UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Department of Computer Science and Technology

Faculty of Computer Science and Technology
Meeting of the Tripos Management Committee

Monday 3 March 2025 at 14:00 via Zoom
https://cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/88043090274?pwd=seHhKNWuN4qn5swCbfbo7sr5jlkS5a.1

Unconfirmed Minutes

Members

Prof Robert Harle (*Chair; Director, undergraduate teaching*) (RKH) ✓
Aidan Bishop (*Undergraduate Teaching Administration*) (AB) ✓
Prof Paula Buttery (*Deputy HoD)* (PB) ✓
Dean Dodds (*Undergraduate Teaching Administration*) (DD) ✓
Lise Gough (*Postgraduate Education Manager*) (LG) X
Dr Tobias Grosser (*Deputy Director, IB undergraduate teaching)* (TG) ✓
Dr Carl Henrik Ek (*Advisor)* (CHE) ✓
Dr Sean Holden (*Chair of Examiners)* (SBH) ✓
Dr Martin Kleppmann (*Deputy Director, Part II undergraduate teaching)* (MK) ✓
Dr Roman Kolcun (*Advisor*) (RK) ✓
Prof Anil Madhavapeddy (*Deputy Director, IA undergraduate teaching*) (AVSM) ✓
Caroline Stewart (*Departmental Secretary)* (CS) ✓
Becky Straw (*Undergraduate Teaching Administration Manager)* (BS) ✓

1	**Apologies for Absence**

2	**Notification of AoB**

MK wished to discuss IB Further Java

AVSM wished to discuss Part II supervisor time guidance.

3	**Approval of the minutes of the meeting of 27 January 2025**

MK wished to correct 4.1, which talked about pushing the cost of training markers and UTOs onto colleges. The action fell to MK, RKH did not believe it was an action, AVSM agreed. This was checked and the action was for MK to incorporate the discussion into a document.

4	**Action from the meeting of 27 January 2025**

Completed actions from the last meeting can be found in the document 'completed TMC actions'
Completed TMC actions

4.1   Part II Projects (copied over from previous meeting):
MK and BS will meet to discuss incorporating some of Jamies proposals such as originality statement **(Action: MK & BS)**.
MK believed the project guidance on the website should be updated as it is currently out of date,

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referring to computing systems which no longer exist. Suggested a template to give students more structure. MK will draft this while discussing with different people from Wednesday and bring it back to TMC **(Action: MK)**.

RKH thanked MK and found this to be comprehensive. There were no objections, so this will move forward, RKH asked for the draft to be cleaned up , the sections on process to be extracted and changes made to the website **(Action: MK)**.

RKH will raise this during the Wednesday meeting **(Action: RKH)**.

SBH objected to removing project checkers as he had previously worked in a department without them which resulted in people doing either too much or too little, felt students were not good at judging what is and is not feasible. Supervisors had vastly different levels of experience which caused problems.

AVSM respectfully disagreed, students were hearing too many voices, Supervisors, UTO Markers, DoSes and Project Checkers.

MK asked if SBH's previous department had the equivalent of UTO Markers, it did not and was marked by the supervisor. MK had proposed a UTO Marker (renamed to Marking Supervisor) who would have the same experience level as the current project checkers and would be expected to take responsibility for the feasibility of the project. MK expected more engagement as the Marking Supervisors would be marking and subject experts rather than randomly assigned as they currently are.

MK asked why SBH was discounting the role of the UTO marker. SBH pointed out that was the same arrangement his previous department had and some people did it well, some did not.

CHE felt it was hard to contribute under the current arrangement as he lacked subject expertise on most of the projects and could only provide very generic feedback.

MK believed there was a risk of a UTO Marker not providing feedback, but the same risk also existed with checkers. Checkers did introduce some redundancy, but in practice this didn't always happen. RKH felt the role of the DoS should not be discounted. Currently most DoSes were not getting involved as they were aware of the checkers and supervisors, however they are in a good position to judge if a student could achieve a project.

AVSM noted this was all unpaid work, one college was refusing to pay one of his PhD students for the hours worked, the student was working an unusual number of hours due to these gateway checks. AVSM supported the idea of guidance on chargeable hours. RKH explained that face to face time with students was chargeable, marking was not. PB noted that Engineering and MML had upper bands on the supervision hours they expected. Colleges would have seen this from other departments but not us.

RKH asked if, with the exception of project checkers, were people happy. No objections. RKH wished to proceed with this but monitor very closely.

RKH and MK will take the matter of supervisions to the DoS forum. **(Action: RKH & MK)**.

4.2   Information Theory feedback: More detailed feedback was sought. This was provided to MK who would read and then speak with RKH, MK wished to also speak with the student rep. **(Action: MK & RKH)**

For RKH's course, students wished to receive notes ahead of lectures, RKH agreed to release last year's notes. The feedback has been addressed and RKH will make some changes next year.

