

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 **2.00pm** on **Tuesday 29 November 2005** in the Old Schools' Meeting Room.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Dr S Holden, Dr N Holmes, Dr K Johnstone, Mrs S Stobbs, Dr I Wilson, Dr N Woodcock, Professor MG Worster, Dr J Little, Dr D Buscher, Dr K Plaisted, Professor D Ward, Dr P Barrie, and Mr N Tamuz, Ms H Stagg, Mrs K Allen and Dr MG Russell (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr L Kassell, Mr A Jefferies

281. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2005 were approved.

282. MATTERS ARISING

i. List of field courses and other costs within the Tripos (minute 275i,268i,257)

The Secretary reported that he had now completed the list, with the exception of Ecology which was still unconfirmed. (**Paper CM.330**). The Secretary advised the committee that this list was being compiled at the request of the PVC for Education. Further details on general policy and funding will be in the prospectus.

The Committee agreed that the figures should now be published on the web.

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

The Committee received the Report (**CM.318**) and a draft response (**CM.319**), prepared by the Chairmen of the two NST Committees. The main themes brought out in the Report were;

- The need to clarify where Part III provision fitted i.e. is it an undergraduate or graduate course? This is particularly important in the light of the Bologna Process.
- The desirability for greater collaboration (i.e. sharing of courses) between different courses.
- Concerns about some departments which share teaching between their Part II and Part III courses i.e. is there clear evidence of progression?
- The governance of the Tripos, in particular whether the current structure of the two committees are adequate.
- The need to clarify and reconsider the entry requirements for Part III, particularly in the light of the course, to some extent at least, being at graduate level.

The draft report met with the Committee's approval, subject to the removal of para. 5. In the discussion it was noted that the report raised issues which were University-wide, and not simply restricted to the NST. These issues included: (a) the funding regime for integrated masters courses, (b) the implications of the Bologna process, (c) the overall landscape of post-graduate provision, and (d) the difficulties in dealing with the resource issues which involved more than one School.

Subject to paragraph 5 being removed, the Committee agreed to the draft response.

iii. Timetabling issues Part IB (minute 279)

The Secretary had received a response from the course organiser of Part IB Physiology (**CM. 331**). The Committee recognised that there were difficulties in the department providing this course, but felt that there was a very strong educational argument in favour of rescheduling the Easter term lectures so that students could study Ecology and Physiology. The Committee therefore reaffirmed its original position.

The Committee asked the Secretary to contact the Course Director of Physiology and request that this timetabling clash be resolved by moving the Easter lectures inline with Michaelmas and Lent Term.

REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

The Committee received a summary of reported business (CM.321). It included:

- Form and Conduct Notice, 2006 (CM.322); in addition, the amendments from Psychology Part II. (CM 334).
- Burgess consultation: General Boards response (CM.323)
- Education Committee's Response to NST Annual Report.
- Report of the Council's and General Board's Working Parties. (CM.324).

283. INDUCTION EVENTS, INCLUDING ON-LINE PART IA PRACTICAL REGISTRATIONS (minute 275iii,268iv,258iv,249)

Mr John Norman, Director of CARET, attended for this item.

The Committee received a report on the on-line practical registration system operated earlier this year (CM.320). The report included some operational data, a summary of the process, recommendations for next year, and feedback from Departments, Directors of Studies and students.

In its discussion, the Committee noted the following points:

- the key benefits of the system included:
 - large savings of time for individual students at a busy time of year;
 - savings of staff time in individual Departments;
 - improved communications to students at an early stage, in particular the communication to them of their complete timetable;
 - Departments, for the first time, receiving information on their students at the start of Term;
 - integration with other student support technologies, including Coursework and the on-line student feedback tool;
- the process was a technical and operational success, and that the feedback received was useful in identifying improvements that could be made;
- the experience of this year highlighted some of the more important aspects of the allocation process, and gave some insight into the time constraints involved;
- a significant number of Directors of Studies were unhappy with the allocations and asked that improvements to the operation of the algorithm be given high priority for next year;
- CARET was confident it could improve the performance of the system and particularly on aspects of the allocation that caused more difficulty this year;
- a number of minor corrections were also needed to the system (mostly factual errors which involved straightforward amendments);
- communication between the University and the Colleges was patchy, and there were misunderstandings about teaching pressures on both sides;
- a software system could not solve the underlying constraints of the volume of students and the space available in laboratories for practical classes;
- ongoing resource and maintenance for the system required some thought, particularly if any major modifications were to be proposed.

