

Biannual meeting of the Directors of Studies in Mathematics

APPROVED MINUTES

Date and time: Tuesday 14th November 2017, 2:00 pm

Venue: Room MR5, Centre for Mathematical Sciences

Chair: Ross Lawther (DoS Convenor, Girton)

Present: Sebastian Andres (Jesus), Irena Borzym (St Catharine's), Alexandre Bouayad (St John's), Wayne Boucher (Sidney Sussex), Chris Brookes (Corpus), Colm Caulfield (Churchill College/Part III Chair ex officio), Maurice Chiodo (King's), Stephen Cowley (Emmanuel), Jonathan Evans (Gonville and Caius), Thomas Forster (Clare Hall), Berry Groisman (Sidney Sussex), Robert Hunt (Christ's), John Lister (Trinity/Chair of Teaching Committee ex officio), Stuart Martin (Magdalene), Nick Nikiforakis (Selwyn), Adriana Pesci (King's), Orsola Rath-Spivack (Lucy Cavendish), Ron Reid-Edwards (Trinity Hall), John Sherwood (Newnham), Stephen Siklos (Jesus), Maria Ubiali (Newnham), Chris Warner (Robinson), Clive Wells (Hughes Hall), Grae Worster (Chair of Faculty Board ex officio), András Zsák (Peterhouse)

Apologies: Stergios Antonakoudis (Emmanuel), Anthony Ashton (Homerton), Rachel Camina (Fitzwilliam), Nilanjana Datta (Pembroke), Sophia Demoulini (Downing), Maciej Dunajski (Clare), Anita Faul (Selwyn), Anders Hansen (Peterhouse), Holly Krieger (Murray Edwards), Peter O'Donnell (St Edmund's), Simon Wadsley (Homerton)

Notes for the Minutes: Emma Grosvenor Myer (Undergraduate Office)

1. Introductions

The Chair (Dr Lawther) welcomed everyone to the meeting and read out the list of apologies.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting on 19th May 2017

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and reviewed prior to the meeting. These were approved and can be uploaded to the website.

4. Matters arising from previous meeting(s)

a) The following have agreed to serve on MUAC:

Chris Warner for three years from 1 October 2017

András Zsák for two years from 1 October 2017

b) Use of Moodle for DoS materials: The Chair (Dr Lawther) asked for confirmation that this should proceed, and this was agreed. Dr Lawther asked the DoS what they would like to see on the site; it was agreed that agenda packs, individual papers and minutes should appear. Dr

Warner suggested archiving of old meeting minutes; this will continue to be done by putting the minutes on the Faculty webpages.

ACTION: Dr Lawther to take forward with the Undergraduate Office to create in Moodle.

5. Admission matters

a) STEP

Dr Siklos reported on the STEP Coordinator's report 2017, explaining that this goes to the Faculty Board annually and any comments should be given to himself or Professor Worster. Dr Hunt pointed out that he had found an error in the marking from the few scripts he had observed. He asked what the system was for dealing with errors, to which Dr Siklos explained that the page should be photocopied and errors highlighted for investigation. Dr Siklos went on to say that this year the marking took place at Hills Road and was particularly thorough; graduate students were given a training session beforehand with sample questions to reconcile any differences in marking. Three Examiners were also on duty, checking the first 5-10 scripts from each marker as a sample, and thereafter random samples were taken to check. Dr Siklos said he is not sure we can do any better than that, but if there are any examples of errors found afterwards then he needs to see them. There was a question concerning the number of hours which graduate students are allowed to work when they are on holiday, but he has since checked with the Board of Graduate Studies who have said it is acceptable to employ graduate students provided they do not exceed the 10 hours per week, on average, allowed.

Professor Lister commented on additions to the new core A-Level syllabus, and asked if some subjects such as complex numbers, linear ODEs and introductory matrices might not need to be taught in Part IA in 1-2 years' time. Dr Siklos replied that nearly all IA students already know about these subjects, so to cut them out might make a marginal saving. However, he added that the students taking Scottish Highers and Baccalaureates may not have come across them.

Professor Caulfield asked whether a catch-up course could be put on for such students in Differential Equations and Vectors & Matrices, following the example of Mechanics. Dr Siklos said that a catch-up course might be put on in the week before term, but not during term because of lack of time. In response to the suggestion that alternative material might be inserted in Vectors & Matrices, Ms. Borzym said that, as St Catherine's has a high percentage of students coming from different backgrounds, they would struggle with an increase in the level of the course. The feeling was that there is no immediate need for change, but the starting knowledge of incoming freshers should be kept under review.

Dr Siklos said that the attempt at anonymous marking worked reasonably well; the idea will be repeated this year, with each page having a bar code and no personal data being available to markers.

b) Mathematics Subject Convenor's Report

Dr Warner reported on Professor Gog's latest paper, saying that once again that we need deeper analysis of the statistics and several years of data to examine to fully understand the situation. The Summer Pool was quiet this year and the winter pool procedure was unchanged from last year and worked well. Dr Warner asked that this can continue this year, which was agreed.

c) MUAC and Faculty Open Days

i) Meeting Minutes

The MUAC minutes were circulated prior to the meeting and accepted as read, with no comments.

ii) Alternative Offer and the response of the Admissions Forum

Dr Cowley spoke about the possible 'flexible admissions' offer and despite having a few volunteers to trial it, requested that this can formally be put forward. The Chair (Dr Lawther) asked for a show of hands in support of a trial. This was unanimously approved, and will be put forward as a proposal subject to approval by the Admissions Forum.

