

Minutes of the biannual meeting of the Directors of Studies in Mathematics

Held Tuesday 11 May 2010 at 11:00 PM in the Music Room, Downing College

Present: Adriana Pesci (DOW, chairwoman), Stephen Siklos (Je), Richard Samworth (JN), Orsola Rath Spivack (LC), Peter O'Donnell (St Edmond's), András Zsák (P), Jonathan Evans (CAI), Jan Saxl (CAI), Tadashi Tokieda (TH), Berry Groisman (SID), Vladimir Dokchitser (EM), Sophia DeMoulini (Dow) Jim McElwaine (CTH), Vicky Neale (Murray Edwards (NH)), Stuart Martin (M), Christopher Tout (CHU), Maciej Dunajski (Clare), Mark Spivack (EM and HH), Christopher Brooks (CC) Hugh Osborn (T), John Lister (T), Ruth Williams (G), Julia Gog (Q), Julius Ross (SID), Robert Hunt (CHR), Jack Button (SE), Rachel Camina (F), Simon Wadsley (H), and Nilanjana Datta (PEM). Also present was Prof. Thomas Körner who attended in his role as chairman of the Faculty Board.

1. **Apologies** Apologies for absence were received from the following Directors of Studies: Irena Borzym(CTH), Annamaria Sinkovics (N), and Matthias Dörrzapf (JN).

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes were accepted and signed.

3. Matters Arising

Item 9 of the previous minutes, relating to taking applicants from the winter pool without interviews was referred to. The chairwoman explained that no one had requested a discussion, and the convenor of the pool meeting reported that some Colleges had taken good applicants from the pool for interviews without having been ...

4. Tripos matters: Parts IA, IB and II

(a) National Student Survey 2009.

The Directors of Studies did not receive the papers from the FB in time for the meeting. The discussion was postponed until the next meeting.

Action: The Chairman of the FB agreed to provide this information for the next DOS meeting.

(b) Prize for best performance on Part II of the Mathematical Tripos.

The FB requested comments from the DOSs.

There were similar concerns to those voiced in FB meetings, namely (i) that the Prize would encourage studying for the exam and thus students would choose courses which they perceive as increasing their chances of winning rather than choosing courses which are of genuine interest, and (ii) that the name of the Prize was not appropriate. The latter objection had general support. The suggestion was made that the Prize was, by default, split three ways between the three top students.

Two votes were taken on two options:

Option I: The Prize will be, by default, split three ways and will have a different name which does not include the donor party.

result: 16 on favour and 6 against

Option II: The Prize will be split only in cases when the top students are ranked very close together, and the name of the Prize will not include the name of the donor.

result: 11 on favour and 8 against the remainder abstained.

Action: The chairman of the FB agreed to convey this information to the FB in its next meeting. The DOSs representative on the FB, if necessary, will go over the matter in detail during the next FB meeting.

- (c) The directors of studies were informed of the changes to be introduced in the courses of Part II.

There was also a discussion on the matter of extending 16 hour courses to 24 hours. There were many objections to such changes in general. The main arguments against it were: (i) that this kind of extension produces considerable, and unnecessary, overlap between courses in Parts II and III; (ii) that it is important to preserve a variety of courses, and since the 24 hour courses tend to be harder and more involved, the progressive elimination of 16 hour courses would leave weaker students without choices; and (iii) it would allow students to concentrate on a narrow selection of courses; the only argument in favour was that there may be an occasional need to re-design a course which is dysfunctional and the extension from 16 to 24 hours should not be completely ruled out.

It was agreed that we should inform the FB that the DOSs oppose changes from 16 hour courses into 24 hour courses, unless it is absolutely necessary, and the change is proposed well in advance so that all parties involved have a chance to voice their opinions.

Action: DOS representative will inform the FB that by consensus the DOSs oppose the increase of hours in the Part II courses unless such change is proven to be absolutely necessary.

- (d) The DOSs were informed of the actions taken by the FB with regards to the course Variational Principles.
- (e) The DOSs were informed of the minor changes introduced in the Part IA courses Dynamics and Relativity, and Differential Equations.
- (f) On the issue of the distribution of the previous years' papers to the students at the beginning of the academic year, it was agreed that this practice will only continue for the incoming Part IA students. Papers for Parts IB and II can conveniently be downloaded from the Faculty web site. It was also agreed to request that the papers are posted as promptly as possible on the web, if possible with the errors and typos corrected. Finally, it was pointed out that the 2009 papers on the Faculty web site were in a new unsatisfactory format.

Action: Dr Siklos agreed to discuss there matters with the appropriate person.

- (g) The report on the MIT Exchange Programme was discussed very briefly, and the DOSs were informed that the future of the Programme was in doubt due to the lack of funding and also to the lack of success of some of the students who participate in it.

- (h) The discussion on the new arrangements for the announcement of Tripos results centred on two main issues: Part III students will know their results the day before discussion about PhD places could take place; and how to deal with the obligations of Tutors and DOSs with regards to students who either fail the examinations or performed at a lower level than expected given that the students will be aware of their result before the Colleges and this will not allow Colleges to act as swiftly as it would be desirable. Given that the changes were a consequence of the students asking for the change to the University and that the University agreed to the change, it is clear that nothing can be done right away to undo the change. It was stated that it is already in the guide to chairs of examiners the they contact the tutor of any candidate who has not passed in advance of the results being made public. Examination results will be sent at about the same time as they are sent to the candidates. There was also a request that the readers of the list in the Senate House will follow the accepted guidelines.

