

GENERAL BOARD OF THE FACULTIES

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Minutes of a meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos held at **2.15pm** on **Tuesday 19 November 2002** in the Board Room of the Board of Graduate Studies.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Mr Z Chang, Professor TW Clyne, Dr A Findlay, Dr J Forrester, Professor J Gray, Dr S Hand, Dr K Johnstone, Mr T Mach, Dr J Miller, Dr J Riley, Dr B Shachar-Hill, Dr N Woodcock, Dr MG Worster and Mr CJ Cox (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr I Wilson and Dr MG Russell

111. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 22 October were approved.

112. MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

Under item 101: Annual Report 2001-2, it was noted that the report had now been seen by the General Board's Education Committee and that that Committee had agreed that the areas concerned with quality assurance were suitably robust. It was also noted that the Department of Earth Sciences should continue in future to supply marks in the agreed format as required.

Under item 102: Allocation of students to Part II subjects, it was noted that the issue of Part II Astrophysics remained, whereby a 'low' II (i) might appear sufficient for a student to take this option, based on the advertised criteria, but in reality places were being restricted due to the results gained in Mathematics. The Committee agreed that clarity from the Institute needed to be sought on this issue.

Under item 103 (ii) (c): Reports of Examiners for the Tripos, it was noted that the altered class boundaries for the Natural Sciences Tripos were now confirmed and that Examiners had been made aware of them.

Under item 104 (i): The use of External Examiners in Parts IA and IB of the NST, it was noted that a response from the General Board's Education Committee was anticipated after their meeting on 20 November 2002.

Under item 106: Natural Sciences Tripos Learning Day 2002, it was noted that the activities next year would be shortened.

113. STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

i Examinations 2002: Statistics

The following statistics were received:

- Classing of candidates in Parts IB, II (General), II and III of the Tripos, compared with classes obtained in the previous year's examinations (**CM.155**),
- Classing distributions in Part II and Part III of the Tripos 1996-2002 (**CM.156**),
- Cohort tracking data for Parts II and III of the Tripos (**CM.157**).

These results were noted as being roughly what was to be expected, based on previous data sets.

ii Examinations 2003: Form and Conduct Notice

The complete Form and Conduct Notice for the Natural Sciences Tripos was received (**CM.158**), as well as an additionally tabled paper concerning arrangements for Part III Experimental and Theoretical Physics (**CM.166**). The Committee noted a typographical correction for Part II Zoology and approved the Notice for publication.

iii Strategic Committee for the Natural Sciences Tripos

The minutes of the meeting of the Natural Sciences Tripos meeting held on 12 November 2002 were received (**CM.159**).

Under item 106 (v): management and purpose of the mathematics courses, it was noted that this was an issue of some concern, and that the Strategic Committee would be discussing this at a future meeting.

Under item 106 (vi): Part IA: should classing continue?, the Committee noted that the process of producing class lists for Parts IA and IB was a requirement of the regulations for the Tripos but suggested that perhaps the regulations should be changed so that a list of marks in each subject be provided instead. Objections to this proposal included that the abolition of classing (specifically with reference to Part IB) would affect:

- distribution of College scholarships and prizes
- some students' LEA grants
- some students' career choices and prospects
- some students' placement on 4-year courses

The possibility of a consolidated class for IA and IB together was also discussed, it being in effect a class for Part I. To the suggestion that providing individual marks by subject might mean candidates felt they could pay less interest to their non-specialisms, it was argued that the mark could be published with a rank, related to average performance.

The Committee agreed to return to the issue at their next meeting for a further discussion.

Under item 106 (vii): Part IB: Advanced Physics and its combination with other subjects, the Committee noted with enthusiasm the decision to make combinations other than Advanced Physics and Mathematics a realistic possibility.

Under item 106 (viii): Part II (General): suggested models and how to proceed, Dr Findlay noted his objection to the use of the syntax 'General', in reference to this area of the Part II syllabus as (although a product of the history of the course) it is somewhat reductive and devaluing in nature.

