

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Minutes of a meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos held at **2.00pm** on **Tuesday 18 October 2005** in Seminar B Room at 17 Mill Lane.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Dr K Johnstone, Dr L Kassell, Dr N Woodcock, Prof MG Worster, Dr K Plaisted, Dr D Ward, Dr P Barrie, Dr J Little, Dr D Busher, Helen Stagg, Namman Tamuz, Mrs K Allen and Dr MG Russell (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor TW Clyne, Mr A Jefferies and Mrs S Stobbs.

272. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received a current list of members and the Committee's terms of reference (**CM.296**) and noted that Dr Kate Plaisted from the Faculty of Biology has returned from sabbatical.

The Chairman welcomed the new members, Dr D Ward, Dr J Little and Dr D Buscher. Dr L Kassell (Department of History and Philosophy of Science) is replacing Professor S Schaffer, who is on Sabbatical this term.

273. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14 June 2005 were approved.

274. REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

A paper of reported business was circulated (**CM.297**). It included:

- Annual Report 2004-2005 (**CM.298**)
- Allocation of Students to Part II Subjects: 2004 allocation (**CM.299**)
- Changes to Regulations: Part II Biochemistry
- Changes to Regulations: Part III Experimental and Theoretical Physics (**CM.300**)
- Graduate destinations statistics (**CM.301**)

The Committee approved the Annual Report and the changes to regulations.

275. MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

(i) List of field courses and other costs within the Tripos (minute 268i, 257)

The list compiled last year was re-circulated (**CM 294**). The Committee offered some alterations to the list which should be made before publication.

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

The Draft Report has been circulated to the NST Committee Chairmen (Dr J Keeler and Professor P Littlewood), who will meet and consider the report, before tabling at the next meetings of both the Strategic and Management Committees, for a joint response.

The Report to be circulated as soon as possible.

(iii) Induction Events, including on-line Part IA Practical Registrations. (minute 268iv, 258iv,249)

Two 1 hour Induction lectures were given; to the Physical Scientists and the Biological Scientists. Both were well attended. The on-line feedback from students is still being collated and will be presented at the next meeting.

The Practical Registration exercise was technically a success, and all students were emailed their timetables during Tuesday evening (i.e. by the beginning of Term). This information was also available to College users at the same time. The exercise did produce a number of contentious comments from some Directors of Studies about the allocation. The main difficulty arose as a result of the distribution of students amongst the subjects being very different to previous years, combined with the fact that the practical sessions for several subjects are running very close to capacity.

The Committee wished to record its thanks to Dr MG Russell, and the staff at CARET for their excellent work on this scheme.

Letter of thanks to CARET, and invite John Norman to attend next meeting for discussion of feedback.

276. TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2004-2005

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.302**),
- Cohort tracking data for Parts II and III of the Tripos (**CM.303**).

NB Part IB corrections are appended as paper CM.314

ii. Amendments to class lists

Attention was drawn to the Notices published in *Reporter* 6 July 2005, p 903, 10 August 2005, p 1068 and 5 October 2005, p 13 (**CM.304**). In most cases these amendments were as a result of applications rather than appeals.

iii. Part IA

Dr Oliver's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Part IA in 2004-05 was circulated (**CM.305**). Dr Oliver's concern over some appointed examiners having little knowledge of the courses for which they were examining was discussed by the Committee. It was noted that some courses have a rather small pool of lecturers to draw from, and so it is not possible for the examiners always to have been lecturers on the course. The problem is particularly acute for interdepartmental courses.

The Committee felt it would be good practice for lecturers always to see, and comment on, drafts of the exam papers. The matter was referred to the Biological Sciences Committee for action.

