

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Unconfirmed minutes of a meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos held at 2:00 pm on **Tuesday 2nd February 2010** in the Greaves Room, Pathology, Tennis Court Road.

Present: Dr N Holmes (Chairman), Professor T W Clyne, Dr P Duffett-Smith, Dr M Fiore, Dr S Fulton, Professor H Griffiths, Professor R Horgan, Dr J Keeler, Dr M Mason, Dr R Padman, Professor D Ritchie, Dr S Russell, Dr C Schwiening, Professor J Secord, Mr F Floether, and Mrs E Oliver (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr P Barrie, Mr N Donnelly, Professor S Redfern.

An updated list of members was circulated (**CM.594**).

The Faculty Board of Biology had appointed Mr Nicholas Donnelly, from Churchill College, as the biological sciences junior member for the Committee.

The Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry had appointed Mr Frederik Floether, from Homerton College, as the physical sciences junior member for the Committee.

The Committee approved these appointments and welcomed the student members.

515) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2009 were approved.

516) MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

A summary sheet of action points and matters arising (**CM. 595**) was circulated.

Scientific Computing in Part IA

Dr Padman reported on progress:

- i. Physics had agreed to provide lecturers but following further discussion the names of Martin Dove and Emilio Artacho from Earth Sciences had been confirmed. It would now be appropriate to set up a Course Management Committee so that timetabling and planning could be in place for an October 2010 start.
- ii. It had not been possible to establish a CHEST agreement for MATLAB and site licences would therefore need to be purchased in the normal way. This had been discussed within the Schools but now needed to be taken forward. The preferred option was to proceed via the University Computing Service (UCS) who would charge to manage the process; another option was to use central purchasing. It was possible that a good deal could be obtained for the first year which could recover costs due to UCS. The software could include all tool boxes but an option existed to take less at a reduced cost.
- iii. Two licences would be required. The licence for students would cost in the region of £20K which equates to £4-5 per head. It was hoped that the Schools would meet this cost and this proposal will be made. A site licence would be required for staff which would cost approximately 100K; this was similar to the current outlay. The software would be used by five Schools in roughly equal

proportions. It was thought likely that the usage of MATLAB across the University was likely to double in the future. If necessary, the proposed course could be taught using Octave, which is freely available and shares many features with MATLAB.

- iv. Regulations now needed to be looked at closely and a proposal brought to the Management Committee. It was also necessary to determine which students would take the module and whether this would be offered outside the Maths courses. There was some concern that students taking Elementary Mathematics for Biology (EMB) would not be able to cope without A-level Mathematics knowledge. The new course would focus on computing and as the number taking EMB was relatively small it may be possible for those students to attend the lectures and collect examples. If the percentage of marks attached is small it may be possible to tailor the examination to meet the needs of these students. It was important to make the assessment options as simple as possible. It had been agreed that Mathematical Biology would take the module. Clear proposals would also need to go to Faculty Boards.
- v. Priority now needed to be given to establishing a Course Management Committee which should consist of a member from each of the contributing departments: Physics, Chemistry, Earth Sciences and Materials Science & Metallurgy, together with the MB Course Organiser, Nik Cunniffe. James Keeler volunteered to Chair the Committee and nominations would be sought.

Action: Secretary to contact Departments for nominations, to set up first meeting and to prepare draft regulations.

517) REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

A paper of reported business was circulated (**CM.596**).

i. Faculty Board of Biology, Biological Sciences Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th November 2009 (**CM.597**) were circulated.

321.02 The deletion of a paragraph from the Faculty Marking and Classing Criteria was queried but it was established that this was a minor amendment.

322. The minute reported a discussion that had taken place but the suggestion mentioned had not been approved.

ii. School of the Physical Sciences, Physical Sciences Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday 27th October 2009 (**CM.598**) were circulated. Another meeting had taken place since then and one of the matters arising from that meeting, the topic of Options A and B at Part II, was on today's Management Committee agenda.

iii. Preliminary Reading List, 2010-11 (CM.599)

A draft list had been prepared following consultation with Course Organisers. There was some discussion as to whether some of the preparatory reading was appropriate. It was thought that the leading paragraph gave an adequate explanation of the purpose of the list but it was suggested that Mathematics should reconsider their contribution which was particularly long, and that Biology of Cells should be asked to check the wording of their entry and to consider whether a more general book could be included. A revised list would be circulated for a future meeting.

Action: Ron Horgan to contact the Course Organiser for Mathematics

Action: Secretary to contact Biology of Cells

iv. Preparation for Part II allocation process.

