

## 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 30 November 2004** in the Council Room.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Dr W Allison, Dr R Hardie, Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Dr K Johnstone, Dr P Oliver, Mrs S Stobbs, Dr I Wilson, Dr N Woodcock, Dr MG Worster, and Dr MG Russell (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor TW Clyne, Mr A Jefferies, Dr J Russell, Dr S Schaffer and Mr R Williams.

### 224. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2004 were approved.

### 225. MATTERS ARISING

#### i. Cohort tracking (minute 212i)

The Secretary reported that he had not yet investigated the wider use of Baxter scores within the University, due to the sensitive issue relating to copyright of the figures. The Committee was reminded that the issue was not over the publication of the figures, but the scoring system which was used to compile them; it was felt that the present system gave a premium for a first class (5) when compared to a II.1 (3) which did not reflect the way in which these classes are currently awarded, especially in the NST. **Mrs Stobbs agreed to discuss with Dr Baxter the scoring system and whether or not there was a reason to change it.** The Committee 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.

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

Following further discussion, **the Committee agreed to hold two parallel 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. . Students would be advised of the more appropriate session to attend, with those taking two or more biological subjects being directed to the biological session, and those taking two or more physical subjects being directed to the physical session. It was agreed that as Geology was more essay-based, the subject should, for these purposes only, be classed as 'biological'. Dr Woodcock asked to be informed on the content of the biology session so that he could comment on its appropriateness for students taking Geology.

**The Committee also agreed that the further development of study skills was more appropriately managed through the Colleges:** delivering teaching in this area was best done in small groups which could focus on the needs of particular subjects and individuals. The Committee noted that there was already quite a significant amount of material available on various websites (both within and outside Cambridge) which gave advice on study skills, and that these websites could be a valuable resource for Colleges to use in developing their own materials. The Committee also recognised that the level of provision varied very much from College to College, with some undertaking extensive programs and others doing rather little. **The Committee agreed to 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.** It was agreed that it would be useful in the letter to give examples of existing resources which Colleges could use, and requesting from Colleges any of their own resources they might wish to share.

### iii. **Changes to regulations** (minutes 211, 219)

The Committee noted that the General Board's Education Committee had approved the changes in the lengths of examination papers in Part II Biochemistry and Part II Zoology, agreed at the last meeting, but that it had not approved the proposed changes to Part IB Pathology for 2004-5; the Education Committee had agreed that the proposed changes could commence from October 2005.

### iv. **Coursework: Use of e-technology in supporting teaching** (minute 220)

At the Committee's last meeting, 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 had 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.

The Committee now received a paper, produced by Dr Johnstone (**CM.261**) outlining the main features of Coursework and how the software may be developed. **Members of the Committee agreed to make this facility more widely known in their Departments.**

It was further noted that a workshop to further demonstrate Coursework has been arranged on Wednesday 16 February 2005, from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m., in Titan Room 2, Computing Service, which was open for anyone to attend. Users who wished to see how Coursework operated could email teachco@plantsci.cam.ac.uk to register.

## 226. **REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS**

A paper of reported business was received (**CM.262**), which included:

- Minutes of the Strategic Committee for the NST (**CM.263**);
- Approval of the abolition of Part II (General) and the inception of Part II Biological and Biomedical Sciences and Part II Physical Sciences;
- Preliminary Reading List, 2005-6 (**CM.264**);
- Form and Conduct Notice, 2005 (**CM.265**);
- Directors of Biological Studies meeting: use of the BMAT (**CM.266**).

Regarding the use of the BMAT, the Committee noted the discussions regarding the alternative TSA test and agreed that data analysis of the effectiveness of the TSA would be required.

## 227. **ADMISSIONS ADVICE**

The Chairman reported on concerns he had received about the detailed admissions advice given at Open Days and by the Secretary (by email) of appropriate preparation for the Natural Sciences Tripos. The Committee reviewed the current standard responses drafted by the Secretary (**CM.267**) and the information in the admissions prospectus (2005 entry) (**CM.268**) and **agreed that the standard responses should be revised in consultation with the Director for Admissions.** It noted that there was a wide variance in the admissions criteria between Colleges and **agreed to raise this with the Admissions Tutors.**

The Committee also noted that the UCAS form requested students to indicate their preferred Part II subject on admissions and **agreed to request to the Cambridge Admissions Office that this was discontinued.**

## 228. **OPEN DAYS**

The Committee received the minutes of a meeting of a Working Party of the Admissions Forum on Open Day Arrangements, held on 29 October 2004, for information (**CM.269**). It noted that Departmental activities would be restricted to the afternoons of the 7 and 8 July 2005. **It agreed to consider at a future meeting the displays to be used at this event.**

## **229. PART II PHYSICS: PHYSICS EDUCATION**

The Committee received a paper, prepared by the Secretary in consultation with the Department of Physics' Educational Outreach Officer (**CM.270**) and noted that they had been asked to comment on the course and its administrative arrangements to the General Board's Education Committee.

The Committee noted the following points to convey to the Education Committee:

- the mechanisms and systems adopted by the Department of Physics were robust and appropriate;
- the course did not entirely substitute practical work required for the Tripos examination;
- some courses would have difficulty in incorporating credit in an appropriate proportion into the Tripos examination;
- the arrangements required significant resources, beyond the reach of most other Departments;
- if the scheme were to be adopted more widely, it would be sensible for the University to provide central administrative support.

## **230. PART IA AND PART IB PRACTICAL REGISTRATIONS**

The Committee received a letter, dated 8 October 2004, from the Secretary to course organisers of Part IA and Part IB courses, and a digest of responses (**CM.271**). The letter noted that, from October 2005, the Student Records Section would no longer be able to provide the support of managing the Senate House for biological practical registrations. **The Committee agreed to thank the Student Records Section for their support in previous years.**

### **The Committee agreed to:**

- investigate with CARET the possibility of producing a fully on-line registration package for Part IA registrations for October 2005, supplemented by students visiting Departments post-registration to collect any materials;
- for Part IB (and for Part IA if the above does not go ahead) practical registrations, for the Faculty of Biology to arrange a central accommodation site for registration on biological courses.

Dr Johnstone reported that data from anything CARET might produce could feed directly into Coursework and that, since CARET was funded through the University, no costs would be incurred to develop the package.

## **231. ITEMS OF RESERVED BUSINESS**

- Reported business: irregular combination of papers
- Payments to Chairmen of Examiners
- Co-opted members of the Committee

## **232. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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