

## The Directors of Studies in Computer Science Forum

Thursday 01 May 2025 at 14:00 via Zoom

<https://cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/83708157857?pwd=4cToxIAZYFmzWMfTxGxLLkMUxS6bjR.1>

### Unconfirmed Minutes

#### Members

Prof Richard Mortier (CHR) RM ✓	Prof Anil Madhavapeddy (PEM) AVSM X
Dr John Fawcett (CH, HOM, HH, LC, M, NEWN, CATH) JF ✓	Dr Carl Henik Ek (PEM) CHE X
Prof Lawrence Paulson (CLARE) LP ✓	Dr Nic Lane (PET, JN) NL X
Dr Jon Sterling (CLARE) JS ✓	Dr Ramsey Faragher (Q) RF X
Dr David Greaves (CC) DG X	Dr Jasmin Jahic (Q) JJ X
Francisco Vargas (CC) FV X	Dr Richard Sharp (ROB) RS X
Prof Alan Blackwell (DAR) ABL X	Dr Jeremy Yallop (ROB) JY ✓
Prof Robert Harle (DOW) ( <i>Chair</i> ) RKH ✓	Dr Richard Watts (SEL) RW X
Dr Dima Szamozvancev ( <i>DOW</i> ) DS ✓	Mr Matthew Ireland (SID) MI ✓
Prof Thomas Sauerwald (EMM) TS X	Professor Frank Stajano (T) FS X
Prof Srinivasan Keshav (FITZ) SK ✓	Dr Neel Krishnaswami (T) NK X
Prof Andreas Vlachos (FITZ) AV X	Dr Hatice Gunes (TH) HG X
Dr Stephen Cummins (GIRTON) SC ✓	Dr Jack Hughes (TH) JH ✓
Dr Russell Moore (CAIUS) RMO ✓	Mr Dean Dodds (Admin) DD ✓
Prof Timothy Jones (CAIUS) TJ ✓	Mrs Caroline Stewart (Department Secretary) CS ✓
Prof Cecilia Mascolo (JE) CM X	Ms Becky Straw (Teaching Admin Manager) BS ✓
Dr Christopher Town (JE, WOLF) CT ✓	Prof Alastair Beresford (Head of Department) AB ✓
Prof Timothy Griffin (K) TG X	Dr Sean Holden SBH ✓
Dr Apinan Hasthanasombat (K) AH ✓	Dr Martin Kleppmann MK ✓
Dr Alice Hutchings (K) AHU X	Dr Damon Wischik DW ✓
Prof Jamie Vicary (K) JV X	Aidan Bishop ABI ✓
Dr Luana Bulat (MUR, ST EDS) LB ✓	

#### 1 Apologies for Absence

Alice Hutchings  
Simon Moore

Carl Henrik Ek  
Tim Griffin  
Hatice Gunes  
Richard Watts  
Cecilia Mascolo

## **2 Notification of AOB**

None

## **3 Minutes of the meeting of 23 January 2025**

Approved.

## **4 Matters arising from the meeting of 23 January 2025**

- 4.1** AB spoke about being part III examiner and modules which are shared. According to the normalisation procedures a part II student must get a lower mark than a part III student, however this year one exceptional student exceeded part III students. RKH wished this to be raised at TMC. **(Action: RKH & BS)**. Will be raised at TMC.

There was discussion regarding part II students obtaining higher marks than part III students in shared modules. TMC had considered this and were satisfied that the processes being applied are sensible and this can happen if there is an exceptional student. Part II and Part III students are graded and ranked separately.

## **5 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**

New standing item

RKH introduced this new standing item.

## **6 Admissions**

### **6.1** Long term admissions numbers (Led by Alastair Beresford)

AB compared this department to others in the Russell group, noting that by faculty size we are the smallest. Student numbers have grown from 400 to 600 in the past ten years, while core funding has not changed during this time, so staff numbers have not increased.

AB noted that the university's income from tuition fees (adjusted for inflation) had increased from six million to twelve million pounds. AB is currently trying to persuade the university to increase funding.

AB believed we had the highest applicant-to-place ratio in the university and predicted further growth.

