

FACULTIES OF MATHEMATICS & STATISTICS  
Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates  
MINUTES

A meeting of this committee will be held on **Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> of February at 12:30pm in N4.01**

**1. Apologies**

(a) Katie Noble from MPLS, Maria Matthis, James Munro

**2. In Attendance**

(a) James Newton (Chair), Neil Laws, Dan Ciubotaru, Reemon Spector, Mario Marcos Losada, Ruairi Garrett, Ben Gould, Tianyang Zou, Tianrui Liu, Prisma Celeste, Anubhab Ghosal, Yongqing Grace Yu, Chris Chang, Ali Goodall, Rosalind Mitchell

**3. Meeting held on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2023.**

(a) Minutes of the previous meeting (attached **Minutes 27-10-23** page 1 of papers)

i. Approved minutes

(b) Matters arising

- i. It was raised that the locked cupboard in the study room should have been broken open by FM. **ACTION: MURC to check if the cupboard is now open.**
- ii. The proposed changes at part A were discussed. It was noted that the changes to Geometry will not come into effect until MT 2025.

**4. Athena Swan Update (page 5)**

(a) It was raised that many of the Athena Swan objectives are not being met. A concern was raised that some Athena Swan objectives are being lowered in response to them not being met. It was noted by the MURC Outreach, Diversity and Inclusion representative that more efforts need to be made by the University and the Mathematical institute to encourage diversity and equality. It was raised that actions are being taken by the institute, however, these actions are not having the desired effect. It was raised that the institute would investigate why their efforts are failing. It was noted that it would be helpful for the institute to ask its female students how the institute could improve its inclusivity. MURC raised some concerns that had already been gathered from the female student body:

- i. Concerns were raised regarding lack of fairness in assessment type.
- ii. Concerns were also raised regarding bias and misogyny shown towards female students by their male peers and teachers during classes.

The MURC representative suggested that mandatory anti bias training be required for tutors and TAs.

**ACTION: JN to pass on to Teaching Committee the concerns raised.**

It was noted that the gender gap in Mathematics exists at GCSE and A level as well. It was suggested that it would be helpful for the institute and the university and the Institute to put resources towards outreach, specifically encouraging female students to pursue maths in school and at university.

**ACTION: JN to pass on the suggestion for more targeted outreach activities to James Munro (Outreach Coordinator).**

It was raised that the department should be more transparent regarding what steps are being taken towards encouraging diversity and inclusion.

**ACTION: JN to contact Ian Hewitt (AHOd for People) about enhancing student visibility of (and participation in) EDI activities.**

## **5. Race Equality Action Plan (Page 12)**

- (a) A concern was raised that the continual increases in international fees disproportionately effects black students and applicants. It was asked what scholarships will be made available to help students/applicants effected by the international fees uplift. It was noted that the department has set up a development officer who will be investigating what funding can be put towards scholarships.

**ACTION: JN to pass on this comment to Teaching Committee, together with comments on item 6.**

- (b) It was raised that the statistics have opened Summer Projects only for UK students. It was asked whether Statistics could also make additional Summer Projects available for international students. **ACTION: NL to ask statistics whether this is possible.**

## **6. Student Fees Exercise Paper (Page 19)**

- (a) The paper sets out a proposal to raise the overseas fees for new undergraduate students by 6.7%. It was noted that the department is not directly responsible for the uplift, with the University setting the fee associated with each tuition fee band. Feedback from international students (collected as a survey by a MURC representative) is that the current fees, and the proposed uplift, are too high. Current students reported that they would not have applied to Oxford with the increased fee level. It was also noted that applicants will be more drawn to American universities which offer considerably more scholarships to international students. A concern was raised about how this will discourage diversity within the student body and in turn create a perception that the university is prejudiced against international students. It was noted that the university is increasing fees because of the higher education funding system. However, it was raised that if the university continues to lean too heavily on its international students application numbers may shrink with a resulting drop in tuition fee income. It was raised that students would appreciate more transparency regarding the reasons for the fee increases.

