

Department of Physics – Weeks 4 & 5 Teaching Surveys Action Plan

The University's Week 4 'check in' survey showed clear differences in the level of satisfaction felt by different year groups of students in the Department of Physics. Year 1 students expressed high levels of satisfaction (78%), as did final year MPhys students (75%). Students in Years 2 and 3 reported lower levels of satisfaction, however; 42% for Year 2 and 37% for Year 3. The main issues highlighted in the negative comments from Year 2 students concerned: (i) their lab sessions, and (ii) a perceived lack of clear structuring for some of their lectured units. The biggest negative issue raised by Year 3 students was that a perceived lack of value for the on-campus IPT sessions, particularly as these are not unit-based problems classes for Year 3 students.

The comments provided in response to this University-level survey were very useful in identifying these broad areas of concern for students. However, in order to ensure that we take the right actions, we felt we needed more detailed feedback from students about which particular aspects of their course they feel are going well, and not so well. We therefore ran a follow-up departmental survey to ask our students more detailed questions about the various aspects of their course. We consulted on the draft questions with our students via our SSLC meeting on 28th October, and the survey was open from 29th October to 2nd November. Our academic reps were very helpful in promoting this survey, which was particularly important given the short window it was open, and there were 114 respondents.

As a result of the student feedback provided to both surveys, we are implementing the following actions:

1. **Volume and structuring of learning materials:** Many students feel they're falling behind, and that they are finding it harder to keep up with lecture material this year, compared to previous years on their Physics course.
 - i. We have asked unit lecturers to be sensitive to this, and to ensure that the volume of material that they expect students to cover does not expand, compared to previous years.
 - ii. We have also asked unit lecturers to ensure that they provide as clear a structure as possible for students, including letting them know in advance when lectures are expected to be available, and a clear suggested timetable for students to watch lectures, consolidate material, work through problem sheets etc..
 - iii. We have also asked tutors to be aware of students' concerns about keeping up, and have asked them to help support the further development of their tutees' study skills by facilitating group and/or individual discussions with their tutees on learning strategies for this new teaching and learning environment.
2. **Years 1 and 2 labs:** The co-ordinators of the Years 1 and 2 lab units are critically reviewing what students are expected to do, both within the lab sessions, and in the assessment, with a view to reducing this wherever reasonably possible. For example, we recognise that students were finding it stressful to have to upload log-books scans at the end of each Year 2 Experimental Electronics session, and we have now changed this to a system of physical log-

book submission at the end of the lab session. We are also extending the short report submission deadline for Year 1 Physics and Physics with Astrophysics students from Thursday 10th December to around mid-January (exact date to be confirmed when the S1 exam timetable is available).

3. **LOILs:** Students reported that the main reason they don't attend LOILs is because they don't feel they are applicable to them, either because the questions from other students are not relevant to them, or because they have not yet had time to study the material that is being covered by the LOIL session. We have encouraged unit lecturers not just to focus on the previous week's lecture material within their LOIL sessions, but to also actively invite student questions and discussion about material from earlier in the unit. We have also encouraged them to enable students to raise questions anonymously for discussion at LOIL sessions, and (when possible) to circulate the discussion questions in advance. We think this will make it easier for more students to ask questions, and for students to gauge in advance whether or not a particular LOIL session will be useful for them.
4. **IPT sessions:** Feedback on IPT sessions varied considerably across different year groups. Students in Years 1 and 2 generally reported that they found IPT sessions useful. Students in Years 3-5 were much less satisfied with their on-campus IPT sessions, however, with many of them reporting that they don't find them useful, due to them not being unit-based problems classes. We will identify how we can offer unit-based on-campus problems classes for Years 3-5 students, with the aim of starting this new system as soon as possible – from Week 8 if at all possible. These sessions will be in addition to the online problems classes for students in Years 3-5, and will replace the current system of academics dropping in to GTA sessions. This will therefore allow Years 3-5 students to be able to choose whether to attend problems classes online or on campus.

Students in Years 1 and 2 also reported that they would like this choice. These students were less likely to indicate that they would want to attend online problems classes, however, and there are some additional complications involved in this, for example in identifying how to organise face-to-face tutorial meetings for students attending online problems classes. Nevertheless, we recognise the valid reasons that students cite for wanting to be able to choose between attending problems classes on campus or online. During Weeks 9 and 10 we will therefore open the current remote problems classes for Teaching Groups 1 and 2 to any student who wants to join them, as opposed to just those students studying remotely. We will then review the impact of this change, with the potential to extend it to Semester 2.