PRIFYSGOL ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

SEFYDLIAD MATHEMATEG A FFISEG
INSTITUTE OF MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICS

PWYLLGOR CYSWLLT STAFF/MYFYRWYR (Pwyllgor ar y Cyd)
STAFF/STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE (Joint Committee)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 19 MARCH 2012 AT 10 A M IN ROOM 320

Present: Paul Arnold (Chair and Year 3 Rep), Katherine Ball (Year 3 Rep), Natasha Barker (Year 2 Rep), Rachel Cross (Postgraduate Rep), Nathan Davies (Year 1 Rep), Robert Douglas (Staff), Gregory Hunt (Year 3 Rep), Alan Jones (Staff), David Langstaff (Staff), Clare McLoughlin (Year 4 Rep), Anthony Meade (Year 0 Rep), James Morris (Year 3 Rep), Sahm Nikoi (Information Services), Jennifer O'Neil (Year 1 Rep), Cerys Rand (Year 3 Rep), Adam Smith (Year 2 Rep), Guy Stimpson (Year 1 Rep), Aled Wyn Thomas (Year 2 Rep), Adam Vellender (Postgrad Rep), Jennifer Wheatley (Year M Rep), Martin Wilding (Staff), Aled Wyn Williams (Year 1 Rep).

Apologies for absence: Peter Bedwell (Year 4 Rep), Craig Bibbey (Year 2 Rep), Adil Mughal (Staff).

In attendance: Llinos Evans and Trystan Pugh.

M I N U T E S

1. Welcome

Paul Arnold chaired the first joint meeting of the Staff/Student Liaison Committee this session and thanked all for attending.

2. MP Modules

Discussion took place regarding MP modules and other modules taken by both Maths and Physics students. Students were asked to consider prior to the meeting whether they preferred one lecturer for the whole course or multiple lecturers. They were asked if they thought problem classes and/or tutorials were effective. Were they satisfied that they received enough feedback? They were also asked if they liked Webassign.

Students responded by stating that they thought the Maths and Physics workshops were very good but they found that there were far too many students in them especially in the laboratories. With the current first year a lot larger they envisaged greater problems next session in this respect. They also did not think that there was enough support to go around the whole class, with there sometimes being only one member of staff available.

RECOMMENDED: that more postgraduate assistance was required in the above and ideally the students should expect two members of staff to be present along with two postgraduate students. A more suitable room should also be sought which would enable students to sit around tables and lecturers to move around more freely unlike the situation at present in the laboratories.

Maths students commented about the lack of desk space and that it was impractical to put note pads around computers which were not even in use. More desk space was clearly required.

Physics students questioned why they had to study differential equations during their first year. Discussion took place and Maths students seemed to think they were taught too much Physics in the first and second years whilst Physics students thought they were taught too much Maths. Students in their third year commented that by the time students reached their final year they would find what they were taught in first two years very beneficial although perhaps they did not appreciate this at the time. A lot however depended on what modules students went on to follow in later years. It was agreed that Classical Physics was a good introduction to students in the first year in preparation for the modules studied in their second year.

Students were asked whether they preferred one lecturer for the whole course or multiple lecturers. Students did not have strong views re this and responded by saying that if a lecturer was competent they had no problems. However others felt that having the services of two lecturers was beneficial.

Webassign

Discussion took place with respect to the above. Students questioned the value of the above especially as they got three attempts to obtain the correct answer and did not feel that this tool tested their true ability. Staff commented that Webassign was a computer and online based resource which should be used to supplement their studies. Some 2nd year students expressed concern that with one particular assessment for a module contributed to 10% for that module. The module referred to was the Quantum Mechanics module. Students remarked that even when the answers they fed into Webassign were the correct ones it would not recognise these. Lack of feedback was also a disadvantage with this type of resource. Students felt that if they were assessed weekly on Webassign they would not have any problem with 10% of the marks being given in this way but did not feel it was fair being assessed on one piece of work for the above module. Staff agreed that it was not good practice to mark assignments by the above method but the use of Webassign in tutorials was a different matter.

RECOMMENDED: that a workshop be run over the summer for staff to improve feedback on the above.

Students also raised concern with the way some lecturers marked their work, in particular coursework where marks were taken away due to some students not showing their working. The Electromagnetism module was an example given and they felt there had been a change in the way marks were awarded for assignments. A student having all the correct answers found that they had lost a lot of marks due to not showing the method used to read these answers. Staff reported that they expected to see the working towards the answer. Students felt that this should be made clear to them at the beginning of the session. The above was a concern only for a minority of students but it was important that this was communicated to all students.

3. Careers Information

Students were asked to consider prior to the meeting if they were receiving enough information in IMAPS on Career matters and how helpful they thought the careers part of the skills module MP12910 was. Students felt that the advice received from the Students Union in respect of the above was very good but sessions run on Careers at the Union were not well attended. Students felt there was no shortage of information available to them within the University on Career matters and that Dr Rudi Winter indeed included sessions in his modules to do with careers by inviting guest speakers.

Students found the session on CV writing very useful and favoured this during their first year as by the time they reached their third year they were far too busy with their studies and felt it was useful that they had this template from their first year. The career planning module offered at Level 1 introduced them to work in excel and minitab. They found the presentations as well as skills introduced very

useful. The fact that this module was offered in Semester 2 was also a good idea as it gave students something to think about over the summer. Physics students enquired as to whether they could follow the module on offer to Mathematics student where they had a chance to research on a particular career and deliver presentations and it was reported that this module was available for both Maths and Physics students. Some students questioned why they had to learn to use minitab, considering how they never needed to use it afterwards. Staff replied by saying that they should treat this as an extra skill which could prove valuable to them in later years as an employee.

Students requested that the Careers notice board would be more beneficial if it were placed outside the 2nd floor laboratory, as it can be easily missed in its current location.

Students enquired as to whether there was a way they could be included in email lists which advertised any positions available after they graduated.

RECOMMENDED: that the above be discussed with Information Services to see if there was a way in which the department could send a general email to all their recent graduates if the department were contacted regarding suitable vacancies by various companies. Also, the Careers notice board will be moved to the wall outside the 2nd floor laboratory.

4. Physics Representation on the Senior Representative Committee

Rachel Cross and Natasha Barker volunteered to represent the department on the above committee. It was reported that there was no Mathematics representation on the Postgraduate Staff/Student Consultative Committee of the University at present. It was therefore agreed that Rachel Cross would continue to represent both Maths and Physics students on this committee.

5. Future of Staff/Student Liaison Committee

Discussion took place regarding the format future meetings should follow and it was agreed that there should be two separate meetings each semester for both Mathematics and Physics with one Joint Committee Meeting annually.

6. Any Other Business

Sahm Nikoi reported that he had attended the Staff/Student Liaison Committee meeting for Mathematics recently and had reported that usage of the Physics Library had indeed improved which was a very important factor in supporting longer opening times. Software available in the library for students was in the process of being reviewed in order to encourage even more use of the library to meet the needs of the current students. Old books belonging to Computer Science were in the process of being moved to external storage. Sahm wished to report this to avoid staff and students in IMAPS being alarmed if they saw books being removed from the IMAPS library. Sahm also informed the committee that he would be sending an email to all students shortly to draw their attention to the service provided by himself at the library on Mondays and Thursdays assisting students individually in his role as Academic Services Librarian.

Meeting closed at 11 a m.