

SMSTC: Summary of student feedback (2023–24)

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

Respondents

The 2024 SMSTC student feedback survey had 11 respondents, just 4% of those eligible (for comparison, last year saw a response rate of 10%). Of these respondents, eight are research students, two are taught postgraduate students, and one is a member of staff. Most respondents took between one and five SMSTC modules in 2023-24, though one took eight modules (not necessarily all for assessment). Between them the respondents had a total of 19 core module registrations and 13 supplementary module registrations. On average, research student respondents spent about six hours per week on SMSTC activities (including classes) and 24 hours per week on research. Four of the research student respondents reported that the balance between SMSTC and their other work commitments was about right, three that they would have preferred to spend less time on SMSTC and one that they would have preferred to spend more time on SMSTC.

On average the research student respondents were registered for roughly 3.5 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 a few comments made on individual modules which have been passed to Theme Heads for their consideration when putting together their reports. Several of the supplementary modules came in for specific praise, for their content, teaching style and/or assessment methods. Several of the supplementary modules used student presentations as the module assessment, and this format seems to be appreciated by students.

Compared to previous years, in which the Structure and Symmetry modules have seen some criticism from students, there was only one student comment that mentioned an S&S module this year, and that in a positive light. *I hope that we can take this as evidence that last summer's revision of the S&S modules has worked well from a student perspective.*

Several students noted that many SMSTC modules cover a large amount of material, and lectures therefore either can provide only a summary of some parts of a module or proceed at a rather fast pace. *This has always been a feature of SMSTC modules, and is one that is worth keeping an eye on.*

There may still be scope for improvement in delivery of some SMSTC modules. For example, one respondent noted that in some cases lecturers' writing on a blackboard was not easily legible by remote participants.

Opening symposium

Out of seven respondents who are first-year PhD students, only three attended the opening symposium, (*which this year was a two-day event held in Perth*). Some of those that didn't attend commented that they heard about the meeting too late to attend. Of those that did attend, all three reported enjoying the symposium overall, found the theme talks useful in making module choices, and found the other symposium talks helpful. There were no other particular comments on the symposium.

This is in line with feedback received from a short survey sent to participants in the symposium last autumn. That received eight responses, all of whom enjoyed the symposium overall. All but one found the theme and module talks helpful, and all but one the other talks helpful. Other helpful aspects of the symposium noted by respondents included finding out general information about SMSTC, and meeting SMSTC staff and students. Three of the respondents noted that the symposium is an intense and tiring event.

Supporting Postgraduates Who Teach Mathematics and Statistics workshop

None of the respondents attended this event (*for context, we had 16 students attend this event in total*). Three respondents reported not being aware of this event in time to register. Of the three that were aware, one reported that they chose not to attend because of the travelling required, and the other two because the topic is not currently relevant to them. One noted that they would like to attend next year.

There was also a short feedback survey sent to participants after this event, which received four responses. All respondents reported enjoying the workshop overall, and particularly the interactive aspects.

Research Skills Day

Two of the respondents attended this event (*for context, we had 17 students attend this event in total*). Those that did not attend were either not aware of the event, felt that participation was too great a time commitment, or felt that the topics had already been covered by their departmental induction. Of those that did attend, both reported enjoying it, and found the presentation skills session particularly helpful. There were no further comments or suggestions for future events.

There was also a short feedback survey sent to participants after this event, which received six responses. All respondents reported enjoying the workshop overall, some suggested more interactivity in the event would be helpful. A session on time management, particularly for students with caring and similar responsibilities, was suggested for a future event (*good idea!*). Two-thirds of the respondents reported that the timing in the academic year for this event was "just right", the remaining one-third would have preferred the event to be held earlier in the academic year.

Website

Nine of the 11 respondents reported that the website was "generally easy" to use, one that the website was "generally easy but with occasional problems", and one that the website was "generally difficult" to use.

The only further comment was that the assessment submission and general organisation of the website leaves room for improvement. *The website is undergoing major development in its overall design between now and summer 2025, which will hopefully address these points.*

Zoom videoconferencing

Six of the 11 respondents reported that Zoom videoconferencing was “generally easy” to use, and all but one of the remaining respondents that it was “generally easy but with occasional problems”. One respondent reported that Zoom videoconferencing was “generally difficult” to use.

One respondent noted the general difficulty of hybrid teaching, and susceptibility to technical problems. Another made the comment (already noted above) that blackboard lectures often do not interact well with Zoom. One respondent found Zoom links difficult to find. *These are posted as announcements on each module site before the start of each semester.*

Other comments

There were no further comments.