

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 repeat¹ examination paper (**Analysis and Linear Algebra** (surprise, surprise, surprise)), since St Mary's failed four 2nd year students in its summer examinations². 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 those who possibly obtained 0% – since **no** student should fail having been taught by incompetent staff³. Have none of you read the 'INCOMPLETE' version⁴ 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 you⁵ 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*

¹ 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...

² 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.

³ All of that is well documented in earlier correspondence.

⁴ A number of you keep referring to this as my 'report', as opposed to my '**incomplete** report'. Please, please read *carefully*.

⁵ In fairness, though, Dr Sweeney might not be as familiar with the circumstances as his more senior colleagues.

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 2005⁶)
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⁶ 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 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

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