

INFORMATION FOR NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to postgraduate research at the School of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh! These notes are intended to help you settle in at the School and contain information about the following:

- What to expect in your first year;
- Points of contact in the School;
- The School's research resources;
- Undergraduate tuition and training;
- Some of the regulations that apply to you as a member of School.

Sections 1–7 were written by Jim Wright, the Postgraduate Advisor. Section 8 was written by Pamela Docherty and Elena Méndez Escobar, the current PG student reps.

You can find all kinds of information at our postgraduate website

www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg

including *Milestones* on the way to you Ph.D.!

1.1. Formalities. The main formality is the need to ‘matriculate’ which you should have done sometime during the week of 14-18 September, 2009. If you have not done so, you should head out to the College of Science & Engineering Office (Weir Building, at King’s Buildings) to matriculate as soon as possible.

1.2. SMSTC. The Scottish Mathematical Sciences Training Centre (SMSTC). is a consortium involving the seven Scottish Universities with post-graduate mathematics programmes and provides a raft of first-level graduate courses for PhD students delivered by video-conferencing technology. You are required to enrol in at least three of the eight courses which will be on offer and you should discuss with your supervisor which courses are most appropriate for you to take. There will be a symposium for all first-year PG students and the stream leaders of the SMSTC in Perth on 6/7 October which will explain how the training centre will operate. This symposium will take place in conjunction with a generic skills training workshop aimed at first year PhD students.

For further information see the website

www.smstc.ac.uk

2. BEING A POSTGRADUATE; WHAT TO EXPECT

Soon after your arrival, you will meet your supervisor and he/she will discuss possible research projects with you. In many cases, your supervisor will suggest that you read papers and/or advanced texts to bring your knowledge of the research area up to the required level. It is essential to take this reading seriously, for it is likely to equip you with the tools and methods that you need for your subsequent research. This reading will take time; it is often necessary to *work through* literature of this kind. Try not to be frustrated if you don’t seem to be tackling any research problems for the first few months. Keep an eye out for research activities aimed at postgraduate students in the department: research seminars, graduate lecture courses, etc. These are advertised on the seminar webpage (<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/seminars>) and also through the appropriate mailing lists.

Get to know your postgraduate colleagues and try to discuss mathematics with them. This is the time to be as receptive as possible to mathematical/statistical stimuli of all kinds. The most

important advances in a particular area of research often come from the development of ideas from different disciplines; you will find that ideas relevant to your own research can often come from areas outside your specific research topic.

You should normally expect to see your supervisor for at least one hour a week during term-time. It is important that you are as honest as possible with yourself and your supervisor; if you don't understand something, if your supervisor is talking over your head, stop him/her and ask for clarification. There is a definite leap from undergraduate to postgraduate work, so don't be alarmed if at times you feel that there are not enough hours in the day to learn all the stuff you have to! If you work hard, you will begin to see how the different facets of the subject fit together.

It is also a good idea to familiarise yourself with the relevant computer packages sooner rather than later. You will certainly need to be able to use email (this is widely used for internal communications in the School), the world-wide web, and a word-processing package such as \TeX or \LaTeX .

After 6–8 months of postgraduate study, you and your supervisor should have agreed a research area, and you may have been asked to start work on a particular problem. Your knowledge and expertise in your chosen field of research should by now be a significant improvement on what it was when you arrived at Edinburgh. (How many new theorems/methods do you know?) If you already have new results of your own, you are entitled to feel very pleased with yourself!

After 9–11 months, it is essential to try to make an honest assessment of your progress so far. This will involve you, your supervisor(s) and possibly the postgraduate advisor.

