



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

Monday 30 June 2025 at 14:00 via Zoom

<https://cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/82916367398?pwd=ygnctnjOKbujNN8QvSaGPdeluv4GpB.1>

Unconfirmed Minutes

Members

Prof Robert Harle (*Chair; Director, undergraduate teaching*) (RKH) ✓
Aidan Bishop (*Undergraduate Teaching Administration*) (AB) ✓
Prof Paula Buttery (*Deputy HoD*) (PB) X
Dean Dodds (*Undergraduate Teaching Administration*) (DD) ✓
Lise Gough (*Postgraduate Education Manager*) (LG) X
Dr Tobias Grosser (*Deputy Director, IB undergraduate teaching*) (TG) X
Dr Carl Henrik Ek (*Advisor*) (CHE) X
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

PB emailed to inform us that she would join late.

2 Notification of AoB

None.

3 Approval of the minutes of the meeting of 29 April 2025

No objections.

4 Action from the meeting of 29 April 2025

Completed actions from the last meeting can be found in the document 'completed TMC actions'
[Completed TMC actions](#)

4.1 [Examiners report recommendations 23_24.docx](#)

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 and MK will take the matter of Part II project supervision payment guidance to the DoS forum. **(Action: RKH & MH).**

Outstanding

4.2 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)**.

Waiting on CHE.

4.3 Point 22, RKH wished to have Damon's feedback re target median 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)**.

Waiting on CHE.

AVSM had discussed this with CHE, was wondering if pre-moderated spreadsheets were available for the current year to check the zero hurdle model, as students did not answer some parts of questions, which skews the data. SBH informed him that this spreadsheet did not exist. AVSM believed this could be completed with the raw marksheets.

SBH wasn't sure what would be learned from this. AVSM believed it would show the quality of our statistics. SBH informed AVSM that exam marks were not scaled, written exams marked towards a target median. Most markers are now aware of this median. SBH had discussed this with the external ensuring questions are well prepared as scaling exam questions was a difficult rabbit hole to go down.

AVSM believed the way things currently function to be fine.

TMC happy to continue with the target median.

4.4 Point 27, A faculty discussion should take place to decide the appropriate scope of a Part II Project, with respect to working style and technical content. The TMC will discuss this in the near future. **(Action: TMC)**

RKH did not believe this needed to be discussed today.

4.5 Point 37, Simplify late coursework penalties to 10 marks (or 10 marks per day.) 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)**.

AVSM outlined the current formula, noting that project penalties differ. RKH requested clarification to remove ambiguity and wondered if one formula should be applied to all submissions.

SBH explained that projects incur a 25% penalty initially, followed by smaller deductions. This system has been in place for 20 years.

RKH questioned its fairness, suggesting students might delay submission to improve their work. MK supported a unified formula to reduce confusion.

SBH noted that due to grade inflation, many students could absorb a 25% penalty without affecting their rank. Minor delays (under 10 minutes) were generally excused, and only a few penalties were issued this year. One student submitted 29 days late and received a significant penalty.

AVSM proposed a one-week cutoff, but SBH disagreed, citing regulations that allow submissions until the end of term. AVSM expressed concern about this arrangement.

RKH asked whether a single rule should apply to both coursework and projects. MK and others agreed; ticks would remain under their separate 10-mark penalty system.

SBH opposed changing the dissertation formula. RKH asked if the same rule could apply to modules. SBH noted it would be unfair for markers to wait until term's end. MK suggested a practical cutoff: after 30 days, the mark would be zero.

AVSM asked whether this applied to MPhil or Part III; RKH clarified they are separate. SBH felt the current formula was simple. MK proposed a slight modification.

SBH questioned the need for changes, citing examiner recommendations. RKH argued for consistency. AVSM suggested clearly stating that work submitted more than 30 days late would not be marked.

RKH argued that a unified formula would still be simple and could prevent future loopholes. SBH described a case where a student submitted improved work after the deadline and was penalised, though they hadn't intended to game the system.

RKH saw this as a loophole. SBH proposed restricting submission times. SBH questioned the focus on consistency; RKH felt inconsistency caused confusion for both students and staff.

AVSM asked if the formula should be publicised; RKH and MK agreed transparency was important.

AVSM asked BS if tracking late submissions was difficult; BS confirmed it was already tracked.

The committee voted to retain the traditional dissertation formula.

CS asked if this required a regulation change; RKH and AVSM said no, and it wouldn't need faculty board approval.

The marking and classing document and all relevant webpages will be updated.

Action: BS

SBH suggested a maximum value (N) for penalties. MK proposed that after 30 days, marks should default to zero.

5 Other matters arising

RKH did not believe anything had arisen.

