to 9.
- o10: Mathematics and Finance
  - There was disquiet about the two-tier arrangements for teaching this paper. 20 students were receiving teaching from the School of Management while the remainder (approximately 50) were taught by the Maths Institute. There was an implication that the teaching at the Institute was less worthwhile. One representative said that her tutor had advised her to change to another paper if she was not going to receive teaching from the School of Management. It was noted that, as the exam would be set by the School of Management, those taught there would be better-prepared for it (although this problem would be diminished by proper communication between those teaching).
- Permanent Private Halls
  - It was asked whether maths undergraduates at PPHs had representation on MURC. Inspection of the standing orders revealed that each PPH was entitled to send a representative to MURC, but it was noted that there were no such representatives on MURC at the moment.

## Appendix: Co-optation of new members of MURC

- [Tom Chothia](#) approved Jacquie Ashmore's (Oriell) and Alison Ingoe's (Brasenose) becoming members of MURC.