Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Friday 22nd November 2019 at 1.15 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 10, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Matthew McCullough, Dr Mark Spivack, Mr Karl Mose, Ms Beatrice Ricci, Ms Hannah Seabrook

Apologies: Dr Robert Jack, Dr Jorge Santos

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 Mose reported.
Lecture Course: Dr Latter.

The student rep had gained feedback through Messenger Chat. People were generally happy and felt the course was pitched at the right level of difficulty although one student said it was the most difficult course they were doing. The lecturer is audible and legible and the students like his emphasis on problems. He tries to put the mathematics in context by mentioning interesting applications.

The students would appreciate lecture videos – see general discussion later.

There were some comments about the printed notes. The latest lecture notes for the section on probability are not yet on the web and sometimes the notes are fragmented and overlap with each other. They are pdfs and the "hidden" text can be revealed by highlighting. This is in note form, and probably not intended to be read by students in its current state so should be hidden more effectively.

The questions on the examples sheets cover the term quite well. They require you to go back to the notes and so complement the lectures well.

The attendance is variable. On Saturdays the rom is less than half full, but on other days it is almost full. There are only a few latecomers.

There was on occasion where the lecture room was locked and the students couldn't gain entry. This did not happen again.

3. Part IA, B course: Ms Ricci reported.
Lecture Course: Dr S Colwell

The course representative had gathered feedback. Overall the responses were very positive. Course material was felt to be very good, detailed and useful. One person had expressed concern that sufficient allowance should be made for non-A-level students, although it was commented at the meeting that DoS should advise when attendance at the A course might be more appropriate.

The pace was generally found to be good and the material interesting and pitched at the right level. Audibility and legibility were mostly fine. It was noted that the left-hand screen was dimmer, making it slightly difficult to read from the back of the lecture theatre.

A few people commented that more exam-related solutions would be helpful.

The lecturer provides handouts with gaps in. During the lecture she goes through these and fills in the gaps. The lecture handouts are on Moodle.

The example sheets are fine and at the right level of difficulty and include an appropriate range of questions. Some students would like solutions to be uploaded one to two weeks later.

Lecture capture was discussed briefly and some felt that it would give an opportunity to go over more difficult parts later. (See later discussion.)

Attendance has remained fairly steady, and the lecture theatre is around 80% full.

4. Part IB course*:* Ms Seabrook reported.

Lecture course: Professor N Peake.

All the reports on this course have been excellent. Everyone thinks the lecturer is extremely good; he goes at a good pace, explains well and doesn't waffle. He has a short break in the middle of his lectures which the students appreciate. He hands out printed notes with gaps and the notes sometimes have rather dense sections of text so the students wonder whether he could use bullet points for clarity.

The lecturer is audible, and usually legible, but sometimes the light reflects off the acetate he is using in the visualiser (so he can move it to the OHP as backup). It would be helpful if people could point this out to him when it happens.

The examples sheets sometimes do not contain enough questions of sufficient difficulty, in particular on topics such as Fourier Transforms which were not covered in much detail during lectures. Some questions didn't seem to relate very well to the lectures.

The student rep was unable to attend the examples class as it clashed with a supervision. Reports from those who did attend suggest it was helpful. The lecturer tells students beforehand which questions he is going to cover so they can try them on their own first, but some students feel that if they succeed in doing the questions there is then no point in actually going to the examples class.

Once again there was a request for lecture capture – see discussion later.

The attendance has been maintained and the room is quite full. There was one occasion where the lecture room was not unlocked for the start of the lecture.

The students felt they had been given too little information about the Computer Practical course, in particular they would have liked a reminder about the need to register for it. There is no further action needed for this year, but they would like this to be noted for next year.

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.

There was a discussion about Lecture Capture which the student reps had requested. This happens in many of the other science subjects, and most of the lecture rooms are set up for it. For example in Physics the videos are Raven protected and so there are no issues about uncontrolled access. The students would like this so they can go over lectures again, in particular to repeat the bits they had initially found difficult, and also so they can catch up on any lectures they had to miss. They point out that the lecturers put a lot of effort into giving explanations of the notes at an appropriate level, which it seems a pity to waste, and if the students look at videos on the web, they do not know which are appropriate. The staff members wondered if it was helpful to have a different perspective. The students also said Lecture Capture would be useful for those with disabilities who could not attend lectures or who had difficulty making notes. The Convenor pointed out that students with disabilities were dealt with on an individual basis, and lecturers were contacted by the Disability Resource Centre who advised on special arrangements.

The students thought the main use of the videos would be for revision, rather than replacing attendance. The staff members wondered whether attendance in subjects where this was in place had been monitored.

The staff members pointed out that this issue had been discussed in various Committees, and the Maths Department's present position was that it was educationally undesirable. Nevertheless the Convenor will relay the student's comments to the Mathematics for NST Teaching Committee.

The student reps also reported that most people did not use books much. The IB rep said that the book by Riley Hobson and Bence was useful but quite dense. The IAB course rep has the book but does not use it, and the IA A course rep does not feel the need for a book, the lecture notes being sufficient for his needs.