AB suspected some students stayed on for Part III as it made sense from a funding perspective to access the MPhil program but then go into industry rather than onto a PhD. Due to this, Part III has shifted toward a more career-focused course.

JF believed that growth would be smaller than in previous years as the field is seen as riskier due to AI. JF also noted the quality of applicants is not high. Looking at previous years' applicants, JF believed we could have taken a few more but not twenty more. AB felt things were different at his college, where he was asked to make eight offers but people had withdrawn. AB considered making changes to Part III rather than taking more students into Part IA.

RKH wondered if we were correctly assessing the students, suggesting that the quality may be there but we are struggling to identify it. RKH also spoke about the lack of advertising, noting that we assume too many people would apply so we don't try. RKH suggested a conservative expansion, reaching out to strong potential applicants.

AB was concerned that university planning often revolved around repeating the previous year, which made planning for changes difficult.

RM believed the quality of candidates was still high and suggested that admissions may be cyclical, as published applicant numbers could discourage potential applicants. RM believed we could comfortably grow if we had the capacity in colleges to do so, but that may mean reducing admissions in other subjects.

RKH was concerned with finding enough supervisors if we expanded and felt the department would need to take action. RM noted that the department's culture may not sufficiently encourage postdocs and PhD students to take on supervision responsibilities.

Regarding Part III, TJ felt it should be changed but was unsure if it should involve more teaching or if Part II students should just apply for the MPhil, currently a halfway house. AB felt that with a growth in staff numbers there would be more people available to teach. TJ supported the idea of an easily obtainable master's, if it could be done without too much extra load for the UTOs. AP spoke about changing the Part III entry requirements. RM was not happy to go down to 2:2 but was undecided on a 2:1 entry requirement.

RM wished there to be a discussion about the purpose of the MPhil and PhD entry requirements and noted that a master's qualification, while desirable, should remain one of several possible routes into a PhD.

AB felt there was a chance for some growth in Part III, the amount of growth Central would be looking for. AB believed he would speak to the senior tutors committee to discuss and create a bid. AB was concerned that in 2027/28 the new financial transparency model would cause disruptions and wished to begin the bid before then.

## **6.2** Finishing this year's admissions:

- a. Results day in August
- b. Summer Pool + August Reconsideration Pool (ARP)

JF informed us that there were no changes this year and admissions would proceed as normal. A level results on Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, Scottish results a few days before. International results already coming in, although most are aligned to A levels.

We will receive results under embargo, seven days before and can decide which offer holders to take. 160 offers made in December, above our usual target. The summer pool and August reconsideration pool will run as normal, although due to the large number of offers will probably

not have the capacity to make many additional offers. JF noted that international student mobility and geopolitical factors may influence admissions outcomes.

Candidates only eligible for reconsideration in August if they were interviewed in December. Encouraged interviewers to consider differing skills of candidates and to not be biased by predicted grades.

### 6.3 Arrangements for next year:

- a. TMUA
- b. Numbers management
- c. New interviewer training
- d. Interviews + Winter Pool

JF explained that next year the TMUA would run as normal. There was one reported case of suspected malpractice in an overseas exam centre. Test more secure due to mitigations. Tests in China will only be offered on one day rather than two to reduce the value of cheating. Some questions are repeated across multiple dates and times, but those questions are not used for the final mark, just for calibration, so knowing or selling those questions could not enable someone to cheat. Logistics for candidates will remain the same, booking the exam and paying a fee (bursaries available). This year's bursary funding was spent, obtained more funding which was only partially spent.

More universities have started using the TMUA exam or are in the process of doing so, which is good for candidates.

Currently we are still in numbers management, the DoS committee has the power to recommend a change. Following AB's direction last year, the preference is to keep this to prevent a surge in numbers. JF believed that unless the committee pushed for a change, numbers management would continue.

Last year the central admissions group was supposed to arrange new interviewer training, for a variety of reasons this did not happen and JF arranged training. Everyone was trained but at the last minute and did not operate as it should. JF has sent this feedback and expected it to be corrected this year.

