

Minutes of the Mathematics Undergraduate Admissions Committee

Meeting held at 13:30 Friday 17 February 2017 in MR10

Present: Stephen Cowley (SJC, Chair), Margaret Duff (MD), Julia Gog (JRG, Subject Convener), Julia Hawkins (JEMH), Eve Pound (EP), Orsola Rath-Spivack (ORS, Faculty Admissions Officer), Stephen Siklos (STCS), Simon Wadsley (SJW), Chris Warner (CDW).

Guest: Sam Lucy (SL, Director of Admissions for the Cambridge Colleges).

1) Preliminaries

- a) Apologies: Julius Ross (JAR), David Tong (DT).
- b) There were no declaration of interest.

2) Welcome

- a) Sam Lucy was welcomed and introduced to the group as a guest. She indicated that she would welcome a continuing dialog on admission matters, e.g. concerning the effects of the changes to AS-levels.
 - i) SJC noted that before Christmas, Richard Craster (the Head of Department at Imperial) had emailed concerning the change of funding of fourth A-levels in state schools; this was likely to have an effect on the teaching of Further Mathematics which is often taken as a fourth A-level. SJC briefly outlined the contents of the Faculty response that he had sent in after consultation with the Subject Convener (SC), Faculty Admissions Officer (FAO) and others.

3) Minutes of the MUAC meeting 11 October 2016

- a) The minutes were approved.
- b) There were no matters arising that were not on the Agenda elsewhere.
 - i) No further information was available about the Oxford MAT.
 - ii) There was a discussion about whether changes would be welcome to the standard interview form. It was agreed that SL and JRG would consult directly about this.
 - iii) Concerning advice to students thinking about reapplying, it was agreed that the FAO would consider drafting something for the next meeting. However, it was clear that there would be different views within the Faculty.

4) Minutes of DoS Meeting of 15 November 2016

- a) Matters arising from this meeting were not on the Agenda elsewhere.

5) Subject Convener's Report (JRG)

- a) *Update on the current admissions round.* Certain points were highlighted.
 - It was noted that the total number of applicants was up by 11% (versus 3% across all subjects). While the total number offers were roughly unchanged, but the proportion of female offers had increased. It was unclear whether this was a random fluctuation, or due to system or behavioural change.
 - As last year, here there was a difference in success rate of gaining an offer with both Grammar and Independent schools are more likely to get offers, and Comprehensives, FEs and "Other" less likely; Sixth Form Colleges and Other Maintained are no different to Home overall.
 - Concerning socio-economic flags, it was noted that singly, only the group with an OAC and no LPN flag have a lower than random chance of getting an offer. There followed a discussion concerning LPN and OAC flags and how we use them, and whether to concentrate on one flag for tracking analysis. SL noted that the LPN and OAC flags count towards different targets (and hence are both relevant).
 - The Winter Pool had worked well, with superb help from Helen Reed and her team. The poolside meeting went well with a prompt meeting. 293 were pooled and 149 were fished, with 15 of those fished after the poolside meeting.

- o It was noted that there was a continuing difficulty in obtaining data from a few colleges.
 - i) *Open offers.* Of the 15 applicants were fished after the poolside meeting, three were by mature colleges making deferred offers, while six had LPN/OAC flags. It would appear that in several of these cases, they were fished because of the second and third looks given to each file while considering them for open offers. Therefore, the open offers scheme seems to have increased the proportion of LPN/OAC applicants that were offered, even without open offers being made. One open offer was made. Concerning this candidate, the question arises whether the system should be trusted so that an applicant (home, state-educated, LPN/OAC) who achieves an 11 STEP offer will be picked up in the summer pool, or whether there should be a procedure to ensure that they are allocated. It was agreed that the standard pool procedure would be adequate.
 - ii) *Feedback from other subjects.* No feedback was available.
 - iii) JRG asked for any feedback on the form of her report, and in particular which bits need to be included in future reports. For this and reporting to the DoS Meeting she would like to converge to a standard format.
- Action: MUAC Committee members to reply to JRG with feedback**
- iv) JRG is on sabbatical leave for 2017-18. She has recommended CDW as subject convener for the year. JRG intends to resume the role on her return. This was supported by the Committee.

JRG was thanked for her report.

