

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Thursday May 14th 2015 at 4.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 20,
Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Wilberforce Road*

Present: Professor Ben Allanach, Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Mark Spivack, Mr Oliver Dutton, Ms Amelia Mitchell.

Apologies: Dr Alex Thom, Dr Harvey Reall, Mr Anushan Fernando.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2. Part IA, A course: Ms Mitchell, reported.

Lecture Course: Dr Jardine-Wright.

The student representative had been unable to gather much feedback, as it was too close to people's exams. In general the comments had been positive, and students liked this course better than last term's. The lecturer has produced a handout with gaps, and in the lectures she just writes in the gaps and doesn't give much extra explanation. The students like filling in the gaps in the handouts, but think it would be helpful if they had more space for additional notes. At present they find it hard to distinguish the fundamental things from the details, and so there was a request for her to embolden the important points, and to give a summary of the main points at the end of each lecture. The lecturer took a show of hands to determine who had done matrices before, but the students think she still assumed too much knowledge. The course can get confusing for those unfamiliar with matrices as they can't see where a particular proof is going and in general they would like the lecturer to emphasise the main ideas so they can see the point a bit more.

The students like the on-line quizzes, (although there were some issues with the formatting of the questions) but they feel there could be more explanations of the answers. They also like the examples done in lectures, but sometimes find it difficult to see why an example proves a particular point. The examples sheets are good, but the students would like more questions, as there is sometimes only one question per topic. (They would also like answers.)

The lecturer speaks clearly, but sometimes her writing is not too good, and as there is a lot of suffix notation in this part of the course, it can sometimes lead to confusion. Attendance is good; the lecture theatre (the large BMS lecture theatre in Chemistry) is usually more than half full and even on Saturdays attendance is reasonable.

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

Lecture Course: Dr O'Donnell.

The students like the way the lecturer presents the material and think he has a "lovely relaxing voice". They feel they have "been nicely lectured". On the other hand his handwriting can be poor, and they would like him to write larger. He hands out notes with gaps, which the students think are good, and in lectures he gives bits of extra explanation, and adds some bits on the side. The pace is usually good, but occasionally he goes too fast especially when using suffix notation and doing row operations. The examples he did in the last lecture clarified a lot of points. The students would appreciate a list of matrix identities at the end of the section.

The examples sheet is long and the questions don't seem to relate to examination style questions. Having said which, there was a request for more questions on suffix notation on the examples sheet.

At the time of the meeting the lecturer had just finished matrices and was moving on to pdes. So far these had been well received, but some students didn't like his habit of writing "dx" etc. on the outside of an integral sign.

In general students are not sure what results they can assume and what they have to prove in examination questions, and would appreciate some guidance.

The attendance is good, and the lecture theatre is usually full. It was a bit thin on first two Saturdays but it is back up now.

Comment on last term's course: The lecturer became more tangential later in the course and made disparaging remarks about other subjects. Although this was done in jest, the students didn't find it amusing.

4. Part IB course: Mr Fernando, who was unable to attend, has not yet reported by e-mail.

Lecture course: Dr Kent.

5. Any other business.

There was a discussion about books; the student representatives said that although the books by Boas and by Riley Hobson and Bence were good, most people don't use books much, relying instead on their lecture notes, or on material found on-line.

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