

**Student-Staff Forum
Wednesday 18 May 2022
Online via Zoom**

Panel Members: Carl Paterson (CP), Michele Dougherty (MD), Ingo Mueller-Wodarg (IMW)

Present: Yasmin Andrew (YA), Kayleigh Murphy (KM – secretary)

1. Will all lectures be fully in person next year? If not, why not?

CP confirmed that most lectures will be taking place in person next year.

2. Why are all the exams in the first month of the term?

CP informed all that we need a reasonable amount of time to process and mark the exams before the Examiner's meetings, which is why exams are scheduled when they are. In addition, first year students have the summer project to work on later in the term and to avoid any workload overload the exams are scheduled before this work begins.

3. For future cohorts, are there plans to develop more resources for Comprehensive exams that adequately reflect the new style of the papers? While the mock gave us an understanding of how marks would be allocated between questions, I think many of us were thrown off by the length of questions in both papers. Practising past paper questions is valuable, but without the same 'familiarity' with the exam format, we may have been slightly disadvantaged.

CP said that the nature of the questions asked in the Comprehensive exams is not much different to previous years so did not believe there would be any disadvantage. The Comprehensives module has slightly fewer ECTS assigned, and the exam structure was changed to reduce the number of questions that need to be read and answered for the exam. Next year, there will be more past papers available.

4. Can we have in-person lectures next year?

Yes. Most lectures will be in person next year but not all. The vast majority are expected to be in person.

5. Does the Department still intend to keep lectures online next year? Having only videos to watch has significantly impacted the quality of teaching and it feels like we aren't getting the education that we came here and paid for. There may be some advantages to online teaching but none cannot be retained by also offering in-person lectures, which most other Departments have already returned to.

See the answer to Q3 and Q4. Each Lecturer will decide on the best format in which to teach their content.

6. When will the MEQ feedback be released? I have not seen feedback even for Term 1 courses - have I just missed it, or have they not been released yet? Some lecture courses have been taught extremely poorly and it is frankly an embarrassment that the Department has such a high tolerance for such low-quality teaching. How does the Department justify this? It has been said that lectures were reviewed before being RE-uploaded this year but there are still

many examples of poor lecturing -- is the review process that easy to clear or does the Department not want to put in the effort to improve them? How can we trust that lectures will improve in the future? I have noticed that the number of ECTS for most of the fourth-year elective modules has been increased from 6 ECTS to 7.5 ECTS for this year's freshers -- is more content being added or is the department acknowledging that it has significantly underestimated the time required to learn a module? Will this be reflected in more lenient marking or scaling?

CP confirmed that there has been a change from SOLE to MEQ for feedback this year. This makes the focus the module and not the lecturer. CP informed all that we are still awaiting the results in a format that is useful and digestible. College/Registry are working on this.

CP confirmed that the Physics Department does not tolerate poor quality teaching. When the Department receives feedback, low-quality teaching is only ever a small fraction.

The ECTS for some FHEQ 7 modules have been increased from 6 to 7.5. As part of the curriculum review, the Lecturers were asked to review their courses. Content has not been added but more interactive teaching has been introduced to help students learn and digest the content taught. CP acknowledged that some modules were heavily overloaded with content but that this does not necessarily mean leniency in marking is needed.

7. When will students receive a response to the open letter?

It was confirmed that this was the letter written after last year's exam season. MD said that a response and feedback had been given to students during a Student-Staff Committee meeting but that it is appropriate to formally respond. CP would do this.

8. Do you know when the thesis grades will be finalised? Will this be at the same time as exam grades?

All grades will be finalised at the External Examiners meeting.

9. Exam model solutions are released only every three years. Since the 2021 exams were very different, will the 2022 model solutions be released?

This will be discussed at the next Teaching Committee which is scheduled for Wednesday 8 June 2022. It was confirmed that the format of the exams is comparable with previous in-person, closed-book exams.

10. Does the Department acknowledge that the online lectures disadvantage students with learning difficulties disproportionately?

IMW said it is not definite that this is the case and that it would depend on the specific learning difficulties of a student. Any concerns about this should be raised on an individual basis to the Senior Tutor and we can look into whether any reasonable adjustments need to be made.

11. Is there a timeline on when MSci marks will be released?

Marks will be released after the Examiner's meetings in mid-July. IMW is usually able to notify students about whether they have passed or require resit exams by the end of the third week in July. Official marks are released by Registry, and this usually takes place by the end of July. The Department is not allowed to release any marks or degree classifications.

12. Will there be an exemplar lab report next year? Inconsistent marking has been quite concerning.

It was said that lab reports all differ from each other so it is difficult to produce a template or example of a good one as this can vary. Following the lab report guidelines should help students identify what is required.

CP confirmed that Heads of Labs do go through all feedback and marks before they are released to students to ensure consistency. YA noted that the Head of Year 1, Stuart Mangles, had done a statistical analysis on Lab report marks a few years ago and released this to students to show that the marking is consistent. YA will ask Stuart to release this data again this year. Any concerns about feedback or marking should be raised to the Head of Lab or YA.

Action

A follow-on question about the release of the marking rubric was raised. This is done for the MSci report.

YA said that was done for Year 3 Lab reports and was shared among staff as an example of good practice. CP said it would be good for this to be released for all year groups and will find out if this does happen in Years 1 and 2. The Lab assessment marking rubric document will be added to Blackboard as a standard.

Action

13. Has a date for the graduation been set yet? (And if not, do you know when the decision will be made?)

Graduation will take place in October. The date will be announced over the summer. MD followed up on this during the meeting and the Graduation Team confirmed that the date will be announced over the summer. MD confirmed that the postgraduate ceremony that took place a few weeks ago was all back to normal. IMW confirmed that students can still attend the ceremony in October even if they have a resit or deferred exams.

14. Will there be a breakdown of the marks for the different article summaries? Many felt some articles were more difficult than others and that they'd achieve a lower mark as a result.

YA will feedback to Stuart Mangles for him to comment on this. It was noted that the skills asked for should always be the same regardless of the difficulty of the article. Marking is done in the context of the article assigned so students so none should be disadvantaged compared to others.

Action

General Comments from Panel Members:

MD commented on the building works taking place and noted that they are worth having but acknowledged there has been disruption because of them. Works will be taking place in the Level 3 corridor over the summer. The Student Shapers project for the bike park will start shortly.

CP noted that getting back to in-person exams rather than having timed remote assessments has been going well. There have been fewer reported problems than we had with the online exams.

IMW agreed that the exam situation is better than last year. IMW asked students with any issues that will affect their exams to contact him before the exam so they can discuss the options, of which there would be more available, rather than after the exam.

YA informed all that end of term BBQs are coming up for all year groups. The dates were finalised yesterday and advertised to students shortly.

The Student-Staff Forums will run again next year and dates are being worked on currently. A discussion as to whether these will continue as in-person meetings will take place.

Actions:

1. YA to ask Stuart Mangles to release the data on Lab marks to students.
2. CP to find out if the Lab marking rubric is released to students and for this to be added to Blackboard as a standard moving forward.
3. YA to ask Stuart Mangles to comment on the difference in difficulty levels of the articles and if this has any impact on the marks students receive.