

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Friday 10th November 2017 at 2.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 1, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road*

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Jorge Santos, Dr Alex Thom, Dr Christopher Thomas, Ms Astrid Berge, Ms Cecelia Catuogno-Cal, Ms Evelina Polyakov

Apologies: Dr Mark Spivack

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: Ms Berge reported.

Lecture Course: Dr Dalziel.

There had not been much feedback, so overall people are content, but there were a few minor points raised. The lecturer scans in his notes after the lecture, and the students ask if he could write in pen rather than pencil, as at present his annotations, although legible in the lecture room, are not always legible on the scans. They would also like the lecture notes split in to explanatory text and manipulations. They would like key equations to be highlighted, and for guidance on what is examinable and what is not. The lecturer is audible, and legible, but sometimes his explanations are hard to understand. Any individual student's opinion of the pace of the course depends very much on what they've covered before.

3. Part IA, B course: Ms Catuogno-Cal reported.

Lecture Course: Dr S Colwell

The student representative explained that she had obtained feedback by discussing with others and via a NST Facebook group. As usual, a range of different opinions had been expressed. The material is generally taught well and clearly; concepts are explained well. In general, the first lecture or two in each topic are considered to be too basic/boring and it'd be useful to have more emphasis on later parts of a topic which are perceived to go too quickly. However, nobody said that they can't do anything or think it's all too hard. There's not much time to ask questions after the lecture - it was suggested trying before the lecture or emailing the lecturer.

There was some discussion of opinions on the style of the lectures and that they only cover material in the lecture notes. It was suggested that last year some students would have appreciated the lecturer giving a different perspective from the lecture notes, but then others would not be happy if the notes didn't contain all the material lectured. Textbooks were mentioned as a source of alternative perspectives. From feedback received, there wasn't perceived to be anything missing from lectures this year.

The second week questionnaire was generally representative. Some don't like skipping lines in examples but others are fine about it. Some students would prefer less time on formal proofs. A few had asked about recording lectures and the Maths Faculty's thoughts about this were discussed. On the other hand, some students find they can get everything from the lecture notes and don't go to lectures.

Students are happy with the examples sheets and these have a good variety of questions. There are a number of basic skills questions but these can be skipped if appropriate.

Legibility is good and audibility is fine (if the microphone isn't working someone points this out quickly). The lecturer uses one screen but can fit two sheets onto it at once. Generally nobody asks questions during the lectures but typos etc. are pointed out.

4. Part IB course: Ms Polyakov reported.

Lecture course: Dr H. Latter.

Generally everybody is really happy. The lecturers are interesting, and it is a long time in to the lecture before people start looking at their watches. The lecturer explains things well, and in a simple way, and makes jokes etc. which keep up the interest. People ask questions after the lecture.

The lecturer provides handouts with gaps at the end of the page. Some students think he should separate notes, theorems, and examples as is done in Dexter's notes. The rep had received 44 responses to her request for feedback, and 86% of these say the speed is fine. The same number had said they did not have enough time to get to their next lecture, so now the lecturer stops a bit early.

He goes through easy questions in the lectures, and some think he should go through harder ones. The examples class was good, and attended by about half of those on the course. He announced the questions in advance to give students a chance to have a go at them before the class. Some thought he had chosen easy questions and thought he should have chosen more standard ones.

The content of the course is good and the examples sheets are easier than last year. There was a request for lecture capture, as at present if you miss a bit it is difficult to catch up. The lecturer is legible and audible, but the contrast on the visualiser is not good.

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 IA student reps felt that the guidance about the choice between the A and B courses was appropriate for students who had done A levels, but those who had done the IB or had other qualifications were overlooked. The staff members of the committee commented that the introductory workbook now contained a section of questions designed to help discriminate, but it seems that some people had been sent the old version. The students think more of these questions would be useful.

The IA reps also reported that students did not use books much, but commented that they would like a book that gave more help with doing examples. The IA A course rep said that the books by Boas and by Riley Hobson and Bence were both useful, but she had not yet found a book that did everything she wanted. The convenor commented that, as was usual in Cambridge, there was no "book of the course".