

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 **2.30pm** on **Tuesday 7 February 2006** in the Seminar Room at the Centre for Research in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CRASSH).

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Mr A Jefferies, Dr K Johnstone, Dr J Little, Mrs S Stubbs, Prof D Ward, Dr N Woodcock, Prof MG Worster, Mr T Whyntie (present for items 293 – 301), Mr A Lakhani (present for items 293 – 301) and Mrs K Allen (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr K Plaisted, Dr N Holmes and Dr I Wilson.

293. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2005 were approved.

294. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee welcomed Mr Tom Whyntie, (Part II Physics, Sidney Sussex) nominated by the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry, and Mr Amish Lakhani (a 3rd year medical student reading NST Part II Pharmacology, Pembroke) nominated by the Faculty Board of Biological Sciences. Both will be serving as junior members on the Committee until December 2006.

295. MATTERS ARISING

i. General Board Review of Part III of the Tripos (minute 275ii,268iii,258iii,248)

Following the Committee's approval of the draft response, and subject to the removal of paragraph 5, the Strategic Committee of the NST has approved the response, with some additional minor changes. A working party has been established to begin work on a practical scheme for allowing sharing of teaching between courses; it is expected that a report will be made by the end of the Lent term. The General Board's Education Committee discussed the report and response; their recommendations will also be considered by this group.

ii. Irregular combinations of Papers in Part IB (minute 286).

The Secretary reported that this item has gone to the General Board's Education Committee, and the Senior Tutors, highlighting the Committees' concern over the number of requests from College's for irregular combinations of Papers. No response has been forthcoming yet.

iii. Payment of Supervisors of Part III projects (minute 284).

Dr G King has confirmed that this issue will be considered by the next Standing Committee on Education.

iv. Proposal from the Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience (PDN) in connection with their Part II courses (minute 287).

Professor Graham Burton, from the Department of Physiology, Development, and Neuroscience, attended for this item at 2.30pm.

The revised proposal (**CM. 337**) has received support from the Council for Biological Sciences and the Faculty Board of Biology. In response to questions, Prof. Burton reported that the workload was comparable to other Biological Part II courses, and that the topics which were covered in the Part II courses which are now being replaced are contained within the new structure. Current students intending to take the previous courses will therefore be catered for. Professor Burton also confirmed that it was the Department's intention, in as far as it was practicable, to integrate the new Part II course into the interdepartmental structure currently being developed by the Faculty Board of Biology. The

Part II in Physiology and Psychology will carry on as before, with some minor changes resulting from the new structure of Part II PDN. All of these changes are ready for implementation in the academic year 2006/7.

The Committee agreed to the proposals for the new Part II Physiology, Development and Neuroscience course structure.

The draft changes to regulations for Part II Physiology and Psychology; and Part II Physiology, Development and Neuroscience were also approved by the Committee.

Professor Burton and his colleagues were thanked for the considerable amount of work they had put in to prepare for the new Part II course.

v. Timetabling issues Part IB (minute 279, 282iii)

The Course Director of Physiology has agreed to the proposed changes in the timetabling clash by moving the Easter Lectures to be inline with the Michaelmas and Lent Terms. This issue is now resolved, and from 2006/7 teaching will be on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays throughout the year.

The Secretary was asked to make sure that Directors of studies were notified, and that the *Guide to Courses* was updated.

vi. Diversity of Examinations at Part IB (minute 267; 278)

The Committee received a revised paper showing the examination load for each Part IB NST subject, along with similar data for Part IB of the Engineering, Computer Sciences, Chemical Engineering, and MVST (CM.339). The discussion brought up the following points

- There was quite wide variation between IB NST subjects, especially in regard to the total number of hours of examinations and the fraction of the marks given to the practical component
- A practical examination is regarded by some as being 'less stressful' than continuously assessed practical work
- A multiple-choice paper, although shorter than a conventional essay paper, can cover a very wide range of topics and so be at least as challenging (e.g. to revise for)
- The time taken for some of the practical components of the other Tripos examinations was not apparent from the data; it was thought that some of these were quite lengthy
- Students taking subject combinations at NST IB which included Geology and some of the biological subjects would certainly have a higher than average examination load.

The committee concluded that although there was considerable diversity, this was perhaps not surprising given the wide range of subjects (with their associated differing traditions) represented in Part IB. It was not felt that this was a cause for concern, but nevertheless it was useful for the data to be available. It was also noted that the regulations, as presently phrased, permit this variation; the NST Committee is empowered, on consultation with the Faculty Board or comparable authority, to issue supplementary regulations defining or limiting all or any of the subjects in the examinations (S & O p. 353/354).

The Committee requested further work on paper (CM.338) in order to identify the number of hours spent on continually assessed work, and whether submitted notebooks were actually marked or simply used to provide additional information.

The Committee noted that the General Board were interested in seeing the outcome from this exercise.

296. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair invited Prof. Worster to report on the progress made by the small group set up to review Mathematics teaching in NST (a report to the Strategic Committee is expected in April). Professor Worster reported that the group were in the process of completing their work, and the exercise had been very beneficial. The schedules had been reviewed, and it was agreed that there was very little

scope for removing material from the A course. However, by discontinuing the 8 lectures on numerical methods it would be possible to allow the lecturers to go through substantive examples within the main lecture sequence; the existing examples classes would therefore be discontinued. The group was also working on a revision of the problem sheets in order to make them more appropriate for the course. Following this report, the Committee suggested that the group should consider the provision of pre-sessional material for first-year students, so as to refresh their mathematical skills.

297. REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

The Committee received a summary of reported business (**CM.340**). It included:

- i.** Preliminary Reading List, 2006-7 (**CM.341**)
- ii.** Minor change to Part III Experimental and Theoretical Physics (**CM.342**)
- iii.** Minor change to lecturing in Part 1A Physics (**CM.343**)

298. LATE SUBMISSION OF WORK

The proposal from the Department of Physics to develop a policy between Departments within the Tripos re the late submission of course work has been submitted to the Board of Examiners. The secretary to the Board of Examiners has informally indicated that in principle the proposal appears to be sensible and manageable. The formal proposal however, will need to wait until the Board's 14 March meeting.

299. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

The Chair asked the Committee to consider proposing a new Chairman at the next meeting, with a view to this person holding office from the Easter term 2006 to the end of the Easter term 2007. This is as a result of him taking sabbatical leave for the Easter Terms of 2006 and 2007.

300. PART II ALLOCATIONS

The Department of Experimental Psychology have indicated a desire to reduce student numbers from 80 to 75, and that the number of research projects available will be reduced from 65 to 50. (**Papers CM. 345; 346; 347**). The Department sight a change in External requirements and changes to funding as the reason for the proposals.

The Committee considered the request carefully, but due to the proposal not having been approved by the Faculty Board of Biology, felt unable to approve the request at this stage. The Committee noted that if other departments took the same steps, this would have severe implications for the provision of Part II places.

301. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:00 pm** on **Tuesday 7 March 2006** in the Seminar B Room at 17 Mill Lane.

Easter Term dates are:

Tuesday 9 May

Tuesday 13 June.

Both will be in the Seminar B Room at 17 Mill Lane