4.3   SBH wished to hold a poll of colleges to see what they think about the feedback box process, RKH was happy to do this. **(Action: RKH)**.

Regarding polling of colleagues, this has not been completed. SBH had polled colleagues at his college and it had universally been considered patronising and SBH considered it offensive. RKH had not encountered anyone else sharing this opinion, but would poll colleagues. **(Action: RKH)**.

AVSM did not find the feedback boxes offensive, but also didn't find them useful or actionable and would prefer written feedback. MK stated that the point was to let us know when courses needed to be prompted for more detailed feedback.

AVSM asked why DoSes were no longer engaged in providing feedback. RKH had never encountered feedback from DoSes, AVSM believed DoSes gave feedback to the college senior tutors.

5   Other matters arising

MK agreed to cover operating systems for Mort's sabbatical.

6   General Teaching Matters

6.1   Examiners report recommendations
Examiners report: Examiners Report.pdf
List of recommendations: Examiners report recommendations 23_24.docx

RKH looked at the examiner's report.

RKH looked at point 3 sabbatical cover and agreed with the proposal. No objections. This proposal will be incorporated into future sabbatical requests. **(Action: BS)**.

Point 4, RKH did not believe this was a TMC matter. CS stated this was part of statutes and ordinances. AVSM wished to combine points 3 and 4. Unsure who was responsible for this, CS mentioned that HR should not share information and we could not request this from HR. AVSM believed there were two different processes. Maternity and paternity leave does not go through CS. CS believed in asking UTOs to be as helpful as possible, asking for TMC to be informed as soon as possible. **(Action: CS)**.

PB wondered about the language, if TMC wasn't approving, then we are just being notified. During a Wednesday meeting people found it unclear who was responsible and believed TMC was. RKH believed that we could not say no to a sabbatical so did not have the ability to approve or reject, but TMC has always asked people to arrange their own cover, with TMC stepping in to arrange cover only when they were unable to. PB spoke about Faculty Board meetings were people incorrectly talked about waiting for approval from TMC.

AVSM's understanding was that we were not approving sabbaticals, we were approving the plan to cover sabbaticals. RKH agreed and this proposal was about looking at examinable components which had not been considered in the past. CS reminded everyone that these were suggestions and we were not obligated to follow.

Point 15, part II modules should have a higher median. RKH was reluctant to change part II marking as it was so delicate. SBH had already encountered an issue with someone returning marks higher than the median. CHE believed there was some scaling on all marks last year.

RKH agreed with MK, could not remember ever writing 'students should achieve more highly on their modules than written papers', did wish to implement this and would push back.

Point 16, 17 and 18 are being discussed as part of the tripos review, although we have been continually trying to do 18 but it is difficult to find the correct mechanism.

AVSM wanted to consider if part II designers should be given some guidance on how to design their modules. RKH stated that if part II modules were discontinued in the next few years, there would be no point creating guidance now. CHE felt the only way to make sense of the problems which keep occurring would be to make the modules pass fail which SBH supported, AVSM felt that since there was no consensus on this, it should be part of tripos review.

Point 19, BS believed allocations were based on prerequisites. SBH noted that one module had an interview which would indicate handpicking. CHE noted the comment referred directly to that course. AVSM and CHE felt interviewing was weird but selecting by prerequisites was fair. CHE was concerned about students gaming the system, intentionally joining a module where others are underperforming knowing that marks would be scaled in their favour. RKH spoke about module convenors who felt that part II students struggled in modules shared with part III students and that interviewing and other methods were needed to select students who could keep up and to weed out others.

AVSM did not like assigning students at random during the student's final year and believed they should be allowed to select their area of focus. SBH suggested not allowing modules to be capped, RKH disagreed as certain modules such as robotics had space, cost and equipment limitations. PB raised the point of Computing Education which involved school placements so could not be uncapped.

MK was happy with random assignment. CHE asked how many modules were oversubscribed. RKH wished to consider this more for the next TMC and for BS to provide statistics on oversubscription and selection methods. **(Action: RKH & BS)**.

RKH asked CHE to provide more information about students gaming the system. CHE said it would be quite anecdotal but would write a few paragraphs. **(Action: CHE)**.

Point 20, CHE disagreed and believed this was effectively already implemented. TMC believes the current system achieves the same goals and should not be implemented.

PB stated that modules were brought in for EDI purposes a few years ago, and asked that with a few years of data could we ascertain if this is true or false and if false should modules be removed. AVSM had checked and found that workloads increased around the same time that modules were introduced, making comparison difficult.

