

## 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 25<sup>th</sup> November 2008** in Pathology Seminar Room, Tennis Court Road.

Present: Dr N Holmes (Chairman), Dr P Barrie, Professor T W Clyne, Dr S Dalziel, Professor H Griffiths, Professor R Horgan, Dr J Keeler, Dr M Mason, Professor A Mycroft, Dr R Padman, Dr R Preece, Dr S Russell, Professor J Secord, Professor D Ward, and Mrs E Fenn (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr P Dupree, Miss J Hatchett, Miss D Kaminski, Professor S Redfern

### 447) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008, were approved.

### 448) MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

Requirements for the BA Degree (minute 443).

The General Board broadly accepted the advice of the Education Committee and agreed that proposals should be taken forward to amend the requirement for the BA Degree. A Draft Consultative Report (**CM.504**) was circulated and the views of the Committee sought. The report proposed that the route through to a BA Degree that did not include a Part II should be abolished. It was agreed that this presented no particular issues for the Natural Sciences Tripos and there were no objections to this proposal. Part II Physical Sciences may be affected as there was a percentage of study at Part IB level. It was felt that this should be a topic for discussion by the proposed Physical Sciences Committee and any change would therefore be for 2010/11.

### 449) REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

A paper of reported business was circulated (**CM.505**) and noted by the Committee. It included:

- Minutes of Biological Sciences Committee: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008 (**CM.506**)
- Minutes of the meeting of the NST Part III Systems Biology Planning Group (SBPG) held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 (**CM.507**). It was noted that a full proposal for this course was due to be presented at the next Biological Sciences Committee and that it was likely that this would come to the next meeting of the NST Management Committee.
- **It was noted that the Department of HPS would be responding to the request from the Education Committee and Senior Tutors' Committee for further information on M.Phil supervision arrangements. Secretary to relay response to Senior Tutors' Committee query on reasons for level of prior attainment for entry to HPS Part III.**
- Recent Form and Conduct Notices (**CM.508**) as submitted to the University Draftsman were noted. A minor amendment to the entry for Experimental and Theoretical Physics Part III was required. It was noted that a Notice for the Part III Interdisciplinary Papers would normally be published before the end of the Easter Term. Some amendments to the text had been suggested by the University Draftsman and the final version would be circulated to Departments for confirmation.

### 450) ANNUAL REPORT (CM.509)

The Management Committee had consulted with Schools on the content of the Annual Report but there had not been much response so the report presented followed the format of previous years. The content was noted and comments were invited. The report on Part II allocation referred to six students not being placed and it was felt that this number should be reduced. It was explained that these students would have been placed eventually but that allocation may have been delayed by inappropriate choices such as oversubscribed courses. Increases in the number of choices permitted, or in the number of rounds of allocation, were considered. It was suggested that the information provided to students and to Directors of Studies should be reviewed.

**Secretary to review when annual updating of Part II allocation material takes place.**

Cohort tracking data for Part II and Part III were no longer available and it was felt that this was regrettable and efforts should be made to provide this in the future.

**Secretary to check for reasons and forward request to appropriate body.**

**Secretary to circulate report to the Education Committee of the General Board and Faculty Boards.**

#### 451) TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2007-2008

##### i. Part IA

Dr S Dalziel presented his report (**CM.510**) in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Part IA in 2007-08. The process had run smoothly and there were no major concerns. There had been one issue of confusion of student codes on the Physics practical marks which had had a minor effect on all candidates. This was partly due to the fact that the randomised candidate numbers were received relatively in the Easter Term when marks for practicals had to be recorded earlier. It was felt that it would also be useful to have the University Student Number on the spreadsheet; this would provide a method for checking by the Senior Examiner and would enable statistics to be produced at a later stage. It would also help eliminate such problems and if more widely applied could be a useful tool for many.

**Stuart Dalziel and Elaine Fenn to discuss and follow up with the Board of Examinations.**

A number of issues were presented for the Committee to comment.

1. The inclusion of students from other Triposes when setting the target distribution was discussed. It was felt that the NST normalisation should not include non-NST students and that this should be made clear in the regulations. The borrowing Tripos would then use their marks as they deemed appropriate.

**Instructions to Examiners to be amended. Stuart Dalziel and Elaine Fenn to discuss.**

2. Although this year had not presented a problem it was felt that it would be helpful if guidance could be provided in the event of the target distribution not coinciding with the class range. It was thought that the guidance to Examiners could state that the target is 6.75% but that consideration should be given to a 'natural break'. There was a clear wish to avoid the overall class being different to the marks.

**Guidance to Examiners to be amended.**

3. The reason for the inclusion of two 3-hour papers in Mathematics was explored. This had been discussed by the Mathematics Department and was felt to be justified. The removal of one paper could disadvantage the less able students as the number and range of questions would also be reduced. It was possible that the computing content may be revised in the near future. The allowance of a maximum of 75 marks towards the final Part I grade was a result of an earlier NST review when it had been felt that a

greater emphasis on Maths could disadvantage the Biology orientated candidates. The varied importance of Maths and the effect on student choice needed to be considered before any change was made and it was agreed that this should be for future discussion by the Management Committee.

4. and 5. These issues were not within the remit of NST Management Committee and the Senior Examiners and Chairmen should be empowered to enforce regulations.

