

Faculties of Mathematics & Statistics

Joint Consultative Committee with Undergraduates

Friday 26th May 2012

Unconfirmed minutes of meeting

Present: Chan-Young Song (*MURC Chairperson*), Ben Spells (*MURC Open Day Rep*), Florence Driscoll (*MURC 4th year Rep*) Dr Richard Earl (*Director of Undergraduate Studies*), Dr Peter Neumann (*Faculty Teaching Advisor*), Dr Martin Griffiths (*Admissions Co-ordinator*), Dr Neil Laws (*Department of Statistics*).

In attendance: Mrs Charlotte Turner-Smith

Apologies:

1) Meeting held on Friday 11 May 2012

a. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting were **ACCEPTED**.

b. Matters arising

MURC's comments from last meeting concerning Part C Perturbation Methods (C6.3a) had been discussed by the Teaching Committee and comments were passed on to the subject panel for future reference.

Matlab and LaTeX classes are being held this term following discussions last meeting.

2) Membership of JCCU

Senior and Junior Members of the JCCU were introduced, with more members expected from MURC following the general election in 7th week. **ACTION: MURC to inform and update Charlotte of new JCCU members once elections have taken place.**

3) Oral Report on Matters Raised in Examiners Reports

Examiners reports are due to be released at the start of 4th week on the public website. Although there were no comments from the Faculty about Mods and Part A reports, a query was raised regarding the difficulty of the Mods Paper A. In response, it was noted that the examiners found that the marks were roughly in line with the other papers, and so there were no causes for concern from their end. It was reiterated that sample papers will be made available for the new Prelims exams, although the style of questions should not be too different from previous years. The importance of knowing the Trinity term material was also stressed, and the questions set would possibly reflect this.

The matter of how the Faculty use Part A and Part B was also raised, in part due to the External Examiners' opinion that the 40% weighting on the 2nd year was too large, as undergraduates may be unduly affected by their 2nd year result in

subsequent years. An individual issue with one of the Part B papers was also mentioned, although the typos which occurred in the paper were accepted to be highly unusual. Nevertheless, as a result, rules on setters and checkers have been clarified.

From the Statistics point of view, it was noted that the External examiner found improvements had been made in Part B, compared to a few years ago.

4) Reports from the meetings of Faculty/Teaching/Academic Committees

Discussed later in the meeting in other items on the agenda.

5) MMathPhys

The background of the proposed MMathPhys course was explained, with MURC raising two points that came up in their discussion with Xenia:

- a. As the MMathPhys course will be rightly advertised as a tough course (in part due to the 10, 16-hour lecture courses), will there be sufficient interest from students? In response, it was suggested that very able candidates would apply, and that a challenging MMathPhys course would be of benefit to those wanting to do research. It was also said that there was a sense that Oxford 'needs' to have the course when noting what competitors can offer.
- b. It was suggested that the disparity between the classification attained on completing the MMathPhys (Distinction, Pass, Fail) compared to that of the MMath (First, Second, Third, Fail) might put students off doing the MMathPhys rather than continuing with Part C. This difference in classification, despite the similar sounding MMath and MMathPhys titles, may also not be clearly understood by employers, in which case candidates may end up getting a better sounding mark by doing Part C than the MMathPhys. In response, it was pointed out that references are also normally given, so that an employer may look at the transcript as well as the reference. In addition, this 'perception' by employers of the classification is handled in part by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education), so that the interests of employers, and consequently those of those seeking employment, are looked after.

The issues raised were agreed to be brought up in future meetings about the course, with more discussion to happen at a later date.

6) MMathPhil Fourth Year Workload

It was explained that whilst the Computer Science, Statistics and Mathematics departments had already agreed to Part C changes, the Maths and Philosophy department were struggling to do so as it was thought that three units of Philosophy and extended essays was a fair amount of work, as compared with four units of Maths. As a result, how would the system work for those wishing to take a mixture of the two disciplines? The suggested solution was that the fourth year undergraduates would be forced to take either Philosophy or Maths units. It was explained that an email had been sent round to students in this situation, and the 10 responses received were all against the idea. Some suggested a 'credit' based system, and in view of the opposition to the idea, Faculty will re-visit the proposals.

7) Potential for Computer Science Part A Options

Following the changes to Part A, the Computer Science department were keen to offer a Computer Science option, such as Models of Computing. **ACTION: MURC to discuss the proposal and report back at the next JCCU meeting.**

8) Online Lecture Notes – Pros and Cons

It was reported that many of the feedback forms from lectures often focused almost exclusively on the availability of Online Lecture Notes, perhaps therefore missing out more subtle areas of improvement. It was stated that lecturers are not required to put up lecture notes online, so to clarify any confusion, RAE had produced the first draft of a document listing the Pros and Cons of Online Lecture notes, which was handed out. In addition to the points mentioned on the document, it was pointed out that disability legislation puts heavy emphasis on providing lecture notes to students unable to attend the lectures, therefore effectively forcing the lecturer to produce them, which means that they might as well put it online for everyone.

It was suggested that if lecturers were unwilling to provide lecture notes then at least an up-to-date and relevant reading list should be explicitly available, so that students would have a good idea of where to start looking for the necessary information.

ACTION: RAE to send an electronic copy of the document to MURC, so that it can be discussed in the meeting later this term. Faculty will also discuss the document too, with feedback from both at the next JCCU meeting.

9) MURC Business

MURC Business had already been covered elsewhere, although the idea of a MURC social event was suggested. **ACTION: Chan to contact Charlotte to sort out details.**

10) Questionnaires

The questionnaire feedback summary sheets were looked at, and no items of particular concern were highlighted by the Questionnaire Rep or any of those present.

11) Open Days and Induction

Dr Griffiths thanked the undergraduates and postgraduates who helped with the Open Days last year, and pointed out that more would be needed for the main Open Days on Saturday 27th April and Saturday 4th May, where the Open Day Rep would also be required to give the usual talk to prospective students.

12) AOB

There was no other business, and the meeting concluded at 2.55pm.