

Letter of resignation as external examiner for St Mary's University College Belfast

"Dear Dr Cosgrave

I am writing¹ in response to your report as Extern Examiner for MATHEMATICS in the BEd degree in St Mary's University College. The substantive issues raised in your report have been addressed by the Board of Examiners and I enclose a copy of the report which they have sent to me.

Thank you for your kind attention and professionalism in providing this service to the College.

Yours sincerely,

Very Rev Professor Martin O'Callaghan

Principal"

"Dear Dr Cosgrave,

REPORT ON BEd MATHEMATICS 2003/04

I write, as the equivalent of Head of School, in response to the advice and comments which you offered in the above Report, for which both my colleagues and I are most grateful...

Once again, I would wish to reiterate our thanks for your valuable help and assistance as an external examiner. Both the University and College are in your debt.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Prof. J.R.B. McMinn

Principal²

Mr Roy Ferguson (Head of Academic Council)
Academic Council Office
Queen's University Belfast

Sunday 17th July 2005

Dear Mr Ferguson,

In an email to you (see Appendix 1 to this letter) of Thursday 7th July, copied to Professor Gregson (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, QUB) and Mr Norman Russell (Academic Registrar, QUB), I wrote: "*I am asking you, yet again, to determine when I might expect to be in receipt of the St Mary's repeat examination papers*". To date I

¹ Letter of 5 October 2004.

² Stranmillis University College. Letter of 4 August, 2004.

have not received any response from you, nor from Mr Russell. I did, however, receive an acknowledgement from the Office of the VC (Appendix 1).

I would ask you, and others, to recall it was *only* through an innocent third party³ I discovered, on Wednesday 6th July 2005 (see the 'Dr Ron McCartney' document in Appendix 2), that the St Mary's College Board of Mathematics Examiners had failed four second year students at its meeting of Monday 13th June 2005 (a meeting agreed by unknown persons in St Mary's and QUB; as all interested parties are aware, that was done *without my knowledge*). I shall soon be sending a substantial letter to the St Mary's Students Union setting out the background to those failings, disassociating myself from those failings, and I shall copy that letter to you and other interested parties.

In a letter to me of 8 July 2005 – written, it would appear, on receipt of a copy of the above mentioned 'Dr Ron McCartney' document – Mr Finn (Acting Principal, St Mary's University College) wrote:

"Dear Dr Cosgrave,

I am in receipt of your most recent email messages. Let me set out my position on what you describe as an extraordinary situation.

[There followed an irrelevant paragraph, which I am omitting.]

On the matter of resit papers for failing students, the Board of Examiners, with the agreement of Dr Reynolds and Dr Sweeney, took a course of action which they deemed to be appropriate under the circumstances. As both my senior colleagues are on holiday at this time I am not in a position to provide any further information.

I received a telephone call on 7 July 2005 from Dr McCartney seeking clarification of his position. I informed Dr McCartney that St Mary's University College was not asking him to perform duties as an external examiner with all that that entails. The nature of Dr Sweeney's request to Dr McCartney is an internal matter for this college.

I will be reporting to the university on the actions taken by the Mathematics Board of Examiners with respect to failing students.

On the matter of the meeting which I attended with you at the Malone Lodge Hotel. Let me make it clear that I am not involved in this matter at an operational level and therefore would never have had the intention to report any aspect of our conversation⁴ to the Board of Examiners. I

³Dr Ron McCartney, Open University Office, Belfast. Dr McCartney was the previous Mathematics external examiner on behalf of QUB at St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges.

⁴ I imagine that what Mr Finn has in mind here is the following: at that meeting (of Sunday 12th June 2005) I informed him, and his accompanying colleague Dr Margaret Reynolds, that it had been my intention to pass *all* the St Mary's Mathematics students, since, in my considered judgement, no student should be 'failed' having been taught by such incompetent staff. All of that is recorded elsewhere, and should already be common knowledge to interested parties.

attended the meeting to enable me to fully ascertain your position in this whole affair and I found the meeting very helpful.

I do however find your most recent emails to me unprofessional, discourteous and unhelpful.

