

Action point document
arising from the meeting of the
Student Staff Liaison Committee on
Tuesday 17th January 2017

First year matters

- The last question on the PX149 (Mathematics for Physicists) January exam contained part(s), which were impossible to complete.
The lecturer apologises for this problem. It affected a small number of marks. He reallocated marks to different parts of the question to ensure that no one is disadvantaged/advantaged by this error.
- Some students reported finding the lecture component of PX150 (Physics Programming Workshop) less useful than the workshops.
In practice, it is only possible to learn programming via practice and workshops. We are therefore glad that the workshops are helpful. However, a few lectures are always necessary to explain a number of generic points. The lecturer will attempt to find ways to enhance their value in future.

Second year matters

- Some students suggested that the five lectures in PX277 (Computational Physics) could be spread more evenly throughout weeks 1-10 (rather than all be in weeks 1-5), or that there be a lecture in each of weeks 1-10. At present, some material is being presented several weeks before it is used in the workshops.
We would not want to extend the module by adding more lectures. The main part of the module is the workshops and students' practical experience. We will look at spreading the lectures over a longer period. However, it is difficult to find rooms, because rooms are usually allocated for five week slots.
- Many students reported that the notes being taken in PX274 (Experimental Particle Physics) lectures were poorly structured (no lecture headings, no subsections headings) and often difficult to follow (e.g. symbols and axes not defined, very few sentences).
The lecturer has now discussed his notes with a colleague. He understands the issue and will attempt to look for a better compromise between his rough handwritten notes from lectures and the printed extended version available from the module homepage.
- Some students reported that on the module Introduction to Secondary School Teaching (Mathematics), they were only given details of their school placement a day before the placement started. This was significantly later than had been advertised.
We contacted the Institute of Education for clarification. They explained that two schools which were due to take a large number of students pulled out at short notice. They have assured us that systems are in place to make such an eventuality next year less likely.
- PX275: Some students reported that the lecturer wrote too quickly. Some noted that some lecture slots had been replaced by set reading.

On core second year modules, the extra slots are meant for examples classes, tests, reading sessions etc. It would not be right to have additional lectures. We have forwarded the comment about writing fast to the lecturer.

- Some students reported that occasionally it was a little difficult to decipher the handwriting in the PX262 (Quantum Mechanics and its Applications) lectures in Term 2.

The lecturer apologises for his handwriting and will try to do better.

- Some students queried why a lab deadline was set halfway through the lab at 4pm. And some students asked whether the Department had considered online-only submission for lab reports.

Most students hand in on the day of the deadline. The lab is open throughout this day, and students are encouraged to submit before the lab session starts at 2pm. Were the deadline set to be 2pm, experience indicates that a long queue would form just before then, which would disrupt the beginning of the lab session. We therefore think that it is better to keep the deadline at 4pm, so that any students who have not submitted by 2pm can hand in at some point during the following two hours when there is no queue, thus minimising disruption to the lab session.

Third year matters

- Some students reported that the lecturer for PX366 (Statistical Physics) had commented that he was working to restructure the thermal physics syllabus in years 1 and 2, to align with this module. They asked for any more details on this.

The teaching of thermal physics in earlier years has been fixed (to a large extent by external bodies). PX366 should be aligned with these modules not the other way round.

- Scientific Computing: students commented that their code was being marked against criteria that had not been advertised thoroughly.

The lecturer discussed good programming practice and marking criteria in lectures, and then provided explicit feedback on the module website after the assignments had been marked. Next year, in addition to the advice presented in lectures, the lecturer will upload more explicit criteria on the module website before the assignments are submitted.

Fourth year matters

- Some students reported that the lectures for PX441 (Quantum Theory of Interacting Particles) are often at a fast pace and finishes early. There is sometimes standing room only for this module.

We understand the class size now fits the room better. The University always matches expected student numbers, estimated on previous presentations of the module, to room sizes. The new rooms in the Oculus building are meant to be flexible and lecturers are encouraged to rearrange the room to meet their needs. The lecturer does finish early, but this is to invite discussion of any aspects of the material the students would like to talk about.

Mathematics matters

None

They will be happy to hear this!