

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 October 2004** in the Meeting Room at the Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH).

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Dr W Allison, Dr R Hardie, Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Mr A Jefferies, Dr K Johnstone, Dr P Oliver, Dr J Russell, Dr S Schaffer, Mr R Williams, Dr N Woodcock, Dr MG Worster, and Dr MG Russell (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor TW Clyne, Dr I Wilson and Mrs S Stobbs.

209. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received a current list of members and the Committee's terms of reference (CM.241) and noted that Dr Jim Russell was representing the Faculty of Biology while Dr Kate Plaisted was on sabbatical.

210. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2004 were approved.

211. REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

The Committee received a paper of reported and straightforward business (CM.242), which included:

- Annual Report 2003-2004 (CM.243)
- Allocation of Students to Part II Subjects: 2003 allocation (CM.244)
- Standards required for entry into Part III of the Tripos (CM.245)
- Changes to regulations: Part II Biochemistry
- Directors of Biological Studies meeting (CM.259)

The Committee approved the Annual Report and the changes to regulations for Part II Biochemistry.

212. TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2003-2004

i. Statistics

The Committee received statistics relating to:

- 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.246),
- Cohort tracking data for Parts II and III of the Tripos (CM.247).

It noted that the statistics did not reveal anything for concern. The Committee engaged in some discussion relating to the use of Baxter scores (over any other algorithm) as it implied a greater I/II.1 divide than was potentially realistic and requested that the Secretary make enquiries over the wider use of Baxter scores by the University and the Colleges.

ii. Amendments to class lists

The Committee received Notices published in *Reporter* 30 June 2004, p 896 and 6 October 2004, p 14 (CM.248). The Chairmen of Examiners reported that there had been a steady trickle of appeals and enquiries over the Long Vacation, but that none appeared completely unwarranted.

iii. Part IA

Dr Oliver reported in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Part IA in 2003-4 (CM.249). The Committee noted that the examinations had proceeded smoothly.

iv. Parts IB, II, II (General) and III

Dr Hardie reported in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Parts IB, II, II (General) and III in 2003-4 (CM.250) and drew attention to the concerns raised by Senior Examiners regarding the classing scheme for Part IB of the Tripos. Further consideration of these concerns was deferred the discussion minuted as item 213i.

v. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos

The Committee received a paper, summarising comments made by External Examiners, which related to Tripos-wide issues (CM.251) and noted that the only concern was regarding the classing scheme for Part IB of the Tripos. Further consideration of these concerns was deferred the discussion minuted as item 213i.

213. TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2004-2005

i. Revision of marking schemes

The Committee received the current marking schemes for the Tripos (CM.252) and a letter from Dr R Carpenter, dated 19 July 2004, regarding the Part IB marking scheme (CM.253). Having noted the concerns raised in the reports already received, the Committee reaffirmed its decision to retain the current marking scheme. The Committee agreed that it was important for Senior Examiners to remind their respective External Examiners that the purpose of setting marks at the subject level was not to class students and that the subject marks were components of a larger examination. Such moderation was considered useful so that students could compare their performance across subjects which used different qualitative marking criteria and methods. External Examiners should be advised to focus on the general levels of attainment and the scope and appropriateness of the syllabus. **The Chairman of Examiners for Part IB of the Tripos agreed to remind Senior Examiners of these points at their next meeting.**

The Committee agreed to make no changes to the marking schemes for the forthcoming examinations.

ii. NST Examinations Data Retention Policy

The Committee received the current Examinations Data Retention Policy (EDRP) for the Tripos (CM.254) and an email from Professor Longair, dated 4 June 2004, regarding the Departmental-level policies (CM.255). The Committee concluded that Senior Examiners should take the lead in ensuring that the marks provided in the material circulated to Colleges should contain useful and meaningful information and that the Secretary would work to incorporate any such information into the current markbooks (for Parts IA, IB and II (General)). **The Chairmen of Examiners agreed to raise this point with Senior Examiners at their next meetings and to encourage them to reflect upon the appropriate level of detail when reporting assessment marks.**

The Committee agreed to remove the references to interim marks from the current EDRP and review the position next year.

The Committee also agreed to request Senior Tutors to remind Tutors and Directors of Studies of their responsibilities in communicating such marks to students, in order to discourage them from contacting Examiners directly.

