PRIFYSGOL ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

SEFYDLIAD MATHEMATEG A FFISEG
INSTITUTE OF MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICS

PWYLLGOR CYSWLLT STAFF/MYFYRWYR (MATHEMATEG)
STAFF/STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE (MATHEMATICS)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2011 AT 3.10 P M IN THE IMAPS COMMON ROOM

Present: Paul Arnold (Chair and Year 3 Rep), Katherine Ball (Year 3 Rep), Craig Bibbey (Year 2 Rep), Robert Douglas (Staff), Alan Jones (Staff), James Lewis (MathSoc Rep), Adil Mughal (Staff), Sahm Nikoi (Information Services), Jennifer O'Neil (Year 1 Rep), Cerys Rand (Year 3 Rep), Adam Smith (Year 2 Rep), Aled Wyn Thomas (Year 2 Rep), Adam Vellender (Postgrad Rep), Jennifer Wheatley (Year M Rep), Aled Wyn Williams (Year 1 Rep).

Apologies for absence: Sam Reynolds (Guild of Students)

In attendance: Llinos Evans

M I N U T E S

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the last meeting which was held on 8 November 2011 were confirmed and approved.

Dr Robert Douglas took the opportunity of confirming that the action points minuted had been attended to namely:

Module MP14010 Classical Dynamics

Concern which was expressed by students at the last meeting in respect with some finding the pace of this module too fast had been discussed with Dr Eleri Pryse. It was agreed that it was helpful if students had followed the Mechanics A-level modules and Physics A-level, beforehand. Additional support was also offered with the Classical Dynamics module and indeed this had been taken up by some students.

Module MA38410 Introduction to Control Theory

The concerns expressed by students relating to the Problem Classes for the above module were discussed with Dr Rolf Gohm who agreed that the questions were too involved. Students responded however by saying that they had noticed a difference with the way these problem classes were now run and were grateful for this.

2. MODULE QUESTIONNAIRES

It was pleasing to report that questionnaires had been completed and returned for every Mathematics module offered in Semester 1. There were varying results across the modules with quite a variation in the response rate again this session. Attendance could be an important factor in this respect and the timing when the questionnaires were actually distributed. If a lecture was well attended then the response rate was naturally good. It was reported that the items on feedback were the ones which the department were most concerned about.

Year 1 Modules

There was a noticeable difference within the module MA10020 Algebra and Calculus. Students commented that one of the lecturers Dr Balasz Pinter spoke too quietly and they felt they were missing out on important information as he also worked too quickly in the lectures. They reported that there were serious problems when using Webassign. Students much preferred to use a hard-copy version than submitting solutions through Webassign.

It was reported that when Dr Pinter used a microphone the lectures were much better received but problems arose when using a particular lecture theatre in the Edward Llwyd building as no microphone was available there.

Students felt chatter in lectures had decreased and they felt the use of a microphone had helped with this. Students listened and concentrated more when they were able to hear the lecturer clearly.

Module MP14010 Classical Dynamics

Students would prefer tutorials as in other modules. They found discussion between fellow students benefitted them and as a result felt less motivated with the above module. They also felt there was too much work covered in every lecture. One of the lecturers, Dr Balasz Pinter, reported that the course syllabus was overfull.

Year 2 Modules

Module MA20310 Abstract Algebra

It was reported that Dr Gwion Evans had apologised for not returning course work to students on the above module.

Students found the noise level too loud and thus found great difficulty with concentration.

MP26020 Mathematical Physics

Students noted that two different lecturers delivered this module – Dr Rudi Winter and Dr David Binding. Each taught the module very differently and therefore it was difficult to complete one questionnaire for this module. Students thought it would have been better to have one questionnaire for each lecturer. They therefore felt they had to give an average score based on what they thought of the way the two lecturers taught this module. It was pointed out that of course the purpose of the questionnaires was to evaluate the module itself but staff did take on board their concerns when two different members of staff delivered a particular module. Some could be very happy with the way one lecturer taught a module whilst they could have serious concerns with a second lecturer.

Year 3 and M Modules

Module MA34110 Partial Differential Equations

Students stated that they would have liked their assignments back but this only happened in one or two cases. They felt the module was poorly organised. There was confusion about the order of assignments, and model solutions received.

The PhD student, Adam Vellender, who assisted with this module was commended for his work.

Module MA38410 Introduction to Control Theory

Questionnaire returns seemed to reflect early perceptions about the Problem Classes. Not many students had handed in assignments.

Module MA31210 Nonlinear Differential Equations and Dynamical Systems

Students did not favour the way the above module was delivered. They felt that the lecturer was getting confused and tended to correct himself a lot. As a result the students themselves got confused at the end. There was an issue with assignments not being marked and returned until late in the term. The lecturer apologised for this.

3. STUDENT MATTERS

Year 1:

Assignments

Students indicated that they would like the assignments to be longer or having all the assignments assessed. One mistake in an assessed piece of work could result in the loss of several marks. They would favour more examples given in the lectures themselves.