Your first year's progress is reviewed formally approximately 10–12 months after you arrive. The assessment takes the form of a 20–25 minute talk (followed by questions) and a report (approx 10 pages in length). The talk will be attended by your two supervisors, a member of the School Postgraduate Studies Committee (see the Postgraduate website for further information about the School Postgraduate Studies Committee), and probably a few other members of your research group. In your talk you should try to outline some of the things you have learned and give an indication of the probable area of your future PhD research. The questions at the end are intended to give you a further opportunity to convey what you've learned, not to put you on the spot or to catch you out. The written report (which should be typed) should summarise your talk, with more details filled in if appropriate. This is a good opportunity to practice the presentation of material with good mathematical style; you should spend some time getting the details right, including any relevant references to the literature. **A draft of your report should be made available to your supervisors at least 48 hours before your talk.** The final version should be submitted to your supervisor and the postgraduate advisor by the mid September.

This review of your first year's work is the basis for making the decision about how well suited you seem to be to study for a postgraduate degree, so it is important to take it (and indeed the whole of your first year of study) seriously. The outcome of the review will give one of three recommendations: 1) to proceed with your studies towards a PhD, 2) to re-register for an MSc or MPhil degree or 3) to extend the probationary period for a further 3 to 6 months after which another assessment will be given by the review committee.

Your progress will also be reviewed towards the end of your second and third year of research; you will be expected to write a 4–8 page report on the progress you have made since your first or second year, which will be read and commented upon by your supervisor. Alternatively, you may submit a chapter of your thesis or a carefully typed exposition of some results you have achieved to date. You will be reminded about these reports nearer the time.

2.1. How hard should I be working? Research is hard work, and you are expected to work hard as a postgraduate student. As a rule of thumb, you should expect to spend at least 40 hours per week on research and research-related activities. There may well be crucial periods in your research career when you will have to work harder than this.

On the other hand, there will almost certainly be times when you get very frustrated with your research work. Try not to let this get on top of you; it may be best to take a break: try working

on a different problem, learning some more background material from a textbook, or even forget about mathematics/statistics for a day or two.

2.2. Do I have to work in the School? It is sometimes tempting to work at home for a day or two, and there is nothing wrong with this, as long as you participate fully with all relevant research activities. However, research can be a lonely activity and you are strongly encouraged to spend a substantial amount of time working in the School, where informal contact with your peers and staff can provide an important source of support and encouragement.

3. POINTS OF CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY

We hope that you will enjoy good relations with staff and your fellow postgraduates and make friends with some of them. Any member of staff will be happy to talk to you and offer advice if they can, both academically and about other matters. Similarly it is often beneficial and enjoyable to discuss matters with your postgraduate colleagues. In addition to any such informal contacts that you may make with people in the School, the following have a more formal role in guiding and advising you during your postgraduate degree.

3.1. Staff. Your supervisor (also known as your *first supervisor*) is your main contact in the School. In addition to providing guidance with your research, he/she will be able to provide support and advice with other aspects of your life at Edinburgh. Normally it is reasonable to expect to spend at least one hour per week (during term-time) with your supervisor.

Your *second supervisor* does not normally play a very active role in supervising your research, but may be consulted whenever appropriate. He/she has a more important role if your first supervisor is away for more than a couple of weeks and can often provide valuable advice and comments on drafts of papers or chapters of your thesis.

The *postgraduate secretary*

Gill Law (Rm 5318, G.Law@ed.ac.uk)

takes care of most of the day-to-day business of the Graduate School and can help with many aspects of daily life as a research student within the school.

The *postgraduate advisor*

Jim Wright (Rm 4621, J.R.Wright@ed.ac.uk)

is responsible for the general well-being of postgraduate research students and acts as a buffer between you and the University. He keeps an eye on your progress and welfare throughout your period of study. If you have any kind of problem that you feel you cannot raise easily with either of your supervisors, then you should consider consulting the postgraduate advisor. The *Head of School* (Michael Singer) or the *Head of Graduate School* (Andrew Ranicki) can also be approached if you feel you cannot discuss your problem with the postgraduate advisor either!

3.2. Your peers. There are two post-graduate representatives: these are elected near the beginning of each academic year. At the time of writing (September 2009) they are Pamela Docherty and Elena Méndez Escobar.

