

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 10th February 2010 at 1.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 10, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road*

Present: Dr Ben Allanach, Dr Robert Best, Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Prof Steve Gull, Dr Harvey Reall, Dr Mark Spivack, Miss Theresa Kreiger, Miss Laura Howell, Miss Lindsey Tate.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2. Part IA, A course: Miss Howell reported.

Lecture Course: Dr Dalziel.

The lecturer is audible and legible and he hands out complete notes, which the students like because they contain a lot of information. However the font size is rather small, so some students find them difficult to read, and some students find the notation to be inconvenient and inconsistent. Sometimes they have been handed out in unnecessarily small sections rather than being collated together, but they do have a wide margin for the students to add their own comments, which they appreciate.

However, the students comment that the lecturer has a tendency just to run through the material without explaining the context. They feel he spends too long on the simple parts and just glosses over the difficult bits. Even those who have met the material at school find the subject hard to grasp as they do not feel that he is explaining things sufficiently. They do not think there is a particular problem with the pace of the course, but there are problems with people being confused. As they do not know the context, they find things rather unstructured and find it hard to judge what is important. Also at the moment the lecturer does not give physical examples, just mathematical ones. The students request that he spend a few minutes of each lecture putting the material in to context.

The lecturer writes out the notes again, but doesn't explain which page of the notes he is going through, so students sometimes have difficulty following things. **They have requested that the lecturer hands out a contents page for the notes with page numbers for each section, and announces the number of the page he is going through.**

Attendance is not very good, the lecture theatre being about half full on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and about a third full on Saturdays. There has been a marked drop in attendance over the last two weeks, and as the attendance at the B course hasn't gone up (confirmed by the B course rep.) it seems that some people are not going to lectures at all, just relying on the notes.

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

Lecture Course: Prof Haynes

The students are very happy with this term's lecturer, and think he is better than last term's. He is clear and explains things well, and is very good at teaching maths to natural scientists, i.e. he is good at putting maths in to a physical context. He gives out partial notes, (which are therefore no use without the lectures) but has said he will put the complete notes up on CamTools. In lectures he does not work from the notes, but writes everything out which makes the pace more relaxed. Some people find that the material they have seen before is covered more slowly than necessary at the expense of the more difficult material, but in general the pace of each lecture is appropriate. People are enjoying the course this term partly because of this reduction of pace from last term. There was a request for some material to be moved out of the Michaelmas Term to the Lent Term.

The examples sheets are in general appropriate, but everyone hates Q10 on Sheet 1. All agreed that it involved a disproportionate amount of algebra and could probably be shortened.

Punctuality is getting worse. At 9.00 only about half the class is there and so the lecturer starts a bit late which means that either his lecture is short or he overruns and students are late to

the next lecture. There were some requests that he should start at 9.00 regardless. There was also a request that the 9.00 Saturday lecture be moved to 6.00 Wednesday,

Note: The small OHP in the Arts School Room A is still useless.

4. Part IA, Computer Techniques and Applications: Miss Tate and Miss Howell reported.

Lecture Course: Dr King.

The students still don't understand what is expected of them for the assessed exercise. The convenor confirmed that she had contacted Dr King after the last meeting, and he had promised to make another announcement about the assessed exercise. The convenor (backed up by the rest of the senior members of the committee) assured the students that the assessed exercise was nothing to get worried about, and that they would get a detailed briefing later in the term. They confirmed that the exercise was well worth doing. The students asked why it was placed so far from the lectures. The convenor commented that the reasons were largely historical, and repeated that this was the last year the course would be run in its current form.

5. Part IB course: Miss Kreiger reported.

Lecture course: Dr Kent

It had been quite difficult to get any feedback on this course as most people were quite happy. Last term's feedback had been very positive, and so this term's course suffers a bit by comparison, but there are no complaints. In general the pace is fine, but some students feel that the lecturer goes through examples too slowly. He goes through the material thoroughly and then does an example in great detail, and so some students are worried that he will run out of time later in the course. The course is found helpful by physicists, but it has been found quite hard by people doing e.g. Education or Geology with maths.

The lecturer is audible, and he writes on a computer tablet and his writing is projected on the wall. Unfortunately his choice of colours is not ideal, as he uses yellows and light greens which do not show up very well, and this makes it difficult to distinguish between (for example) his us and his vs. **The students request that he use different colours.**

The examples sheets are very good; they are helpful and at the right level. The attendance has been stable and the lecture theatre is about three quarters full.

There had been some comments on the computing exercises. Some people say the handout is too detailed and prescriptive, others say there is not enough detail. There had been a request the course be done in MatLab or similar, rather than Excel which is not entirely suitable. The Convenor (who just happens to run the course) responded that the course had been running in its current form for some time, and would probably be reviewed following the review of the IA computing course (although the IB course is not about computing as such, it is a vehicle for teaching numerical analysis).

There was a request that the lectures be scheduled so as not to clash with the applied maths lectures from the Maths Tripos, as some people would like to be able to go to both. There was a general feeling amongst the senior members that this would not be practical.

6. Any other business

Professor Gull asked why the numbers attending the lectures were not routinely counted by an assistant as happens in Physics (and some other subjects) .

The student reps confirmed that most people worked from lecture handouts and did not usually need books, but they thought it would be a good idea if there were a book specifically recommended for the IA course. The Convenor pointed out that the Schedules (handed out at the beginning of the Michaelmas term, and available on CamTools) did contain a book list. The students said that the recommended book (Riley, Hobson and Bence) was quite useful for looking things up in, but was too wordy to be useful to try to learn things from.

Next term's meeting will take place in the second week of lectures, and will be arranged very early in the term by birdcage.