Physics Department
Warwick University

Meeting of the Student Staff Liaison Committee on Tuesday 9th May 2023

First year matters

- The PX156 Quantum Phenomena lectures have to dance around our exams in term 3. Why do we have term 3 teaching?
  We believe that term 3 teaching is valuable. It provides structure to the first part of the term and requires students to meet with the staff, tutors and other students. We do not like the idea of a whole ten weeks dedicated to examinations with students revising entirely by themselves. While this may work for some, we believe that many students benefit from continuing to study new material. The first year laboratory also fits nicely into this period. We have also noticed that attendance at third term classes is good.
- Could we move some exams into January, to balance the workload across the year?
  There is no official University examination period in January. We are only allowed to run examinations at the expense of timetabled teaching. The Department believes that end of year examinations allow you the time necessary to digest the module material and put it into context with material from other modules. Exam periods are for some stressful and multiplying them does not seem an obvious improvement.

Second year matters

- Some students like the not-for-credit term 1 quizzes in PX262 Quantum Mechanics & Its Applications. Could these be extended to cover the term 2 material?
  We will pass this suggestion back to the lecturer.
- Some students are unclear what in PX282 Stars and the Solar System is examinable.
  The lecturers have replied to confirm that everything covered in the lectures is examinable unless explicitly stated otherwise.
- Some students think there are inconsistencies in the expectations of different markers of the lab reports.
  This to some extent mirrors real life, in that different areas of physics have evolved slightly different expectations for how papers are normally written. The markers are all trained by the (very experienced!) module convenor, to try to minimise inconsistency. We encourage students to meet with their marker in advance of the submission, if there are questions about how the story should be told.
- Could we have revision lectures?
  Revision lectures
  The Department does not schedule revision lectures. In the final scheduled lecture of a module some staff may summarise the main themes but should not try to re-teach the whole module. Staff should not offer an additional lecture in which they select the topics to be covered. Any choice of topics is liable to be interpreted as an indication of what is in the exam. If this led to a complaint from a student, who did not pick up on

this hint or who was not at the session, it would be difficult to defend what the lecturer had done.

Question & Answer sessions
In the past students (eg from PhysSoc) have approached a module leader on behalf of other students and presented a list of questions they want to go over. Some lecturers have then decided to organise a session in a lecture room or online to go through the topics raised. This is OK. In general, however, we think it's best when we provide written answers to the list of questions and post them on the module forum. (Students are automatically informed of new posts to the module forum.)

- The PX263 Electromagnetic Theory & Optics lectures and assessment have to dance around exams. Why do we have term 3 teaching?
  Please see the answer to the similar question above.
- Question 2 of the PX2800 Environmental Physics paper contains material on the economics of climate change, which some students had not prioritised in their revision.
  The economics of climate change is one of the learning outcomes of the module, and had not been assessed in previous exam papers. The examinable material for the module is the visualiser notes, the slides, and what the lecturer says (the recordings). The material required for the question was contained therein.

Third year matters

- Some students prefer problem sheets which are self-contained and in the style of exam questions. Is there a problem sheet for PX3A4 Plasma Physics & Fusion?
  You have access to the five most recent exam papers and solutions for Physics modules. Some lecturers may use their problem sheet to provide more stretching examples. All of the problems on the problem sheet for PX438 Physics for Fusion Power [see www.warwick.ac.uk/px438] should be relevant to students taking PX3A4 Plasma Physics & Fusion.
- Some students think that the exam timetable could be better.
  The exam timetable would be simplified if we were to discontinue our joint programmes with the Maths Institute and WBS, ban students from over-catting, ban students from taking modules from other departments, and close de-registration much earlier in the year. We think that almost everyone would agree that almost all students would be a lot worse off! We think that the Exams Office do a very good job at solving what is verging on an over-constrained problem. Having two exams in one day is very rare these days (but was common for previous generations).
- Could we have module fairs to help with module choice?
  Module fairs may make sense for departments which do not allow de-registration from any modules, where they can help minimise the risk of choosing wrongly. We think that students in physics are best placed to think about the next year's modules after they have their examination results. Our system is the envy of many students in departments which do not allow any de-registration or over-catting.
- Why is PX391 Non-linearity, Chaos & Complexity being discontinued, and will its material re-appear elsewhere? Will the material in the discontinued PX396 Nuclear Physics re-appear elsewhere?

Each research group had to decide how to align their optional research-stream lecture modules with the University-imposed new credit framework. They had to consider whether to combine existing 7.5 credit modules or create new ones. In the cases of PX391, PX396 and some other 7.5 credit modules (PX370 and PX388) the groups responsible for them decided to concentrate on other things. This is natural as physics is evolving all the time.

There is finite space in the timetable and the number of module slots available is limited. The timetable organiser would veto any increase in the number of lecture modules taught.

Some of the material in PX396 will re-appear in PX262 to replace material on particle physics which is now in the first-year core module.

- JX2.03 (Junction) doesn't have lecture capture facilities.
  We understand that these facilities should be installed ready for next year.

Fourth year matters

- Some students think PX430 Gauge Theories is not well taught (although comes with good notes).
  This module will not run again.
- Some students think that, where there are three lecturers on a module (PX446 Condensed Matter Physics II, PX431 Structure & Dynamics of Solids), there is a tendency for too much material to be taught. In particular, some students think the optics section of PX446 could have less content (and better structure/notes).
  We will ask the lecturers to consider this.

Mathematics matters

- Can we run mid-module feedback, as is done in the Maths Institute?
  The problem with formal module feedback is that the participation rates are already low (although higher than on many Maths modules). Asking for yet more formal feedback would almost certainly lower the participation rate further and make the data even less representative.

  Whenever this question comes up, we ask you to raise issues directly with lecturers. Please speak to them directly or email them. This way, the message is transmitted immediately and there is the possibility of direct discussion.