- b) *Pre-Interview testing.* SL outlined the process in other subjects. A review is underway, although preliminary feedback was that the pre-interview assessment had been found to be helpful in a number of subjects, e.g. NST and Economics. SL added that Mathematics needs to think about what it wishes to do for 2019 entries. It was reported that two years ago the DoS Meeting had concluded that it did not want to introduce pre- or at- interview testing, and had accepted that there might be increased numbers for interview with little basis for deselection. While at present there was no reason to change this decision, . However, it was agreed that the SC and FAO should collect more data and that the situation should be reviewed in the light of this next year.

6) Faculty Admissions Officer Report

- a) *Open days.* ORS reported that almost everything is in place to hold Open Days in the CMS and that the Newton Institute. The number of Maths lectures per session has had to be reduced, but there will be extra activities, such as a Q&A session and mathematical treasure hunt. It was suggested that there be adequate briefing papers and that these be circulated to DoS in good time. It was also suggested that that there be a briefing session for students helpers both for those helping in the CMS and, optionally, for those helping in Colleges (e.g. the day before). There was discussion on how to increase the number of female attendees. ORS confirmed that details of the next open day had already been released on the Eventbrite booking system. The issue of 'no shows' was raised, but as we usually take extra bookings this was not thought to be a major problem.
- b) *Revised 'Guide to Admissions' document.* The proposed new document is far more aesthetically pleasing, with a new front cover, improved layout of the text, and more images and quotations. It was well received. ORS noted that she was intending to include more about careers. A request for suitable images related to the Tripos was made, cf. the image of the swimming duck generating a constant angle wake as lectures in the *Waves* course. There was a discussion of whether it was more appropriate to market ourselves as 'Mathematics in/at Cambridge' or 'Cambridge Mathematics'. ORS asked for feedback on the 'Guide to Admissions' document.

Action: MUAC Committee members to reply to ORS with feedback

ORS reported that an A3 paper based four-sided leaflet is being produced for the 'Oxbridge' conferences taking place at the end of Lent term.

- c) *Website.* The front page has been updated and the new look site went live before the start of school half-terms. There is now more information, including key admissions information, "above the screen fold" on the front page.
- d) *UCAS Code and Unistats:* ORS gave an update on the new regulations. SJC said we need to check the changes have been implemented.

7) Undergraduate offers

- a) *Further Maths Requirement.* The requirement for Further Mathematics A-level for those applying in October 2018 for admission in October 2019 entry has been approved by the Faculty Board, the Directors of Studies Meeting, the Admissions Forum and the Senior Tutors' Committee. The question of whether IB Higher Level Physics should be "desirable" or "essential" was discussed; it was agreed that the intention of the Faculty and the DoS Meeting was that it should be "desirable".

The Meeting adjourned to MR12.

- b) *An Alternative Admissions Offer.* The paper on an Alternative Admissions Offer, or "flexible offer", was discussed at length. It was agreed to revise the paper concentrating more on the OFFA criteria, and to then submit the paper to the Admissions Forum. It was agreed that a pilot of an offer of "A*A*A/1,1 or A*A*A*/1" was worth trialing in a few Colleges.

8) STEP matters

- a) *STEP support programme.* An update was provided. It was noted with thanks that every UK state-school Cambridge offer-holder whose offer includes STEP papers 2 or 3 has been offered the opportunity to attend a face-to-face STEP Support event.
- b) *STEP marking: refinements, including blind marking and electronic delivery of question by question STEP results.* It was reported that it was still not confirmed that blind marking would be in place this year. It was agreed that that SC would follow this up with Cambridge Assessment as the Committee was strongly in favour of blind marking.

Action: JRG to follow-up with Cambridge Assessment

- c) *STEP "reading time" prior to the summer pool.* It was reported that there should be extra reading time of STEP scripts prior to the pool this year.
- d) *STEP Syllabi.* STCS reported on the likely syllabi for STEP 1, 2 and 3.

9) Athena SWAN

- a) *Update on Silver application and Action Plan.* ORS reported on the progress of the Athena SWAN submission, and reported that the Action Plan would be circulated around the Faculty prior to submission.
- b) *Progression Statistics.* Due to pressure of work, progress had been slow, but it was hoped that tangible results would be available over the summer.

10) Date of Next Meeting - to be discussed by email circulation (see suggestion below)

- a) Would a date between 10 May and 12 May be acceptable? For reference, the second Faculty Open Day is 6 May, the second DoS meeting of the academic year is 19 May, and the last Faculty Board is 25 May.

Action: MUAC Committee members to reply to SJC

11) AOB