The situation now is as follows: St Mary's University College and the University have agreed on the establishment of a review panel to examine the areas of concern in your report and subsequent correspondence. It would be inappropriate to engage in further correspondence on this matter in advance of the panel's report.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Finn

Acting principal" [end of quoted letter]

Now, I wish to make some comments on some of Mr Finn's letter:

1. Re "course of action". I presume Mr Finn has in mind the *approach* to Dr Ron McCartney (Appendix 2). Since there is *no* mention in Mr Finn's letter of *any* QUB involvement (unlike the Monday 13th June examiners meeting), I ask the rhetorical question: do the authorities in QUB accept that St Mary's College acted *appropriately* in asking someone – Dr Ron McCartney – who is **not** the QUB-appointed external examiner to '*scrutinise*' (see Appendix 3) the autumn repeat papers? What exactly did the St Mary's authorities intend doing? *First* invite Dr McCartney to '*scrutinise*' the repeat papers, and *then* ask me to do the same? This must *surely* be considered to be absolutely unacceptable by QUB.

2. Re "appropriate". Surely it was *most inappropriate*, given that I was – at the time – the QUB-appointed external examiner.

3. Re "circumstances". What "circumstances"? Please note from the 'Dr Ron McCartney' document (Appendix 2): "While all of you are aware – or *ought* to be aware – of my well documented reasons for not visiting St Mary's College on Monday 13th June, the autumn repeat examinations pose *no* similar difficulties. It is *standard practice* that the external examiner does *not* visit the college whose work he/she is examining, but rather relies on the *integrity* of the college staff to furnish him/her with the appropriate documentation, which generally says something along the lines of: *these students have certainly passed; these others were borderline, and having given their work a thorough look-over we have arrived at certain decisions; while these others are definite fails (over which we could stand if challenged)*. That's *precisely* what happened last year at St Mary's." [end of quote]

4. Re "St Mary's University College was not asking him [Dr McCartney] him to perform duties as an external examiner with all that that entails." Here Mr Finn tells one what (the inanimate) St Mary's University College was *not* doing, but Mr Finn fails to tell one what it *was* doing.

5. Re "The nature of Dr Sweeney's request to Dr McCartney is an internal matter for this college." This is really too *ex cathedra* for words; it is simply saying: *mind your own business*. But it *is* (or rather *was*) my business, and it really ought to *be* the university's business. Appropriate senior officials in QUB must *surely* want to take an interest in this...

6. The final paragraph is, in the immediate circumstances, entirely irrelevant, and tells me nothing new. All interested parties already know that "St Mary's University College and the University have agreed on the establishment of a review panel to examine the areas of concern in your report⁵ and subsequent correspondence". It is irrelevant because Mr Finn fails to distinguish between the long-term future (when interested parties will pore over the past, with a view to making decisions about what to do concerning St Mary's Mathematics Department), and the actual present and immediate future (the repeat examination paper for the four 'failed' second year students, and the actual repeat examination).

In view of all of the above, I see no useful purpose in my continuing to act as external examiner on behalf of QUB for St Mary's University College, and I hereby tender my resignation (for St Mary's) with immediate effect.

I do, of course, wish to finish my term with Stranmillis University College, and I trust you would be agreeable to my doing so. I shall send you a final report for Stranmillis College after their autumn examination work is complete.

Finally, a purely practical matter: given my experiences with St Mary's University College, I do not wish to receive whatever fee might be due to me for my work with that institution, and I would ask you, Mr Ferguson, to kindly arrange payment of the *gross* amount, together with whatever fee was due to me for my Stranmillis University College work (that does *not* imply any dissatisfaction with Stranmillis, a college with whose staff I had an extremely positive association), to the Irish Cancer Society at this address: 43-45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Cosgrave (BSc (London), PhD (London))

Copied to: Professor Peter Gregson (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, QUB)

Mr Norman Russell (Academic Registrar, QUB)

Professor John Gardner (Dean, Faculty of Legal, Social and Educational Sciences)

Mr Peter Finn (Acting Principal, St Mary's University College)

⁵ Once again Mr Finn refers to my "report", when – on innumerable occasions, the most recent being in the 'Dr Ron McCartney' document – I have *corrected* that term to "Final Report 2005 INCOMPLETE".

