

Biannual meeting of the Directors of Studies in Mathematics

MINUTES

Date and time: Friday 26 February 2016, 2pm

Venue: MR5, Centre for Mathematical Sciences

Present: Nathanael Berestycki (DoS Convenor, King's), Irena Borzym (St Catharine's), Alexandre Bouayad (St John's), Henry Bradford (Trinity Hall), Christopher Brookes (Corpus Christi), Stephen Cowley (Emmanuel), Sophia Demoulini (Downing), Maciej Dunajski (Clare), Jonathan Evans (Gonville & Caius), Anita Faul (Selwyn), Thomas Forster (Clare Hall and St Edmund's), Julia Goedecke (Newnham), Julia Gog (Queens'), Berry Groisman (Sidney Sussex), Anders Hansen (Peterhouse), Robert Hunt (Christ's), Anastasia Kisil (Corpus Christi), John Lister (Trinity), Orsola Rath Spivack (Lucy Cavendish), Stephen Siklos (Jesus), Paul Smith (Murray Edwards), Mike Tehranchi (Trinity), Christopher Tout (Churchill), Simon Wadsley (Homerton), Chris Warner (Robinson), Clive Wells (Hughes Hall), András Zsák (Peterhouse).

1. Apologies

Stergios Antonakoudis (Emmanuel), Rachel Camina (Fitzwilliam), Nilanjana Datta (Pembroke), Julian Gilbey (Jesus), Ross Lawther (Girton), Clément Mouhot (King's), Peter O'Donnell (St Edmund's), Adriana Pesci (Downing).

2. Admissions matters

a) Information on a proposed programme for STEP preparation support

Dr Siklos outlined details of the proposal to extend the pilot STEP Correspondence Course and to discontinue the STEP Easter School. There was some discussion of the benefits on the course, including being able to reach more students and earlier intervention. The Directors of Studies expressed their enthusiasm and support for the proposal. As the final decision rests with the Bursars' Committee, Dr Siklos urged the Directors of Studies to convey their support to their Bursars. The Chair thanked Dr Siklos, who in turn thanked Ms Julia Hawkins.

b) MUAC: admissions guidance document

There was some discussion of a proposed new admissions guidance document, describing three desirable qualities in potential undergraduates. It was felt that some fine tuning was required, particularly to the third item ("Enjoyment of, interest in and commitment to mathematics"). The final draft would go to the next MUAC meeting in May, and then the next Directors of Studies' meeting shortly after.

c) 2014-5 and 2015-6 admissions rounds: reports from subject convenor

Dr Gog reported on the most recent summer and winter pools. The removal of the reading of names step had no adverse effect, and the significant time saved meant that more students had been picked up. Any suggestions for change to this procedure are welcome, otherwise its continuation will be proposed in May.

The previous meeting's proposal to order pool files by college rather than alphabetically was rejected by the Admissions Forum.

In recent summer pools, there have been a small number cases of a student who had a pre-condition on their application, such as a college-specific bursary, which the college which fished that student hadn't discovered until later. Cambridge Admissions Office will be informed of this and asked for guidance.

d) Open days

Dr Rath Spivack asked the Directors of Studies for their opinions on the possibility of holding the undergraduate open days in the CMS or other alternative venues. There are typically 450 visitors at the first open day, and 250 at the second, which means that MR2 wouldn't be big enough for the talks. There was discussion of streaming between multiple rooms, or holding parallel sessions in two large lecture theatres such as MR2 and Wolfson Hall at Churchill. Dr Rath Spivack will circulate a report and ask for feedback.

e) Faculty documentation

Dr Rath Spivack reported on the updates to the undergraduate documentation for upcoming open days and other events. The Directors of Studies were asked to check their college's entry in the Admissions Guide, and to send any examples they might have of alumni case studies for an information sheet on careers.

3. Tripos matters:

a) Teaching Committee reports

Professor Lister asked the Directors of Studies on their views about recommended numbers of lecture courses students should attend, and how this might be communicated to the students. It was agreed that the students would be advised of a standard workload, and told to speak to their Director of Studies if they were thinking of doing anything substantially different. This would be communicated via the Guide to Courses booklets and at the induction sessions at the start of Michaelmas term. All of the information disseminated at the induction sessions should be sent to the Directors of Studies for information.

Following some comments from the National Student Survey, there was some discussion about the potential need for personal development for students looking to go into non-academic careers. Directors of Studies may recommend activities like summer placements or joining STIMULUS for certain students. It wasn't felt that providing official guidance or a programme would be helpful or necessary at this time.

b) Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education: Turnitin text matching software

After a short discussion, the Directors of Studies agreed that the Turnitin software would not be useful for mathematics at a college level.

c) Legibility in exams

Dr Siklos raised the issue of legibility in exams. The rubric states "Write legibly; otherwise you place yourself at a grave disadvantage." There was some discussion as to whether this is still appropriate to include, given that the Student Registry can arrange for transcription of illegible scripts. It is understood that the Faculty may be asked to remove the statement from the rubric.

Otherwise, if it remains, it was agreed that the current wording should be added to the schedules booklet, along with an explanation of what this means in practice.

d) MIT exchange

On behalf of the MIT Exchange Committee, Dr Siklos asked for feedback on how the scheme works. After some discussion of the issues, the general consensus was that, while there were some success stories, the mismatch between the courses meant that Cambridge students tend to be at a slight disadvantage on their return. After this discussion there was a vote, the majority agreed to let go of the scheme, three voted to continue.

e) Mock exams

Dr Forster reported that at least one other undergraduate course was arranging mock exams for assessment. The Directors of Studies agreed that, for the Mathematical Tripos, mocks should be used for self-assessment and practice, and should not be formalised, although it may be helpful to share resources between colleges.

f) Supervisors

There have been increasing reports of colleges experiencing difficulties finding supervisors for some courses. The Directors of Studies expressed their concern that too much might be being asked of the graduate students, and felt that more training and support is needed, particularly for those who did their undergraduate degrees elsewhere.

g) The Students' Unions' Advice Service

There is a new website at <http://www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk/>, with advice and support on a range of issues for both undergraduate and graduate students.

h) Moodle page for supervisors

There is a new Moodle page for supervisors, on which they can share ideas, problems and resources, and ask each other questions. Dr Rath Spivack will contact Dr Ross about the possibility of merging this with the supervisor matchmaking site, which is currently hosted on CamTools.

4. Any Other Business

a) IB supervisions

On behalf of the Curriculum Committee, Dr Tehranchi asked the Directors of Studies when they arranged the supervisions for the IB courses that are lectured in Easter term. The vast majority of colleges give supervisions for all three courses early in Michaelmas term, while a smaller number give them in June.

b) Exam policy

Dr Borzym reported hearing from more than one source that some students have been told that they would be marked down in exams if they used results from other courses, and asked the meeting for their opinions. The Directors of Studies agreed that modularity is not a good thing and that this is not what we should be telling our students. In general, using results from previous years should be allowed.

c) Class lists

Following the discussion by email about the future of class lists, Dr Cowley reported that it looked like the practice of displaying class lists would be coming to an end, meaning that June 2016 might be the last time the Part II and III results would be read at the Senate House.