6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

New standing item

SBH had noticed that women were slightly overrepresented in the first and under represented in the 2:1s and 2:2s, overrepresented in thirds for part IB but not in part II. There seemed to be an uplift in terms of women. SBH did not believe this required further investigation as these were all blind marked.

7 General Teaching Matters

7.1 Exam summary

SBH thanked everyone involved in administering the exam and the external examiner. SBH criticised the university for not allowing the external examiner to hire a car and come in person

due to sustainability rules, the examiner had to work remotely. RKH asked if this could have been paid for by the department. SBH has raised this question with Alastair and Andrew will raise it further. AVSM believed the sustainability rules were good, but were mainly for flying and could be overridden on a case by case basis.

SBH spoke about the exams office lacking treasury tags causing multiple questions to be bundled together, needing to be manually separated later and causing additional work for us. Exams office also mishandled one of the corrections.

People marking modules had ignored requests to mark to a specific median. SBH had given them a choice, to either regrade to the median based on their expertise, or it would be scaled, all but two chose to regrade. This was a problem for comparability.

RKH agreed and wished to follow up with the lecturers who ignored the department's policy, this will be done in the examiners report.

SBH believed the same problems were occurring with dissertations, not following the marking guidance resulting in vastly inflated marks, requiring moderation.

SBH believed appropriate content for a dissertation would need to be made explicit, some were overinflated and students achieved high marks for little work. MK will draft a document to clarify this **(Action: MK)**. AVSM believed showing students exemplary dissertations would be useful. RKH explained that we couldn't publicise the final marks for the work, wondered how much would be revealed by highlighting good and poor examples. AVSM believed we would need to create our own 'bad' examples. MK agreed, but did not think we would need a complete 'bad' example dissertation, simply highlights.

SBH spoke about making it clear that UTO markers must mark. Many UTO makers hadn't marked the dissertation and had their PhD students do the work for them. SBH wished to be much firmer and explain to UTOs that it was their job. RKH asked how this was discovered, SBH explained that during moderation, UTOs admitted they had not marked the piece. AVSM found this unacceptable. RKH, MK and SBH will discuss offline who these people were, compile a list and discuss this with them. **(Action: RKH, MK & SBH)**.

AVSN suggested a pro-forma coversheet which the marker would need to sign. RKH felt this was infantilising, but if it worked he supported the idea.

SBH explained that when students answer more than five exam questions, only the best five are accepted, SBH believed this was unofficial and needed to be codified. RKH explained that this had been codified.

Vivas were conducted, one student had an extremely low mark and after the viva that was considered deserved. The three highest graded dissertations were considered deserved after the viva. Two were selected at random, high sixties and following the viva felt that the students were not as good as expected. Chosen at random so students are aware that unexpected vivas could be a possibility and to discourage the use of ChatGPT.

SBH felt grades had gone up over the years partly due to changes to university rules regarding the percentages required. SBH felt standards had been relaxed, did not believe we should do this and that we should maintain standards. SBH felt that module convenors were biased towards their own students and marking overly favourably.

One of AVSM's students was ranked in the 90s. AVSM had spent time thinking about why, believed this student was exceptional. Believed middle band students had also improved. SBH spoke about his previous experience as examiner ten years prior, believed there was a difference between then and now. MK believed that if students performed well they should be rewarded

and did not believe we should try and discourage this. SBH clarified the problem was moderating down.

AVSM suggested stack ranking and not looking at absolute numbers.

AVSM asked if handwriting was a problem, SBH agreed, believed this was the first year a scribe was required to translate illegible work. One piece also had two different styles of handwriting, which is apparently not unusual. SBH believed that in time sanitised computers would be needed. AVSM had seen this attempted and assistant programs such as Grammarly were still being used on those laptops even though they were supposed to be inaccessible.

7.2 Python Bootcamp

Intention is to run this at the start this next term. RKH will circulate a document in the next week or so. Appears to be feasible, can use centralised tooling and not university tooling, github classroom seems well suited. A series of sessions and mini challenges where students can write some substantial code and anonymous code review for other students. RKH believed this would be an interesting bootcamp, AVSM and others will help.

AVSM had spoken to people who wondered, if they are already familiar with python could they get a head start on foundations. RKH did not wish to do that, wished for everyone to participate to feel like a cohort, rather than more experienced people isolating themselves. Those who are more experienced could help others and mentor. Even if students were familiar with python, RKH did not believe they would be familiar with more technical things such as code submission.

AVSM was worried about being dependent on github classroom. RKH did not believe it was likely to be replaced, but felt that even if classroom became unavailable, could be replaced and git would still be available.

