

Report on the 2006 meeting of Newton Institute Correspondents

This year's meeting of Correspondents was held on Friday 23rd June 2006 at the Institute. It was attended by 37 Correspondents or their substitutes (30 from Universities plus 7 from other organisations), out of a possible 80 (59 plus 21 respectively): a list is attached. The Institute took the opportunity, as last year, to use the fact that some Universities' Correspondents were unable to attend to suggest to Heads of Department that the time might have come for a new appointment; this resulted subsequently in a handful of changes.

The agenda was as follows:

- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.30 Steve Cook (Rothschild Visiting Professor on the *Logic and Algorithms* programme):
Computational Complexity and Proofs of Combinatorial Principles
- 14.30 Sir John Kingman and Robert Hunt: presentation on future programmes at the Institute and current initiatives
- 15.15 Heather Tewkesbury (Smith Institute): presentation on the Knowledge Transfer Network
- 15.30 Tea
- 16.00 Open Discussion: "an opportunity for a wide-ranging exchange of views"
- 17.00 Alan Bray (Manchester, participant in the *Principles of the Dynamics of Non-Equilibrium Systems* programme): *First-passage problems in systems with many degrees of freedom*
- 18.00 Wine Reception

The scientific seminars that topped and tailed the afternoon were particularly well received.

The presentation by the Director and Deputy Director covered the future plans of the Institute and the programmes currently in preparation, emphasising the importance of UK-wide participation, and outlined various schemes and initiatives operated by the Institute to ensure that the benefit of Institute activity is spread as widely as possible around the whole UK community. Particular emphasis was placed on satellite workshops and other meetings, the Junior Membership scheme and the mechanism for encouraging overseas participants in Institute programmes to travel to other UK institutions to give seminars and make new contacts. Correspondents were strongly urged to invite suitable overseas participants to their own departments and to make maximum use of this scheme.

The Deputy Director explained the various categories into which visitors to the Institute fall: these categories will, in future, be known as Visiting Fellows (with full facilities, including an office and dedicated computer); Programme Participant (with no office space and shared computer facilities, typically offered to those visitors who are able to attend a programme only for a short period); and Workshop Participant (for those attending only a workshop or conference but not taking part in the programme proper). Visiting Fellows and Programme Participants are invited by the programme organisers; however, any academic who is interested in taking part should contact the organisers to solicit an invitation. Workshop participation can be applied for online, and there are no restrictions other than the capacity of the lecture room. Workshop participants are charged a registration fee and accommodation costs, but in many cases these will be covered by external funds.

The Director introduced the Director Elect, Sir David Wallace. Sir David said that he hoped to visit as many Universities and other institutions as possible during his tenure, in order to spread the word about what the Institute has to offer; to understand how the Institute might adapt to the needs of other institutions; and to get a feel for the most exciting up-coming scientific research areas. As well as meeting mathematicians he might speak to University management, e.g., pro-Vice Chancellors. All Correspondents were encouraged to arrange a visit from Sir David, by contacting the Institute.

During the Open Discussion, a wide variety of points was made.

- Sir David asked for the views of the meeting about communications facilities at the Institute, following on from Heather Tewkesbury's presentation on the Knowledge Transfer Network and its

facilities for remote interaction. Should the Institute be a haven in which academics can escape from the pressures of everyday diversions while they interact with other participants, or should they use it as a base to reach out to other institutions? The discussion led on to the question of dissemination of seminars, both by the Institute's current mechanisms ("Seminars on the Web") and possible future mechanisms.

