# Nine Colleges Challenge II
## Intercollegiate University Challenge

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# Contents

# 1 "Your starter for ten..."

*University Challenge* is a long-running BBC quiz show that pits teams from various U.K. universities against each other in a battle of the trivia. The Nine Colleges Challenge is a year-long series of intercollegiate competitions, currently in its sophomore year, focusing on encouraging participation in the collegiate system via providing opportunities for those less-served by the more traditional, sporty fare.

One of these competitions, running over Michaelmas and Lent terms, is the Intercollegiate University Challenge, based on the aforementioned quiz show. Having recently wrapped up the final with a last-minute Cartmellian win, we are producing a report on our experiences interning the competition.

# 2 A Tale of Two Interns: A report on what happened in 2016/17

With only the two of us interns, plus some staff assistance, we had to effectively divide up our resources. We divided the task into the following sections:

## 2.1 Tournament Organisation

Before Pietro joined the team, the tournament structure was worked out between Ben and Mary Smyth. In a break from the freshman year of the Challenge, in which Grad were held back to be faced by whichever team made it through to the final, this year we had decided on having all nine colleges (presuming all nine produced teams) duke it out in the qualifiers.

This of course required working out how to pit nine teams against each other to produce four winners. The nine teams were randomly allocated[1] into groups of three. Each team would play each other team across the Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the qualifier week, with three games going on concurrently on each day. If a college outright won their group, they would progress to the semi-finals. If there was a two-way tie on wins within a group, the college with the most cumulative points across their two games would go through. The fourth place in the semi-finals would go to the remaining college with the most overall cumulative points.

Ultimately, we had three outright winners and the overall highest-earning college go through–Cartmel, Bowland & Pendle, plus Furness.

## 2.2 Teams

Ben was responsible for liaising with the assigned contacts for each college to ensure that they a) produced a team each and b) that said team then attended each round they were in. One issue he had was getting responses–the Cartmel College Manager eventually took over the running of their team due to no reply from the assigned JCR contact. Therefore, CCing in the College Managers[2] to all correspondence is a safe bet.

Some teams also showed more dedication than others, but luckily no games had to be forfeited due to no-shows. Cartmel played a man down for one of their qualifiers, but that was it. We had originally implemented strict rules against substitutions, but these were dropped almost immediately when we realised how unworkable it would have made things.

## 2.3 Question-setting

Pietro handled most of the question-setting for the qualifiers, and then both Ben and Pietro divided up the job for the semi-finals and final. A major purpose of the Intercollegiate University Challenge is to involve staff members in the collegiate experience at Lancaster University, and we achieved this through soliciting them to write questions for us in order to supplement those from our other sources.[3]

Due to the *University Challenge* format, academics were advised to write questions in batches of four–one starter

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[1] Teams were allocated using `random.org` to avoid any suggestion of bias
[2] `CollegeAdministrators@exchange.lancs.ac.uk`
[3] Those we wrote ourselves, those from *The University Challenge Quiz Book* (Steve Tribe), those from online, etc.

question, and then three related bonus questions on a separate topic. Many stuck to this, but not all, but all question submissions were well regarded.

Pietro first tried to contact a range of academic departments across the full spectrum of the university–STEM, humanities, the arts, etc. Email proved the most effective means of contacting academics, and those academics who were involved in the challenge's freshman year (see Appendix **??**) were far and away more likely to respond to the request. Less-targeted emails to the Departmental Officers asking them to forward the request onto interested staff yielded fewer results. However, with regard to getting new academics involved, contacting the organisers of the staff quiz competition unsurprisingly proved a big success.

Pietro also had success in contacting quiz societies from other U.K. universities, including Oxford and Edinburgh. Helpful information regarding where to purchase buzzers, good question sources and tips for running the actual round were much appreciated.

Each round had 20 sets of questions, with 5 extra starters–these were to be asked until the game time elapsed reached 30 minutes, and if answered correctly would give the team a chance to answer a set of bonus questions that had been skipped over earlier due to an incorrectly-answered starter. This proved very useful–the final game down to 3 or 4 of these, the last being asked at 29:58.

## 2.4 Question Review

Question review was undertaken by both Ben and Pietro, as well as a subset of the question-setting academics who volunteered to help. A number of mistakes, both major and minor, were flagged up in this process, so it's definitely not one you want to skip–the most last-minute was delivered minutes before the start of the final, and probably avoided a scuffle further down the line.

## 2.5 Question Mastering

Pietro again handled the recruitment of question masters (QMs). Originally, the plan was to have an academic QM each of the 12 games (which would require a minimum of 6 QMs). Even with withdrawal of one of the semi-finals' original QMs, this was achieved. In the future, having a list of reserves would be a good idea. QMs were also utilised in question reviewing via sending them their QM sheets a few days in advance to give them a chance to 'familiarise themselves with the questions'. This, again, revealed a couple mistakes that the other reviewers had missed.

## 2.6 Marketing

Ben also handled the marketing side of this. Prior to and during the competition, this meant getting the word out about the competition to encourage team applications and bout audience attendance–*Squeak* and *MyLancaster* were both easy enough to get plugs into. From Ben's prior experience as Media & Comms Officer for Pendle JCR Exec., he considered physical postering to be a waste of effort compared to the results it tended to give, but College Managers were asked to put mentions of the competition into their college newsletters–though able to speak only for Pendle, this seemed to be quite successful.

After the final, Mary Smyth handled the staff press release in *LUText*, whilst Ben again handled dissemination of the result through *Squeak* and *MyLancaster*.