114. CHEMISTRY LECTURE THEATRE – RELOCATION, EASTER TERM 2003

A letter, dated 11 November 2002, from the Director of Teaching at the Department of Chemistry, regarding the closure of the large lecture theatre and its impact on timetabling, and a chart of possible alternative locations was received (**CM.160**). The Chairman introduced to the Committee the issue of the Easter Term 2003 refit of the large lecture theatre, which was a necessity, and also the plan envisaged to cover the lectures during the period of closure, which largely utilised Lady Mitchell Hall as well as three other venues on four occasions. It was noted however that this left the issue of three Part IA Chemistry lectures for a number of students that at present did not have a venue.

After discussion, **it was agreed that the three Chemistry lectures involving a timetabling clash for some 50 students (who would have an Evolution & Behaviour lecture at the same time) should be given twice, both at 10 a.m. (for the E&B students) and at 11 a.m. (for all other students). Information about the envisaged timetable would be circulated to students and Colleges at the end of the Lent term.**

115. TEACHING OUTSIDE OF FULL TERM (minute105)

It was noted that at their last meeting, in response to concerns in an e-mail from the Teaching Committee of the Department of Physics, the Committee had requested a digest of the lectures currently given outside of the weeks normally allocated (*i.e.* Thursday week 1 – Wednesday week 8) for Parts IA and IB. The digest was received (**CM.161**).

The Chairman added that Part IB Chemistry lectures were also given on Wednesdays before the official start of lectures. However, it was noted that these seemingly anomalous arrangements were actually in place so as to increase the amount of time between the end of the lecture courses end and the commencement of examinations.

Dr Findlay noted the slight scheduling difficulty of Tuesday mornings, when some Colleges would be running pre-examination preparation tests, but it was further noted that it might be possible to reschedule these for the afternoons, particularly as these lecturing arrangements met with wide approval from students.

116. WRITING ON EXAMINATION SCRIPTS

A letter, dated 31 October 2002, from the Head of Department of Biochemistry, regarding the writing of comments on examinations scripts was received (**CM.162**) in addition to the letter referred to by Professor Thomas (**CM.163**).

It was noted that the agreed NST policy was to allow examiners' comments only on problem questions, and not on essay questions, as this could compromise the system of 'double-blind' marking. Additionally, where comments *had* been written on an examination script and the student wished to see them, they would need to be transcribed, generating additional paperwork.

After discussion **it was agreed that the Committee should advise the Department of Biochemistry to exercise their own professional judgement in the matter and in their dealings with the External Examiners who had raised the problem, but to do so with the issues surrounding double marking and transcription of comments given prominence.**

117. PART 1A PRACTICAL REGISTRATIONS

A paper from the Secretary regarding the arrangements for practical registrations for Part 1A of the Tripos this year was received for discussion and comment (**CM.164**). It was noted that the new system had been put into operation as a measure to deal with enhanced numbers of Part IA students.

The issue was raised that the new arrangements had led to some students having two practicals within the same week, and that this had a knock-on effect on organisation of supervisions. It was also noted that the limitation of numbers for Cells and Physiology had caused some difficulties, as had the general inequalities of demand and supply across the system, related to the division of numbers in the biological and the physical sciences, exacerbated by the variety of intake of students by Colleges.

It was stressed that organisers of the Part II course for 2004-5 needed to be made aware of the current strain on the system, as an aid to planning provision in the future. Also it was noted that the subject of practical registrations needed closer attention by Directors of Studies.

The Committee agreed that the current system should be used in the coming academic year, subject to some small improvements which resulted from the first year of operation.

118. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A tabled paper from Mr Dixon regarding the Notice on the use of Calculators in Examinations was received (**CM.165**), with instructions for Committee members to e-mail comments to the Secretary, so that he might forward them in a digest to Mr Dixon.

119. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:15pm on 4 February 2003** in the Board Room at the Board of Graduate Studies, Mill Lane.