In addition to the seminars and colloquia listed below there is a post-graduate colloquium which meets weekly and information regarding speakers and topics can be found on the PG website. The PG colloquium is currently organised by Daniele Sepe.

4. MATHEMATICS/STATISTICS RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH

The research activities of the School are divided into a number of research groups, most of which run a programme of seminars (some of which are joint with other Universities), and it is a good idea to make yourself aware of all these seminars and attend as many as you can. (Remember that good ideas often come from different fields!) You should certainly attend all seminars run by your research group. Don't worry if you find them difficult to follow—most of us find that from time to time; and don't be scared to ask questions!

4.1. **Web-based information.** The departmental home page is at

www.maths.ed.ac.uk

Here you will find information about the people at the School and its teaching and research activities. There is a postgraduate website

www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg

Here you will find information about your peers, transferable skills programmes and other news items which you will find helpful. We encourage you to construct your own website – information on how to do this is on the postgraduate website. A transkills course on writing webpages for mathematics postgraduates is planned for mid-October.

Other useful web pages include:

- EDINFO – www.ed.ac.uk (the University's home page);
- LIBRARY – www.lib.ed.ac.uk (includes searchable catalogues and databases);
- Science & Engineering – www.scieng.ed.ac.uk (contains a post-graduate area detailing regulations concerning the MPhil and PhD degrees and containing other useful information).

4.2. **Libraries.** The main library covering mathematical sciences is on level 4 of JCMB; it contains books and journals on mathematics, statistics, physics and computer science. It is necessary (but easy) to register, and then you will be able to borrow books and journals.

If you need something that is not stocked by the JCM Library, then you could try the Scottish National Science Library (on the corner of Causewayside and Salisbury Place) or ask for an inter-library loan. (The latter are free, but you will need to ask the School Secretary (Rm 5319) for a token.)

There are many other valuable on-line resources, including MathSciNet at (for example)

<http://www.ams.org/mathscinet/>

which gives access to reviews of almost all articles and books published in the mathematical sciences; and preprint servers such as the one at

<http://arxiv.org>

where many researchers send their preprints prior to publication. Beware: anyone can post there, so there's a lot of rubbish. However, there are also a number of electronic journals whose articles *are* refereed. A list of these can be found by going to

<http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk>

and clicking on 'Quick access'. To search the catalogue, go to

<http://catalogue.lib.ed.ac.uk>

There are other useful resources here as well.

4.3. **Computer resources.** Other than email and online resources, it is essential to familiarize yourself with a word-processing package such as \TeX or \LaTeX , and perhaps other mathematical software such as Maple or Mathematica if you have not already done so.

There are courses introducing you to computers, UNIX and \LaTeX run by the University. The web-address is

<http://www.ucs.ed.ac.uk/usd/cts/courses>.

The policy of the school is that every PG student may have a desktop computer on their desk if they so wish. If you prefer to use your own laptop and you need some special software for your research we do have a small fund to buy licences for personal laptops for some programs. For more information on this ask Andrew Ranicki. A wireless network connection is available in all offices. There are more computers in the Computer Room 5211: networked printers and scanners are also in this room.

Important: The school of maths is not responsible for the safety of any personally owned hardware nor the data stored on personal computers.

Please refer to

<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/itsupport.html>

for more information regarding IT services.

Our computer officers are Steve Law (Room 5209), Marion Brown (Room 6219) and David Marsh (Room 6219). Reach them by emailing ‘support@maths.ed.ac.uk’.

4.4. Seminars, colloquia and graduate lectures. Seminars provide the opportunity for speakers (usually from outside the School) to describe their research. The subject matter can be very specialised and technical, but you should keep going at least to the seminars organised by your own research group. Even if you don’t feel that you understand very much at first, there may be some idea or insight that can help with your work; and if nothing else you may learn something about the skills involved in presenting mathematical material to an audience.

There is also a programme of Colloquia (usually preceded by tea). These talks are supposed to be accessible to a general mathematical/statistical audience. It is worthwhile to try to attend as many of these as possible, to try to acquire a broad knowledge of current developments across mathematics and statistics.

