

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 5th May 2009** in Seminar Room B, 17 Mill Lane.

Present: Dr N Holmes (Chairman), Dr P Barrie, Dr S Dalziel, Dr P Dupree, Professor R Horgan, Dr L Kassell (in place of Professor J Secord), Dr J Keeler, Dr M Mason, Professor A Mycroft, Dr R Padman, Dr R Preece, Dr S Russell, Dr N Rutter (in place of Professor T W Clyne), Professor D Ward, Miss S Zhang and Mrs E Oliver (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor H Griffiths, Professor S Redfern.

484) **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3rd March were approved, subject to the following amendment in paragraph 474) :

Currently there was no defined ownership and it was agreed that Chemistry would manage the Interdisciplinary papers but that the NST Management Committee would have ownership.

485) **MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA**

A summary sheet of action points and matters arising was circulated (**CM.541**) together with the Terms of Reference for the two Working Groups (**CM.542, CM.543**). The Committee noted the contents. The Working Group on Classing in NST Part IB had met once and would meet again on 6th May. It was noted that Dr Tim Lewens had replaced Dr Lauren Kassell on this group. The Working Group on Scientific Computing within NST would meet shortly. There were no additional matters arising.

478) **REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD**

A paper of reported business was circulated (**CM.544**).

- The minutes of the Biological Sciences Committee: 12th March 2009 (**CM.545**) were noted.
- The minutes of the Part III Systems Biology Planning Group: 3rd March 2009 (**CM.546**) were noted. Discussion took place on the lack of a University site licence for MatLab. Several Departments were in possession of user licences for various numbers of users for a limited period of time but despite continuing efforts by individuals there was still no mechanism to unify users. It was felt that there was a willingness from several parties to share and that a site licence was both desirable and would have the full support of the NST.
- The minutes of the first meeting of the Physical Sciences Education Committee (**CM.547**) were noted. The Committee were pleased to note that this Committee had discussed the topic of rising student numbers which affected NST Part IA and Part IB. The topic would be discussed by the Undergraduate Admissions Committee on 29th June. An estimated intake of 655 NST students was anticipated in October 2009 – a slight increase over the current Part IA numbers. It was felt that the role of the new Undergraduate Admissions Committee was helpful and could provide better oversight and thereby management of student numbers. It was felt that the creation of the Physical Sciences Committee was a positive step and would provide a useful contribution to the management of NST.
- The proposed NST Management Committee dates for 2009-10 were noted.

- Suggested revisions to Open Day information (**CM.548**) were discussed and some changes agreed. The Natural Sciences brochure would need to be re-printed in the Autumn for the next admissions round and there was discussion as to whether this was still required. The brochure had been introduced at a time of falling numbers when web information was not so widely available. It was suggested that the view of the Cambridge Admissions Office be sought.
Secretary to contact Cambridge Admissions Office.
- Details of changes to entry requirements were discussed. It was noted that A*AA would now be the standard requirement and that the subject for the A* was not likely to be defined. It was noted that had the A* been in place for 2009 entry, it would have had little effect. It was likely that a light touch would be used this year and that in some cases the A* could replace the use, in some colleges, of offers based on module marks.
- The response from Professor John Rallison (**CM.549**) regarding students sitting papers in college was noted. There remained general concern that the incidence of students sitting examinations in college was on the increase and that there seemed to be little that could be done.
- The proposed changes to Part IA Physics (**CM.550**) were noted.

479) **SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY**

A proposal for a Part II Interdisciplinary Module in Synthetic Biology was circulated (**CM.551**). This module, developed by the Departments of Plant Sciences and Engineering, has arisen from the iGEM competition which has run for the last seven years and incorporates laboratory work, lectures and seminars. It is intended as an additional optional module in Part II Plant Sciences and would run in the July preceding the start of the Part II year. Candidates in Plant Sciences would be examined by questions in the end of year examinations and the examination would be structured so as to ensure that the Synthetic Biology module could not be used as a substitute for one of the 4 modules normally studied during Michaelmas and Lent Terms. This proposal had been discussed and approved by the Biological Sciences Committee, had been approved by the Education Committee of the General Board subject to approval by the NST Management Committee and had been welcomed by the Senior Tutors' Committee. Comments were requested and several members spoke in support of the module as an optional component to existing provision. It was welcomed for its genuine interdisciplinary approach.

The Committee approved the proposal for commencement in July 2009. No changes to regulations were required for Plant Sciences.

480) **CONFIRMATION OF DEPARTMENTAL NORMS FOR PART II AND PART III PROJECT SUPERVISIONS**

An updated spreadsheet of departmental norms was presented (**CM.552**). As previously agreed, departmental norms should be confirmed annually, reported to the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education and posted on the NST website and STC Camtools site. The spreadsheet presented related to the current year but in future years, it was proposed that the document would be updated during the summer for reporting to the Senior Tutors' Education Committee in the Michaelmas Term. Comments were sought. From the ensuing discussion, it was apparent that practice and philosophy vary from department to department. Some departments issued guidance discouraging UTOs from claiming whilst for some it was accepted. It was felt that payment for supervision of projects was primarily a method for paying supervisors who were not UTOs and that perhaps this should be made clear. It was suggested that

it would be useful to obtain data from CamCors on how many supervisions are submitted and claimed for.

Secretary to contact CARET.

481) NATURAL SCIENCES ENTRY ON 'THE FURTHER MATHEMATICS NETWORK' WEBSITE

A proposal for an entry on The Further Mathematics Network website was presented **(CM.553)** and the Committee was asked to agree a statement. The origins of this proposal were explained. These stemmed from concern in some colleges that the level of Maths for some students of physical sciences NST was lacking and that students could benefit from the use of the Further Mathematics Network to improve their knowledge before starting the course. Access to the site was granted and the Network requested a statement on the website which explained the importance of Further Mathematics within NST. Some departments were developing alternative support mechanisms intended to offer encouragement without obligation. Other sources of potential help were mentioned such as the distance learning course run by Loughborough and intended for gap year students. The message from physical sciences NST Directors of Studies was that students should take AS Further Mathematics if they had the opportunity as the study of some Further Mathematics material would be an advantage. It was felt that the message also needed to be conveyed to schools who were inclined to encourage students to take other subjects to increase their options. It was agreed that Further Mathematics should not be a requirement for NST.

The Committee agreed that a statement could be added to the Further Mathematics Network website which should be consistent with current admissions information and that a draft statement should be prepared for the site in consultation with the Admissions Office.

482) CARET PROPOSAL: SUPPORTING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW

JISC funding has recently been awarded for a project to investigate the potential of technology to support course development, administration and review. CARET is providing development resource and project management and is looking for a pilot group with whom it can work closely. It has been suggested that there are areas of NST that could benefit. A briefing note was circulated **(CM.554)** and the Committee was asked to comment on the proposal. An outline of the project was provided and various options discussed. It was agreed that the support of technology could improve the delivery and administration of NST in some areas and help with future development. Areas that were felt to be particularly complex were interdisciplinary courses and their examination entries and scheduling of classes and practicals. An online timetable would be of enormous benefit to both staff and students. It was felt that such a facility, if developed for NST, could then be made available for wider University use.

It was agreed that the Chairman should meet with CARET to discuss the proposal in more detail.

483) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A recent Admissions Forum had discussed the topic of NST UCAS codes. Currently one code was used for all NST applications and there was some interest in a distinction being made at the point of application, between those applying for NST biological subjects and those applying for NST physical sciences. It was requested that this be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee.

484) **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting shall take place at 2:00pm on Tuesday 9 June 2009 in Seminar Room B, 17 Mill Lane.