

## **Student Staff Forum Notes**

**17 October 2023, 12:00, LT1**

### **Panel:**

Carlo Contaldi, Deputy Head of Department- Education

Yvonne Unruh, Head of Year 3 and 4

Henrique Araujo, Head of Year 2

Yasmin Andrew, Student Liaison Officer

- NSS Results 2023 – a summary was given on NSS results and how the Department compares with others in College and the UK.
- The different questions in the NSS were discussed along with how the College is taking steps to improve in these areas.
- The improvements that the Department has already made such as investments in Labs, student spaces and mental health support were highlighted.
- The top priorities for further improvement by the Department over the next few years were outlined

**Q1.** Do staff visit other universities for ideas on how the Department can improve?

*A. Imperial staff visit and work with other universities all the time. This happens regularly with both physics research and teaching. External examiners are invited every year and carry out an in-depth review of our examination and wider teaching procedures. Our own staff acts as external examiners in other UK universities. These interactions bring valuable insights into how other departments work on a yearly basis.*

**Q2.** Will the Department offer alternative teaching for the lectures that were missed due to strikes in the previous academic year?

*For most of the courses affected by strikes the missed material was covered, albeit in an abbreviated form in remaining lectures (this may not have been made clear enough in some cases) and notes were issued for reference. Lecture notes are the backup in cases where lectures cannot take place because of unavoidable problems such as strikes, sudden illness, etc.*

*In the case of TPSM the missed content was not covered, notes were not released, and no other remedy was provided. Prof Oulton, who is teaching the core module Solid State Physics (SSP) has kindly agreed to cover the missed content (again in abbreviated format) in the early part of the course as this is required knowledge for SSP. The Department will also prepare in-depth notes on the content that can be used by students for reference.*

**Q3.** Could the Module Specifications be used to outline what students should be taught and what has already been covered?

*There are known issues with lecturers' knowledge on what students have and have not been taught previously causing some difficulties with study. The Department is working on implementing a course syllabus to create a more streamlined teaching and learning process for staff and students. Module specifications are not designed for this purpose which is why the Physics Department is starting this project.*

**Q4.** What steps are being taken to stop the same thing happening again next summer?

*The Physics Department now has more experience in handling a Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB) and processes for marking, provisional progression and communication will be improved. It is important to remember that the Department has no control over industrial action. In most cases, those participating in industrial action do not need to declare so until the day of the action or when e.g., marking is due. The Department is not allowed to ask other staff to replace workers during strikes (strike breaking) and cannot force any staff to do replacement work when e.g., MAB happens. The Department is also excluded from any negotiations surrounding industrial action. We can only work to mitigate the consequences of industrial action within these constraints.*

**Q5.** Could the Friday 1 PM lectures be replaced by alternative teaching such as Rapid Feedback for next year?

*Yes, we can take that into consideration for next year. The current timetable reflects the constraints on the teaching space this year. Blackett LT1 was available for Year 3 and 4 lectures, without having to restrict the number of students taking that module or reduce the number of electives offered to students. We have tried to use the available learning and teaching space as efficiently as possible.*

### **Questions submitted in advance of the forum**

**Q6** What is the feasibility of having optional maths classes for (returning) students?

*Please could you email the Physics Student Liaison Officer, [ph.studentliaison@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:ph.studentliaison@imperial.ac.uk), to discuss the type of maths classes you had in mind, which year and topics. For example, the Department runs additional maths tutorials for Year 1 students in Term 1, twice a week. You could also ask for help with maths topics at the Helpdesks.*

**Q7** Can we have more academic tutorials?

*The Department understands that students find academic tutorials valuable to their learning and academic development. Due to timetable and teaching hours constraints, it is not currently possible to schedule additional academic tutorials. However, students are encouraged to make more use of the office hours that course*

*leaders offer. This is an under used learning and teaching opportunity and a chance to discuss with academic staff directly in small group settings. In addition, the Physics Helpdesks on Level 3 run three times a week and offer an additional opportunity to answer questions and solve problems.*

*More information on the Physics Helpdesks can be found here:*

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/physics/students/current-students/undergraduates/community/phd/>

**Q8** Why can't you guys teach us how to do questions?

*Undergraduate physics students can find the shift to the higher level of independent learning expected and required at university somewhat challenging. In addition to the problem solving taught in tutorials, seminars and rapid feedback sessions, students are encouraged to attend office hours and the Physics Helpdesks. Both these additional learning and teaching settings can help to develop students' question answering skills. Finally, peer learning in study groups is a valuable way to learn different approaches from fellow students and consolidate your understanding by explaining to others.*

**Q9** When are we getting our scores? Expected timeline?

*MAB affected marking should begin this week and marks will be given to students by Registry by the end of Term 1.*

*Update: The Head of Department has directed staff to complete the marking now that MAB has ended (18<sup>th</sup> October 2023). Staff have been asked to prioritise this marking above any other work except for student-facing roles or critical departmental roles. A deadline of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 has been given for return of all marking. Once we have the marks the Department will push the information as fast as possible through the necessary checks and procedures so that Registry can update students' transcripts.*

**Q10** Does the Department have any conference grant provide for UG students if they want to present their research?

*If you are planning to attend a conference to present your physics research please email the Physics student Liaison Officer, [ph.studentliaison@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:ph.studentliaison@imperial.ac.uk). Yasmin will apply for a conference grant on your behalf to the Faculty Dean's Fund or to the Physics Department.*

**Q7** Are there any updates or an active investigation being held for the MAB complaint sent by the student body?

*There were 56 signatories of the complaint. They do not represent the “student body” but a separate student group formed specifically around the issue of the complaint.*

*The complaint investigation has been conducted and the report has been delivered to College and the complaint signatories. The Department has no other role in this complaint other than acting on the recommendations outlined in the report. It is up to the signatories of the complaint whether they are satisfied with the outcome or not and what further steps they wish to take.*

*The Department is focused on learning any necessary lessons from dealing with the terrible situation over which it had no control and that it was forced into by negotiations it had no influence on. The frustration felt by students is shared by many staff who were left to deal with its consequences as best as they could.*