Some of the research groups organise additional research activities—reading seminars, informal working seminars, etc... Get involved with as many of these as you can; and feel free to make suggestions about other activities of this kind that you think might be useful and stimulating.

In addition to the courses offered by the SMSTC (see above), there are further postgraduate lecture courses covering general/basic mathematical areas which will supplement your more specialised studies. Students are expected to attend the courses which are relevant to their programme.

Keep an eye out for the meetings of the Edinburgh Mathematical Society (EMS). It has meetings at the main Universities of Scotland throughout the year, and the speakers are often very good. When the EMS meets at the University of Edinburgh, the lectures are at the Appleton Tower. The EMS’s home page is linked to the School home page.

The International Centre for Mathematical Sciences (ICMS) also runs activities that may be relevant for your studies. The headquarters of ICMS are at 14 India Street (the birthplace of James Clerk Maxwell). The centre is primarily concerned with the organisation of workshops and conferences, but some of the activities are directed specifically to postgraduate students. The ICMS web-pages are also linked to the School home page.

4.5. Workshops, conferences, summer-schools etc. The School has funding for postgraduates to attend conferences etc. These funds are not unlimited, so choose carefully. We encourage you to seek funding from other sources in the first instance, in particular workshops/conferences usually have funding set aside for PG students and you should apply for these funds (see the school PG website for advice on applying for travel grants). Our current budget allows us to fund up to 250 pounds per student per year (exceptions can be made but as a general rule these funds cannot be carried forward to latter years).

Your supervisor must be willing to approve your attendance at the meeting, and you must remember to apply well in advance. **Before you travel** you should:

- Download the expenses application form from the Graduate School website and print it out;
- Fill in the form (this requires a contribution from your supervisor) and return to the postgraduate advisor.

For administrative reasons we cannot usually fund applications for expenses that are completed after attendance at the meeting.

The postgraduate advisor will usually be able to let you know whether your application for expenses will be approved when you return the completed application form. Occasionally, however, it will be necessary for him/her to consult with the Administrator. In such cases, you will be advised by email of the outcome.

Once the expenses have been approved, it is possible to get a cash advance but this takes approximately **21 days** to process, so you must allow yourself plenty of time.

On your return (and within 1 month of your travel) you will be required to complete an expenses claim in the normal fashion and either claim any outstanding expense or reimburse the University

if the claim is less than the original advance. It is also possible for the Administrator to arrange your tickets for you through the University travel supplier.

Alternatively, when you get back from your trip, you can claim expenses electronically but you need to register for this service. Registration forms are in the School Office. **All claims must be supported by receipts for all items costing £5 or more.** Once your electronic claim has been approved you will receive the money in your bank account within a few days. The intention of the School is that this system will replace the paper claim form entirely during this academic year. For this reason we encourage you to apply for an e-expenses account as soon as possible.

4.6. The common room (Rm 5212). This is where staff pigeon-holes are, and where people tend to have morning tea or coffee (around 11), lunch (from 12:30 onwards) and afternoon tea (about 4).

In the common room you will also find a fridge, a water cooler, boiling water and a coffee machine for which you will have to purchase "coffee" tokens from Toby Bailey (Rm 5604). You will have to provide your own tea and you may join the milk club. The notice-board towards the other end of the room is where you will find details of the various seminars that take place in the School and conference announcements.

There is a microwave in the common room that you are welcome to use. Please notice that its maintenance is entirely up to the users so if you become a regular user please join the microwave cleaning rota.

4.7. The departmental office (Rm 5319). This is a good place to start if you have questions about the fabric of the School; how to use the photocopiers etc. Stationery is kept here and you are free to take what you need for your studies.