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

Dr Hardie's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Parts IB, II, II (General) and III in 2004-05 was circulated (**CM.306**), and accepted by the Committee.

v. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos

Aside from one or two comments about marks on scripts only one report (from Part IB, HPS, of the Tripos) raised any issues. This report was circulated (CM.307), but the Department's response to this has not yet been received. It was reported that the External Examiner had been clearly briefed about the nature of the IB examination process and the need to produce marks within the given framework. Nevertheless, the External Examiner appeared to believe that he was 'classing' candidates, and had consequently made remarks in connection with such a procedure. The Committee did not feel that any action was needed.

It was noted that in essay based subjects examiners found it difficult to use to upper part of the mark range. Attention was drawn to the 'twelve point' scale used by some departments to alleviate this problem; it was agreed to circulate details of this scale with the minutes.

Appended to these minutes as CM. 317

277. TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2005-2006

(a) Revision of marking schemes

The Committee received the current marking schemes for the Tripos (CM.308). Concerns were raised by 19 Directors of Studies regarding Classing Policy and candidates "forced" into a third. The Committee noted that: (a) the percentage of third classes has been unchanged over a number of years; (b) the marking scheme inevitably resulted in some infelicities (such as candidates being awarded a first, despite having no first-class marks, or a third despite having several II.2 marks); (c) the whole process of classing in Part IA has recently been extensively reviewed by this Committee, and it was decided that until the University moves to a transcript-based system there was little to be gained by altering the present scheme. It was therefore decided to keep the current guidelines.

This will be referred to the Board of Examiners for their consideration.

(b) NST Examination Policies

The current policies were circulated (CM.310) for amendment. Subject to a few minor changes, the policies were endorsed.

278. DIVERSITY OF EXAMINATIONS AT PART IB

At the meeting of 14 June 2005 the Committee asked to review the diversity of the examinations arrangements for Part IB of the Tripos. An initial paper was circulated. (CM.311).

The Committee was interested to note that the total time devoted to assessment varied widely, but that on average the assessment burden seemed to be rather high when compared to other Parts of the Tripos. It was also noted that written examinations and unseen practicals tended to produce a much wider distribution of marks than does continuously assessed work.

The Committee felt it would be useful to send the table (revised to take into account factual errors) to course organisers inviting them to consider the questions posed in the paper.

In, addition, course organisers would be invited to consider whether:

- they are happy with current arrangements
- they would consider reducing the assessment load (either theory or practical)
- students performed unevenly between theory/practical elements on the assessment

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

The Committee asked if comparisons could also be made with similar Tripos' e.g. Engineering; Computer Sciences; Chemical Engineering; MVST.

NB amended paper is appended as paper CM.316

279. TIMETABLING ISSUES

Twice now in the past two years the General Board's Education Committee, at the request of this Committee, have approved the non-standard offering of Ecology and Physiology in Part IB of the Tripos (This combination is disallowed as lectures for these subjects are timetabled opposite each other in the Easter Term: Part IB Physiology currently occupies different timetabling slots in different Terms.) The Part IB timetable was circulated. **(CM.312)**. The Education Section has received two such requests this term. The current timetabling of Physiology with Ecology is proving difficult to defend with increased student demands. The Committee felt this was not an unreasonable combination of subjects.

The Committee requests the Course Director of Physiology to move the Easter Lectures from 2006-07, and approved the two requests for recommendation to the General Board.

280. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would take place at **2:00 pm on Tuesday 29 November 2005** in the **Old Schools Meeting Room**.

Marking scale:

| Mark / 12 | Class | Percentage equivalent |
|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 12 | High I | 100 |
| 11 | Mid I | 85 |
| 10 | Low I | 70 |
| 9 | High II(i) | 66.6 |
| 8 | Mid II(i) | 63.3 |
| 7 | Low II(i) | 60 |
| 6 | High II(ii) | 56.6 |
| 5 | Mid II(ii) | 53.3 |
| 4 | Low II(ii) | 50 |
| 3 | High III | 45 |
| 2 | Low III | 40 |
| 1 | Fail | 20 |
| 0 | Utter fail | 0 |