



Department of Mathematics

Staff Student Consultative Committee Minutes

Wednesday 13 November 2019, 2:00pm

Room 706, 25 Gordon Street

In attendance: Dr Mark Roberts (Staff Co-Chair), MR
Laura Sanchez Perez (Lead Rep Co-Chair), LSP

Sam Hopkins (Secretary, Minutes)

Professor Helen Wilson (Staff), HW
Dr Sergei Timoshin (Staff), ST
Dr Robert Bowles (Staff), RB
Prof Gavin Esler (Staff), GE
Joseph Attia (Year 1), JA
Yuyan Wang (Year 1), YW
Artem Kutovoy (Year 2), AK
Yanqi Cheng (Year 2), YC
Jiahe Yuan (Year 3), JY
Nikolai Juraschko (Year 3), NJ
Rui Liu (MSc Financial Mathematics), RL
Gaila Comesaña González (MSc Mathematical Modelling), GCG

Preliminary Business

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from Nadia Sidorova, Isidoros Strouthos, Andrea Macrina Steve Baigent, Yiannis Petridis, Tamara Evstafyeva.
- 2 **Constitution and Terms of Reference**
MR noted both the constitution and terms of reference of the committee.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 June 2019 were approved.
- 4 **Matters Arising from the minutes**
There were no matters arising.

Standing Items

- 5 **Annual Student Experience Review (ASER) comments**
NS not present to report. MR will be raising queries on her behalf under relevant topics of discussion later in the meeting.

6 **UCL ChangeMakers Projects**

LSP noted the availability of ChangeMakers funding. Students need to propose any projects to be backed. RB suggested canvassing students via Unitu.

7 **Unitu**

(i) General response from reps was that the introduction of Unitu has been positive in terms of responsiveness and transparency, although LSP notes that interaction is not particularly high, and YW suggested that many students may not be aware of the platform. HW noted that it is positive that Unitu allows the department to be proactive in responding to issues, instead of waiting for end of term/end of year surveys. LSP suggested having the topics of Unitu posts appear in the notification emails.

Action: SH to request this from Unitu developers.

(ii) ST queried if the SEQ process will run via Unitu. SH confirmed that this will continue to be done as in previous years.

8 **Matters to be raised by Student Representatives**

(a) Lead representative for department

(i) LSP mentioned that joint honours Mathematics and Physics students do not get assigned tutors from their other department in the same way that they do with pure and applied mathematics tutors. MR clarified that this is an issue for how teaching resources are allocated in the Physics department.

Action: MR to liaise with Physics department to confirm status of academic tutors for joint honours students.

(ii) A number of reps raised the matter of the level of interest for Lecturecast among students, while accepting the fact that the technology is not sufficient to capture whiteboard teaching. HW confirmed that the lack of hi-res cameras is a college-wide issue, and the department is not willing to force lecturers to change their lecturing style and restrict the quality of lectures in order for lecture recordings to be useful. MR noted that most module leaders provide lecture notes via Moodle, although there is no department policy for notes distribution. LSP agreed that most modules have good resource provision. RB noted that he had recently been using visualisers to deliver lectures, which is less favourable compared to traditional teaching of a lecture. JY suggested that even audio-only recordings would be useful to refer back to during the revision period, which other students agreed with.

HW noted that lecture attendance and lecture-style teaching remains the principal way for students to be taught mathematics, but that the department recognises the students' continued interest in Lecturecast, and will continue to liaise with UCL Digital Education regarding future technology implementation.

(b) First year representatives

(i) AK noted that the new second-year tutorials had been extremely useful, although there had been teething issues with differing group numbers, which MR confirmed would be inevitable for such large cohorts.

(ii) It was noted that a small number of students face issues with travelling between lectures due to the UCL-wide constraints of sufficient room availability in module timetabling.

(iii) LSP and JA mentioned that when lecturers have specific office hours, this may clash with teaching hours for some students. HW stressed that it is reasonable for students to contact lecturers directly to speak via email or arrange another time to visit.

(c) Second year representatives

(i) AK mentioned that question solutions were not uploaded to Moodle for the Fluid Mechanics module. HW mentioned that it may be that the module lead does not want these to be widely circulated.

Action: HW to speak with module leader.

(ii) YC mentioned that the Economics department has a trip arranged during reading week. RB and HW suggested finding out the level of interest there would be for a mathematics trip. NJ suggested contacting the ADM Society if they would be interested in organising it.

Action: YC to contact ADM Society, find out if there is interest.

(ii) YC requested more information for students with regards to module selection, such as detailed information on delivery, introductory videos, or recordings of previous lectures. MR highlighted that all of the module syllabi are available online, with teaching and topic information. The Module Selection meeting with introductory talks are generally not well attended. RB reminded students to talk to their personal tutor, the department tutor, and other students regarding modules. Lecturecasts of previous lectures could be of interest to students, but would face the issues highlighted in the earlier discussion.

Action: SH and MR to investigate possibly recording introductory videos from the lecturers for each module.

(d) Third year representatives

(i) NJ noted an issue raised at the DTC that there is an imbalance between the number of Pure and Applied modules offered over Term 1 and 2. This will continue to be monitored as the department's module provision continues to evolve.

(ii) NJ requested a list of contact numbers to be posted in the 4th floor corridor for offices with restricted access.

Action: SH to create.

(e) Fourth year representative

TE not in attendance.

