

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on

Monday 14th May 2012 at 1.00 p.m.,

in Meeting Room 11, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road

Present: Prof. Ben Allanach, Dr Robert Best, Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Chris Lester, Dr Harvey Reall, Mr Calum Kennedy-Dietrich, Miss Hannah Williams, Miss Elizabeth Matthews.
Apologies: Dr Mark Spivack.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. The Committee welcomed Dr Lester from Physics in place of Professor Gull, who is on leave.

2. Part IA, A course: Mr Kennedy-Dietrich reported

Lent Term Lecture Course: Dr Dalziel.

Mr Kennedy-Dietrich wished to make some further comments on the Lent Term lectures. The students felt that the quality of the lectures had dipped towards the end of term, and the attendance had dropped to that usual for Saturday lectures. The lecturer would make small mistakes in manipulation in the lectures themselves, and then spend too long trying to find his errors. They felt that the quality of the notes had also fallen, although the summary sheets remained excellent.

Easter Term Lecture Course: Dr Jardine-Wright.

The students are much happier with this term's lecturer, but they acknowledge that the subject (matrices) helps. A few students find her style condescending, but many describe her as "lovely" or "wonderful" and overall the course is going very well. The notes are comprehensive and extremely good. The lecturer hands out notes with gaps, and then fills in the spaces on the board. The question sheets are also very good although the students would like a clearer distinction made between the basic questions and the harder ones and suggest that the harder ones be marked with an asterisk (or some other symbol). The students appreciate the fact that the completed notes go up on line progressively, as do the answers to the question sheets. Attendance has increased from last term, and the large Chemistry lecture theatre is about two thirds full.

3. Part IA, B course: Miss Williams reported.

Lecture Course: Dr O'Donnell.

Most students are happy with the lecturer, although a few do not think he is as good as the previous two lecturers. His writing is not always large enough to be clear especially when there are a lot of suffices, and occasionally he addresses the OHP rather than the audience. There was a suggestion that he should make his suffices disproportionately large so they can be more easily deciphered. He does read everything out, but it is not always easy for the students to take it down. There is a feeling that suffix notation is a barrier to understanding the material and that the lecturer could have explained it more thoroughly before using it. Dr Lester confirmed that the students he had taught were having difficulty with this part of the course.

The lecturer has handed out notes with gaps, and the students would rather they were complete as they feel that some of the missing parts are crucial points. At the time of the meeting the notes on CamTools still had gaps, and the students would like these filled in. The attendance is high, as students need to come to get the lecture notes. The first few lectures overran, but the lecturer's timekeeping is now fine. Some students, however, still come late and disrupt things by walking across the front of the lecture room.

The examples sheets are good, but the students think that there are not enough harder questions to prepare them for Tripos questions. The lecturer didn't do any examples at first, but has now done a lot together. The students would prefer if they were interspersed more with the

material. Sometimes the lecturer demonstrates two different methods of solving a problem and does the harder one first. The students feel it would be better the other way round.

Overall the lecturer comes over as very keen and interested and the students appreciate this.

4. Part IB course: Miss Matthews reported.

Lecture course: Professor Manton

The students like the lecturer, who is audible and legible, and think that the course goes at a good pace. He writes everything on acetates, but has not yet handed out any printed notes although these do exist on CamTools. The third section of these notes is said to be rather dense. The examples sheet questions are quite easy, but this gives time to go over Tripos questions in supervisions. The students feel that the course is quite heavily biased towards physical applications, but the lecturer is good at explaining things. The only criticism is about the examples class where the lecturer went over the examples sheet questions rather than Tripos questions. Attendance has been good as people need to come to get the notes, and the lecture room is quite full.

6. Any other business.

There was a question about the ordering of the questions on the IB examination papers. The Convenor commented that it was usually chronological, i.e. the first paper covered the material from the Michaelmas Term and the first part of the Lent Term, and the second paper covered the rest. Neither she nor any of the other staff members thought it was formally specified, but offered the collective opinion that the order was unlikely to depart from usual practice.

The IA A course rep clarified his previous request about a formula sheet. The Physics department has a list of "Formulae you ought to know" on their website. The students would like this to be available on CamTools, or at least for there to be a link from the CamTools site to the Physics website.

The Committee thanked the student representatives for their efforts throughout the year and wished them well in their examinations.