

Welcome!

Welcome to the first student page under the new editor – me! Hannah has sustained this page for two years and I don't want to drop the ball, so I thought I'd start by doing a shout out to anyone who has ever found this page boring – put up or shut up!

Trisha Goddard says that bottling up issues can be very bad for your health, so if you have anything you want to get off your chest, please drop me a line. I've inherited a few articles from Hannah, but more are always welcomed. I see this page as *Trisha* for student actuaries (but without the DNA tests) so don't hold back!

I'd especially like to hear from anyone who attends the new modelling course and who would like to tell us about this brave new world that has such spreadsheets in it.

Any comments on this page are also most welcome – so feel free to get in touch!

Tristan



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Chariots of FIA

Tristan Walker-Buckton experiences three hours of sweaty pain. The marathon wasn't too pleasant either!

RECALL AN ARTICLE ON THIS PAGE LAST YEAR likening sitting actuarial examinations to running a marathon. Having experienced both within the past week, I am wondering whether this is a valid comparison after all. For starters, rubbing Vaseline around my groin is not part of my standard exam preparation. Perhaps it should be.

I mean, I plan my marathons months in advance. I draw up training timetables based on advice from the official body and periodically turn up at road races with other roadrunners to consolidate my training. But my carefully laid schedules fall to pieces as I fritter valuable running time watching *Trisha* and *Desperate Housewives* in my pyjamas, forcing a last-minute 20-mile run in the week before the race in the hope that it might just see me through to the end.

All right, so perhaps there is something in this idea that the exams are run like a marathon! The feeling you get staring at an exam question, wishing you had paid just a little more attention to that part of the course notes, is the same as you get when your legs are falling off with 20 miles still to go. Who hasn't offered up that silent vow in the middle of an exam – that you never want to feel this pain again, that next time it really will be different? During the race I certainly had ample opportunity to reflect on previous mistakes from Markov chains to marathons.

Unfortunately by the time this train of thought had come to the end, I was only at mile 14 and needed something else to take my mind off the pain and the increasingly attractive man in front dressed as Wonder Woman. I started to think about the converse – what if the marathon was run in a similar manner to actuarial exams?

I couldn't actually get very far with this as all the marathons I have run have been organised with military precision. I am informed of my running number months before the big day – I'm lucky if my exam pass turns up at all. This year, the London Marathon organisers distributed 710,000 bottles of water to 35,000 runners at 26 equally spaced points. In the exams you're lucky if the number of chairs matches the number of desks. Each runner received an electronically recorded finishing time, with results uploaded to the website two hours after the race finished, not ten weeks later.

Judging from the last sitting, if the London Marathon was organised by the Institute, you would turn up to find a note on London's front door saying that the race was actually being held in a hastily erected replacement town round the corner. Probably Basildon.

Of course we don't really have any option but to grin and bear it – it's not as if we have a choice in our exam provider and could voice our dissatisfaction by switching to an alternative brand. But we also only have one option

of education provider and ActEd genuinely seeks feedback to improve its service. Perhaps we could see the introduction of an exam feedback form where we could comment on the venue and organisation of our exams. I would suggest that the situation in which you sit the exam has a reasonable effect on your performance compared to the contents of the paper. It's certainly got to be worth a few marks. Three sittings in for me and I'm still searching for that Shangri-La of a quiet room, roomy desks, and a lackey to hand me fresh sheets of paper and mop my brow. But turning up and being recognised as a candidate would be a good first step.

Perhaps I'm being a little unfair and a lot of people do work hard to ensure that, in the main, things go right. But from our point of view it seems that the exam organisation is getting progressively worse and I know that a great many of you are feeling frustrated after the last sitting. I appreciate that it was the first under the new regime, but considering that the typical entry fee is ten times that of a marathon, I think that we can expect a better service. There has been a gracious apology from the Institute (sadly no refunds!), though it was tempered with the news that the results would be a week later than planned. I hope that things will get better – but only time will tell.

Many races have hurdles and perhaps the exams just have a few extra before the start line for good measure. On balance I think that the exams are harder than running a marathon and you don't even get a souvenir T-shirt. But the exams and the marathon do have that same common feeling (apart from sweatiness) – the mixture of pain and elation at crossing the finishing line. And like all the great races, we run them together, sharing in the loneliness of the long-distance actuary.



Forthcoming SIAS events

Tuesday 14 June

Climate change

Sunday 19 June

5-a-side football

For details see p3 or visit the SIAS website at

www.sias.org.uk