

Minutes of the Meeting of Directors of Studies in Mathematics

13th November 2006, 2.00- 4.00

Present: Stephen Siklos (Jesus), Simon Wadsley (Jesus), Paul Russell (Emmanuel), Keith Crane (Kings), Irena Borzym (Saint Catherine's), Richard Samworth (Saint John's), Tadaski Tokieda (Trinity Hall), Stuart Martin (Magdalene), Amanda Turner (Selwyn), Nilanjana Datta (Pembroke), Konstantin Feldman (Christ's), Hugh Osborn (Trinity), Maciej Dunajski (Clare), Julia Gog (Queens'), Rachel Camina (Fitzwilliam), Christopher Trout (Churchill), Jan Saxl (Caius), Ruth William (Girton).

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Natalia Berloff (Jesus), Mathias Dörrzapf (St Johns), Houshang Ardavan (New Hall), John Dawes (Newnham), Sophia Demoulini (Downing), Imre Leader (Trinity), Robert Hunt (Christ's), Richard Smith (Queens') and Nikos Nikiforakis (Selwyn).

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 7th February 2006 were approved.

3. Matters arising

No matters arose.

4. Mathematics with Computer Science

Dr Neil Dodgson, Chair of the Computer Science Teaching (Curriculum) Committee, attended for this item.

Dr Dodgson explained the proposed restructuring of the Computer Science Tripos and it was noted that the current arrangements for the Mathematics with Computer Science option in Part IA of the Mathematical Tripos, if continued, would not provide a suitable basis either for the Part IB of the Mathematical Tripos or for Part IB of the Computer Science Tripos. It was agreed that the loss of this option, while regrettable, was inevitable.

Dr Dodgson then explained that his Teaching (Curriculum) Committee wished to explore the possibility of an option in Part IA the Computer Science Tripos in which students could spend 50% of their time taking courses from Part IA of the Mathematical Tripos. This was welcomed on academic grounds. It was thought that provided the numbers did not increase hugely from the expected number of 10 students a year, this would pose no great difficulty for Mathematics Directors of Studies, for example in providing supervisions. However, there was concern about the qualifications of the students. Directors of Studies were strongly in favour of requiring applicants to state on their application forms if they wished to be considered for this option and believed that a conditional offer based on STEP would be appropriate. In any case, Further Mathematics AS level (or the equivalent) should be prerequisite, as it is for Mathematics applicants. It should be made clear to students accepted for one of the other CST options that they should not expect to be able to change their minds on arrival (though such a change would be possible for a suitably qualified student). Finally, it should be made clear to the students taking this option that they should not expect to be able to change into the Mathematical Tripos for Part IB (though such a change would be possible for a suitable student, as it is now).

5. STEP

(i) It was noted that the three statistics questions on each of the three STEP papers were very time consuming to set and had very low take-up. It was agreed the number of statistics questions on each STEP paper should be reduced to two so that the total number of questions is on each paper is reduced to 13. Concern was expressed at the message this sent to schools but it was agreed that the fault lay in the disparity between what is currently in the A-level specifications and the requirement to set testing questions for STEP.

(ii) The meeting received the report on STEP 2006 from the STEP coordinator (Stephen Siklos). He explained the need to recruit extra help with examining STEP (and with the Easter School) and asked Directors of Studies to email suggestions, in particular past students who are now teachers, to him at stcs@cam.

This year, STEP examination papers were marked 'in-house' by graduate students. The STEP coordinator reported that the whole procedure had worked very smoothly and efficiently. This has opened the possibility that marks on individual questions, or even alphas might be available to Directors of Study which will be borne in mind for 2007.

(iii) Concern was expressed about the late arrival of some of the STEP marks this year. The STEP coordinator reported that this was a teething problem connected with the new marking arrangements and it is hoped that there will not be similar problems this year. It is believed that no applicant was disadvantaged.

(iv) It was noted the Ms Eleanor Pippard will no longer be administering STEP. Directors of Studies asked the chairman to write and thank her for all her very considerable efforts over the years.

(v) The STEP Easter school went very well and will be run again next year (subject to funding). The Committee expressed its appreciation to all those involved in the organisation and teaching the school.

(vi) It was noted that there is an increasing number of non-UK applicants for whom a STEP offer would be desirable. The STEP coordinator explained that the international branch of Cambridge Assessment (formerly UCLES, of which OCR is a branch) has centres in almost every country which in could in principle be used for STEP. He will see if he can obtain a list of locations.

6. Admissions moderation

The meeting agreed that our current arrangements are effective. Some concern was expressed about the practice of deselection. This does not seem to be uniform across colleges. Directors of Study agreed to note how many candidates were deselected this year and on what grounds. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

7. Pool meeting procedure

The meeting agreed minor modifications to the procedure for the January pool meeting, which were intended to make it easier to compare stringed applicants with the gathered field.

8. Loss of students to other universities

Concern was expressed that good British students were going abroad, particularly to Harvard. There is little evidence of this currently but it was agreed to monitor the situation, particularly as higher Tuition fees come in.

9. Tripos changes

Changes to Part IB courses (Methods, Complex Methods and Complex Analysis) were noted.

10. Teaching Committee report on 2006 Tripos examinations

The Chairman reminded Directors of Studies that one reason for the new timing of this meeting was to allow input into the Faculty Board discussion of last year's Tripos examinations. The meeting considered the lengthy report from the Teaching Committee on the undergraduate examinations. Views were expressed on the following points.

- (i) There was no overall preference on the introduction of short and long betas;
- (ii) After considerable discussion on the general issue of plagiarism, it was agreed that the guidance given in the CATAM booklet to students was not adequate and should be redrafted.
- (iii) There was strong opposition to the suggestion that the number of thirds given in Part IB might be increased; especially because this result is crucial for those students who make job applications in their third year. There was no consensus about Part IA, though it was noted that again the result might have bearing on job applications.

11. Any other business

- (i) It was suggested that some overseas funding bodies do not treat Mathematics as a (possible) four year course. There was mild agreement that we should ask the Faculty Board to write to some of the major such bodies making this clear.
- (ii) Concern was expressed at the difficulty British Students from other universities have getting funding for Part III. No suggestions on how to deal with this were forthcoming.

12. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting should be at the start of the Easter term. It was agreed that meetings should continue to be held in colleges rather than the CMS.

Peterhouse will again host the meeting, having swapped with Pembroke in the rota.