

Mathematics Undergraduate Representative Committee

Wednesday 24th January 1996

Present

- Tom Chothia (Chair), Sukhjeet Atwal, Penny Burnham, Ailsa Burkimsher, Mark Colman, Chris M Dickson, Richard Harrison, Anthony Henley, Andrew Huddleston, Janet Lucke, Owen Massey, James Mushin, Erica Neely, Jim Oliver, Ian Rapley, Francis Tang, Salim Tharani, Russell Taylor, Beth Turner, Ann Warland, Kathy Weeks, Bob Wilton, Brigitte Worth and Terry Boon (Secretary).

Apologies

- Received from Helen Haworth and Deirdre Hollingsworth.

Minutes of Last Meeting

- The minutes of the meeting of 22nd November 1995 were approved.

Matters Arising

- Bob Wilton was appointed Maths and Computation/Computation Rep.
- Helen Poole (Univ), although not a college rep, had expressed willingness to act as Maths and Philosophy Rep, and was appointed to the post.
- It was noted that the late announcement of fourth-year subjects made the choice of b-papers difficult. Fears were expressed that not all announced o-papers would be running.
- It was noted that some lecturers who had been regarded unfavourably by students in previous years were still lecturing the same courses, and it was reported that there had been no perceptible improvement in their performance.
- It was reported that a Computation student was unhappy about the narrowness of the Computation course and the absence of o-papers from it. A letter from Geraint Jones (who sat on the Standing Committee responsible for the course) was shown to the meeting; it suggested that some changes might be adopted, but not in the immediate future. It was decided that MURC reps would consult at their colleges about how other Computation students felt about the structure of the course.
- It was suggested that printed lecture notes be distributed for maths lectures to allow students to follow the lecturer's explanations instead of scribbling down notes from the blackboard, and this was generally thought to be a good idea. It was reported that this was already done for computation lectures. One suggestion was to distribute at

least the longer proofs in this way. It was reported that, in some other subjects, intentionally incomplete notes were distributed to make lecture attendance necessary.

- There was still concern on the committee about the Nestle refreshment machine, in response to Nestle's allegedly unethical practices in the Third World as part of its distribution of powdered baby milk. It was believed that alternatives would be more expensive, and the Chair agreed to find out the relevant figures. A sign on or near the machine informing users about Nestle's practices was thought to be a good idea. It was noted that graduates and staff at the Institute relied more on the machine and could resent the more mobile undergraduates dictating to them on the issue.
- It was noted that MURC reps generally had a low profile in their colleges. It was thought that a mailshot to be distributed to all undergraduate mathematicians in Oxford would be a good idea. The Chair urged reps to publicise their role within their colleges.
- It was found that most of MURC regularly used e-mail and it was agreed to set up a MURC/'Oxford maths' e-mailing list to facilitate discussion. Bob Wilton agreed to investigate the possibility of establishing a WWW site with similar subject.
- The method of distributing questionnaires was considered. It was thought that there should be some other way for students to complete and return questionnaires even if they do not attend the appropriate lecture.
- It was reported that it takes a full term to process the questionnaire results, so no prompt action could be based on them, and that the lecturers receive the statistics and a full printout of the comments.
- It was thought that sample exam papers for the new syllabus were desirable; even an indication of suitable past questions would be preferable to nothing.
- The Chair expressed his desire for the social role of MURC to increase, despite the fears of some that the term 'maths party' was self-contradictory. [Chris Dickson](#) was appointed Social Secretary.
- It was suggested that MURC meet more frequently; with meetings in 2nd and 7th Weeks, business could move very slowly. However, it was pointed out that more frequent meetings could result in lower attendance, and it was decided to leave the timing as it was.
- The Chair explained the reason for distributing agendas beforehand, and urged reps to consult other mathematicians at their college about issues that arise.
- It was suggested that MURC meet at a pub, but this was thought impractical. Moving meetings from lunchtimes to evenings was also suggested, but was unpopular.
- [Brigitte Worth](#) volunteered to the office of Booksale Rep, after the second-hand maths booksale had been absent for some years. Sukhjeet Atwal agreed to take over as Questionnaire Rep. There were still no volunteers to edit the 'Boolean'.
- The Open Day reps reported that they had been busy with organising the open day. They said that, in previous years, there had been problems with the low number of tutors available on the day, and also emphasised the importance of at least one undergraduate (not necessarily the MURC rep) from each college helping.