

MINUTES OF THE BIENNIAL MEETING OF THE DIRECTORS OF STUDIES IN MATHEMATICS

Held Tuesday 16 November 2010 at 2pm in the Games Room, Robinson
College

Present: Chris Warner (R, chairman), Irena Borzym (Cth), Sophia Demoulini (Dow), Vladimir Dokchitser (Em), Jonathan Evans (Cai), Berri Groisman (Sid), Robert Hunt (Chr), Henri Johnston (JN), John Lister (T), Stuart Martin (M), Vicky Neale (ME/NH), Hugh Osborn (T), Adriana Pesci (Dow), Jan Saxl (Cai), Stephen Siklos (Je), Orsola Rath Spivack (LC), Tadashi Tokieda (TH), Christopher Tout (Chu), Simon Wadsley (H), Ruth Williams (G), András Zsák (PET), Tim Dokchitser (R, secretary). 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 Christopher Brookes (CC), Jack Button (Se), Rachel Camina (F), Nilanjana Datta (Pem), Matthias Dörrzapf (JN), Maciej Dunajski (Cl), Julia Gog (Q), Jim McElwaine (Cth), Peter O'Donnell (StE), Julius Ross (Sid), Richard Samworth (JN), Annamaria Sinkovics (N), Mark Spivack (EM & HH) and Gareth Taylor (CC).

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting.** The minutes were accepted and signed. An incomplete sentence in §3 was noted and will be fixed by AP.

3. **Matters arising from the minutes.**

(4a) National student survey: 2010 survey will be circulated either electronically or by post (TK).

(4f) Circulation of Part IA papers: The DoSs agreed that they wish to continue to receive hard copies of IA papers.

4. **Tripods matters: Parts IA, IB and II.** Alice Benton's 'Supervision norms and 1-1 Supervisions' and 'MIT exchange' documents, and Senior Tutors' Committee documents 'STC: The Supervision System', 'Supervisions — future directions', 'Provision of supervisions and future directions' and an attachment on supervision norms were circulated.

(4a) Part II General Relativity lectures.

A proposal to increase Part II General Relativity from 16 to 24 lectures was discussed at the DAMTP staff meeting. The DoSs raised concerns that this will make the course more specialist and less attractive both to pure students and to weaker students; also, students get less choice if there are too many applied courses of 24 lectures.

The DoSs voted against the change to 24 lectures (1 for, 11 against, 7 no preference).

- (4b) Alice Benton's letter from 1 September 2010: "Supervision norms and 1-to-1 supervisions" .

The DoSs agreed that several points in the letter did not need a discussion: (a) clear, (c) not an issue for mathematics, (f) not a problem at the moment.

(d) [Supervision norms.] There was an extended discussion concerning the number of supervisions that should be stated as a norm. General consensus is to specify the norms as exactly 40 for Part IA, roughly 35–45 for 1B and II, and "few" or "normally supported by classes" for Part III, with additional notes explaining the exact formula.

(e) [Difficulty in finding supervisors.] The DoSs decided that current system works well, and agreed to a statement that "Arrangements are in place to make sure that we have supervisors". Several people (CW, RH, SS) noted that the supervisors website resource does not work, and that this issue has to be raised at the next meeting.

(g) [Teaching basic study skills.] The DoSs agreed that while STEP does not eliminate the need to do this, the current practice in mathematics (lectures by experience people, occasional early supervisions) addresses the problem already, and supervisions take care of the rest.

[1-1 supervisions] The DoSs agreed that 1-1 supervisions is a tricky issue, but it is counterproductive to issue a statement which would force (or even advise) supervisors to regroup students. They agreed to a statement that 'DoSs do not like singleton supervisions either'.

The chairman commended TK for his letter to Alice Benton with an excellent summary of supervisions in Mathematics. It has been noted that it is important that the supervision norm numbers appear in the final document.

- (4c) Distribution of "Courses in Part X" booklets.

DoSs agreed that we should keep the booklets, but that it is not necessary to print them. (The DoSs who want to can do it themselves.)

- (4d) MIT exchange.

The DoSs agreed that they are not satisfied with the new exchange scheme. It has been agreed that *only after a careful selection and only in exceptional cases* the students from MIT mathematics should be accepted.

Action (TK): FB should write to MIT directly & copy to Alice Benton, explaining this.

- (4e) Teaching committee report:

Over the years there has been a substantial decline in the take up of short questions by students in examinations (declined from 30 to 20 in 1B etc.). It appears that the students think it is better to attempt long questions. The DoSs agreed that it is not clear why this is so, and that more data should be collected.

Action (TK): It should be proposed to FB that more data is collected. In particular, is it strong or weak students who tend to attempt short questions?

5. **Tripods matters: Part III.**

(5a) Admissions to Part III:

External candidates: The DoSs were asked by the FB to select two or three of their number to be available for consultation by the admissions officers when difficult cases arise. It was agreed that Orsola Rath Spivack and Irena Borzym will be the two representatives. It was stressed that it is essential that colleges actively participate in the acceptance of difficult decisions; past part III examiners pointed out that we had failed a lot of weak external students last year.

Internal candidates: The DoSs were asked by the FB to select four of their number to be members of the admissions committee. It was agreed that John Lister, Adriana Pesci, Stuart Martin and Chris Warner will be its members.

(5b) Award of the backdated MMath and MAST degree. The first one went very well (noted).

6. **Admissions.** ‘Admissions Report 2010’, ‘Admissions for Part III’, ‘Admissions Research: The Great Multivariate Study’ documents, a letter from TK to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Education on admission numbers, and a table ‘Mathematics Applications by College and by year’ and a report on the 2010 STEP Easter study school were circulated.

(6c) Mathematics numbers in recent years: There is a 18% drop in numbers of applicants in 2010 compared to 2009, and 4% compared to 2008. There were various reasons why the colleges took fewer applicants in 2010: more people got A* in other subjects (R), more graduate students made their offers so there was an accommodation issue (Dow), the college wanted fewer mathematicians this year (T), a cut down on students to do better in Baxter tables (Chu), admissions pressure (Caths). At the moment this appears not to be a major concern, just minor fluctuations.

SS remarked that the number of people wanting to do the Further Maths A-level is increasing, which is pleasing. He also noted that PreU exams may cause some problem in the future (no module scores), and mentioned that the Easter school included an interesting experiment in online tuition, the success of which has yet to be assessed.

Action (All): Give SS the feedback from the students about online tuition, if there is any.

- (6e-i) Winter pool - CamSIS: SS reported on the plan for DoSs to put all the winter pool information on CamSIS, and CW noted that this is one of the steps towards paperless admissions (next year all overseas applicants information will be on CamSIS as well). For this to work, it is crucial that all DoSs use CamSIS to enter all winter pool information. The DoSs agreed to do this.

Action (SS): Email the DoSs with the explanation how the system works before the pool.

- (6e-ii) Winter pool - rules concerning best practice:

The undergraduate admissions handbook wants to to have a separate round of bidding for offers and interviews. The DoSs agreed the our current system (in which we do not have a separate "offer without interview round" but have procedures to prioritise offers without interview) works well, and we want to keep it as an exception.

Action (SS): Write to Dr Parks that "We like the system that we have, with full support from DoSs".

- (6f) Faculty open days: The dates (afternoons of Sat May 7th and Sat May 14th) were noted.

The multivariate study report was noted.

Dates of next meeting. The dates of the next meetings were noted:

Tuesday 10 May 2011 at 11am, Robinson College

Tuesday 15 November 2011 at 2pm, Clare College