

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 **2.15pm** on **Tuesday 4th March 2008** in Seminar Room B, First Floor, 17 Mill Lane

Present: Dr N Holmes (Chairman), Dr P Barrie, Professor B Clyne, Dr S Dalziel, Professor H Griffiths, Professor R Horgan, Dr B Nolan, , Dr R Padman, Dr E Robson, Dr N Woodcock, Mrs S Stobbs, Miss D Kaminski and Mrs K Allen (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr R Barnes, Dr P Dupree, Dr J Keeler, Professor A Mycroft, Dr R Preece and Miss Jessica Hatchett

412) **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5th February 2008 were approved.

413) **MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chairman welcomed Professor Howard Griffiths; and the new junior member Miss Jessica Hatchett (Part IA, Biological Sciences, Clare College) had been nominated by the Faculty Board of Biology.

414) **MATTERS ARISING**

i. **Tripos examinations 2006-07** (minute 390iii; 407ii)

The Faculty Board of History and Philosophy had raised an issue over the classing of Part IB students and the role of the External Examiner. The Committee received the correspondence involved, this included: a response from Professor J Secord (**CM.462**), a letter from the Secretary (**CM.463**); a letter from the Department to Dr Gooday External Examiner (**CM.464**) and his original Report (**CM.465**). The Chairman informed the Committee that this was an ongoing historical problem with External Examiners at Part IB; where students take three subjects and the classing is done after all subject marks are in.

The underlying problem would appear to be the difficulty in interpreting the 'guidance notes' sent out by the Board of Examinations. The Department and External Examiners are failing to recognise that the use of local NST procedures takes precedence over the 'guidance notes'; NST External Examiners are not required to advise on classing issues at Part IB subject level, this does not preclude them from ensuring that the general level of marking is broadly in line with that at cognate UK HEIs. However, deviation when setting the marks within the prescribed perimeters is permissible if the subject Senior Examiner agrees the processed shift with the Chairman of Examiners.

The Committee, therefore, ask if the 'guidance notes' could be made more explicit in their requirements for NST External Examiners to follow 'local, Tripos' advice; which will leave final classing to the NST Board of Examinations for Part IB. The Committee also expressed the view that, with only three subjects retaining externals at Part IB, it would be desirable to eliminate them wherever possible (recognising that specific external bodies accreditation may exceptionally require retention).

The Secretary will confirm what paperwork is circulated to External Examiners, and explore options for how this can be amended to reflect NST requirements.

The Secretary, on behalf of the Committee, will draft a suitable response to the department.

ii. **Preliminary Reading list** (minute 408i)

The Committee noted that the revised list is in progress; course contacts were asked to get their updates to the Secretary as soon as possible. The list will be circulated electronically for approval by the end of the Lent Term.

iii. **Part III course sharing** (minute 388; 396ii; 407i)

The Committee noted that the Faculty Board of Earth Sciences and The Needs Committee (for Physics and Chemistry) would be discussing the Interdisciplinary courses at their next meetings, and would feedback to the Management Committee in the near future.

iv. **Maths provision**

One member of the Committee felt there was a need to re-visit the teaching of Mathematics within the NST; looking at delivery of the whole provision; whether it should remain compulsory and including the final weighting of the examination paper.

The Committee were informed that the Syllabus Committee for Mathematics in the Natural Sciences Tripos had recently spent some time reorganising and streamlining the provision. The revised programme was first offered in October 2006; Course A becoming the default course, Course B being for those students who had taken further maths at A level.

The Committee did feel it was a little soon to be reviewing this subject again, but would recommend it be presented as a project for the new Committee to consider in October 2008.

415) **THE GOVERNANCE OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS**

The Committee were informed that the Final Report had been presented at the last Education Committee of the General Board and had been accepted; it would then go to the Council before the Report and Grace are published by the Draftsman.

The Committee received a paper (**CM. 467**) drafted by the Chairman and Secretary of the practical arrangements for carrying out 5a and 5c of the recommendations. The Committee agreed that this list complemented Regulation 7 (a – j), but wished to clarify the following points:

- Responsibilities for administration of the Open Days, and any material required for this activity would be funded by the two Schools;
- Under *S & O p.122 on Appointment, Attendance and Retirement of Members*, under item 4, is the provision to replace members who fail to attend three meetings in a row. The Committee agreed this was a useful option, as it was important for Committee members to be reliable and regular attendees. The Committee agreed that any future cases would be referred to the Chairman for a decision.
- Any decisions made by the Committee of Management to be implemented by the Schools/Faculties/Departments as applicable.

Under item 5b) and the '*introduction of a mechanism to address strategic issues relating to the management of the Tripos*'; the Committee discussed options for how the new Committee could deal with this complex issue in a meaningful way. It was acknowledged as a sensitive

and complex area of the Committee's work, especially in light of the difficulties experienced by the Strategic Committee. The Committee felt that strategic issues should be a regular item on the agenda, and that the agenda would benefit from a 'revamp' to reflect the shift in areas of interest to the new Committee. There would be a need for such items to progress in a timely fashion, with the setting up of pertinent working parties, who would offer regular progress reports to the Committee, where final decisions and actions would be taken. The impetus for such items could come from Committee Members or the Schools.

Item 5d) and the format and content of the Annual Report would best be served if the Schools were asked what they would like to see in such a report.

The Secretary will write to the Schools asking for guidance on their expectations for the NST Annual Report.

416) EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS FOR MATRICULATION

The Committee received a letter from the Deputy Academic Secretary along with the draft Report on examination requirements for matriculation for their comments (CM. 468). The Committee felt that language requirements mentioned under (6) were unclear as to what the stated level was or what the prescribed qualifications included were:

'Applicants whose first language is not English would still be required to pass, at a stated level, one of a number of prescribed English Language qualifications.'

The committee discussed the appropriateness of the proposed requirements for matriculation of students studying within the Natural Sciences Tripos. The committee agreed that the proposal was sensible given that there was provision for special cases under proposed Regulation 2.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:15 pm on Tuesday 6 May 2008 in the Seminar B Room at 17 Mill Lane.**