

Report on the Annual Meeting of Correspondents 2003 Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences

The Annual Meeting of Newton Institute Correspondents was held on 30 June 2003 at the Institute: 23 Correspondents attended. A further 35 Correspondents sent their apologies, and 16 did not reply to the three email invitations sent by the Institute.

As well as a presentation by the Director and Deputy Director and an open discussion forum, the programme contained (at the suggestion of the National Advisory Board) a number of talks on a variety of scientific topics given by Correspondents themselves. These talks were aimed at a general mathematical audience and were well received. Those Correspondents who were able to stay were also invited to the Rothschild Visiting Professor Seminar at 5pm: this was given by Professor Joel Smoller of the "Nonlinear Hyperbolic Waves in Phase Dynamics and Astrophysics" programme.

During the presentation session, the Director showed the membership of the various Institute Committees and explained their roles, in particular the ways in which the Committees interact with each other. He also explained how a programme makes its way from the initial proposal through the Scientific Steering Committee and finally the Management Committee before being accepted. The Deputy Director then explained some aspects of the role of Correspondents, in particular setting out their duties and what the Institute promises to do in return (see attachment). He expanded on the scheme for encouraging long-term participants to visit other Universities during their stay, and on the role of satellite workshops. Finally, Professor John Toland of ICMS gave a brief presentation on the status of ICMS and its future programme; he suggested that at some point in the future, Correspondents might become joint INI/ICMS Correspondents, and this suggestion received some support.

The open discussion forum touched on many different areas, not all connected with the work of Correspondents. Professor Truman (University of Wales, Swansea) commented on the lack of opportunity for Welsh mathematicians and revealed that a bid is being prepared for the Welsh Assembly for a new research institute. He suggested that the day's meeting might have been videoconferenced live instead of asking Correspondents to make the journey physically. He also thought that the Institute should videoconference some of its seminars, to enable researchers to take part remotely; he was of the opinion that the current online seminars are too difficult to use and do not allow interaction.

There were some queries about the level of funding available for an Institute programme, and also about the Junior Membership scheme. Explanations were provided. Professor Truman commented that to buy a young lecturer out of teaching commitments would cost around £6K, and asked whether money might be available for this purpose; the Director asked Correspondents to provide any specific evidence they had of people experiencing problems in attending Institute activities.

In response to a question about whether Correspondents could do more than just act as disseminators, it was emphasised that Correspondents are supposed to act as a two-way channel for exchange of ideas.

The Director welcomed new Correspondents (those attached to organisations other than Universities). Mr Youdan (IMA) said that he would be happy to advertise Institute activities in the Association's publications.

One Correspondent said that Institute programmes could sometimes seem like rather exclusive clubs. The many ways that researchers can get in touch with the Organisers of programmes, either through the Institute or directly, and how they can subsequently get involved, were outlined. It was emphasised that Correspondents have an important role to play in alerting the Institute to potential participants of whom the Organisers may not be aware; the Institute in turn could advise Organisers.

A discussion on how information should be disseminated to departments other than mathematics was inconclusive. Correspondents seemed pleased with the event, and many used lunch as a way of networking with others.

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