(f) MSc representatives

(i) RL requested additional Python support for MATH0094 for students without previous experience. SH shared the module leader's response as the issue had previously been raised via Unitu, that there are introductory notebooks and additional resources, exercises and solutions provided via Moodle specifically for these individuals. The TA also reviews basic Python with reference to the reading week test. MR suggested that further individual support should be offered as programming is an assessable component of the module. Students are encouraged to make best use of office hours and tutorials, and notify the lecturer if they have specific requests for additional support.

Action: SH to feed back to module lead for them to find out from the class if any further additional support required.

(ii) RL raised the issue of a timetabling clash between MATH0062 and COMP0041 in Term 2.

Action: To be passed to MSc Administrator to look at rescheduling.

(iii) GCG brought up the teaching pace of some modules. HW responded that specific feedback is encouraged, particularly for lecturers who may be new to the department or new to teaching that module. Such feedback can be made directly or passed on anonymously.

Items for Discussion

- 9 **Student Evaluation Questionnaires 2018-19**
Responses were circulated, results were generally positive, no further comments were made.
- 10 **Results of NSS and PTES**
(i) Responses were circulated, comments were overall very good. Student Voice was noted as an issue, and staff members confirmed that the use of Unitu was proposed as a solution of this recognised problem.

(ii) MR raised the issue of student academic feedback on behalf of Dr Nadia Sidorova. Reps agreed that assessment feedback can be inconsistent. Staff explained that the manners by which feedback is given in the department, in terms of group homework feedback and tutorial sessions. The consensus was that students need to be more proactive in requesting individual feedback where necessary, as the resources do not exist for continual personalised feedback, and group feedback makes more sense for common issues with certain questions. MR noted that was there was not a formal structure for feedback, and that students should be encouraged to show initiative to request feedback when they need it. It was noted that lecturers are always happy to give time to students e.g. in office hours, and that perhaps it should be made explicit to students (particularly new students) the way in which feedback is delivered and to encourage them to engage proactively.
Action: SH/MR to send communication to students regarding feedback.

(iii) Departmental resources were noted as an NSS issue, although it is not particularly a subject-specific issue for the mathematics department when compared to the resources required for other departments. HW theorised this was due to the closure of 503, which has now been reopened for student use.

(iv) PTES assessment scores had decreased compared to previous year, although the large percentage variations are due to small course size and low engagement. It was noted that the survey takes place at exam time, and as the course is only 1 year duration, this could skew which types of feedback was gathered.
- 11 **To receive notification of and comment on any departmental changes to teaching, admissions, assessment or policy**
MR noted the introduction of second-year tutorials, which had been well-received. See 13 regarding assessment.
- 12 **The priorities and actions of the Department Teaching Committee**
See 13.
- 13 **Report on exams**
GE raised that a topic of discussion at the DTC was to extend the length of exams from 2 to 2.5 or 3 hours. Staff were generally in favour, as longer exams allow for the stretching of stronger students. GE stressed that the exams were to otherwise stay the same, but allow for more thoughtful questioning. This has been suggested as a mechanism by which to reduce the number of Firsts awarded by the department, which is a concern of the external examiners. GE suggested the idea of a pilot scheme for 2.5 hour exams for 4th year students in 2020-21. A show of hands resulted in a fairly even response of 4 in favour and 3 against. RL noted that their undergraduate exams at another institution were 3 hours. NJ raised that 2 hours can feel rushed, but 3 hours could also end up being rushed if there is just an hour of additional work. HW clarified that the intent is not to require longer answers, but provoke more thought. ST noted that this does still mean that students will be spending more time doing exams, although GE

confirmed the exam period has been extended by one week. NJ suggested that this will be difficult to sell to students. Staff clarified that the difficulty to achieve Thirds, 2:2 or 2:1s will stay the same. YW suggested having harder questions on problem sheets and exam prep for these more difficult exam questions, which staff agreed was reasonable.

Action: GE and NJ to canvass 3rd year students.

- 14 **Physical resources in the department and safety**
The opening of the 4th floor, the refurbishment, and the return of Room 503 to student use were welcomed.
- 15 **Personal tutoring**
LSP noted that the personal tutoring system was going well in the department.
- 16 **Assessment and feedback on assessed work**
17 **To note the departmental Equal Opportunities Liaison Officer**
It was noted that Ms Helen Higgins continues to be the DEOLO for Mathematics.
- 18 **Careers: Employment, employability and personal development**
SB not present and had nothing to report back about careers. It was noted that Careers have consolidated a centrally-managed team for events and drop-in sessions. RL raised that the majority of events are finance-focused, and RB suggested that as the Careers office is data-driven, they know that a large proportion of students are interested in those career paths, and make provisions accordingly.
Action: SH to contact Careers to note that more diverse careers events had been requested.
- 19 **Opportunity for the Department Lead Representative to report on meetings they have attended at the Faculty level**
Faculty level meetings had not yet taken place.

Concluding Business

- 20 **Any Other Business**
No other business was noted.
- 21 **Dates of Next Meeting**
The date of the next SSCC will be scheduled for February 2020, likely for a Wednesday afternoon in either Week 25 or 27. The details will be circulated in due course.

Sam Hopkins
Teaching & Learning Administrator
Department of Mathematics SSCC Secretary
Tel: 020 7679 3939, Ext: 33939, Email: s.hopkins@ucl.ac.uk

Date minutes ready:
27/Nov/2019

Note: the unconfirmed minutes of an SSCC meeting, as approved by the Co-Chairs, should be displayed to all students via a Department webpage, Moodle or any other appropriate method within ten working days of the meeting. These minutes should also be emailed to sscc@ucl.ac.uk within this timeframe for collation by the Students' Union and Academic Services.