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Dr Margaret Reynolds (Dean, Faculty of Education, and line manager for Mathematics, St Mary's University College)

Dr John Sweeney (Senior Tutor Academic Affairs, St Mary's University College)

Professor J.R.B. McMinn (Principal, Stranmillis College)

Dr Ron McCartney (Open University, Belfast)

Appendix 1

Folders » Inbox » RE: your letter dated 30 June 2005

From: "vc" <vc.office@qub.ac.uk> [« Add to Address Book »](#) [« Block sender »](#)
To: <john.cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie>
Cc:
Subject: RE: your letter dated 30 June 2005
Sent: Fri, 8 Jul 2005 15:32:08 +0100

I acknowledge receipt of your email of 7 July 2005.

-----Original Message-----

From: John Cosgrave [mailto:john.cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie]
Sent: Thursday 07 July 2005 13:39
To: Roy Ferguson
Cc: Professor Peter Gregson (Principal and VC, QUB); Norman Russell (Academic Registrar, QUB); John Cosgrave
Subject: RE: your letter dated 30 June 2005

To: Roy Ferguson
Head of Academic Council Office
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN

Dear Mr Ferguson,

I am in receipt of your email. It would be entirely inaccurate to describe it as a response. I am truly saddened that you - who had seemed to me to be an honourable and decent man - have been reduced to this. You have not had the courtesy to send me the requested electronic version of your letter, which means that I shall have to go to the bother of requesting one of my college's secretaries to type out a copy of your letter.

Given yesterday's developments (re Dr McCartney) I am not even going to challenge (for the moment) what you wrote in your letter, since instead I am much more interested in receiving a response to yesterday's 'Dr Ron McCartney' document. Both you and Mr Norman Russell should be asking yourselves this single question (perhaps you are already doing so): since someone in St Mary's College told a half-truth (to use delicate language) to Dr McCartney concerning my 'resignation', could it also not have happened that your Academic Registrar's Office was similarly fooled (and all of us are gullible, and can be misled, there is no shame in that; shame only falls - and will fall - upon those who mislead) with regard to my non-visit to St Mary's College on Monday 13th June? Eventually I shall expect to receive massive apologies from all concerned (persons of integrity might even resign). QUB will not emerge from this with an enhanced reputation; in fact, quite the contrary.

And now, really, my patience is almost exhausted with QUB and St Mary's, and I am asking you, yet again, to determine when I might expect to be in

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receipt of the St Mary's repeat examination papers. I simply cannot be kept waiting, day after day, without knowing. You simply cannot continue in the manner in which you have without there being serious consequences.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Cosgrave (External Examiner in Mathematics for QUB, BSc (London), PhD (London))

PS Please note that, besides Mr Russell, I am also sending a copy of this to the Office of the QUB Principal and Vice-Chancellor.

-----Original Message-----

From: Roy Ferguson [mailto:sr.ferguson@qub.ac.uk]

Sent: 07 July 2005 08:11

To: john.cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie

Subject: RE: your letter dated 30 June 2005

Dear Dr Cosgrave

Further to your email of 5 July 2005, I would refer you to Mr Russell's email of 4 July 2005....."St Mary's University College and the University have agreed on the establishment of a review panel to examine the areas of concern raised in your report and subsequent correspondence. The University's senior management has concluded that it would be inappropriate to engage in further correspondence on this matter in advance of the panel's report"

Yours sincerely

Roy Ferguson
Head of Academic Council Office
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN

Tel No 028 9097 5007

-----Original Message-----

From: John Cosgrave [mailto:john.cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie]

Sent: 05 July 2005 16:15

To: Roy Ferguson (Head of Academic Council Office, QUB)

Cc: John Sweeney; Peter Mc Polin; Margaret Reynolds; Peter Finn; John Cosgrave; Norman Russell (Academic Registrar, QUB)

Subject: your letter dated 30 June 2005

Dear Mr Ferguson,

I am in receipt of your letter of 30 June 2005. For ease of response I would very much appreciate having an electronic version of your letter (preferably in Word, if that's possible). I very much wish to take serious issue with your "I understand that at your meeting..." - with its implied last minute nature - but will wait until I have the electronic form of your letter to do so.

In the meantime, would you kindly inform me when I will be sent (possible) repeat examination papers for St Mary's College, or did the assembled St Mary's College mathematics staff award 'passes' to all its students (on the same grounds that I myself would have passed them, as I informed Mr Finn and Dr Reynolds on 12 June (namely, that no St Mary's student should 'fail' having been taught by such incompetent staff)?

