

Minutes of the Mathematics Undergraduate Admissions Committee

Meeting held at 15:00 on Wednesday 21 February in MR20

Present: Stephen Cowley (SJC, Chair), Chris Warner (CDW, Subject Convener), Eve Pound (EP), Zain Patel (ZP), Orsola Rath-Spivack (ORS, Faculty Admissions Officer), Stephen Siklos (STCS), David Tong (DT), Simon Wadsley (SJW).

1) Welcome

- a) *Apologies and declaration of interest:* Apologies were received from Julia Hawkins and Andràs Zsak. There were no declarations of interest.

2) Minutes of the MUAC meeting 9 November 2017

- a) The minutes were approved.
- b) Matters Arising
 - i) *Correlation between MAT and Oxford Examinations.* SJC said he had made no progress with this; if there was research, then Oxford seemed reluctant to publish; he said he would email a contact that might have some information.

Action: SJC
 - ii) *Deselection Numbers by College.* Information has not been received.

Action: CDW
 - iii) *Interview Feedback.* STCS explained that he believed that this item was about the information given by Colleges on interview report forms, especially the forms of pooled applicants. STCS asked if we might get some real examples from the Summer Pool so that good and bad practice could be shared. ORS to look into this.

Action: ORS
 - iv) *Success of State School Applicants.* SJC tabled a spreadsheet indicating the comparative acceptance rates of State-School and Independent-School applicants. These indicated that while Mathematics has the second highest number of 'home' applicants from State Schools (84.4%), the percentage of 'home' acceptances from State Schools (68.8%) is the seventh highest number. Further, the acceptance rate of State Schools is only 14.9%, compared to 36.6% for Independent schools; this places mathematics essentially at the bottom of a table when compared to other subjects.

ORS suggested that the figures should be taken to the meeting of Directors of Studies.

Action: SJC
 - v) *Progression Statistics.* ORS noted that there is still a need for a statistician to analyze the data. It seemed that the best way forward might be to employ someone this summer (s/he would be have to handle sensitive data). SJC and ORS agreed to speak to the two heads of Department.

Action: ORS and SJC
 - vi) *Commercial Providers of Admissions Support.* ORS and SJC have met with Sam Lucy who indicated that this issue is on her agenda. SJC asked EP and ZP to forward any requests connected with such commercial providers they have received via faculty mailing lists.

Action: EP

3) Minutes of the DoS Biannual Meeting of 14 November 2017

- a) The Minutes were noted; there were no outstanding actions or comments.

4) Subject Convener Report

- a) *Winter Pool Report.* ORS noted that further socio-economic and gender data would be helpful (e.g. the number of female applicants made offers from those fished from the pool). CDW offered to forward the data to ORS.

Action: CDW
- b) *Pre-admission Testing and the Loss of UMS.* SJC noted that Oxford has significantly more applicants than us. He also noted that there was some concern amongst Admissions Tutors that when UMS

disappear as a pre-application filter, then there may be a significantly higher number of applicants. Nothing can be changed re the 2019 admissions round, but if there is an unmanageable increase in the number of applicants this year, should there be a contingency plan, e.g. use of the MAT or the TMUA as a filter, for the 2020 admission round? DT felt that we should introduce a test only as a last resort, a view supported by ORS. ORS added that there would be cost considerations; Oxford funds the MAT test for applicants, whereas candidates have to pay a fee to take STEP. There would also be an overhead managing complaints from two tests, and the possibility of a significant PR issue in requiring applicants to take two tests (assuming that we retain STEP). It was agreed to take this item to the Directors of Studies Meeting.

Action: SJC and ORS

5) Faculty Admissions Officer Report

- a) *2019 Entry*. The Admissions Forum has agreed to a trial of the “flexible offer”. ORS said at least 9 colleges have agreed to trial the offer.
- b) *Open Days*. ORS said that three sessions would be run instead of four, as the final session was not well attended. ORS aims to maintain a gender balance amongst those contributing. ORS welcomes suggestions and ideas from members of the MUAC. There was a discussion of STCS’s STEP booklet; it was agreed that a hard copy would be made available for viewing. ORS said that she planned to circulate information to Directors of Studies and student helpers so as to give participants more time to prepare.
- c) *Website*. SJC invited members to peruse the admissions web pages, and to email ORS if they have any suggestions. It was noted that work is underway to spot broken links. It was also noted that there is a need for Directors of Studies to perform regularly a “sanity check” on College websites.

6) Undergraduate Offers

- a) *Treatment of Mathematics A-level when taken in Y12*. There had been some confusion concerning whether a Mathematics A-level taken in Y12 could be counted as part of an admissions offer, with mixed messages coming from CAO, e.g. a suggestion that 3 ‘A’ levels have to be taken in Year 13; the latter is not necessarily the case for Mathematics because of STEP (although the continuation of 3 A-levels into Y13 is viewed as desirable). This confusion resulted in the paper, produced by a teacher, entitled *University Entrance Requirements relating to A Level Maths and Further Maths*, which was incorrect. The Admissions Forum (AF) had been approached, and it was anticipated that the matter would be corrected at the AF Meeting on Friday 23 February. It was agreed to draw the attention of the Directors of Studies to this issue.

Action: SJC

- b) The AF has agreed to some colleges trailing a flexible admission offer. Wording had been agreed for the University prospectus but was still under negotiation for the Faculty and College websites. SJC asked for any comments on the proposed wording to be forwarded to him in the next 24 hours.

7) STEP matters

- a) *STEP Support Programme*. It was noted that a few College WWW pages need to be updated to link to the latest STEP support programme WWW pages. Students, including EP and ZP, are continuing to give their support to the programme.
- b) *STEP Classing Criteria*. SJC said that he had made no progress on a paper discussing the percentages used to class STEP at key grade boundaries.

8) SPC Undergraduate Outreach Coordinator

The Committee noted the appointment of Steph Baughen as the SPS Undergraduate Outreach Coordinator. According to the School, this is a new post and her remit is to support Faculties and Departments with outreach and recruitment activity, in order to promote study at Cambridge, particularly amongst under-represented groups. She will also be responsible for ensuring that a range of processes to support this activity, including data collection and evaluation, are followed and that all relevant legislation and good practice guidance is adhered to.

Further, she will take responsibility for the delivery of some new outreach activities as well as coordinating and supporting events and activities delivered by others, and act as a central point of contact for colleagues

across the collegiate University wishing to work with Faculties and Departments within the School. In addition, the role will involve the creation and development of promotional material and communications activity specific to the School, and close communication with colleagues.

9) AOB

SJC noted that there had been difficulties at Emmanuel this year when an interviewer had become unavailable at short notice. A contingency should possibly been in place at the College; however this is likely to be a rare event at any one College. He wondered if contingency arrangements for all Colleges might be coordinated by the Faculty. CDW said that a group of experienced “extra” interviewers used to exist who would step in in an emergency if an interviewer became unexpectedly unavailable. It was agreed to take the matter to the Directors of Studies Meeting.

Action: SJC

SJC also queried how robust the pooling system was, since there had been a number of queries at a College about the non-pooling of candidates with very high UMS scores.

10) Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed by SJC.

Action: SJC