6. The question of whether the 'seconds' classification should be divided was discussed. This had been the subject of several previous long discussions in recent years and it was not felt appropriate to discuss it further at this point. If new members wished to take this further they should submit a position paper to the Chairman.

7. Some variation in reporting of marks had occurred and guidance was sought. It was felt that the Chairman of the Examiners, with the support of the NST Management Committee, should enforce application of an appropriate method.

8. A request for additional time to be allowed for marking before submission of marks was regrettably deemed not feasible.

In response to further recommendations that had been put forward, it was agreed that:

- the guidelines to Examiners on classification should not include reference to the Ordinary BA,
- Senior Examiners should ensure that examination papers are checked before photocopying by the Reprographics Unit.

Updated versions of the Guides to Examiners would be provided to the Interim Senior Examiners Meetings in draft form and would be confirmed by the Management Committee at its next meeting.

## **ii. Parts IB, II, and III**

Dr R Preece's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Parts IB, II, and III in 2007-08 (**CM.511**) was circulated. The overall process had run smoothly. There had been one invigilation-related problem which was being addressed by the Board of Examinations. It was noted with some concern that the number of students taking examinations in Colleges was on the increase and this could lead to complications with papers and in making appropriate contact if problems occurred. It was agreed that this concern should be relayed to the Board of Examinations.

### **Secretary to write to Board of Examinations.**

A correction to the report in paragraph 4a was noted and would be amended. The largest deviation from the 60% guideline for a subject with >50 candidates was 3.8%.

It was noted that the norm referencing process had resulted in a small number of students achieving an overall class that was lower than their individual marks per subject, as a result of the double scaling process. Methods of addressing this issue were discussed. The Chairman of the Examiners was empowered to make minor adjustments and would be supported by the NST Management Committee. However, norm referencing had been introduced to ensure a more even distribution of marks across subjects and had been reviewed from time to time. It was agreed that generally it worked well.

### **iii. Statistics**

The following statistics were circulated and noted:

- Classing of candidates in Parts IB, II and III of the Tripos, compared with classes obtained in the previous year's examinations (**CM.512**)

### **iv. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos**

Most of the reports had now been received by the Secretary and distributed to the Departments for their comments; in general External Examiners were happy with the overall process. A summary of comments and responses will be prepared for a future meeting.

#### **452) ANALYSIS OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN PART IA AND PART IB**

Time did not allow for the paper on the Analysis of the Correlation between Part IA and Part IB marks (**CM.499**) to be further discussed and Richard Preece will report at the February meeting.

#### **453) PART IA ALLOCATION PROCESS (Deferred from October agenda.)**

The Colleges registered online 713 students this year for the NST; CST; Physics with Maths, and Education Studies courses. A draft report (**CM. 501**) was circulated which summarised the process and gave the final course sizes per Tripos for this year and the previous two years. This item was deferred to the February meeting.

#### **454) POSSIBLE CHANGES TO PART II CHEMISTRY**

The proposal from The Department of Chemistry was presented (**CM.513**). The intention is to close down the route to Part II Chemistry that currently serves those who have taken Chemistry A (but not Chemistry B) alongside Physics, Materials or Mathematics. The Committee agreed the proposal. It was recommended that relevant students be approached and, providing no student would be adversely affected, this change could be implemented in October 2009. Otherwise the implementation date would be October 2010.

#### **455) TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS: MARKING AND CLASSING SCHEMES AND QUESTION SPECIFIC FEEDBACK**

Guidelines on Marking Standards and Classing Conventions drawn up by the Education Committee were circulated, together with an extract from the National Student Survey 2008 relating to marking criteria, and a CUSU paper on examination feedback (**CM.514**). An explanation of the survey was provided and the Committee noted the contents. Low satisfaction had been noted in the area of provision of marking criteria and examination feedback in NST subjects. It was agreed that the information provided on the NST website would be reviewed and additional information would be provided where appropriate. It was felt that provision of feedback was hindered by the size of classes for most of the subjects. The CUSU paper was discussed and it was reported that several Departments were likely to publish a summary report on examination performance which would present both a useful and pragmatic solution.

**Secretary to review information provided during annual update.**

#### **456) NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2008**

A paper containing data and anonymised student comments extracted from the National Student Survey was circulated (**CM.515**). The Committee was pleased to see that most

students were mostly satisfied. There were several references to work load which were noted. It was recognised that the Natural Sciences Tripos did require hard work in order to achieve the required standard.

**Secretary to report comments to Education Section.**

**457) NST WEBSITE (Helen Sargan by invitation)**

Following changes to the format of the University webpages Elaine Fenn met with Helen Sargan (University Computing Service) to discuss the updating of the NST website.

Helen Sargan provided a brief handout and presented a test area for comment. Most of the content remained the same but had been organised to be more user-friendly. A new section to include contact details for Course Organisers was proposed. Members were asked to provide suitable pictures for inclusion on the site. It was agreed that the list of 'Famous Cambridge Scientists' should be removed and a link provided to the central 'Major Cambridge Researchers' which could be expanded to include some additional NST-related scientists.

**Secretary to email link to test site to all members, including student representatives, requesting feedback. Members to provide suitable pictures for inclusion on the site to Helen Sargan.**

**458) ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**459) DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting shall take place at **2:00pm on Tuesday 3 February 2009** in the **Pathology Seminar Room, Tennis Court Road.**