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MATHEMATICS UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Monday 26 January 2015, 1:00pm, MR20 (EL.09)

Present: Nigel Peake (Chair) (NP), Julia Gog (JG), Paul Russell (PR), Stuart Martin (SM), Ross Lawther (RL), Julia Hawkins (JH), Stephen Siklos (SS), Amy Dittrich (AD), minute secretary

1. Apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Approval of minutes of meeting held on 2 October 2014

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Junior membership of the Committee

The Undergraduate Office had sent an advert via email to the undergraduate students, to which NP had received a number of replies. NP will consult the students' DoS for recommendations before making a final decision. The committee suggested that student members who were active in outreach and could talk on equal terms with the committee would be particularly valuable.

Action: NP

4. Duties of the Faculty Admissions Officer

NP reported that the Heads of DAMTP and DPMMS had yet to appoint a new Faculty Admissions Officer. In the absence of a long-term solution, the Committee discussed temporary cover for the various responsibilities, as follows.

(a) Open days

Orsola Rath Spivack had already agreed to organise the programme and speakers. JH confirmed that the Millennium Mathematics Project would continue to organise the displays. NP will approach Orsola to ask if she would be able to work with JH on updating the display material for the University Open Days in July.

Action: NP

SM agreed to revise the literature in conjunction with the Undergraduate Office (i.e. the Guide to Admissions, Guide to Tripos, Reading List, webpages, etc.).

Action: SM and Undergraduate Office

(b) Easter School

Berry Groisman and Julius Ross were both suggested as potential academic leads, as they had run STEP schools for their College. NP will approach them.

Action: NP

(c) Sutton Trust Summer School

This currently runs during A-level results week. The possibility of bringing it forward in future years was discussed; it was agreed that it would be desirable to schedule it earlier in the summer, but noted that the choice of dates offered by the CAO tends to be limited. The CAO is flexible on Faculty involvement with the application process. The main requirement is for an academic programme, which NP agreed to cover.

Action: NP

(d) Other

The STEP Summer School is not running this year, due to funding.

Cover for Oxbridge conferences had already been organised, by Stephen Cowley.

SS agreed to continue helping the Undergraduate Office with the less trivial admissions queries.

It was noted that there was currently no Faculty involvement in events such as the CUSU Shadowing Scheme, or Trinity College's Sixth Form Access Scheme.

5. Latest admissions round and working of pool

The Committee received and noted the paper on the latest admissions round and the working of the pool. JG reported that the number of applications this year had dropped slightly, possibly due to the effect of the change in the standard offer for A levels to A*A*A. It was noted that while the number of applications had decreased, those that applied were of better quality; and that the number of applications was still up from 2011.

The Committee noted that, while the percentage of female applicants getting an offer was close to the average (40.0% compared to 39.7%), the percentage of female offer holders being admitted was below average (31.5% compared to 44.2%). The Committee speculated on potential reasons for this discrepancy, such as STEP and type of school. The Committee will give further consideration to the possibility of making videos about STEP for the website, and using social media to reach out to potential applicants.

JG reported that there had been 264 applicants in the pool, more than half of which were fished. While it was generally agreed that the pool had worked well this year, the Committee identified some improvements for future years, including:

- To save time, DoS should be asked beforehand if they are going to retrieve any applicants.
- When calculating the bidding order, the ratio of offers intended to the number of offers already made should be calculated later.
- There shouldn't be a deadline for retrieval string pulling.
- Mature applications should be dealt with before the main round, perhaps before the meeting, giving mature colleges first choice.
- While some found the reading of names at the start of the meeting useful, it was time-consuming, particularly within the very limited time available for the meeting. The Committee agreed that this stage should be removed, perhaps to take place electronically before the meeting.

The Committee agreed to put the potential changes to the pool to the next DoS meeting, particularly the changes to how mature applicants are dealt with, and the reading of names.

Action: JG

6. STEP Easter School

SS reported that undergraduate helpers were currently being recruited. As discussed previously, NP will approach Berry Groisman and/or Julius Ross about covering the academic side.

7. STEP Correspondence Course

SS reported that the Department for Education had funded a pilot correspondence course, in which Year 12 students are sent fortnightly STEP assignments, which are marked by graduate students and returned. Participants are selected on the basis of their school and the support available, with preference given to schools with a history of unsuccessful applicants to the Mathematical Tripos.

The Committee discussed the possibility of making the course a permanent fixture, initially in parallel to the Easter School, and perhaps as a replacement in the longer term. It was noted that the correspondence course was less expensive than the Easter School, but that the Committee would have to be certain of the course's effectiveness before scrapping the Easter School in its favour. It was agreed that the Committee would consider drafting a proposal.

8. Gender balance in Tripos and data tracking

JG reported that she is working with the Teaching Committee and the Athena SWAN Committee, together with the CAO and Anita Briginshaw, to put together a dataset tracking students' UMS scores at application and STEP results, compared to their Tripos marks. This could be used to analyse the effects of, for instance, gender and type of school. It was noted that Richard Partington should be kept informed

Action: JG

9. Forthcoming Open Days

As discussed previously, Orsola Rath Spivack is putting together the programme this year.

10. Date of next meeting

A date will be fixed in Easter term.

Action: Undergraduate Office

11. AOB

There was no other business.