Possible future suggestions for improvement would include perhaps making a website–or at least a Facebook page– for the Nine Colleges Challenge, as well as perhaps tying in with other student media such as *SCAN* and *LA1:TV* for promotion. Perhaps postering has been unfairly disregarded–by all means, utilise it if you think it'll be worth it.

As an aside, Cartmel JCR Exec. decided of their own volition to livestream the final. There were "just shy of 400 unique viewers on the night, watching anything from a few minutes to the whole thing..." plus "15+ people watching at all times, with a high of 26". A week or two after the final, over 1,200 people had watched the video.

## 2.7    Running the Rounds

For the qualifiers, with three concurrent games on at any one time, a third assistant was needed to ensure that someone was keeping an eye (and the time) in each game. For the Friday, Ben was unavailable. As a result of this, he recruited two friends to help out on the Monday and Wednesday, respectively–this ensured that when both assisted Pietro for the Friday games, each had prior experience. They were paid an equivalent rate to that of the interns, and did a stellar job.

For the remaining games, Pietro and Ben handled the running. For the final, Pietro was chosen to be the assistant due to Ben being in Pendle College (who were in the final)–Ben instead borrowed a camera from Pendle JCR Exec. and set about taking pictures.

Ben and Pietro would arrive around about an hour before each game to set up the rooms–two sets of four tables and chairs each arranged in a shallow 'V' shape around the two tables for the QM and the assistant to site at. The chairs immediately surrounding the QM and assistant were moved to head off accusations that anybody in the audience could be reading questions from over their shoulders and assisting the teams, and from the semi-finals onwards tables were decorated with both player names and college flags kindly donated by Cartmel College's College Manager (and apparently bought for last year's Challenge).

The scorekeeping sheets were redesigned during each day of qualifiers to be more efficient and easy-to-use, producing the final version that allowed for real-time scores to be read out without calculation at the round half-way point.

Ultimately, running the actual events went pretty smoothly–all except for one aspect...

### 2.7.1    On Buzzers and Buzzerless Games

Buzzers, however, were the bane of Ben and Pietro's life. In the year previous, two sets of buzzers were bought: one for the Nine Colleges Challenge itself, and one for LUSU.

In short: after asking LUSU for their set of buzzers way back when in September/November 2016 and being told they were on the hunt for them, nobody was apparently sent to look until, er, January 2017 (a.k.a. long after the qualifiers were over).

Thankfully still in time for the semi-finals on the 1st February, we were told that they had been found and that we need merely come into the LUSU office and pick them up. Alas, we were then helpfully informed at 10am on that very 1st that they had not been found after all. This being the day of the semi-finals, and thus the last time we would need more than one set of buzzers, we were not best pleased.

A saying was thus that day established: 'a buzzer in the hand is worth two in LUSU's offices'. We would **strongly** recommend that you don't hand over our buzzers to them in the future.

However, any number of other reasons could occur that leave you having to run a buzzerless game (we lost a buzzer down the back of a sofa at one point). We found the best and fairest way to do so was to randomly decide which game(s) would be buzzerless, and then stick the assistant for that game in the centre-back of the audience, rather than beside the QM. For starters, stare directly at the spot between both teams/over the QM's head–your peripheral vision is more sensitive to movement, and so you will stand a much better chance at determining split-second-faster hand-raises. It was important that the assistant go forward with their initial decision, even if they later questioned it, as being perceived to have reversed their own judgement after protest would just open the doors for further disputes. Alternatively, they could defer to the QM to tiebreak, or to move on and ask a new question.

# 3 How to Set Up an Intercollegiate University Challenge for Dummies

1. **IMPORTANT: Purchase as many sets of buzzers as you need until you have 3**

2. **EVEN MORE IMPORTANT: Do not let them go anywhere near LUSU**

3. Decide on tournament structure

   - In our opinion, the three-group, round-robin, two-qualifiers-played-each setup worked better than last year's setup in which Grad were held back for the final.

4. Send out requests for teams to JCR contacts

   - CC in the college administrators—they can put you in their college newsletters too
   - Consider plugs in *Squeak* and *MyLancaster*
   - We gave about a 4wk deadline, which seemed to work well

5. Book rooms

   - It's better to book more than you need and cancel later than to leave this too late and not be able to book a good space
   - George Fox LT1 is good for the final due to the amphitheatre-style seating—it would likely be too big for the crowds the qualifiers and semi-finals draw though

6. Solicit questions from academics

   - Start with the ones who have helped previously
   - Also email departmental officers
   - If you know any academics personally, by all means approach them
   - Ask any who respond if they'd be willing to play QM as well
   - You can also contact other university's quiz societies for tips

7. Aim to have the first draft of questions finished the week before any match

   - This allows you to review the questions, spot errors (remember, this kind of event attracts a rather pedantic sort)

8. Get marketing out there prior to each match (*Squeak*, *MyLancaster*, college newsletters)

   - Audiences were quite small for the earlier qualifiers, but grew to healthy numbers around the semi-finals. This may have been due to the fairly niche nature of the event, or perhaps there's some marketing silver bullet that we missed
   - Live-streaming, certainly for the final but perhaps also for the semi-finals, worked really well and had a really good response
   - We only had a photographer for the final—consider photography for more rounds, as it will give you pics to go into marketing posts

9. Give yourself an hour prior to the match for printing off, setting up chairs, etc.

10. And another after for clearing up

11. Make sure you have the trophy before the final starts

12. Invite the academics that have helped throughout to the final

13. Live-streaming, certainly for the final but perhaps also for the semi-finals, worked really well and had a really good response

# 4    Acknowledgements

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On top of that, a big thanks to the teams from every college for competing and to their organisers for running around trying to keep track of them all. There wouldn't have been much of a competition without you guys.