

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Friday 15th May 2020 1.45 p.m., by Zoom.*

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Robert Jack, Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Mark Spivack, Mr Karl Mose, Mr Abhay Sagar, Ms Hannah Seabrook

Apologies: Dr Matthew McCullough, Dr Jorge Santos,.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2. Part IA, A course: Mr Mose reported.

Lecture Course: Professor F. Quevedo.

Mr Mose had not received much feedback, partly because the meeting had been convened at short notice. Nevertheless he had previously received a lot of feedback about other issues, so people knew how to make their voices heard if they wanted to. He thinks that the video system is nice, and he appreciates the fact that it enables students to study the lectures in their own time and at their own pace. The lecturer uses Powerpoint slides which he does not annotate by hand and he explains things clearly. The examples sheets are good.

3. Part IA, B course: Mr Sagar reported.

Lecture Course: Prof B Allanach

Overall the lectures are fine. The lecturer annotates an electronic copy of the printed notes with gaps but does not make the annotated notes available separately afterwards. This means that people have to go back and search through the videos to find standard results. The students would like a separate pdf of the annotations for later use. There was an initial confusion with the release of the lectures, and in the student rep's College at least, a conflict between the pacing of supervisions and of lectures.

The questions on the examples sheets seem to give an uneven covering of the course. People are viewing the lectures at a rate to enable them to attack the examples sheets and were having to rush to catch up. It was reported that after four lectures on matrices, the students could only attack four questions from the sheet.

It seems that maths is more affected by this issue than the other IA Nat Sci subjects in the rep's College, but detailed arrangements for supervisions and other types of class etc. will vary between Colleges.

4. Part IB course: Ms Seabrook reported.

Lecture course: Dr M Wingate.

The feedback on this course has been positive, and considering the circumstances students have very few complaints. The delivery of the on-line lectures is clear, and their organisation is good. The lecturer works through notes with gaps, and annotates them in the lectures. He puts the annotated notes online later. There was one (but only one) comment that the lecturer's handwriting can be hard to read. The student rep has been making her own notes as she works through the lectures, but there have been some requests for the annotated notes to be uploaded more quickly. Also, the students would have appreciated it if the basic notes could have been put up earlier to give students more time to print them out. Initially some of the lectures were not released on time, but that problem has been fixed now.

The examples classes have been quite good, although a lot of people haven't actually been attending them. The lecturer has been concentrating on the problem solving element of questions, rather than the bookwork which the students have found helpful.

5. Any other business.

There was a question about whether lecturers were available to answer questions “after lectures”, or whether they had set up office hours. Dr Wingate does this by Zoom, but on as far as the student rep can tell, the take up has been limited. It seems that most people are relying on the supervision and other formal or informal arrangements set up by their Colleges.

The Convenor enquired what the student reps would like to see done differently if this system of lecture delivery had to continue in to the Michaelmas Term. The major comment was that lectures should be uploaded on time, and more note should be taken of students in different time zones. Panopto was felt to be the best platform because of the flexibility it gives to share screens, skip between slides etc.

The students had been very unsettled about the arrangements for assessment. They are much happier now they have more information, but would still like to know more about which topics will be covered in their papers.

Unfortunately, the quality of the Convenor’s internet connection was very poor, which limited discussion. Nevertheless, it was clear that the students were broadly happy with the arrangements that had been put in place at short notice in very challenging circumstances.

The Convenor thanked the student representatives for their service on this Committee.