MEETING OF 28th MARCH 2017


The meeting begins at 12h15 in room ME.B1.10

1) Agenda and approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 02.03.2017
The agenda is adopted as is.
A modification is made to the point 4 of the minutes: one of the speakers is R. Butté and not G. Anciaux. The necessary correction has been made.

2) General information
As a follow up of the consultation with CDS and P. Vandergheynst regarding the prerequisites for BA1, which are to be maintained for BA 2 and 3, A. Billard established a list of both positive and negative points that will be submitted to P. Vandergheynst during the meeting of the 27th April 2017.

3) MAN reform
Slides and discussion presented by H.-J. Ruppen.
For the current academic year (2016-2017), it has been decided that it is now mandatory for BA1 students to achieve an overall average of 3.5 in the main block during the autumn semester in order to continue the normal course of studying in the spring semester. The main block includes the following subjects: analysis, linear algebra, physics and a faculty-oriented course. Should the average grade be below 3.5, the student will take part in the new MAN (Mise à niveau) programme.

Managing the redirection of the students concerned was no easy task. It had been statistically estimated that between 735 and 840 students would be taking the new MAN programme. H.-J. Ruppen decided to aim at a total number of 750 students, and the actual turn up was of 716 students, which represents about 45% of students in their first attempt of BA1. According to H.-J. Ruppen, this is too high of a percentage. On another note, the drop out rates can be found in the CDS documents, which keep track of the number of drop outs during the course of the first semester as well as at the end of it and during the MAN programme (cf. joint document).

The MAN programme is made up of Math1 (analysis, algebra and integrals), Math 2 (geometry and linear algebra) and Physics. It is an extensive programme which totalises 30 hours of classes a week. A half-day break in the middle of the week has been incorporated into the schedule to allow students to keep up to date with their work and hand-ins.

H.-J. Ruppen introduced the teachers who are part of the MAN programme (cf. slides provided).
The students have been divided into 3 groups and the classes given to them are identical in terms of contents and working rhythm.
The subjects to be taught had been presented to the CDS and had been accepted without modification. The MAN programme is coherent with what is studied in a year in the CMS excluding chemistry and biology, which makes it possible to be completed in a single semester.
The mentoring framework includes one Teaching Assistant (TA) and one Assistant Etudiant (AE) per 40 students. AE are available for 2 hours in late afternoons during the week to help students with the completion of their exercises and the understanding of the more difficult subjects. The AEs are somewhat more efficient than the TAs in their work, as their overtime hours are accounted and paid for. The different sections had been called upon to provide a comfortable number of TAs per section, and H.-J. Ruppen is pleased with their participation. A. Billard would like to know whether it would be possible to find enough AEs and not to use TAs. It is naturally a cost-related problem. The costs of only employing TAs amounts to half a million CHF. For comparison, the tutorage costs 1 million CHF, and it is obvious that the Presidency would not allow such a budget for the MAN programme. Regarding the school fees paid by the students, no additional fees are imposed on the MAN programme students.

Two Moocs, one on physics and one on linear algebra, have been created for MAN students. A special platform that contains approximately 600 exercises and their corrections has been set up for the MAN programme. The website containing information on the programme (http://man.epfl.ch) is available to the general public. Exercises can be uploaded to the platform a week ahead of class, which allows assistants to timely make relevant subjects available and thus closely follow both the programme schedule and the students’ needs. The platform is also a mean of communication with about a hundred assistants taking part in the programme.

All MAN students remained affiliated to their section and no specific “MAN” section has been created. It has been decided that a common examination will take place for all MAN students. This decision will result in around 3500 copies that will have to be corrected in the 5 days following the examination, given that results are to be known as soon as possible (before the end of July 2017) for the students to be able to make the necessary arrangements depending on their results.

In conclusion, this programme has been designed to allow students to acquire the required level of knowledge (CMS) and develop a good sense of discipline. High hopes are set for the efficiency of this programme. H.-J. Ruppen is convinced that students that attend every class, thoroughly complete exercises and stay on schedule should be able to obtain an average of at least 4.5 at the end of the semester.

The CDS has published, among other interesting statistics, a summary of the success and fail rates depending on the students academic background and home country. The relevant information has been forwarded to the CCE (cf. most recent CDS meeting minutes).

O. Burdet would like to know whether it is possible for a student who failed the MAN programme at the EPFL to study in Zürich. It is indeed possible, but at the ETH only. Every cantonal University has its own structure regarding the acceptance of students who have failed the MAN programme at the EPFL.

The CCE expresses its sincere gratitude to H.-J. Ruppen for the quality of his work.

The meeting ends at 13h25
Minutes / S. Muller