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7 November 2014

Dear Vice Chancellor,

Re: MSc in Mathematical Foundations of Computer Science, 2013/2014 cohort.

I am writing to you as one of the two external examiners for the above mentioned MSc. I represent the mathematics side of this joint programme.

There were 18 candidates in all and I must say straight away that the standard of most of them was, as I have come to expect, very high indeed and certainly equal to previous years' cohorts. We awarded 11 distinctions and 7 passes, all completely justified.

The material itself is very rigorously tested. Each candidate chooses a minimum of five courses (according to a rubric that dictates that a certain number of advanced and applicable courses must be taken). For each course a miniproject is set by the lecturer which tests both a fundamental understanding of the material as well as having an open-ended component that gives the candidate an opportunity to display some originality or, at least, some reading outside of the set texts and lecture notes. The miniprojects are double-marked (a very welcome process that began a couple of years ago) by the lecturer and another expert member of staff. It is then our job at the Michaelmas and Hilary Terms examiners' meetings to monitor their reports on each candidate, especially in cases of inconsistency which are, in fact, quite rare. The whole process strikes me as watertight and fair.

There was one minor hiccup when model answers to a miniproject were made available too soon. This was, however, sensibly resolved to the satisfaction of both students and proctors and it turned out that the actual outcome, or even any plausible possible outcome, was unaffected.

It was not necessary to have a Trinity Term meeting for the small number of miniprojects in that term, and all the business was conducted in a routine manner via email.

This brings me to the final examiners' meeting where we discussed the dissertations and listened to the oral presentations. In the past I have used this report to comment on the fact that the candidates are not, in general, as good at talking about their work as they are at writing about it. They have, however, definitely improved a little. Perhaps, things would be even better if the candidates were told in advance who the members of the viva committee will be.

As for the dissertations themselves, they were of the same high standard as the miniprojects and in some cases contained publishable work.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all in Oxford involved in both the academic and administrative side of the MFoCS for making the whole assessment process for this course run so smoothly.

Yours sincerely,

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