

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*Minutes of a meeting held on
Tuesday 15th November 2016 at 1.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 20, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road*

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Mark Spivack, Dr Alex Thom, Dr Christopher Thomas, Mr Thomas Rialan, Mr Sridhar Prabhu.

Apologies: Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Jorge Santos, Mr Alex Petrosyan.

Dr Colwell left the room whilst the IA B course was being discussed.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

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

Lecture Course: Dr Dalziel.

Overall everyone agrees that Dr Dalziel is a great lecturer, and most people are enjoying the course. He is very dynamic and keeps things very active. Some people think he spends too much time on material they already know, but others who have not covered so much find the pace quite fast. The handouts are good, and there is no problem following them. They have some gaps for examples, but the lecturer puts the complete notes up on Moodle very shortly after the end of the lecture. The only criticism is the way the stapling and double sided printing is done, which makes flipping through quite difficult. The lecturer makes small mistakes which he corrects at the beginning of the following lecture, but sometimes his corrections cause more confusion than the initial mistake (which some students have already spotted and fixed themselves).

Some people have ceased attending the lectures, for conflicting reasons; some find the lectures too fast, and some find them too slow. The attendance dipped a bit just after the start, but then went up again and is now stable. The large Chemistry lecture theatre (the BMS lecture theatre) is about half full.

The lecturer is audible, but there is quite a lot of interference on the microphone which can be annoying.

The examples sheets are good in general, but students think they contain too many basic skills questions. The staff members pointed out that students were not obliged to do all the questions, and that supervisors should provide guidance on this.

There had not been much feedback on the initial workbook, but those who did comment had found it useful. In particular, international students who hadn't done A levels found it helpful to see what material they should be familiar with. The questions designed to help with the A/B choice were added after some people had already downloaded the workbook so not everybody knew they existed.

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

Lecture Course: Dr S Colwell

The feedback is overall very positive and the lecturer is described as "fantastic", though as usual there were a range of different responses. Most find the material challenging in a good way but some feel that the lecturer writing out notes is a waste of time. Speed is about right to stretch you just enough. The lecturer is always on hand to clear up any questions. Handouts are provided, either at the start of the lecture or a lecture in advance, and these have blanks (example questions) to be completed during the lecture.

There can be some difficulty in keeping up with what has been written because only one visualiser is used (only one is present in the lecture room). The situation would be improved if two visualisers were used (as is done, for example, in the Chemistry lecture rooms). It would

also be useful for the lecturer's overheads to be put online after the lecture along with an audio recording of the lecture (this is done for chemistry lectures).

Legibility is good and audibility is generally fine but on occasion it can be difficult to hear from the back of the room. Could the volume be turned up a bit?

Attendance is stable and the room is completely full. Example sheets are pretty comprehensive. Not much feedback was received on the workbook and DoS did not discuss it.

It was commented that, although the lectures start promptly at 9am and finish on time at 9:50am, there is a rush to get to the Chemistry Department in time for the next lecture.

4. Part IB course: Mr Petrosyan, who at the last minute had been unable to attend the meeting, subsequently reported by e-mail.

Lecture course: Dr H. Latter.

Generally the feedback is positive and everyone is quite happy with how Dr Latter conveys the information.

Some students felt the examples sheets were unbalanced with the first sheet becoming much too difficult and the second sheet starting with tasks that were too simple etc. . The rep proposed that the questions be labelled to reflect the amount of work that might be needed for a specific question, e.g. C -meaning difficult, B meaning just about doable etc.

Another concern is that one of the main textbooks (Riley, Hobson and Bence) follows a different convention for Fourier Transforms from the lecture notes, and the rep would appreciate it if something could be done about that.

Note added by convenor: the second week questionnaire had contained some very positive comments, and students obviously thought Dr Latter was a very clear and comprehensible lecturer.

5. Any other business.

The results of the second week questionnaires had not been circulated in advance, but were available at the meeting and the student representatives were given time to read them. The comments were generally in line with those they themselves had received.

The student reps felt that they had been given appropriate guidance about the choice between the A and B courses.

The IA student reps reported that students did not use books much, preferring to look things up on line, and commented that the recommended books were not always available in their College libraries. One of the staff members pointed out that the book by Riley Hobson and Bence was now freely available on line.

The A course representative stated that he was no longer going to the A course lectures, but had decided to go to the B course lectures instead, and to stay with the B course next term. The Committee agreed that the course rep should be someone actually attending the course, and accordingly thanked Mr Rialan for his efforts and agreed that a new representative should be appointed.