If the St Mary's staff are sending me repeat examination papers then I would, of course, expect to receive them in good time, and not find that I have to write other emails to Dr McPolin like the following of 12:12 28 April 2005:

"Dear Peter, Have you yet posted your summer exam papers to me? If so, then when? None have yet arrived here... My college will be closed next Monday, and I'm off to London for five days from May 12th. Sincerely, John"

Also I would not wish to receive in return another response like his of 14:11 28 April 2005: "Dear John, I have not posted the exam papers yet. I am sorry about this delay. I hope to get all the papers to you next week. Best Wishes, Peter"

[Some subsequent emails on that topic were as follows, without omission, and in time-date sequence:

>From myself, 14:24 28 April 2005: "Dear Peter, This is shockingly late. Next week we're into May, which is outrageous, with exams that month. After my critical report of last year I had hoped for better. Stranmillis sent me summer exam papers in January. Recall that I must - simply must - be provided with written solutions, and clear marking schemes (as is standard everywhere). And you must pass exam papers around internally to eliminate obvious blunders before papers are sent to me

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(standard practice). Sincerely, John"

>From myself, 16:19, 4 May 2005: Dear Peter, Your papers have still not arrived. What *exactly* has been your problem? Could you not have completed *everything* over your Easter break? Could you discuss with your college administration the finding of a new mathematics external examiner? I do not think that I could tolerate another year as your external examiner. Sincerely, John Cosgrave"

>From Dr McPolin, 13:46, 5 May 2005: "Dear John, the reason why I'm so far behind is due to the third year paper on Geometry - This is a new course and I found it very tricky setting a paper which would be of an acceptable standard yet doable. I am sorry for the delay. I am also sorry that you have decided to resign as extern as I value your opinion highly and would ask you to reconsider if at all possible. Yours Sincerely, Peter"

>From myself, 11:41 6 May 2005: "Dear Peter, "I hope to get all the papers to you next week." 'Next week' has come and gone, and still no papers. I've already told you that I'm off to London next Thursday 12th. You simply *must* have all your papers delivered (exactly *how* is your problem) here on Monday. No, I won't reconsider. I've had enough. I will inform QUB when I write my report. Sincerely, John"

>From Dr McPolin, 12:10 6 May 2005: "Dear John, would it be OK if >emailed them to you on Monday? The exams are in pdf format and I can scan the solutions. I will inform my Faculty director of your decision to resign (as requested in your previous email). I'm so sorry about the way this has turned out -please accept my sincere apologies. Yours Sincerely, Peter"

>From myself, 13:16, 6 May 2005: "Dear Peter, Email and scanned solutions it will have to be. Since you tell me that your problem is with your new geometry paper then I ask you to now send me the other papers and scanned solutions *today*, so that I may have some time to read them over the weekend. I know that goes against my asking you that everything be sent simultaneously, but time is getting to be dangerously tight. What is the date of your first examination? Our examinations start two weeks from next Monday. John"

>From Dr McPolin, 15:32, 6 May 2005: "Dear John, Please find attached the year 3 paper 2 on Number theory and Graph theory together with solutions and marking scheme - this was paper was set by one of my colleagues. I will send the other papers on Monday morning as I need to make some further minor adjustments to them. I had some technical difficulties so I'm sorry for not replying sooner to your last email. The first exam is in May 26th. Thanking you, Peter"

>From myself, 16:16, FRIDAY 6 May 2005: "Dear Peter, There is something radically wrong here. First you tell me that your problem is (only) with your new geometry paper; I ask you to send me *everything else*, and you send me *one* paper and solutions. You mean to tell me that two weeks before your exams start you will be sending me papers following the making of some 'minor adjustments'? How can you possibly leave your external examiner with so little time to read your papers before your exams start? Sincerely, John"

Not having received any response by the morning of Monday 9 May I wrote as follows, sent at 11:50 9 May:

" To Dr. John Sweeney (Registrar, St. Mary's University College, Belfast)
Dear John,

In my (understated) critical report for QUB last summer 2004 I wrote: "Standard practice for Mathematics in Britain and Ireland is to provide the external examiner with all papers and written (not typed) 'model solutions' at the same time (and in good time). There may be no universal guideline as to what is meant by 'good time', and Registrars' offices may allow some leeway in that regard; however the external examiner should not be placed in a situation where he is under pressure to carefully deal with external work, when he is almost certainly under time pressure in his own institution. This year there was a problem with regard to postal deliveries in the Dublin area around the time papers were being sent to me, and some papers and solutions were sent to me in scanned form by email attachment, while others went sent through the regular post. Some solutions were typed, others written.