TMC will discuss this further and analyse the data, while also looking at whether there is a link between module grades and dissertation grades. **(Action: TMC)**.

Point 21, bringing the module assessment scheme within the scope of the examiners review process. CHE believed this would be very hard, also some courses are very adaptable. CHE questioned how many months before would examiners need to review. CHE believed some courses would struggle. TMC did not consider this to be practical

SBC mentioned that we are quite anomalous, having one exam committee for IB and II. Would need separate exam committees due to the increased workload. TMC did not consider this to be practical.

Point 22, RKH wished to have Damon's feedback as he had created the current recommendation. AVSM wondered if there needed to be a zero hurdle model. RKH asked CHE to write a response, TMC will consider at the next meeting. **(Action: CHE)**.

Point 24, MK informed us that this had been implemented, although TMC had the ability to approve additional people.

Point 26, considered reasonable and consistent with guidelines.

Point 27, TMC will consider this in the near future. **(Action: TMC)**.

Point 28 MK will complete this in time for the next academic year. **(Action: MK)**.

Point 29, TMC agrees and the proforma should be updated. **(Action: BS)**.

Point 30, MK and BS had discussed several changes regarding making the dissertation anonymous so it can go directly to the examiner without further processing.

Point 31 and 32 fall under the web page overhaul.

Point 34 is part of the tripos review.

Point 35, RKH believed this had been completed. PB mentioned the AI policy had been updated. RKH asked BS to compare the webpage and updated guidance which can be reviewed at the next TMC. **(Action: BS)**.

Point 36, AVSM wished to adjust this from specifically GitHub to anyone in general.

Point 37, RKH wondered if this was a knee jerk reaction, AVSM thought it seemed reasonable. AVSM will write a response for the next TMC. **(Action: AVSM)**.

Point 39 CHE stated this was due to a very specific case. RKH wished for this to be looked at by faculty board. **(Action: CS)**. SBH believed this was a symptom of a wider issue, the university refusing to impose penalties which enabled students to get away with things. CHE believed the first example of plagiarism wasn't considered serious but subsequent ones were, BS and RKH did not believe this was correct and all plagiarism cases were considered serious.

Point 40 for Faculty Board. **(Action: CS)**.

Point 41, according to CS this is no longer relevant as the appeals process is being changed.

Point 47, RKH and BS will review offline. **(Action: RKH & BS)**.

6.2   Part II Modules discussion

Wondered if there were enough modules. BS did not have a complete list yet, FL was not running, but only four students were enrolled. Mobile Health would accept Part II students if necessary. CHE felt it was unlikely that ADS would run. BS believed there would be enough modules if robotics came back, will have more information at the next meeting. **(Action: BS)**.

6.3   Python

Alastair wished to have a python bootcamp at the start of the year. The proposal is to take up the first Thursday to Monday, so three lectures would need to be removed from Foundations OOP and Electronics, unsure of how to remove them from electronics. RKH is discussing this with Ian Wassell, perhaps having some two hour lectures or removing some, no decision has been made yet.

7   **Tripos Review**

8   **Any Other Business**

Further Java had been abandoned for a few years, run as an unassessed self-study course with dated content and using a system setup by Andy Rice which was no longer maintained. MK proposed abolishing the course and incorporating some of the exercises into Concurrent and Distributed Systems as optional work.

RKH explained that TMC had already agreed that Further Java should be rolled into CDS but had not discussed the format. RKH explained a little bit of the history of the courses and how they were intended to interlink.

RKH was worried that some students could get to the end of the degree having avoided any programming. Supervisors should be given guidance that students must complete the programming exercises.

PB noted that since MLRD ticks were moved to supervision work, students aren't doing the work. Out of 130 students only 110 submitted the equivalent of tick 1, 80 submitted tick 2 and 20 submitted tick 3, a significant drop off. MK suggested doing this as supervision work for the first year and if students did not complete the work, change to ticks for the following year. RKH supported this and wondered how the students could be monitored. PB suggested uploading their work to Moodle for supervisors to receive. MK liked chime as it forced students to become familiar with Git. RKH thought that would be a problem, as that system may not be maintained.

RKH polled and this plan was supported. PB noted that supervisors and tickers are paid at a different rate, which would require some thought.

MK wished for a departmental structure to keep track of supervisors. RKH agreed, the current system is broken and needs to be fixed, which is part of the tripos review.

TG volunteered to help with the Python course and wished to incorporating Git. RKH and TG discussed the aims, teaching python well, using git and having a social element. RKH spoke about cribbing from Damon's data science course. TG asked if students had a communications platform, RKH believed they had multiple channels, discord, WhatsApp and so on suggested a more official channel. RKH was keen to introduce some form of code review.

Date of next meeting: 29 April 2pm