Minutes of the School of Physics & Astronomy Student Staff Council meeting

Staff Common Room, Monday 14 October 2019

Attendance – Ian Bonnell, Cara Kidd, Aleks Scholz, Charlie Baily, Chris Hooley, Veronika Sedlakova, Daniel Marshall, Sammi Bowers, Sarah Johnston, Joshua Bernard-Cooper, Mai Nguyen, David Hayes, Harry McLennan, Benjamin Sonnet, Isabelle Terry, Amy Gallacher, Craig Wells, Jay Anderson, Samantha Cook, Kate Trinkaus, Riccardo Bonzano, Vanessa Anucha, Bradley McCallion, Drew Millard, Moira Jardine, Bruce Sinclair, Natalia Korolkova, Phil King, Cameron Rae, Paul Cruickshank, Rita Tojeiro, Jonathan Keeling, Anne-Marie Weijmans

Apologies – Donatella Cassettari, Vicki Cormie

Minutes and Matters Arising
Amy welcomed all the new reps to the first Student Staff Council Meeting.
External Examiners Reports – a summary of the External Examiner Reports for 2019 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Year Reports

Fifth year

Experimental – Students are enjoying Group Theory – the delivery of lectures is good and well-paced. A contents page to show what is being covered would be useful. It would helpful if the lecturer gave some time for students to ask questions. Students are enjoying ADA – the material is interesting and they like Python. The instructor has provided lecture slides in advance after a request by students. In Laser Physics students felt that not enough new material was covered in lectures, but otherwise they were enjoying. In Modern Topics students like the different methods of assessment and in-depth analysis.
Astro – students are generally happy. They would like more exam style questions and recaps for revision purposes.
Theory – Students appreciate the feedback provided for QFT. They are finding the material quite hard but interesting, and for some the pace is too fast, but they have contacted the module coordinator. General Relativity is going well, but some students are finding the maths difficult to understand and will contact the module coordinator to discuss. Students are enjoying Applications of QP lectures, but would like typeset notes to be provided. They are also enjoying Foundations of QM but would appreciate more resources to be available online.
MSc Photonics – Students are enjoying Biophotonics and find the lecturers interesting and the material is well explained. Laser Physics lecturers are good and students would like more tutorial questions. Optical Imaging Concepts lectures are well paced and the lecturer always answers questions. Students would prefer to have typed lecture notes that are available before the lectures. In Photonics Labs there is a good variety of experiments and demonstrators are helpful. 3 ½ hour labs can be quite exhausting, but students are encouraged to take breaks. Lab equipment should be checked regularly to make sure everything works. Nanophotonics lectures are engaging and fast paced, but manageable. The notation can be confusing and the order of notes is different from the lecture slides.

Fourth year

SH Astro – students are enjoying Obs Astro and would like more guidance on how long their lab reports should be.
SH Theory – overall students are enjoying their modules. In SR students are appreciating how their knowledge from prerequisite modules is coming together. Students are enjoying new concepts in Physics of Music and would like more interactive lectures. The volume level in Nuclear and Particle Physics lectures was low but technicians will be able to rectify this.
SH Experimental – Students are enjoying Condensed Matter lectures and tutorial problems. Labs are going well. Optoelectronics is interesting, students would like to have typed lecture notes and solutions on Moodle after tutorials.

Year 2

Physics returning students – everything is going well and students are happy with lecture content. They would like maths revision to be spread more evenly. In Thermal Physics lectures, students would like more examples and this has already been discussed with the instructor. Students have settled into labs, although have found that some demonstrators are not as well acquainted with the lab script as they would expect. The lab coordinator will follow up on this.
Physics Direct entry students – Students are unsure how to answer prelab questions and would like examples to be available. Students with different educational backgrounds are encountering varying problems with material.
Astro direct entry students – all the students are enjoying AS1101 but would like more guidance on what material will be covered in the exam.

Year 1

Physics – students are enjoying Mechanics and Waves & Optics but some are finding the scope of material in Properties of Matter too broad, and that prior knowledge, especially in Chemistry, is assumed which some students don't have. The School DoT asked for more specific information. They would like more example problems in lectures. Adjusting to university learning and time management is challenging and trying to fit in Peerwise is sometimes difficult.
Astro – students are all happy. They like the style and pace of lectures and appreciate the pauses in lectures to catch up on notes. They like the availability of textbooks, lecture notes and lab scripts online. Students are unsure how to structure their lab reports and the module coordinator will discuss this. The module coordinator has recently emailed the students about what to expect in the class test.
Gateway – students are finding the maths and astronomy work quite challenging but are keeping up. They requested a mock test before the PH1501 class test to help with preparation. The PH1011 PoM lecturer is to give a Properties of Matter study session to go over material covered in Physics 1A.

Third year

JH Astro – students are enjoying Transferrable Skills. They like the choice of topics but are finding that the assignments require more time than scheduled, the deadlines should be clearer, and the tutorials more structured. Extragalactic Astro lectures are interesting and the research seminars are good. Students prefer smaller group tutorials to whole class tutorials. It is a large class with a mix of JH and PGT students who have different levels of challenge expectation. They will discuss with the coordinator.
JH Experimental – Students all like electronics labs and tutorial questions. The pace is fast and they have whole class tutorials, but they have discussed with the coordinator and additional whole class

workshops will be introduced. The interactive lecture style in QM1 is popular with students. Some were unsure what standards of questions they should use in Peerwise but the coordinator has explained and students now feel happier about using Peerwise. Students are enjoying MfP and lectures are engaging, but there seems to be a disconnection between the material covered in lectures and tutorials. They would like to see more examples in lectures, a contents page for lecture notes to make them easier to navigate, a list of learning objectives, and office hours when the coordinator is available to see them.

JH Theory – In Comp Phys the students who have less coding experience find the assignments more challenging. Students find timed tests very stressful. No marks are awarded for partial credit for a question that is unfinished when the time runs out. The standard increases every week so it is hard to keep on top of work. The School DoT explained that the time limit is there in part due to previous generations of students spending way too much time on similar assessments. Other issues will be taken to an extra meeting to discuss.
Joint Honours – potential joint degree students would like more information specific to joint honours students to be provided, and for his to be highlighted to all students. This information is all in the Handbook and the DoT will discuss with class rep.

Society Reports

AstroSoc – successful events were held in Orientation week, with thanks to MMJ, AMW and AS. Stargazing attendance is good. A talk is held every week and volunteers to speak are welcome. Coming up is a cheese and wine event organised with PhySoc.
PhySoc – there were not as many new members as in previous years, but PhySoc are raising their profile at other events, like the celebration for the Nobel Prize winners event with the Centre for Exoplanet Science.

The DoT thanked both societies for their input during Orientation Week.

President's Report
Time had run out for the President's report.

AOCB
None.