

Consultative Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences

*DRAFT Minutes of a meeting held on
Wednesday 17th November 2015 at 1.00 p.m.,
in Meeting Room 10, Centre for Mathematical Sciences, Clarkson Road*

Present: Dr Sue Colwell (Convenor), Dr Austen Lamacraft, Dr Jorge Santos, Dr Mark Spivack, Dr Alex Thom, Dr Christopher Thomas, Ms Eleanor Sheekey, Mr Deaglan Bartlett.

Apologies: Mr Peter Gerlagh.

1. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising.

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

2. Part IA, A course: Ms Sheekey reported.

Lecture Course: Dr Dalziel.

This course is regarded very differently by those who have done Further Maths A level, and those who have not. The former find many topics familiar, and are able to get ahead in supervisions; some of the latter struggle to keep up and wonder whether the lecturer realises that some of his audience haven't done Further Maths. The students feel that the printed notes are laid out confusingly, especially for the examples done in lectures, with large gaps between lines, so it is not clear where they are supposed to make annotations. The lecturer writes in pencil, and sometimes moves off the visualiser. His writing is also quite small, and so it is quite hard to read. He also makes quite a few typographical mistakes, although he does always correct himself. The students very much appreciate the fact that the complete notes are uploaded on Moodle straight after the lectures. The examples sheets are felt to be at an appropriate level, but the students would appreciate model answers to them.

People enjoy the lectures, but some think his explanations could be better. The attendance has been good, the large Chemistry lecture theatre is about three quarters full, and numbers have been maintained although people do turn up late.

Although not strictly relevant to this Committee, the Convenor agreed to record the comment that the Scientific Computing course would benefit from more demonstrators.

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

Lecture Course: Dr J. Taylor

The initial comments were mostly about the relative pacing of the different parts of the course. Many people felt that the lecturer covered the content at the start quite slowly, but was rushed when he moved beyond the Further Maths content. Some people struggled with Vectors, and everyone felt that he did not spend enough time on Coordinate Systems considering that no one had done these at school. This has improved a lot, and he now goes through the basic content more quickly, and new content more slowly. The handout is very good, and his handwriting is generally very legible although upper and lower case fs are very difficult to distinguish. He is audible, and in general he gives very clear explanations, although occasionally he does not give enough explanation between lines of a derivation or example. He seems to appreciate feedback, and he talks about the relevant bits of his own research which the students find interesting.

Attendance has been maintained; the Babbage Lecture Theatre is more than half full and there are no latecomers. The examples sheets contain a wide range of questions and the harder ones (specifically for the B course) are felt to be appropriate and challenging enough, although some biologists complain that these are physics dominated.

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

Lecture course: Dr H. Latter.

Overall the students seemed quite satisfied, and there had been no specific complaints. There was a general comment that the lecturer spent too much time on the easy parts of the course (which had been covered last year) and not enough time on some things that were actually new. It was not clear, however, that there would be agreement on which parts could have been covered more quickly, and which deserved more time.

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, and hence not many students had moved between the two.