

# SMSTC: Summary of student feedback (2021–22)

Fraser Daly (F.Daly@hw.ac.uk)

May 3, 2022

*This document is a summary of student feedback gathered through the online survey. Our comments are italicised; all other opinions expressed are attempts to summarise the students' responses as accurately as possible.*

## Respondents

The response rate was somewhat lower this year than in recent years, with only 16 respondents, all of whom are research students. Each respondent took between one and six SMSTC modules in 2021–22. Between them the respondents had a total of 35 core module registrations and 12 supplementary module registrations. On average they spend about 12.5 hours per week on SMSTC activities (including classes) and 16 hours per week on research. Half (8/16) of the respondents would have preferred to spend less time on SMSTC, and one student would have preferred to spend more time on SMSTC. The remaining 7/16 students reported that the balance between SMSTC and their other work commitments was about right.

*On average the respondents were registered for roughly 3 modules each, with each module notionally taking around 25% of their working time. Of course, some of these module registrations are students taking classes not for assessment.*

## Comments on individual modules

There were some comments made on individual modules which have been passed to Theme Heads for their consideration when putting together their reports. In general, however, there were relatively few comments on specific modules.

From the more general feedback on modules, there seems to be a preference for in-person (rather than online) tutorials. There is also a preference for 'blackboard-style' lectures, in which notes are written out, over lectures which used prepared slides. The large amount of material covered in some of the core modules was remarked upon by some students. The level of the core modules came in for mixed feedback (some noting that they provided a good introduction for non-experts, others that the level was too high for beginners); without particular modules named in these comments it is hard to form a pattern of which modules are perceived as correctly pitched and which are not. Similarly, the good organisation of modules was noted by some students, and others noted that the organisation of some modules left room for improvement, but without specific modules being named it is hard to see a pattern.

Of the supplementary modules, the teaching style in Stochastic Networks and Processes came in for particular praise. Glowing feedback from one student was also given to the tutorials offered by the Maxwell Institute in Stochastic Processes.

## Symposium

75% of respondents attended the opening symposium (*which this year was a one-day event held over Zoom, attended by a total of 80 students*). Those that did not attend were either unaware of the symposium in time, or had not yet started their PhD.

Of those that did attend, 83% reported enjoying the symposium overall, 75% found the theme talks useful in making module choices, and 70% found the other symposium talks helpful. *This seems to be similar to other (non-online) years*. No respondents made any further comments or suggestions related to the symposium.

## ***Research Skills Day, November 2021***

25% of respondents (four students) attended this event (*for context, we had 23 students attend in person and 25 attend online in total*). Those that did not attend were either unaware of the event in time, did not have enough time for the event (e.g., because of assignments) or felt they had already received sufficient generic skills training through their university. Of those that did attend, all reported enjoying it and found it helpful. The presentation on scientific writing and the careers panel discussion came in for particular praise.

## ***Supporting Postgraduates Who Teach Mathematics and Statistics* workshop, March 2022**

21% of respondents (three students) attended this event (*for context, we had 30 students attend in person and 12 attend online in total*). Those that did not attend were either unaware of the event in time, did not have enough time for the event (e.g., because of assignments) or do not currently have any teaching or tutoring responsibilities. Of those that did attend, all reported enjoying it and found it helpful. Two respondents described it as ‘excellent’ and ‘outstanding’.

## Website

75% of respondents reported that the website was “generally easy” to use, and the remainder that using the website was “generally easy but with occasional problems”. No-one reported that the website was “generally difficult” to use. Most of the suggested improvements to the website were around the submission of assignments, particularly requests for clear confirmation that submitted work had been received. *We will continue to look into this with our web developer*. Other suggestions included email notification when feedback is released.

## Zoom videoconferencing

80% of respondents reported that Zoom videoconferencing was “generally easy” to use, and the remainder that it was “generally easy but with occasional problems”. No-one reported that Zoom videoconferencing was “generally difficult” to use. Specific suggestions were mainly related to the settings for the Zoom meetings (e.g., requests to turn off the audible join/leave notifications and to automatically mute participants upon entry). One student noted the varying levels of comfort that staff have with Zoom, *but the particular issues we noted last year related to some lectures (e.g., writing on a whiteboard not being clearly visible over Zoom) were absent this year, suggesting that staff are making overall improvement in this area*.

## Other comments

There were very few additional general comments received, and the majority were more relevant for funders and departments than SMSTC. For example, one student requests that “everything should be optional” (*which it is: SMSTC does not require any particular student to take any particular module*) and another that “the number of courses per semester should be reduced” (*SMSTC places no requirements on how many modules students should study*).