

School of Mathematical Sciences

National Student Survey 2006

1. Background on recruitment

UG Student numbers (only full-time mathematics students are counted)

1 Dec 00: 334 Home + 44 Overseas = 378
1 Dec 01: 319 Home + 54 Overseas = 373
1 Dec 02: 325 Home + 62 Overseas = 387
1 Dec 03: 309 Home + 63 Overseas = 372
1 Dec 04: 315 Home + 47 Overseas = 362
1 Dec 05: 377 Home + 60 Overseas = 437
20 Nov 06: 524 Home + 76 Overseas = 600

Applying 2005-06 progression rates and assuming that we recruit next year as well as this year, our student population for 2007-8 will be about 680. This is an increase of 81% compared with the mean population of 374 over the five years before 2005-6 (the year when we were asked to recruit more).

2. National Student Survey

The National Student Survey apparently shows up the School of Mathematical Sciences in a bad light. We are concerned about this and wish to improve our position within the College and, in turn, also help the College to improve its national standing. We believe that a substantial part of the perception of student satisfaction is down to the College experience. There are serious issues that are beyond our immediate control.

College issues

Many of the problems are associated with increasing student numbers and the environment in which they work. A key concern of the School is that no matter how well we deliver the teaching and learning experience, the overall perception of our students is that don't have a place they can call home, and even if they see the School building as home, it is totally inadequate for the student population we have. It is run down and dirty with virtually no social space. Also, the heating system is random. This is for a School with an intake of over 280 students this year.

Unfortunately, the College does not have large social areas to compensate, and so we see no solution to this without extending the building. There is available space between Maths and the Informatics building and this should be considered as a potential development site to provide home facilities for study and IT in

Mathematical Sciences. We have been visited by the Senior Vice-Principal in the last few days to view the building problems and he agreed that the building need to be renovated. He is thinking of several possibilities which could transform the environment for both students and staff.

We identify the following specific issues to be addressed at the College level:

- Poor facilities – no communal space other than six chairs in the stair well of the School building. The reference “Poor access to specialized equipment” under learning resources in the NSS probably points to there being no UG School building facilities other than two lecture rooms. This view is supported by end-of-degree questionnaires that we ask final year students to return.
- Lecture rooms are full to overflowing. We have to negotiate for larger rooms and this is painful and stressful for staff. We need more large lecture theatres seating in excess of 300 students (currently there is only one on the Mile End campus).
- Booking of rooms for mid-term tests (an essential part of our progression strategy) is difficult. For example, the Great Hall has very limited availability for week 7 in 2007-2008, as a result of it already being externally booked, and so we already know that there will be problems with seating for tests in November, 2007!
- Another problem that is beyond our control is the student experience from the Registry. The information that we carefully prepared and sent to the registry for dissemination was not transmitted clearly to the students. This resulted in approximately 100 students missing induction week. These disappointments in provision are not necessarily neutralized by the provision in the class room!
- Being asked to recruit more reduces the possibility of increasing entry qualifications, weaker students complain more.

School issues

The issues raised for Mathematical Sciences in NSS2006 are:

- Staff have not made the subject interesting:
 - The end-degree questionnaires do not support this and suggest the cohort answering the NSS may not be our representative (see below)
- Assessment and feedback:
 - We are unsure about this as allocation of marks is clear in mathematics and we go to considerable lengths to set and mark regular courseworks. The coursework contribution towards a final mark is small (normally 10%) and therefore

the main purpose of coursework is to give students prompt feedback on progress.

- Academic support:
 - The advisor system is always subject to a wide variation in performance. We are currently proposing that we employ a student support administrator to help even out the student advising experience by identifying students who need support.
- Personal development :
 - We have obtained a grant to develop a “Writing in the Disciplines” course aimed at improving students’ communication skills.

We think that we are providing strong and continuous support to the students in Mathematical Sciences. End-of-degree questionnaires suggest that students like their undergraduate experience. Also course questionnaires are very satisfactory overall and so internal and external questionnaires seem to disagree. We therefore plan to address directly the final year students on the issues of the NSS questionnaire. Specifically, we intend to hold meetings with all third year students to ask them to consider whether they would wish to be associated with a University that performs well in the NSS, and if so, to indicate how they might approach the questionnaire in a positive way.

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