5. TUTORING AND OTHER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the research in mathematics/statistics that is the main focus of your postgraduate degree, your time here will give you the opportunity to acquire other skills. These are:

5.1. Tutoring. Most postgraduates find it rewarding to do a moderate amount of undergraduate teaching, and it is considered to be a very valuable part of your experience as a postgraduate. Most postgraduates are involved in undergraduate tuition only through tutorial work; they are not asked to give lecture courses or to do large amounts of marking of examinations.

Please note: There is some bureaucracy involved for you to get paid for your work as a tutor. Make sure you understand the procedure detailed on the Teaching Scholarship Information Sheet that can be found at

<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg/data/TeachingScholarship.pdf>

The type of work covered in tutorials varies from course to course and from year to year; typically you will have to mark work handed in before the tutorial, and then discuss with the students any problems that they have had with the week's work. In the first two years undergraduate tutorial groups consist of approximately 12 students.

By doing some work of this kind, you will be able to develop your skills in communicating knowledge and handling groups of students. It also helps provide us with further insight into your capabilities, which can be useful when we write references for your future employers.

More details are available from the Mathematics Teaching Organization (MTO) (Rm 6314). Please enroll as soon as possible if you are interested; there is a form to fill in and you will have to attend a short training course for new tutors.

Relevant information about tutoring is circulated in the tutoring mailing list that you should have been automatically subscribed to.

5.2. Training courses and other opportunities. There are several other highly recommended training opportunities available. The College of Science and Engineering mounts various training courses specifically for postgraduate students: details are at

<http://www.scieng.ed.ac.uk/transkills>

EPSRC also offers a number of opportunities, the “Research Councils’ Graduate Schools Programme”. More information can be found through the EPSRC web-site:

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk>

(Click on ‘for students’ and then ‘The Research Councils Graduate Schools’ Programme’.)

In addition to formal training of this kind there are other opportunities to participate in activities related to mathematics education. Such activities include assisting at the Edinburgh International Science Festival and the University’s Sci-Fun programme, and mathematics courses of various levels that take place during the vacations. Please see Lois Rollings (L.Rollings@ed) for information about these and other ‘public understanding of science’ initiatives.

EPSRC students please note: EPSRC now *requires* you to attend at least one Research Councils’ Graduate Schools programme as part of your postgraduate training.

There is also a fund (Roberts Funding) which is intended to help postgraduates broaden their skill sets and several transkills courses are organized throughout the year by the School. The fund will also pay for you to attend language courses given by the university. For a list of the language courses available please see www.ials.ed.ac.uk. For more information on what the Roberts Funding can be used for see the Information section of the Graduate School website or ask Gill.

6. PROGRESS THROUGH THE PHD DEGREE

If you transfer successfully to the PhD degree after the formal assessment at the end of your first year, you must try to keep up the momentum you have acquired: continue to work hard, read critically, participate in the activities of the School and attend all relevant research seminars.

By midway through your second year, you should have a good grasp of the research problem(s) that will form the core of your PhD, the methods you will need to solve them, and some of the key papers in your subject. In addition you may be starting to get some new results at this stage. Your research activities will probably have shifted away from reading background material (though it is good to read widely at all stages of your degree) and towards the details of your own research work.

There will probably be some times of frustration, when you feel your progress is being held up by some annoying details. This *is* frustrating but don’t be discouraged: it happens to everyone as part of the unpredictable nature of research. If possible, try to leave the problem for a bit and work on some other aspect of your research project.

If all goes reasonably smoothly, however, and there aren’t too many hold-ups, you will have sufficient work to start writing your thesis 30 months or so after you started. How long it will take you to write up is hard to predict, and there is a lot of variation in length between different theses. It is wise to allow several months for the task. You will want to show preliminary versions to your supervisors; they will need time to read what you have written, and you will need time to act on their comments.

Most students succeed in writing up their PhD thesis before the end of their fourth year in the School. There are several reasons why it is important that you do so. If you are still working on your PhD at the beginning of your fifth year, you will have to start paying University fees, and it will not look so good on your CV! **It is best to think of yourself as having three years in which to complete your degree, with the fourth as a safety net.**

7. FORMALITIES

The official rules governing postgraduate study are in the University Calendar in the University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Study Programme. There is also a University booklet on postgraduate supervision which suggests good practice. Students and supervisors are expected to act in accordance with this Code of Practice document which is available online at

www.postgrad.ed.ac.uk/rescode/

Some of the rules and guidelines from these documents are informally summarised below.

