

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Tuesday May 15th 2018 at 2.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 21,
Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Wilberforce Road*

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Jorge Santos, Dr Mark Spivack, Dr Alex Thom, Ms Astrid Berge, Ms Cecelia Catuogno-Cal, Ms Evelina Polyakov

Apologies: Prof John Richer, Dr Christopher Thomas

* Dr Santos left the meeting whilst the IA A 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 Santos

There has not been much feedback as most people are happy with the course. Some people find the section on matrices a bit slow and easy, but those who haven't met matrices before think the pace is fine. The lecture is audible and intelligible, and students like his self-deprecating humour (although they say he has nothing to deprecate himself about). He starts each lecture by recapping on the previous one, and he makes sure people can follow him. He uses an Ipad, and draws on it, annotating his Powerpoint slides. He hands out printed notes one chunk per lecture, and the notes are the slides. These notes also go up on Moodle. The students requested that he put them up earlier, and he now puts them up ahead of the lectures. The lecture notes contain a lot of examples, one on every concept.

The examples sheets are good so far. They are much shorter than last term's and a bit easier.

The attendance dropped a bit after the first lecture, but is now stable.

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

Lecture Course: Professor Allanach

People don't have that much to complain about. The lecturer uses two projectors, and the one on the opposite side of the room is difficult for students to see. He writes using a thick blue/brown pen which is not that easy to read. The students have asked him to use the central projector.

The lecturer is audible and his style is quite fluent. He usually starts a bit late, and sometimes overruns by up to ten minutes.

Some people are using the A course handouts rather than the B course one, as they find them easier to use, and the B course one seems a bit complicated. The lecturer goes through the material in the lectures, but the students feel he could do the difficult bits more slowly. For example suffix notation takes a bit of getting used to.

The examples sheets are fine. The questions are not too hard/easy or too long/short.

The attendance is good, and although it has dropped off a bit, people are still standing at the back.

4. Part IB course: Ms Polyakov reported.

Lecture course: Professor Kent.

Overall, this course has not been well received. The attendance is only about 50 (out of about 150 students doing the course.) The student representative had circulated her own questionnaire and had received 39 responses. Some students feel the pace is fine, but others think it is too fast.

The printed notes are complete and very full, and although some students commented that they were too discursive they do think they are well organised. Although the lecturer puts them up on an OHP during the lectures, he does not refer to them, but instead talks to his own handwritten notes which he projects from a tablet. These are already hard to read, and he annotates them in the margins in an orange/yellow colour which makes it even more difficult. The students think that these notes should be typed for legibility. The lecturer is audible, but some find his speech patterns a bit odd.

The major complaint is the difference between the printed notes, and the lecturer's handwritten notes as he does not explain how the two relate. One disgruntled customer said he would like "a cohesive narrative in which the lecturer's comments flow with the lecture notes and the two are not disjoint".

There is divided opinion as to whether the lecturer explains things well. Some students find his style a bit verbose, and in particular when he gave an introduction to symmetry as motivation for group theory many people felt it was a waste of time. They also feel that he should introduce definitions early and avoid using jargon without explanation.

The examples sheets are fine. The first examples class was held at the very beginning of term which the students thought was too early, and the second one was yet to come which is perhaps a bit late. For the first class he had written out the answers and just talked through them. The students would have liked to see the whole process.

The student rep commented that perhaps people were a bit overcritical as the Michaelmas Term's lecturer had set a very high standard.

5. Any other business.

The results of the second week questionnaires were not available in time for this meeting.

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