

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 8 February 2005** in the Seminar Room at the Centre for Research in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CRASSH).

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Professor TW Clyne, Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Mr A Jefferies, Dr S Schaffer, Mrs S Stobbs, Mr N Tammuz, Dr N Woodcock, Dr MG Worster, and Dr MG Russell (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr W Allison, Dr R Hardie, Dr K Johnstone, Dr P Oliver, Dr J Russell, and Dr I Wilson.

236. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2004 were approved.

237. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee welcomed Mr Naaman Tammuz (Part II Physics, St. Edmund's) to his first meeting. Mr Tammuz is serving as a junior member on the Committee until December 2005. Mr Tammuz was nominated by the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry.

The Committee noted that a junior member had yet to be nominated from within the Faculty of Biology and Dr Holmes undertook to progress this matter.

238. MATTERS ARISING

i. Use of Baxter scores for cohort tracking (minute 212i, 225i)

At the last meeting, Mrs Stobbs agreed to discuss with Dr Baxter the scoring system and whether or not there were reasons to change it, taking into account changes in classing distributions since it was first introduced. The Committee had also noted that whereas it was at liberty to use any scoring system for cohort tracking in NST, it would make sense for everyone in the University to use the same system.

Mrs Stobbs reported that she had spoken to Mr Barden (assistant to Dr Baxter) and indicated that further talks about the use of Baxter scores in a wider context may take place.

The Committee noted that to use a different, but similar, scoring system may be confusing and **agreed that continued use of Baxter scores was appropriate at this time.**

ii. Provision of a Study Skills Session (minute 217, 225ii)

At the previous meeting, the Committee agreed to hold two parallel study skills sessions (one for physical scientists and one for biological scientists) of one hour in length introducing study skills to first year NST undergraduates. The sessions would take place on Wednesday 5 October 2005 at 2 pm. The Committee also agreed that the further development of study skills was more appropriately managed through the Colleges and requested that the Secretary raise this matter with Senior Tutors, pointing out the proposed introductory lectures, the current variation in provision, and inviting them to discuss the level of provision provided by their own Directors of Studies.

The Secretary reported that the Senior Tutors' Committee had agreed to the Study Skills Sessions for 2005-6, on the understanding that feedback on their usefulness and effectiveness was gathered before a commitment to future years was made.

The Committee was reminded that advice for students reading Part IA Geology would include reflection on the subjects that it was combined with, to determine the most appropriate session for their needs.

iii. Admissions advice (minute 227)

The Committee received, for information, a copy of the letter by the Secretary to the Director of Admissions (CM.272); no response had yet been received owing to his admissions round duties.

iv. Open Days (minute 228)

At the previous meeting, the Committee agreed to review the material and displays to be used at the Sciences Open Days in July. It now received copies of the posters on the general NST stand (CM.273) and the handouts used (CM.274).

The Committee noted that the handouts were more a general introduction to the Tripos, rather than a prospectus. Members of the Committee were requested to provide updates and corrections to the Secretary.

The Committee also agreed that the lecture slides in the general talk could usefully be displayed, perhaps on a PowerPoint loop throughout the day, and that a general poster about admissions requirements should be prepared in consultation with the Director of Admissions.

v. Part IA and Part IB practical registrations (minute 230)

At the previous meeting, the Committee agreed that it should investigate with CARET the introduction of an on-line practical registration system for Part IA of the Tripos.

The Secretary reported that he had met with the Director of CARET to discuss the current system, its shortcomings and other related issues. CARET had agreed to take on the project on a no cost-no guarantee basis, as it would potentially add value to its other projects, including Coursework. CARET intended to produce a system for October 2005, noting that decisions would need to be made regarding allocation criteria and data entry in a specification, which would be prepared by the Secretary.

The Committee agreed to proceed further with the project, but noted that, for October 2005, Faculties and Departments should be prepared to operate the procedures used in 2004-5. It also agreed that CARET should proceed on the assumption that Directors of Studies (rather than individual students) in Natural Sciences and other subjects would input subject choices. The Committee also noted that there may be associated maintenance and support costs in the future for the system.

The Secretary agreed to remind Faculties and Departments of the revised arrangements for Part IB registrations, and update them on progress towards on-line Part IA registrations.

239. REPORTED BUSINESS

The Committee received a paper of reported business (CM.275), including:

- Directors of Biological Studies meeting (29 September 2004) (CM.276)
- Coursework: Use of e-technology in supporting teaching (minute 220, 225ii)

240. GENERAL BOARD REVIEW OF PART III OF THE TRIPOS

The Committee received a copy of a letter, dated 18 January 2005, sent by the Secretary to a number of Directors of Teaching (CM.277) for discussion. The Secretary reported that he had received information from most of the Departments involved in teaching Part III of the Tripos and would circulate by email a first draft of the submission as soon as practicable. Members of the Committee were urged to return comments so that a second draft could be considered at the next meeting.

Emerging issues for the submission included:

- **admissions criteria for the four-year course** (as summarised in **CM.277**). Mrs Stobbs reported that she had requested that the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education consider this issue to help inform the submission.
- **the possibility of the Part III being offered as a standalone course** (*e.g.* a Postgraduate Diploma). Informal arrangements of this nature already existed in a number of Departments (*e.g.* ERASMUS funding), with uncertainty over fees, student status and the lack of formal qualification.
- **the possibility of "borrowed" or "shared" modules between Part III subjects**. Departments had expressed a variety of opinions on this matter.

241. PART III BIOCHEMISTRY: ABOLITION OF CLASSING

The Committee received a copy of a letter, dated 10 January 2005, from the Head of the Department of Biochemistry to the Secretary of the Faculty Board of Biology, regarding the abolition of classing in Part III Biochemistry (along the lines of Part IIB of the Engineering Tripos) (**CM.278**).

The Committee noted that agreement of the proposal was dependent on the Department agreeing a "conversion algorithm" between distinction/merit/pass and nominal classes for the annual returns to the HEFCE, and that the Faculty Board of Biology had not yet considered the proposal.

The Committee agreed that a case had not been made for the replacement of the classing structure with a distinction/merit/pass system and that the proposal would introduce an obscurity into the Natural Sciences Tripos for no obvious benefits.

242. ITEMS OF RESERVED BUSINESS

- Irregular combination of papers

243. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:15 pm** on **Tuesday 8 March 2005** in the Meeting Room at CRASSH.