- (1) There are strict rules relating to the use of computers and safety; you are expected to acquaint yourself with those that are relevant to you.
- (2) You will have access to photocopying facilities, but you must ensure that any copying you do does not infringe copyright laws and regulations. The amount of photocopying you are allowed to do is limited – you may photocopy individual journal articles or small chapters from a book. You are **not** allowed to photocopy large portions of any single book.
- (3) You must matriculate each year until your thesis is eventually approved (even if you only have to complete corrections to your thesis). Remember to do this at the correct time, as there is a fine for late matriculation!
- (4) Remind your supervisor to complete any forms that are required for payment of your grant.
- (5) You should inform your supervisor if you are ill for more than a couple of days. It is also very important to inform the MTO in advance if you are unable to take a tutorial. Please see the postgraduate website for details of the School's sickness policy.
- (6) You are entitled to 4–6 weeks holiday per year, to be taken during the University vacations. You should not be away in term-time without the permission of your supervisor. If you require compassionate leave, please ask your supervisor.

8. CONCLUSION

Think hard, participate to the full, be enthusiastic, creative and energetic!

Jim Wright

Postgraduate Advisor

9. THE PG STUDENT VIEW

Here we provide some information about life as a PG student in the maths department from the point of view of the other students. Most of this information can be found in our website (<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg/index.shtml>) but here you'll find a bit more of an explanation of what the things you can find there are.

If you have any questions or complaints you might want to contact the PG representative. Currently these are Elena and Pamela but elections will be held at the beginning of October and they will change. For the time being feel free to contact them:

E.Mendez@ed.ac.uk, P.J.Docherty@sms.ed.ac.uk.

We are here to help you!

9.1. Research related PG Activities. There are several research activities organized by PG students. This is a space where you can discuss topics that interest you and learn from other PG students in a relaxed atmosphere.

The PG colloquium happens every Thursday at 3pm and is followed by cake in the common room. It provides an exceptional opportunity for you to practice your presentation skills as well as to learn about what the other students in the department are doing and also socialize with them. This year it is organized by Elena so if you would like to give a talk do not hesitate to drop her an email and volunteer yourself (E.Mendez@ed.ac.uk). The talks need not be about your current research: it might be, for example, an undergraduate project that you did and you consider interesting or some other math-related topic. In the past we have had talks about women in mathematics, science in the kitchen, mathematical games, how Google works, mathematics in video games, etc. For inspiration you might want to have a look at our archive:

<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg/colloquium.shtml>.

There are two more specialized subject groups that run regularly: the Geometry Club and the Mathematical Physics' Speakers Corner which is now working as a pre-seminar series for the Mathematical Physics seminars. For more information on the Geometry Club check out <http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/~s0198576/gc/>. If you are interested in their activities you might want to subscribe their mailing list (instructions on how to do this can be found on their website) or contact Daniele (D.Sepe@sms.ed.ac.uk) or Florian (f.t.pokorny@sms.ed.ac.uk). If you are interested in the Mathematical Physics' Speakers Corner contact Patricia (P.D.Ritter@sms.ed.ac.uk).

Also there are more informal journal clubs running around. Some just run for a few weeks to discuss a specific topic and some run for a longer time. To find out more about these ask the other students in your research group. Of course you can also start your own journal club.

9.2. IT. Most information about the school, seminars, PG issues, tutoring, etc. is announced in the appropriate mailing list. For this reason it is very important that you subscribe to them. By default you should have been subscribed to the PG mailing list and to the tutoring list. If you have not received a welcome email yet to these lists please make sure you subscribe as soon as possible.