The information provided to students was circulated for information (**CM.600**). This included a paper indicating numbers of places offered for Part II subjects in 2010 compared to student choices in previous years. It was noted that progress had been made in reducing the number of unplaced students but that some weaker students would benefit from clear advice from Directors of Studies when considering opting for heavily subscribed courses.

v. External Examiner Reports 2008/9

A paper was circulated (**CM.601**) which gave a summary of comments from reports received from External Examiners in 2008/9, together with a summary of the responses by Departments. External Examiners were in general satisfied with the process. Some had made recommendations and suggestions to which Departments had responded. There were no over-arching Tripos-wide issues. There was some mention of double marking but it was not the role of the Management Committee to impose marking and classing criteria for Part II and Part III examinations as this was a matter for the Faculties.

vi. Board of Examinations – Consultation on Saturday examinations

An extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Examinations held on Tuesday 8th December 2009 was circulated which provided a summary of the consultation regarding Saturday examinations to which the Committee had contributed. The Board had agreed that, wherever possible, examinations on Saturdays should be avoided whilst ensuring that any adjustments in timetabling would not lead to a reduction in the time available for marking or delay in posting class lists. The Examinations Office would work towards implementing any changes with effect from June 2011. Draft timetables were in the process of being issued and it was thought that there would be little change for this year.

vii. Board of Examinations – Publishing class results for students

An extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Examinations held on Tuesday 8th December 2009 was circulated which provided a summary of the consultation regarding publishing class results to which the Committee had contributed. It was noted that from June 2010, students would have access to their individual results prior to the posting of the class list outside the Senate House. It was understood that the information would be available on-line a minimum of one hour ahead of publication. The new arrangements would not prevent students from applying to the Applications Committee to have their names withheld from the posted class list.

viii. Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining: accreditation report

The Committee congratulated Materials Science and Metallurgy on the renewal by the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining of accredited status for Parts II and III of the Natural Sciences Tripos for five years from 2009-10.

ix. Report on the proposed Social Sciences Tripos

The Committee noted that the report on the proposed Social Sciences Tripos had recently appeared in the Reporter of 13 January 2010. It was felt that it would be useful for the Committee to have an oversight of the potential impact on NST and to

be kept informed as proposals are developed. It was understood that the new Committee for the Social Sciences Tripos was likely to have a member from the NST Management Committee and that there was also likely to be representation from the School of Biological Sciences. It would be important for NST to be aware of any NST subjects which may be shared by SST, and how Psychology would be organised. It was felt that the experience acquired in managing NST could provide useful guidance for the new Tripos. There was some concern that entry via SST may be a route through to the NST for students with inappropriate entry qualifications but it was agreed that Regulations could be amended if necessary in order to manage this.

x. Amendments to Class Lists and Allowances for Examinations

The extract from Reporter No 6171 from 9th December 2009 was noted.

518) GUIDES FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS FOR PART IA, (CM.602) PART IB (CM.603), PARTS II AND III (CM.604) AND ADMINISTRATION TIMETABLE (CM.605)

The revised Guides and Appendices which had been presented to the recent Interim Meetings of Examiners were circulated and approved by the Committee.

519) MANAGING NUMBERS IN THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

An extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Undergraduate Admissions Committee held on 23rd November 2009 (**CM.606**) and the supporting paper (**CM.607**) were circulated. It was suggested that a standing sub-committee should be formed to maintain an overview of numbers. It was recognised that this was a complicated issue which was dependent on other factors outside of the control of the Committee. It was important to maintain a balance and to be aware of changing patterns. There was currently no realistic possibility that NST numbers could increase without a corresponding drop in other subjects as overall numbers were limited by college accommodation. Physical Sciences had recently discussed ways to make better use of resources and to relieve the difficulties currently experienced by Chemistry with large numbers of students from several Triposes. Biology had also reviewed numbers as part of the School Plan. A strategic overview was needed and it was agreed that a small sub-committee, consisting of the member from each School together with the current Chairman, should be formed. This sub-committee could include in its discussions, matters such as resource issues and advice to students from their DoSs.

520) OPTIONS A & B IN PART II PHYSICAL SCIENCE SUBJECTS

Following discussion amongst Physical Science departments there was a proposal to remove the alternative options A and B in Part II Chemistry, Experimental and Theoretical Physics, Geological Sciences, and Materials Science and Metallurgy with effect from October 2010. . A copy of the amended Regulations was circulated (**CM.608**) and the Committee approved the changes subject to a minor amendment.

521) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing additional was raised. There was no reserved business.

522) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:00 pm** on **Tuesday, 2nd March 2010** in the Greaves Room, 1st Floor, Department of Pathology, Tennis Court Road.