Interviews and winter pool will operate as usual. A return to in-person interviewing is becoming more popular in some subjects and colleges, but a majority have a preference for online interviewing. There was discussion regarding whether UK candidates should be interviewed in person while international candidates remain online. A proposal will be taken to the admissions forum regarding reinstating the overseas interview program, eighteen months from now. International admissions interviews were last done before covid, JF explained this process for anyone unfamiliar. DoSes, members of faculty and admissions tutors are sent to seven locations around the world, interviewing on behalf of all colleges. These people would fill in a report and hand over to the preference college. JF felt there were advantages to being interviewed by a computer scientist and in person, while there were differences compared to interviewing at the applicant's chosen college, JF believed this was a fair compromise. Not asking the applicants to fly to Cambridge speculatively and avoiding the resulting carbon footprint. We may return to this in the next cycle in eighteen months. JF asked any interested colleagues to contact him so he could create a list of names to provide to the university.

## 7 Tripos matters

### 7.1 Part II project supervision payment guidance

Queries were raised regarding what colleges should pay for when paying for part II supervisions, as some supervisors were charging for marking and other things. RKH clarified that supervisors should be paid for one to one contact time and not any other work on the project. Colleges could choose to override that and decide on a different policy, but this was the standard guidance. The department is not putting a cap on time but DoSes could. RM believed twenty hours was the average amount of time, but half of his time was spent reviewing the dissertation and found it to require a significant amount of time and different than marking. RKH explained that the senior tutor committee's perspective was, reviewing the dissertation and marking were the same. RM will discuss this with his senior tutor. **(Action: RM)**.

CT wondered about conversations with supervisors over the summer as one person had charged for four hours of preterm discussions. RKH explained that there was no indication that would be paid for as the person would not be a formal supervisor.

### 7.2 Part II projects

MK explained that he wished to rename the UTO Supervisor to Marking Supervisor. UTOs and DoSes free to supervise projects, but if a DoS was supervising, another UTO should be involved.

Wished to change the role of checkers. Currently during the proposal submission in October, two UTOs provide feedback. Felt this was overkill as currently five people sign off on a project. Wished to remove checkers, leaving a day to day supervisor, marking supervisor and DoS. If a UTO or DoS supervised project, an additional UTO would be recruited so three pairs of eyes review all projects. RM was very supportive but asked who the third pair of eyes would be in a DoS supervised project. MK explained that a marking supervisor would need to be recruited by the student or DoS. RM wasn't sure if this was necessary as it would be a small conflict of interest. MK was more concerned about students having an argument with their DoS and having no one else to turn to, this provides some redundancy. RM saw the advantage of this, but felt the marker would be less familiar with the project than others and potentially at a disadvantage. MK noted only five projects were DoS supervised so did not anticipate this being a large problem. JF asked how students would find additional markers? RKH explained that first students would be asked to find someone, if they were unable, the UTO or DoS would attempt to find someone, finally if no one could be found it would fall to the department and RKH. RKH agreed that while there was a system in place, it could be improved.

CT was concerned about the early deadline and that it would disadvantage weaker students. Wished for the deadline to be pushed back as he had seen in the past weaker students improving given more time. RKH was keen to have the deadline brought forward after negative feedback from students about not being able to start on their project a few weeks into termtime. However RKH wished to look further at this. **(Action: MK & RKH)**.

MK noted that there were some concerns about this proposal increasing the workload for DoSes, but did not think it would significantly increase the workload. Asked DoSes to carefully read proposals before signing off as there would be less redundancy.

### **7.3 25/26 Tripos changes**

RKH wished for a python bootcamp to be run in October 2025, without making the other Tripos changes yet. The goal of the course would be to ensure core python abilities, teach good practice, introduce new tools and to help the students mix socially. Teaching language concepts and algorithms were not goals for this bootcamp and it would not be assessed.

The bootcamp would run from Thursday to Monday in week one, a combination of lectures, workbooks and exercises. RKH showed the planned schedule change, spoke about the displaced foundations and digital electronics lectures. Although NST maths would continue unchanged. After the bootcamp, normal lectures would resume with a few additional lectures.

The course design was in the early stages and RKH invited feedback via email and encouraged people who wished to become involved.

No objections or concerns.

### **8 Any other business**

None.

### **9 Date of next meeting: 9 July 2025 at 2pm**