**ACTION: JN to report to teaching committee on student dissatisfaction with the fee uplifts and the request for more transparency about the rationale for the increase.**

## **7. MURC business**

- a) **Option Fairs:** It was raised that students would like more guidance when choosing courses. A request was made to have an option fair for Part A options in addition to Parts B and C. It was also suggested that MURC run a separate option fair where students can discuss courses with students who have taken them previously. The committee agreed that a student lead option fair would be a great addition to the department.
  - a. **ACTION: JN to follow up with DC regarding a potential departmental Part A options even. MURC to consider planning a student-run options event.**
  
- b) **Friday's at 2:** A suggestion was also made to implement more student involvement in Friday's at 2. It was noted that students would like to see more sessions discussing the careers a degree in Maths can lead to. A suggestion was made to also involve computer science and statistics to see if they would also be interested in a careers event.
  
- c) **Summer Projects:** Concerns were raised about the lack of communication regarding Summer Projects. It was noted that the department apologises for the lack of communication. Due to a small number of project proposals, the usual Summer Projects Booklet will not be circulated this year. The department will be inviting students to make enquiries with faculty about project availability and to apply for summer project funding. Information will be circulated regarding this as soon as possible. It was suggested that information regarding alternative funding sources for Summer Projects (perhaps hosted at other institutions, in the UK and internationally) be gathered and shared to students.
  - a. **ACTION: Academic Admin to see if they can gather information on alternative funding bodies, such as: other universities, industry, etc.**
  
- d) **Part C Mini-projects and Dissertations:** It was noted that students would like the examples of Part C Mini Projects and Dissertations to be annotated on the maths website to indicate what marks and comments these projects received.
  - a. **ACTION: Academic Admin to see if this information can be gathered and shared.**
  
- e) **Part B and C Past Papers:** It was asked what the current status is regarding past papers. It was noted that the faculty are currently making corrections to past papers and the plan is for them to be released by the end of the term.
  
- f) **Courses in Different Departments:** It was raised that students are having difficulty signing up for courses at other departments. It was suggested that the department share guidelines regarding the process of applying to take courses at other departments.
  - a. **ACTION: Academic Admin to investigate arrangements for taking courses in other departments.**

- b. It was noted that Maths and Stats students would also like to take courses at computer science but are unable to. **ACTION: NL to investigate if this can change.**

## 8. Reports from the meetings of the Faculty and Teaching Committees (Page 22)

### (a) Mathematics

- i. **Intercollegiate Classes:** It was raised that students are deeply dissatisfied with the running of Intercollegiate Classes. A concern was raised that numerous classes were opened without schedules. It was noted that this was due to Academic Administration not receiving schedules from tutors ahead of registration opening, despite circulating reminders. It was noted that the staggered Part B and C registration on TMS was helpful. It was further suggested that registration for Applied and Pure courses also be staggered.

Discussion of this topic will be continued at an additional JCCU meeting in Week 4.

### (b) Organisation of Intercollegiate classes

- i. A concern was raised about the number of class cancellations this term. It was raised that this was often due to teaching faculty illness. A concern was raised that students were very disrupted by these cancellations due to communication issues. It was raised that tutors often either attempt to communicate their class changes/ cancellations through academic admin or Moodle. It was noted that academic admin are not able to immediately inform the students of any changes that take place due to the often last minute nature of the requests and their demanding workloads during intercollegiate classes. It was also noted that there are often significant scheduling errors made during intercollegiate classes due to the Moodle and TMS systems not synching and the tutors being unable to check that their schedules are correct, this leads to many discrepancies between the systems themselves and also the information relayed to students and tutors. It was further noted that tutors cannot easily communicate to students through moodle as the announcements do not produce immediate notifications to students causing them to often miss the change. It was suggested that it would be ideal if the tutors could communicate their class times immediately and directly to students through moodle or another platform as this would produce far less error. It was also suggested that it would be ideal for announcements on moodle to produce notifications. **ACTION: AA to investigate if it is possible for tutor to student communication on moodle to become more efficient.**

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of communication to students regarding the behind-the-scenes organisation of Intercollegiate Classes. It was explained that once registration is open academic admin email every tutor, TA and marker for each class to let them know if they need to increase their class sizes, or create another class, at which point the lecturers and the tutors have to find an additional TA/marker. It was noted that students would be more understanding of the waiting list delays if they aware of the work that goes on behind the scenes. A concern was raised regarding the number of classes that were labelled TBD when registration opened. It was noted that this was due to academic admin not having received the tutor's schedules prior to registration opening. It was noted that Teaching Committee has discussed assigning tutors to classes earlier to reduce scheduling delays. It was also noted that tutors, TAs and markers are overwhelmed by the current class system which inevitably increases delays in recruitment and scheduling. **ACTION: JN to raise tutor assignment at TC.**