>From a letter to me dated 8th April (arrived 13th) I quote: Please find enclosed the draft year 4 paper "Topics in Mathematics" with solutions. I hope to get the other year 3 paper to you next week. Again I beg your indulgence for the extreme inconvenience this is undoubtedly causing you. No external examiner should be awaiting examination papers at such a late date.

A standard practice, too, is to circulate papers amongst colleagues before sending papers to externs, to pick up on any obvious 'typos' etc. Had such a practice been in place, most of the time-consuming comments that I had to make in the attached St Mary's #1 2004 (9th April) and St Mary's #2 2004 (14th April) documents could have been avoided.

In future I must receive all papers (already checked internally) and written solutions at the same time, and in good time (at the very latest a few weeks before the Easter break)." [end of quote from 2004]

As of last Friday afternoon (6th May, several weeks after Easter, and some two weeks before your

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examinations are due to commence) I had received only one paper: Paper 2, Year 3 (even then I only received that paper because of an initiative of my own; see the sequence of emails below, commencing with mine of 28th April 2005).

I have done little else since Friday afternoon but mull over that paper, and type up my comments (which so far run to some seven pages, and I have not yet finished). How, at this late stage, can Dr. McPolin expect that I will have the time to comment *fully* on the other, as yet undelivered, papers? Indeed there would appear to be little point in my commenting on any of the other papers at this late stage, except perhaps to point out any major blunders.

I was in receipt of all papers and 'model solutions' from Stranmillis College before the end of January, and I had communicated all my (minor) comments by 21st February.

Yours sincerely,

John Cosgrave" [end of my email to Dr John Sweeney]

and so on, and on, and on...

I would very much appreciate hearing as soon as possible when I might expect to receive repeat examination papers, and I would hope that you can exert some pressure on St Mary's to not leave me waiting overlong. The St Mary's College 'line-manager' would appear to have no influence over her colleagues, failing (for example) to obtain responses to the following email of mine 16:43 7 June 2005: "Dear Margaret, From last year's 'Issues from the External Examiner's Report in Mathematics' (sent to me by your college's Principal, and cc-ed to you as Faculty Director):

"5. Final year theses. The External Examiner requested that a selection (with a range of quality) of final year projects (referred to by him as theses) be sent to him in advance.
Action. This will be done."

So far it doesn't look like 'this will be done', and it's now too late for me in any case, as our own extern arrives tomorrow and will be here until Friday. Could you please determine from Dr McPolin if he has sent the promised range or not. I rather suspect it will be 'no', but I would appreciate confirmation one way or the other.

Last year the head of mathematics at Stranmillis sent me all their thesis/project work by early May, giving me *time* to read (and I did) their (fine) student work, but in St Mary's last year, well you will know what happened, as I wrote about it in my report.

Another (promised) 'Action' from last year was in connection with:

"1. Examination papers and solutions. The External Examiner has requested that all papers (checked internally) be sent to him in good time (at the very latest a few weeks before the Easter break) together with hand written solutions. Action. The examination papers will be sent to the External Examiner in good time next year along with solutions. The papers will be checked by the internal examiners before being sent to him...."

Let us turn a blind eye to the *completely broken* promise with regard to "the examination papers will be sent to the External Examiner in good time next year", and turn to the further promised "the papers will be checked by the internal examiners before being sent to him". In connection with the latter, could you please determine the following from the St Mary's mathematics staff: which member of staff checked which papers, before they were sent to me? Sincerely, John Cosgrave" [end of my email to Dr Reynolds of 7 May 2005]

Once again, I would very much appreciate it if you could persuade Dr Reynolds to obtain the sought information, being part of what I legitimately require to enable me to (eventually) complete my final report on St Mary's for QUB. I trust that QUB would wish St Mary's staff to cooperate with me, rather than obstruct my work.