The reason why we have a separate mailing list for tutoring is because this topic generates lots of emails which people who do not tutor don't want to be spammed with. You may at any time unsubscribe from this list. However be aware that, if you do so, you will miss out on important information about regular tutoring as well as occasional opportunities for extra cash covering for some other tutor who is absent or marking exams.

The school has a Google Calendar (on <http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg>) where all the major events are announced. That way you will find in one single place all the information about seminars, colloquia, semester dates, bank holidays, school events such as welcome or Christmas parties, etc. You can view this calendar online or subscribe to it if you use a program that understands iCal such as Outlook or the Mac calendar. The address of the calendar can be found in the PG website. If you need any help subscribing to it ask Elena.

On top of this we have a Graduate School Calendar where we announce those events concerning PGs only such as the PG colloquia, subject groups seminars, SMSTC courses, social events, etc. The address can again be found in the PG website. If you create a Google calendar account you

will be able to see both calendars in the same place (and also your personal calendar if you have one). To do this you do not need a Google account. If you need help setting this up ask Elena.

If you need help for any IT related issues you might find some answers in the IT section of the school website, otherwise write an email to IT support (support@maths.ed.ac.uk) and they should be able to help. The policy of the school is now that every PG that requests so can have a desktop computer in their office. If you prefer to use your own laptop and you need some special software for your research we do have a small fund to buy licenses for personal laptops for some programs. For more information on this ask Andrew Ranicki.

Finally just let you know that the section of the website entitled “By current PG students” is maintained by the students (usually the PG representatives). This means that you are welcome to add content to this section that you consider might be relevant or useful for others.

9.3. Funding for travels. Travelling to conferences, workshops or to collaborate with academics at other institutions is an important part of your PhD but funding those trips is not an easy task (although not impossible!). We have created a special document with some tips on how to do this and examples of what other students have done in the past. You should have been given this document in your welcome pack. Some information can be also found here:

<http://www.maths.ed.ac.uk/pg/conferences.shtml>

When funded by the school, the usual procedure is that first you need to agree with your supervisor and with Jim Wright how much money you may be allocated to use for a given trip and for what purpose. After this has been agreed, you should pay yourself for the expenses and then claim them back from the University providing the appropriate receipts. The easiest way to do this (and very soon the only one) is to use an online claiming system called e-Expenses. It is not completely straightforward to set it up and the first time takes some days to activate your account. However, once this is set up, it is an extremely fast way to get your money back: it will only take a couple of days to have the money in your account after the payment has been approved and you have provided the appropriate receipts.

9.4. Community life. As well as academic matters, the PG representatives also have the happy task of organizing social events within the Graduate School. There are several events which happen on an annual basis. These include the Welcome Dinner, which happens around the start of October to welcome new postgraduates to the department. We also have a Christmas social which either takes the form of a dinner or a party at the department. In the spring, we have a 3 day trip to Firthush, the University’s outdoor activity centre on the shores of Loch Tay. We also try to take advantage of our links with Heriot-Watt University by having a joint colloquium and wine evening at ICMS.

There are also social events organized for the School as a whole. These include a Cheese and Wine party, which is organized with the aim of bringing staff and Honours undergraduates together. This takes place sometime in the first semester, as does the Maths Ceilidh, featuring the School of Maths Ceilidh Band.

Furthermore, the Edinburgh Mathematical Society run a 3 day trip for postgraduates from all the Scottish universities to The Burn in the Highlands. This is again a great opportunity to meet PGs from elsewhere, and you have the opportunity to give a short presentation on your research if you so wish, as well as enjoying the countryside.

You will be informed of all of these events nearer the time, through email and posters around the department.

Finally, we believe that by far the best way of getting to know the department and your colleagues in in the Common room. Most of us have lunch there between 1 and 2pm everyday, as well as a tea break around 4:30pm. By coming to lunch and/or tea you will learn all about what is going on in the department and will be able to raise your concerns, share ideas, etc.

We look forward to meeting you!

Pamela Docherty and Elena Méndez Escobar, PG reps,

September 2009