**(c) Teaching of the Intercollegiate Classes**

- i. **Marking and Solutions:** A concern was raised that students are often still on waiting lists by the time the first mark problem sheets are due, often resulting in them not receiving half of their marking. A suggestion was made for problem sheets 2 and 3 to be marked rather than 1 and 3. It was noted that this change is currently under discussion in the department. It was raised that lecturers need to be reminded to release solutions to students for any problem sheets which are not marked at part B or C. It was noted that some professors would prefer for solutions to not be released to students. It was suggested that teaching committee raise the importance of sharing solutions to lecturers. **ACTION: JN to raise this at teaching committee.**

It was raised that the marking guidance is often not being followed and students are receiving inconsistent and often unhelpful marking across their classes. It was noted that Intercollegiate Classes often consist of the tutor going through the solutions. It was further noted that some tutors refuse to take questions as they are concerned about getting through the solutions. It was raised that tutors are required to answer questions and that specific tutoring and marking guidelines are provided. It was noted that students should inform academic admin through the student hotline if they have concerns that their tutor, TA or marker is not following the guidance or creating an healthy learning environment. It was suggested by students that the solutions for all problem sheets be released as students felt the

class time would be better spent if the tutor was not required to go through the problem sheets. However, it was also raised that some students prefer for classes to be spent going through the solutions. It was further noted that students would prefer to have the solutions available even if marking is provided for the sake of consistency since they are not receiving consistent, high-quality marking. It was raised that solutions need to be of high quality across all of the courses in order for students to be comfortable with marking being withdrawn. A concern was raised that students with learning disabilities could struggle with receiving the solutions rather than marking. A suggestion was made that office hours be made more available if marking will no longer take place. **ACTION: AA to recirculate the teaching guidance to tutors and TAs.**

**ACTION: AA to remind students of the existence of the student hotline and that they should anonymously report any issues with guidelines not being upheld.**

- ii. **Large Classes:** It was raised that students are dissatisfied with large classes as they are not interactive and often feel more like a lecture than a class. It was suggested that the TAs also be present for the large classes to avoid the class becoming a lecture. It was raised that large classes are supposed to be paired with office hours. It was noted that this information has not been shared efficiently to academic admin, the faculty or the student body. **ACTION: AA to circulate this information to faculty and students.**
- iii. **Suggestions for Improvement:** It was noted that students would prefer for some classes to be run as more interactive and others to be more solution based in order to accommodate every student's learning style. It was suggested by the student reps that it would be ideal for there to be more clarity given by tutors regarding their teaching style before students sign up to their classes.

It was noted that students would in general like more access to past papers, solutions, and lectures. It was noted that some lecturers have reservations about sharing this content and worry about students not completing the work because they already have the solutions. The point was made that students tend to be studying Maths because they genuinely enjoy maths, and their desire to access more content is so that they can learn more, not avoid learning. It was noted that the department is slowly moving towards everything being released.

- iv. **Survey:** It was raised that the department is planning on implementing numerous changes to Intercollegiate classes. It was

noted that students will be receiving a survey regarding the classes. It was further noted that the department would greatly appreciate MURC's help in advertising these surveys. **ACTION: Department to contact MURC when they advertise the ICC surveys.**

**(d) Statistics**

**(e) Items to refer to Faculty or Teaching Committee**

**i. ACTION: JN to bring up scaling issue at TC**

**9. Questionnaires (page 27)**

**(a) MT Lecture questionnaires**

It was noted that students do not feel like feedback is being listened or acted on. Concerns were raised regarding the difficulties caused by the surveys being circulated through Moodle. It was also noted that there are too many surveys being circulated which results in the students engaging with them less. It was suggested that if students used the hotline to send specific feedback or concerns the department could potentially reduce the number of surveys.

It was raised that students would perhaps engage with surveys more if the questions were more relevant and up to date. It was noted that some of the questions on the current surveys are only relevant for teaching conducted during COVID. It was suggested that the department explore how MURC make their questionnaires each term in order to create questionnaires that are relevant to the students and the individual terms. It was also suggested that MURC aid in the promotion of the termly questionnaires to encourage students to respond to them. **ACTION: AA and MURC to liaise regarding updating the questionnaires.**

**(b) NSS 2023 results**

**10. Open Days**