I would also very much appreciate it if you could influence Mr Finn to have his secretary (a Miss Peggy O'Neill) respond to my email of 15:40 29 June 2005: "Dear Miss O'Neill, On Friday 10th June I received a hand-delivered letter from Mr Finn and Professor Richard McMinn (Stranmillis University College). The letter was dated '8 June 2005' and began "We have been informed by the Course Team Leader for BEd Mathematics...". I would very much appreciate it if you would kindly send me an electronic version of that letter (presumably typed by you using 'Word?'), and send it to me as an attached file. Thanking you, Yours sincerely, (Dr) John Cosgrave (External Examiner in Mathematics for QUB)"

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Cosgrave (External Examiner in Mathematics for QUB, BSc (London), PhD (London))

PS As you see, I am cc-ing this email to the following persons: Mr Norman Russell (QUB Academic Registrar), Mr Peter Finn (Acting Principal, St Mary's), Dr Margaret Reynolds (Dean of the Faculty of Education, and 'line manager' for Mathematics, St Mary's), Dr John Sweeney (wrongly identified to

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me as being the 'Academic Registrar at St Mary's), and Dr Peter McPolin (Course Team Leader for BEd Mathematics, St Mary's).

John B. Cosgrave,
Mathematics Department,
St. Patrick's College,
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9,
IRELAND.

My most recent (Nov 2004-Jan 2005) mathematical work is at:
<http://www.spd.dcu.ie/johnbcos/jacobi.htm>

F[382447], discovered by Yves Gallot and me (July 1999), was the largest known composite Fermat number. New records F[2145351] and F[2478782] Were established in Feb and Oct 2003 with help from Paul Jobling, George Woltman, and my St Patrick's College computation group.
Details at my web site: www.spd.dcu.ie/johnbcos

Appendix 2

The following is the entire original text of my 'Dr Ron McCartney' document.

To: Mr Peter Finn (Acting Principal, St Mary's University College Belfast)
Dr Margaret Reynolds (Dean of Education Faculty and 'line-manager' for Mathematics at St Mary's College)
Dr John Sweeney (Senior Tutor, St Mary's)

Wednesday 6th June 2005

Dear Mr Finn, Dr Reynolds, and Dr Sweeney,

This morning I learned that Dr Ron McCartney (Open University, and previous external examiner for QUB at your college) was informed by Dr Sweeney that I had resigned as external examiner. Dr Sweeney failed to mention that my resignation dates from the *end* of this September. Of course it is *possible* that Dr Sweeney was misinformed about this by more senior colleagues at St Mary's, but, in the extraordinary circumstances in which we all find ourselves, he should be better briefed (otherwise, he ought to brief better).

I also learned that Dr McCartney was asked by Dr Sweeney to act as external examiner for a 2nd year repeat⁶ examination paper (**Analysis and Linear Algebra** (surprise, surprise, surprise)), since St Mary's failed four 2nd year students in its summer examinations⁷. Mr Finn and Dr Reynolds clearly forgot to inform the Monday 13th June 'emergency' internal examiner's meeting that I had informed them on the previous evening that it was my intention to pass *all* St Mary's students – even

⁶ Only yesterday, Tues 5th July, I wrote to Mr Roy Ferguson, asking him when I might expect to be in receipt of repeat papers, if there were any...

⁷ Am I to understand that there were *no* 'failures' in the 3rd and 4th years (one *ought* to read my report on the Number Theory and Graph Theory paper, in which I document gross errors on behalf of the internal examiner, and more besides), or has Dr Sweeney approached others to act as external examiners for other repeat papers? I really do *expect* to receive an answer to that question, and I also would expect QUB recipients of this document to take an *active* interest in this matter.

those who possibly obtained 0% – since **no** student should fail having been taught by incompetent staff⁸. Have none of you read the 'INCOMPLETE' version⁹ of my Final Report, in which I detail my comments on the grading of the corresponding December 2004 (Erasmus paper, on **Analysis and Linear Algebra**, the paper that was sent to me only *after* the examination had *already* taken place). Is it any wonder that there were *some* 'failures' on the corresponding summer paper? I *shudder* to think of the standard of grading that produced only four 'failures' (perhaps there were only four students).

While all of you¹⁰ are aware – or *ought* to be aware – of my well documented reasons for not visiting St Mary's College on Monday 13th June, the autumn repeat examinations pose *no* similar difficulties. It is *standard practice* that the external examiner does *not* visit the college whose work he/she is examining, but rather relies on the *integrity* of the college staff to furnish him/her with the appropriate documentation, which generally says something along the lines of: *these students have certainly passed; these others were borderline, and having given their work a thorough look-over we have arrived at certain decisions; while these others are definite fails (over which we could stand if challenged)*. That's *precisely* what happened last year at St Mary's.