Year 2:

Module MA20310 Abstract Algebra

The fact that assignments had not been returned to students for the above module discouraged them from handing further work in. Staff indicated that there had been a high volume of marking with this particular module and this was one reason why the work was late being returned to them. Staff agreed however that students had to wait too long for their work to be returned to them for this module.

Staff noted that there was a trend in the second year for students not to submit work which was not assessed.

Year 3:

Module MA34110 Partial Differential Equations

One lecturer's handwriting was difficult to read. Students felt there were not enough examples given; one example which had been given in a lecture turned out to have errors. They reported that they had two different lecturers who had two different approaches to teaching. They indicated that they would like to receive their assignments back.

Adam Vellender reported on the revision sessions and indicated that they hoped to offer more before the end of term. It was noted that the assignment handing-in rate was very low. Adam Vellender

reported that he had marked all of his work but was unsure what the problem was with assignments being returned to the students.

Module MA38410 Introduction to Control Theory

Some students found it hard to understand the lecturer delivering this module. This was not a problem for others.

Module MA31210 Nonlinear Differential Equations and Dynamical Systems

Students had been promised that the solutions would be put up on Blackboard but weeks after this was still not the case. Students felt they did not know what was going on in lectures and as a result were worried about the examination especially as the exam for this module carried 100% of the assessment.

Staff suggested that students need not worry too much as this is one of the easier Level 3 modules, but students were still concerned about even passing this module.

During the problem class they found that the examples were only given to them 20 minutes before the lecture which was not enough time.

Library

Students complained that the library was very cold this term as well as the lecture theatre in Physics B.

Students complained about the examination time-table this semester; this was a concern for second and third years. Mr Alan Jones reported that the department had raised these concerns with the time-tabling officer and that the outcome would be known next week. Too many modules were grouped together on the examination time-table. Students felt therefore that they were at a disadvantage.

Level M students

There was nothing to report.

Postgraduate Students

Students felt that the compulsory research training exercise was not very subject specific. The new intake of students did not find any of it useful for embarking on their research. They felt that attending departmental seminars should count towards the above. It was reported that this seemed to be a general problem across science departments in the university and did not just relate to IMAPS students.

Maths Society

It was reported that the arrangements for the Christmas meal had gone ahead with it taking place on Thursday evening at 7.30 p m in the Glengower Hotel.

4. STAFF MATTERS

Sahm Nikhoi reported that steps had been put in place to reduce the level of noise in the library following concerns expressed at the last meeting. Sahm stated that he had taken over from Mrs Tegwen Meredith and was present in the IMAPS library on Mondays between 9-1 o'clock and Thursdays between 2-5.30 p m. He was there to provide help and support re IS general queries.

Portable heaters had been placed in the library to help with low temperatures. This matter was also raised at the Staff/Student Liaison Committee for Physics students.

RECOMMENDED: to bring the above to the attention of Consumer Services and request an inspection by the University Energy Officer. It was also an Estates related issue and should also be reported to them.

It was reported that the opening hours of the library would be cut in the near future with the library closing at 5.30 p m in the evenings. Students were reminded that the Hugh Owen Library would be open 24 hours a day to compensate for this. The level of usage after 6 p m of the IMAPS library was the factor which determined that the opening hours had to be reduced. The access to resources was also a factor. Students were reminded that textbooks could be obtained on short-loan in the Hugh Owen Library. The final decisions re cutbacks had not finally been decided yet and this would be delayed until after Easter when a better informed decision would be taken. If students had any concerns re the library they were asked to report these first to Sahm Nikoi and then he would take it them to senior management. Students felt the IMAPS library was very important to them and they did not wish to lose this facility. They were assured that there were no indications at present that this would happen and the cuts were due to lack of usage. Students would prefer the library to close at 7 rather 6 o'clock to allow them time to visit the library after their last lecture. If as a result students used the library a lot to borrow books between 6-6.30 p m then this argument could be used to extend the opening hours.

Dr Robert Douglas asked the student representatives if they had received any information re help desks, especially the new SCHEME arrangements. Students replied by saying that Dr Balazs Pinter had informed them that there was an extra help desk specific to Dynamics on a Tuesday and Friday. Concern was expressed by 2nd and 3rd year students that no email was sent round to draw their attention to the second help desk. The sign which appeared on the door to the SEL room was also very vague. As a result it was thought that only one student made use of this provision.

For the regular Help Desk, it was noted that the postgraduates/masters students were only allowed to give limited help with certain assessed assignments. They could, however, run through unassessed assignments and lecture notes.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Students were reminded that Sahm Nikoi was available in the library for any help or support and students were urged to call to see him if they wished. He was also available to teach them information skills and offer one to one consultation.

RECOMMENDED: Sahm Nikoi to send an e-mail to all students with dates of his availability in the IMAPS library and of the assistance on offer.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting should fall in the second week of Semester 2 and then to have a joint meeting with the Physics students during the third week. A date would be set once the time-table for semester 2 was confirmed.