

Annual Report of the Teaching Committee 2017–2018

1. The Teaching Committee is required by its terms of reference to provide an annual report to the Faculty Board.

2. The members of the Teaching Committee this academic year have been

Lorna Ayton	Nilanjana Datta	*Oscar Donlan	Berry Groisman
Richard Jozsa	Henrik Latter (L)	*George Robinson	Michael Tehranchi (ME)
Henry Wilton	András Zsák	Jonathan Evans	John Lister (Chair)

* Student members

Expressions of interest for the vacant student position were sought via an e-mail to all upcoming Part IB students before the start of the year, and the new representative was appointed from a field of 14 on the basis of the applications and comments from Directors of Studies.

3. The Teaching Committee met a total of 5 times in the academic year 2017/18, and dealt with some items by circulation. As usual, the major item on the agenda was the review of the undergraduate Tripos examinations, but other items have also needed attention.

We provided a detailed report on the undergraduate examinations to the Faculty Board based on reports of the Examiners and the External Examiners, on examination statistics and the actual questions, and on the information from the e-mail questionnaires. This report was considered by the Board at its November meeting, having previously been received by the meeting of Directors of Studies, and was used as the basis of the Faculty Board's response to the General Board's Education Committee. Agreed recommendations were transmitted to this year's Examiners, and the guidance to lecturers on question-setting in Part II was strengthened. The full report on examinations is available online.

4. We reported on the National Student Survey findings and in general on other forms of feedback. The NSS showed a significant drop in overall student satisfaction, which was not mirrored in our own internal feedback. Many of the NSS scores were highly discrepant relative to previous years. We concluded that the most plausible causes were the circumstances around the 2017 survey created both by the NUS boycott and by media coverage about possible student fee increases under TEF.

5. We provided a report to Heads of Department (and to the Director of the Statslab) on the teaching of their departments, based on the paper and on-line questionnaires. A small number of courses/lecturers were referred to the Heads of Department for possible action. In general, the feedback from students was very positive and we drew attention to 14 courses where the feedback was outstanding.

In this year's report we drew the attention of the Heads of Department to a total of 6 courses (out of 62) where the feedback was negative: in some cases the lecturer is no longer lecturing and no action was necessary; in others we took action ourselves as well as alerting the HoDs.

6. A new C course was introduced in Part II on Quantum Information and Computation and appears to have been received well. The lecturer, Prof Jozsa, coordinated provision of supervisory capacity in this specialist new area, which in the event proved more than sufficient.

By contrast, an unexpected 50% increase in the demand for supervisions of some Part II Applicable courses caused considerable difficulties. It is not clear how much was due to last year's IB exams and how much to a significant shift in student behaviour in an evolving job market.

7. The arrangements by which the new Director of Undergraduate Education and the Chair of the Teaching Committee work together, with complementary but overlapping roles, appear to both parties to be working smoothly in this their first year of operation. We suggest a brief review this summer.

8. A major headache throughout the year has been the availability of suitable lecture theatres for Parts IA and IB. This year's central allocation was initially unsuitable and would, for example, have involved students having to change sites for the middle lecture of three. Next year's demolition of the Cockcroft threatened to displace Part IA to Lady Mitchell Hall. After lengthy negotiations, it appears that we have secured slots in the Babbage instead for next year, but longer term plans by the University remain a concern.
9. In addition, members of the Teaching Committee were involved in various miscellaneous activities (for some of which the Board has received an independent report), including:
 - Attending early lectures of all new lecturers and some other lecturers, and discussing their lecturing;
 - Monitoring electronic student feedback on the Feedback line and in second-week questionnaires;
 - Advising on the choice of lecturers;
 - Advising on the timetable for lectures;
 - Preparation for, and participation in, the Learning and Teaching Review
 - Email communication to students regarding course information;
 - Induction session for first year students;
 - Induction sessions for second and third year students;
 - Examination briefing session for Part IA students;
 - Supervisor training sessions.

John Lister
May 11, 2018