I really do *expect* to receive a response from you with regard to the above.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Cosgrave (Head of Mathematics, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra)
External Examiner in Mathematics for QUB (until September 2005¹¹)

⁸ All of that is well documented in earlier correspondence.

⁹ A number of you keep referring to this as my 'report', as opposed to my '**incomplete** report'. Please, please read *carefully*.

¹⁰ In fairness, though, Dr Sweeney might not be as familiar with the circumstances as his more senior colleagues.

¹¹ Asserted by Mr Finn, and the Principal of Stranmillis College, in their jointly *signed*, hand-delivered letter, dated 8 June 2004, received 10 June. Note, in fact, the following email of mine dated 29 June 2005:

-----Original Message-----

From: John Cosgrave [mailto:john.cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie]

Sent: 29 June 2005 16:31

To: Roy Ferguson

Cc: John Cosgrave

Subject: QUB email #04

To: Roy Ferguson
Head of Academic Council Office
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast BT7 1NN

Dear Mr Ferguson,

Further to my email of yesterday I should inform you there were some failing students at Stranmillis College, that I have already reviewed their repeat papers, that my name will appear on their papers, and that I will, of course, be consulted concerning the repeat results.

The Acting Principal of St Mary's College (Mr Finn), and the Principal of Stranmillis College (Professor McMinn), wrote to me as follows in a hand-delivered letter dated 8 June (seen in my office on the morning of Friday 10 June; I have written to the St Mary's Personal Assistant to the Principal asking her to kindly send me an electronic version of that letter, and I shall forward a copy to you when it arrives):

"... You will understand that your appointment as External Examiner was for BEd Mathematics modules in Queen's University ie in both St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges and therefore it will be necessary

BSc (London), PhD (London)

John.Cosgrave@spd.dcu.ie

www.spd.dcu.ie/johnbcos

Copy to: Dr Ron McCartney (Open University, Belfast)
Mr Roy Ferguson (Head of Academic Council, QUB)
Mr Norman Russell (Academic Registrar, QUB)

Appendix 3

The following is the entire text of a clarification from Dr Ron McCartney, not read by myself until Thursday 14th July.

To: Dr John Cosgrave

Thursday 7th July 2005

Dear Dr Cosgrave,

With reference to your letter of 6th July to Mr Peter Finn, Dr Margaret Reynolds and Dr John Sweeney, and copied to me in an attachment to your e-mail, I wish to qualify two points about what Dr John Sweeney told me in his telephone conversation.

Firstly, he did inform me that you had resigned as external examiner, but whether or not he said that your resignation was from the end of September, I do not recall. Thus, I cannot claim that he failed to mention that your resignation would be from that date, and, if I said that or gave the impression that he definitely failed to do so, I was not conveying the truth.

Secondly, following your clarification of the above date of your resignation, it is clear that my statement that I had been asked to be examiner for one paper was a misinterpretation by me, and, as I recollect, was not Dr Sweeney's wording. He asked me to scrutinize the paper and comment on it.

I tried to check with Dr Sweeney today to confirm what he did say, but I cannot, because he is on holiday.

for the University to appoint a *new* [my emphasis, JC] External Examiner for BEd Mathematics *from* [my emphasis, JC] September 2005." (sic)

Since Mr Finn has signed a letter stating that I - John Cosgrave - am the External Examiner, is it not highly irregular that he (or perhaps others at his institution, but surely with his knowledge) made 'alternative arrangements' for the St Mary's College examination grades to be processed without consulting me? While not expecting QUB to 'take sides' on this issue, I do expect to get a correct hearing on this matter, which - for the moment - I am reluctant to bring to the attention of your President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Gregson.

I still await a response to my email of yesterday (QUB email #03), but I hasten to add that I do not expect an immediate response. I would ask you, though, to bring this extra communication to the attention of anyone in QUB with whom you may have already shared my email of yesterday [added by me: i.e. QUB email #03].

Yours sincerely,

John Cosgrave

Letter of resignation as external examiner for St Mary's University College Belfast

I apologize to you and Dr Sweeney for any misunderstanding to which my report of his conversation with me may have given rise.

Yours sincerely

Ron McCartney