214. EMAIL LIST FOR ADMISSIONS ISSUES RELATED TO THE TRIPOS

The Committee noted that, at its last meeting, it had agreed to consult Directors of Studies over the setting up of a second email list for Directors of Studies and Admissions officers in the Natural Sciences for discussion over the consideration of candidates, ensuring quality of treatment and the use of the pool. It noted that there had been very little response to the suggestion and **agreed to wait until after the implementation of CamSIS before considering this proposal further.**

215. PROVISION OF PREPARATORY COURSE INFORMATION

The Committee noted that, at its last meeting, it had agreed to consider, in consultation with Directors of Studies, more detailed provision (than the current preparatory reading list) outlining suitable preparation of applicants for each course. It noted that there had been very little response to the request for suggestions, but that the reading list in its current form was used by some Colleges and was a popular page on the NST website. It noted that the existence of the reading list provided prospective students with an outline of topics of interest and possibly deflected enquiries relating to preparatory material. **The Committee agreed to retain the preparatory reading list in its current form.**

216. PART II ALLOCATION PROCEDURE

The Committee noted that, with the proposed introduction of Part II Biological and Biomedical Sciences, the Secretary now proposed a revision to the procedures for the allocation of students to Part II subjects. The revised procedure (**CM.256**) was based around whether students wished to undertake a research project or otherwise, and on which Department they would like to study with. Other features of the allocation procedure remained largely unchanged. The Committee noted that the procedure had received a positive response from the Directors of Biological Studies and the Biological Sciences Committee and **approved its implementation for the next allocation round.**

217. PROVISION OF A STUDY SKILLS DAY

The Committee was reminded that, in 2002-3, it agreed to suspend the Learning Day as it had seemed to outlive its usefulness, given the increasing provision of support from the Colleges towards their own students. The Directors of Biological Studies and the Committee of Management for Part IA Biology of Cells had now expressed concern that such provision was patchy and could lead to inequality of preparation and that some form of study skills induction should be reintroduced (**CM.259** – item 7ii of minutes, **CM.257**).

The Committee noted that there had been no detailed suggestions regarding what such a skills session might contain and that the skills required depended in part on the subjects students were reading. **The Committee agreed to recommend that, as the concerns had been raised from within the Faculty of Biology, the Faculty should consider staging such an event for students reading Part IA biological subjects.**

The Committee noted that Senior Tutors would need to be informed that a slot before lectures started in the Michaelmas Term would be needed; **the Secretary agreed to undertake informing Senior Tutors of this.**

218. EDUCATION STUDIES: PHYSICAL SCIENCES

The Committee received a proposal from the Faculty Board of Education, to introduce “Education Studies with Physical Sciences” into their portfolio from October 2006 (**CM.258**) and noted that it had the approval of the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry. **The Committee agreed that the proposal was very welcome, but challenging, and, for its part, approved the introduction of the new strand in the Education Studies Tripos.**

219. CHANGES TO REGULATIONS

i. Part II Zoology

The Committee approved a proposal to change the length of the general essay paper in Part II Zoology from three hours in length to two hours, with immediate effect.

ii. Part IB Pathology

The Committee received a proposal from the Department of Pathology (**CM.260**) regarding the replacement of one three hour written paper (2x90 minute essays) with a 90 minute multiple choice question paper. The Committee noted that the change was intended for this year's examinations and expressed concern that Directors of Studies and students would need informing of the change and careful preparation for both revision and the new assessment. Dr Holmes indicated that the Department was working on a number of measures, including a mock examination paper and a meeting this term with students to ensure students had adequate warning and preparation.

The Committee noted that Part IB Pathology was following a pattern of assessment already established in the MVST and in NST Part IB Physiology, Neurobiology and Pharmacology. **It agreed to approve the proposals but noted the final decision about implementation for this year's examinations would rest with the General Board.**

220. COURSEWORK: USE OF E-TECHNOLOGY IN SUPPORTING TEACHING

Dr Johnstone demonstrated a new e-learning platform, Coursework (a CARET product), which had been introduced for some NST biological courses this year, for use by students, supervisors and course contributors to support student learning. The Committee noted the ease with which material could be posted to the relevant directories and welcomed further opportunities to explore and implement Coursework in their own Departments. **Dr Johnstone agreed to produce a paper and host workshops to demonstrate Coursework further for those Departments interested.**

221. ITEMS OF RESERVED BUSINESS

- **Appointment of Examiners for the Tripos, 2004-2005**

222. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would take place at **2:15 pm on Tuesday 30 November 2004** in the Meeting Room at CRASSH.