- The Institute is looking actively at webcasting, especially for seminars given by the Rothschild Visiting Professors 4 or 5 times a year. Many different systems are being explored, including the various types used at other institutions around the world (AccessGrid, WebEx, the MSRI model, etc.), and their merits were discussed. The distinction was drawn between one-way and two-way webcasting. When the Institute has installed suitable equipment, hopefully early in 2007, it would advertise the facilities widely through Correspondents and other means. Correspondents were particularly keen that introductory or training seminars should be broadcast. It was agreed, however, that the true breaking down of barriers between disciplines, in which the Institute has a particular strength, really required face-to-face interaction.
- The idea of an online forum, to run alongside seminars that have been webcast, was mooted. This would enable issues to be raised about the talks, and would allow speakers to be asked questions. It might be an alternative to true two-way webcasting, or it might be additional.
- It was suggested that programme organisers could give a general introduction, using webcasting facilities, to the topic of their programme just after it starts.
- What would the Institute most like Correspondents to draw the attention of their colleagues to? The Deputy Director said that colleagues should be encouraged, first and foremost, to participate; or, if no forthcoming programmes are relevant to them, to put together a proposal for a programme that *is* relevant. They could also offer their University as a satellite workshop location, or invite Institute participants to visit them. At the very least, they should explore the Seminars on the Web.
- Correspondents asked for some text describing the Institute and what it does, to inform colleagues in their home institutions. The Deputy Director would produce such a text.
- A key aspect of the Correspondents' role is to distribute emails advertising workshops, etc., to colleagues, especially in departments other than mathematics. It was agreed that it can sometimes be difficult and time-consuming to decide precisely who should receive each email, despite the Institute's system of including information about relevant scientific areas; and recipients do not always understand what the Institute does and what is being offered. The Deputy Director would produce an explanatory paragraph for inclusion in such emails.
- Following on from comments at the last Annual Meeting of Correspondents, the Institute now distributes to Correspondents (via email) extra information about each programme that is intended for a non-expert audience. These so-called "Ladybirds" can also be found on the web under the heading "Background Information".
- Satellite workshops were discussed, and the funding arrangements clarified (EPSRC and LMS are particularly willing to receive grant applications for satellites, and the Institute will match fund up to a maximum of £5k). It was pointed out that organising a satellite workshop could be a lot of work, even though the Institute staff offers substantial help: there are many matters that can be dealt with only by the organisers.
- The Correspondent from the Institute of Actuaries asked for suggestions about ways in which the IoA could make contact with other bodies in order to liaise more actively with academics. Wine receptions and presentations were suggested. The Institute has held two highly successful programmes on quantitative finance, and proposals for follow-up meetings would be received with great interest.

The Director thanked all Correspondents warmly for their contribution to the work of the Institute; their role continues to be of very high importance.

Robert Hunt

July 2006

Attendees

University Correspondents

SR Alpern	LSE
C Athorne	Glasgow
K Baur	Leicester (substitute for F Neumann)
T Brzezinski	Wales, Swansea (substitute for A Truman)
AD Burbanks	Portsmouth
BL Burrows	Staffordshire
PJ Cameron	Queen Mary
J Chapman	Keele (substitute for JJ Healey)
I Chenchiah	Bristol (substitute for F Mezzadri)
PA Clarkson	Kent
R Douglas	Wales, Aberystwyth
SW Ellacott	Brighton
J Grbic	Aberdeen (substitute for A Sevastyanov)
S Huggett	Plymouth (substitute for C Christopher)
J Kaplunov	Brunel
T Konstantopoulos	Heriot-Watt (substitute for S Foss)
N Mackay	York
D Macpherson	Leeds (substitute for A Pillay)
Y Mao	Nottingham
P O'Donnell	Anglia Ruskin
M Prest	Manchester
M Reid	Warwick
J Reinard	St Andrews (substitute for D Dritschel)
L Rempé	Liverpool (substitute for PJ Giblin)
T Swift	West of England (substitute for K Henderson)
A Vdovina	Newcastle (substitute for J Stoyanov)
S Virmani	Imperial (substitute for M Plenio)
S Watson	Strathclyde (substitute for M Ainsworth)
WJM Zakrzewski	Durham
K Zhang	Exeter (substitute for AM Soward)

Correspondents from other Institutions

CM Bishop	Microsoft Research
P Cooper	LMS
R Hibbs	OR Society
T Maynard	Institute of Actuaries (substitute for P Simpson)
M Semenov	Rothamsted Research
H Tewkesbury	Smith Institute
D Youdan	IMA