ACTION: Dr Cowley to take forward with the Admissions Forum, asking it to allow Colleges with experienced Directors of Studies to participate in a trial.

Dr Rath-Spivack, commenting on her report, said that once again the percentage of female students is lower than in the past. She feels that having an alternative offer might attract more applicants from female or non-traditional backgrounds. Dr Hunt asked if the drop off was between application and offer, to which Dr Rath-Spivack said that the drop off was between offer and confirmation.

There was a lot of discussion about STEP as a predictor of examination success, summer schools and applicants from State schools, and Dr Cowley said he has some raw statistical data available to the DoS if they wish to contact him.

iii) Open Days

Dr Rath-Spivack said that she is expecting feedback from the Central Admissions Office in January, and hopes this is communicated in time for the publication of booklets. The short mock interviews were very successful; their number is being doubled this year, and for the July open days.

The Faculty Open days booked via Eventbrite had 400 visitors the first day, and 399 on the second. Using the tools in Eventbrite made it easier to gather data and feedback as individual email addresses were captured. Individual activity changes for this year will be in response to feedback. She added that we want to be able to track what visitors do after the open day and which Universities and Colleges they apply to.

Dr Rath-Spivack said she has found someone to help run lectures for the Sutton Trust Summer School.

6. Tripos matters

a) Joint DoS-Faculty Board working group concerning Resource Audit

Professor Caulfield reported on progress, having attended a detailed discussion meeting recently to set the Terms of Reference. The aim is to have a broad remit, to report back on existing resource and staff that could be doing teaching. The goal is to get a better idea of how many are interviewing, supervising, examining and lecturing, and what demand there is. It is clear that some people are doing a great deal of supervision, while some courses are finding it hard to obtain supervisors.

Professor Caulfield said he will collect more data, and that there is another meeting in January when a report will be produced. He suggested that the new course 'Quantum Information' might be a good one to pilot with co-ordinated faculty-wide supervision. The Chair (Dr Lawther) asked the DoS if they were happy with this idea and this was agreed.

b) Faculty Teaching Committee report

Professor Lister reported on his paper, and Dr Hunt raised a concern about the delay in communicating corrections during examinations from the main hall to the colleges, suggesting that it can take as long as 75 minutes to reach students. Professor Lister said that he hopes that the Colleges will send a note in to say at which time corrections were received, so that this can be better measured.

c) Supervision Feedback Survey

The Chair (Dr Lawther) gave an update on the supervision feedback survey conducted in the Queens' circus last year. Dr Lawther has agreed to take over this responsibility from Dr Goedecke who has since left. The survey is still restricted to the Queens' circus with data assistance from Amy Dittrich (Undergraduate Office), and will continue for a further year. Each student will be sent a questionnaire about their supervisions; the results for each course will be collated and anonymised in the Office, and passed to Dr Lawther; he will then forward them to the Director of Studies responsible for recruiting supervisors for the course, who will pass the results for each individual supervisor to the supervisor concerned.

d) CATAM

Dr Cowley briefly reported on his paper and asked for a volunteer for next year to take over this responsibility.

He spoke about the Introductory Project and said that he felt that it would be good if all colleges offered supervision on the project, as only about 50% had supervision. The need for more supervision was put to the DoS with a mixed reaction. Professor Lister said that he feels it is hard to give feedback on writing style, and feedback needs to be given by someone who understands the course; such qualified people would need to be found, and the feedback would involve a high number of man-hours when there are higher priorities on the allocation of teaching time. Dr Cowley felt there is probably some resource available but it needs to be found and training provided.

e) Introductory Part III programme

Dr Hunt said that this year the provision of extra catch-up sessions had resulted in a clash with college meetings. He felt that we need an extra slot to have meetings, but that Mondays must be held free for colleges. Professor Caulfield said that student feedback from the Curriculum Committee suggested that a 2 hour catch-up session is difficult to absorb and would be better split into two. He added that perhaps it could start on Tuesday, the day after college meetings, with perhaps Monday for Colleges, Tuesday for MaST and Wednesday for MMath. Dr Hunt agreed this would be a good proposal.

7. Membership of other committees

a) Part III Permissions Committee

The proposed members were announced to the Committee, and Dr Rath-Spivack voiced a concern that there were no female representatives. Ms. Borzym said that she would be happy to continue to serve on the Committee if requested.

ACTION: The Chair (Dr Lawther) to pass the nominations to the Faculty Board, and to ask it to consider the gender imbalance.

8. Any other business

There was no other business and the meeting was concluded by 4:00 PM.

9. Date of next meeting

Friday 18th May 2018, 11:00am, Room MR5