Action: DOS representative in FB will inform the FB of the request for guidelines for examiners.

5. Tripos matters: Part III

- (a) The FB representative announced that the Senior Tutors had agreed in their meeting that the responsibility for the Part III course internal admissions should be assumed by the Faculty of Mathematics through the Faculty Board.

The DOSs were most displeased about these new developments. The main arguments against this new policy are: (i) Different Colleges have very different admission policies for Part III, this new approach to admissions will foster uniformity in a negative fashion. (ii) Since the students who did not rank first in Part II may have to go through an appeal process, they will not know if they can proceed to Part III until after graduation day. Not to mention the added stress of the waiting period. (iii) When the performance in Part III of students coming from within Cambridge is compared with that of students coming from outside Cambridge the data show that the average performance of students from within is above average of the total. If stiffer rules of continuation to Part III are adopted this distortion will be emphasised. Moreover, many students who would have been admitted under the present rules, and who would perform well might opt to go to other Universities to avoid the wait and penury caused by the waiting and the appeal process. (iv) Colleges with very stiff Part III progression policies would have to accept students who would have been rejected, making it possible for a Department (Mathematics in this case) to impinge on the internal affairs of a College.

After these objections were discussed the DOSs unanimously supported writing a letter to the Senior Tutors voicing their concerns in the strongest possible terms.

Summary of the position of the DoSs:

The Directors of Studies voted unanimously in November that they believed admission to Part III of students currently taking Part II Mathematics should remain under control of the College subject to a new Faculty Board guideline that students should be of First Class or First Class potential.

In a meeting on May 11 the Directors of Studies confirmed that this is still their belief, notwithstanding the recent pressure brought to bear on the Faculty Board by the General Board and the Senior Tutors' Committee.

None of the Directors of Studies present recalled being consulted by the Senior Tutor of their own College. The Directors of Studies were also not consulted by Faculty Board before the Faculty Board agreed to accede to the pressure placed upon it.

The Directors of Studies note that progression from Part II to Part III is not covered by the OIA ruling regarding MPhil to PhD transition. Neither is progression from Part II to Part III in Mathematics the same as progression from Part II to Part III in other Triposes: in other Triposes Part III was set up recently as the final year of a four-year degree, with a relatively low hurdle such as a 2.1 or even a 2.2 for automatic progression; Part III Mathematics has a much longer history, and none of the class boundaries are appropriate as hurdle for automatic progression, owing to the unique and demanding character of the course.

The Directors of Studies note that decisions such undergraduate admission and change of course are regulated by the Colleges, and the personal involvement of Directors of Studies who have knowledge of the student concerned is a very important strength of the Cambridge Collegiate system. They believe it would be in the best interests of both the student and the College for progression to Part III Mathematics to continue to be the responsibility of the College, where the relevant Director of Studies is best placed to assess the case from their personal knowledge of the student. The need for an appeals process to satisfy the OIA should be satisfied by an appeals process within the College, which should be present for other purposes.

Action: The DOS representative in FB will write and circulate a draft of the letter, and after this process is finished the representative will send the letter to the Senior Tutors.

On this same issue the representative of the FB explained that the situation is such that since a repeal of the decisions taken by the Senior Tutors is very unlikely, and the FB will have to take on the progression to Part III decisions by Fall next year, it was very important that the DOSs gave their opinion on the matter. Thus there was a vote on the three possible options for progression proposed by the FB: proposal (A) All students who fail to get a First in Part II Mathematics and who wish to do Part III need to submit a request to the 'Admissions Committee', proposal (B) Certain students who fail to get a First in Part II Mathematics but who fulfil certain other criteria announced in advance will be allowed to do Part III. The remainder need to submit a request to the 'Admissions Committee'. Within (B) there were two distinct options: (B1) 'a First in Part II Mathematics or who appears in the top 40 % of successful candidates by merit mark in both 1A and 1B' or (B2) 'a First in Part II Mathematics or a First in 1B and 2.1 in II'.

A vote was taken with the proviso that this should not be considered as agreeing to the change before other avenues, such as the letter to the Senior Tutors, have been exhausted.

Proposal (A) was favoured by a large majority. If the FB were to decide to follow proposal (B) then the DOSs will greatly prefer option (B1).

It was also made clear that the DOSs want representation in the committee that will be assembled for the purpose of admissions and progression to Part III and also with appeals. The number of members was not discussed because of lack of information about the composition of this not-yet-existing committee.

Action: The representative of the FB agreed to convey this information to the FB in its next meeting. The DOSs representative on the FB, if necessary, will go over the matter in detail during the next FB meeting.

6. Admissions

- (a) A report on Open Days was noted.
- (b) Winter pool procedure: a short comment was made on the success of the changes implemented at the last pool.
- (c) The Admissions Forum requested to consider the possibility of uniform requirements for admissions to replace those specified for individual Colleges. After a very short discussion it became apparent that Colleges have some very particular requirements which they are not willing to modify just for the sake of uniformity. It was concluded that the answer to question of 'whether they [the Colleges] can agree on uniform requirements' is simply 'NO'.

7. STEP

- (a) Easter school: The DoSs were informed that Easter school was successful and that there were 80 participants in attendance.
- (b) The list of examiners for STEP 2010 was circulated.

8. Other matters

No other matters were brought up in the meeting.

9. Any other business

No other business was discussed in the meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

Proposed date: to be determined. Time: 2:00PM. Place: Clare College (as per rota).