It was agreed that the key priorities which any modifications to the system needed to address were:

- ensuring that students with bi-weekly practicals (Chemistry and Physics) has these on the same days;
- that students in the same college had, in as far as it is possible, similar practical timetables

- ensure that all CST students are allocated practicals on the same day.

The Committee agreed to provide CARET with a prioritised list of constraints under which the system should operate next year. It also agreed to receive, at a future meeting, a prioritised list of amendments and improvements, with costings, for further consideration. It was noted that funding for any extensive work would need to be sought from the Councils of the Schools.

The Committee also received students' feedback on the Induction Programme (CM.325). The Secretary reported that both the Biological and the Physical Sciences induction talks had both gone very well. The student response rate to the questionnaire was 80%. Other than a few students feeling there was some repetition, the overall impression was of a successful event.

The Committee recommended that the induction talks are run again next year. The survey results will be circulated to the Colleges with the information for next years events, or sooner if requested.

284. PAYMENT OF SUPERVISORS OF PART III PROJECTS

The Committee received email correspondence between the Chair and the Senior Tutors' Committee (CM.326) regarding payments for project supervision. The Chair gave some background to this item; the Department of Chemistry currently pay an honorarium to their PhD and Post Docs for laboratory supervision of Part III students, but felt that there was a case for the Colleges to contribute financially to this teaching of individual students. The Senior Tutors Committee had suggested the Committee look at any current procedures in place across the Tripos of payments for supervision of projects. The project structures and requirements for both Part II and Part III were presented in Paper (CM. 327).

After a lengthy discussion, the Committee felt it would like to propose the following to the Senior Tutors Committee: a formal system of payments and reporting to the Colleges of laboratory-based supervisions, to consist of one hour per week (up to a maximum of 8 per term) for the duration of the project, and termly progress reports for the College.

The Chair agreed to draft a letter to the Senior Tutors' Committee, to be agreed by circulation.

285. LATE SUBMISSION OF WORK - this item was deferred until the next meeting

286. IRREGULAR COMBINATIONS OF PAPERS IN PART IB

The Committee noted that it had received a number of requests for combinations of papers (in Part IB) specifically not allowed by the current regulations: it agreed that College officers needed to pay more attention to the allowed combinations, which reflected the lecture and examination timetable. Students taking irregular combinations would *de facto* miss large parts of the teaching programmes. The Committee was concerned that this would undermine the educational aims of the courses, and could also lead to a poor educational experience for the students.

It agreed to write to the General Board's Education Committee and the Senior Tutors' Committee highlighting this point.

287. PROPOSAL FROM DEPARTMENT OF PHYSIOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT AND NEUROSCIENCE IN CONNECTION WITH THEIR PART II COURSES

The Committee received a proposal from members of the Faculty of Biology for a new Part II course in Physiology, Development and Neuroscience (CM 332), reflecting the recent merger of the Departments of Anatomy and of Physiology. It also received an email from the Secretary, with requests for further information and clarification (CM 333).

The Committee felt that the documentation presented to them was substantially incomplete, and that further consideration of the new course was needed at both Departmental and Faculty level before it

could be reconsidered. It also considered the submission of a proposal at this late stage was too ambitious for changes to courses to be agreed for 2006/7, particularly as the Part II allocations process would soon be under way. In conclusion, the Committee suggested that the major changes be delayed until 2007/8 with the current courses in Anatomy A and B, and Physiology being run (with minor changes) for one more year.

The Secretary agreed to write to relevant officers in the Department and Faculty with the Committee's recommendations.

288. JUNIOR MEMBERS

The Chairman thanked the Junior Members for their time and commitment to the NST Committee, and wished them well in their studies.

289. ITEMS OF RESERVED BUSINESS

- Reported business: irregular combination of papers
- Payments to Chairmen of Examiners

290. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place at **2:30 pm on Tuesday 7 February 2006** in the Meeting Room at CRASSH.

PLEASE NOTE THE LATER THAN USUAL START TO THE MEETING
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