7.3 IB Group Project decision

RKH believed a lot of good points had been made, complex and we have run out of time. Did not feel this was the right year to attempt to make a change.

MK asked if this would be easier in future years, RKH believed it would as other changes would be made.

7.4 Feedback (to be circulated shortly)

Very small number of responses across the board.

IA:

Software and Security, students enjoyed the lectures but felt it was unfocused. RKH was not surprised by this feedback.

Interaction Design, mixed feedback, people unsure of what they were doing.

Intro to Probability, mixed feedback which was unusual for this course. Based on the small number of responses, unsure if anything can be made of this.

AVSM was concerned about the number of non-UTO lecturers, Algorithms differing from syllabus and rumours of Churchill only supervision sheets. RKH wished to hear more. **(Action: AVSM & RKH).**

IB:

Artificial Intelligence, only one person responded.

Complexity Theory, no responses.

RKH to discuss feedback with some lecturers (**Action: RKH**).

Formal Models, no responses.

II:

Business Studies, no action required.

AVSM recommended reading William Henderson's feedback.

7.5 Module update

BS included the analysis page (which contained inaccuracies due to multiple responses, but gave an approximate idea).

NLP was popular. BS had not looked at boundaries in detail, but believed everything was fine.

All looked even. No complaints had been received.

7.6 Hoare Logic not running

RKH explained that this course was popular as it has a reputation as a good exam topic among students. Had trouble finding someone to teach this, had used a Postdoc who was no longer willing and no one else was keen to pick up. Proposing dropping this course for next year but likely that it would return in the future.

No objections and no volunteers to teach Hoare Logic. Not running next year.

7.7 Teaching support requests

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sx0B32aN2gRQICG2pPk-ZFQByXp4CNIRyu7LGlg0Klk/edit?gid=1420860500#gid=1420860500>

Looked at the current requests, not many and all looked reasonable according to RKH.

AVSM looked at the covering lecturer for Business Studies, felt this was different than requesting help. According to RKH this was just for backup, was happy with TAing and covering one lecture, asked BS to speak with the person who requested this. (**Action: BS**).

7.8 Software and Security Engineering

MK believed the course was in a sad state. The course was taken over by multiple lecturers following the death of Ross Anderson with no one taking ownership of the course. Student feedback was not bad but felt the course was disjointed. MK found some of the course material to be outdated and wrong. MK believed the course needed some attention with one or two people taking ownership.

RKH explained there were criticisms of this course even when Ross Anderson was running it, regarding the course containing both Cybersecurity and Software Engineering, could and should be covered in the Security courses such as Cybersecurity and Cryptography. Only Ross was in favour of this, the rest of the security group were opposed. If security was removed, this would not be an eight part course, similar feedback in the tripos review. RKH believed the python

bootcamp would also remove one lectures worth of material, leaving only four. AVSM wished to integrate the software engineering into Foundations. RKH believed in a few years this course would be dissolved into others. Unsure what to do in the meantime. MK wished to ensure key elements were not lost when dissolving into other courses, liked the focus on the human element rather than the more technical Cybersecurity. RKH wondered if this was appropriate in IA as the students may not have enough experience to understand yet. MK felt it was important to get students thinking about the human side early on, AVSM agreed. AVSM suggested adding AB testing and guest lectures to Cloud Computing. AVSM volunteered to write a proposal during his sabbatical. **(Action: AVSM).**

RKH wished to focus on next year for the meantime before making major changes. MK was happy to update lecture materials.

MK, RKH and BS were given authority by RK, CS and SBH to decide what to do, as the decision may need to be made quickly without much time for discussion. They will meet to discuss this. **(Action: MK, BS and RKH).**

7.9 Further Java

MK proposed dropping the course as it had been unmaintained, the platform it ran on had not been maintained and it had not been examinable for several years. MK wished to fold some of this course into CDS but would also like to change it significantly.

RKH was worried because Java was still an important language in the real world, IA Java was not enough. Understood that quite a few students completed the course despite not being examinable. MK did not believe the material taught was significant, but RKH drew attention to concurrency. MK felt writing this in Java was painful and wished to use another language.

This would not be completed in time for next year, RKH was concerned about this gap, wondered if this would be run as an optional course again. If this was done, it would need to be moved from chime for one year according to MK.

RKH was worried about a graduating cohort who had never learned multithreaded programming. MK offered to add questions about this into CDS and to show example materials.

RKH asked how many people have taken the optional course, MK did not know.

MK and RKH will discuss offline, with the default being to not run this course. **(Action: MK & RKH).**

8 Tripos Review

Nothing to report, most had been discussed under the python bootcamp.

9 Any Other Business

None

Date of next meeting: TBC