

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 2:00 pm on **Tuesday 1st May 2012** in the Todd–Hamied Room, Chemistry Department, Lensfield Road.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chair), Dr M Aitken, Dr A Alexandrova, Dr P Barrie, Dr S Fulton, Professor R Horgan, Professor A Mycroft, Professor D Ritchie, Dr N Rutter, Dr T Tiffert and Mrs E Oliver (Secretary).

Apologies: Professor M Carpenter, Mr G Cottiss, Dr D Good, Professor H Griffiths, Professor Colin Hughes, Professor J Morton, Mr V Oleinikovas Dr R Padman, Professor S Redfern,

643) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th February 2012 had been circulated and were agreed.

644) MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

A summary sheet of action points and matters arising from the meeting of 28th February (**CM.771**) had been circulated.

Minute 638.

A list of Part II students eligible to take a Part III subject had been circulated to relevant Departments who were currently dealing with applications.

Minute 638.

Key Information Set data on NST subjects had been forwarded to Faculty Boards by Educational & Student Policy for agreement prior to consideration of the overall data by the Education Committee in June.

Minute 640.

The Notice giving the 2013-14 Entry Requirements for Part III subjects had been published in the Reporter of 21st March and the NST website updated.

Minute 641.

A paper on the proposed change to timetabling of Mathematical Biology would be presented at this meeting.

Minute 641.

A report on the discussions on the Part III and M.A.St fees and funding had been relayed to Professor Mycroft.

645) REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

A paper of reported business had been circulated (**CM.772**). It included:

i. Faculty Board of Biology, Biological Sciences Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th March 2012 (**CM.773**).

ii. Physical Sciences Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th February 2012 (**CM.774**).

iii. Preliminary Reading List

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman had approved the updated Preliminary Reading List for prospective students for 2012-13 (**CM.775**). This had been updated on the NST website and an electronic copy had been circulated to Colleges.

iv. Admissions

The film on Natural Sciences organised by Cambridge Admissions Office had been published on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l1mNRarrE8> and on the Admissions website: <http://www.study.cam.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/natsci/index.html> and also had a link from the Natural Sciences website. It was felt that it had been well made and should prove helpful, particularly in providing an impression of laboratory practicals. Departments who took part were thanked for their contribution.

v. Revisions to Open Day information

A collection of general leaflets and posters had been circulated (**CM.776**). These had been updated and would be reproduced for the Cambridge/NST Open Days on 5th/6th July. An updated version of the NST website page for prospective students had also been circulated (**CM.777**). The text had been updated so as to be consistent with the current prospectus.

Action: Secretary to arrange for reproduction of posters and leaflets and for updating of information on the NST website.

vi. Part IA Practicals Allocation – update from CARET

Further to the consideration of the Part IA Practical Allocation report at the November meeting of the Committee, discussions had taken place with CARET with regard to the modifications required to implement the suggested improvements. Certain changes were relatively minor or were covered by the normal annual updates to text and software; there were a small number which required additional work by CARET to enable the modifications to be effected. The Committee were pleased to note that CARET had agreed to absorb the cost of these within reasonable limits.

vii. Part II Subject Allocation

Information had been distributed to colleges and at the Part II Fair on 15th March. The CamSIS process was now live and students had until 7th May to make choices. A total of 945 students would be seeking Part II places of whom 360 had completed their choices by 1st May. A reminder had been sent to students, colleges and Directors of Studies.

Further work had taken place on the process of merging student choices with their Part IB marks; this would be included in the next CamSIS release on 8th May and a further trial run would take place soon afterwards.

viii. Part III Interdisciplinary subjects

In accordance with Statutes & Ordinances pg 388, Regulation 33, the Management Committee was required to publish details of the Interdisciplinary papers in the Easter Term in the year next preceding the examination. The draft Notice had been circulated and was approved by the Committee for publication in the Reporter (**CM.778**). An updated summary of the Interdisciplinary process (**CM.779**) had been provided for information and would be circulated to relevant Senior Examiners together with candidate lists.

Action: Secretary to arrange publication of Interdisciplinary Notice and to circulate guidance note and candidate lists to relevant Senior Examiners.

ix. Programme specification

Programme specifications were currently being updated and individual subjects had been sent their own summary specification together with the overall NST specification for checking and updating. The contents of the Subject Summary were being updated as part of the same process. The Committee noted the draft NST specification which had been circulated (**CM.780**).

x. National Student Survey

The University had now reached its target of responses from at least 50% of students to enable inclusion in the survey report. 50% had been exceeded in 12 of 17 NST subjects as at 23rd April. Those subjects with student numbers above the threshold would receive a breakdown of data in due course although for 2012 the overall numbers had been reduced by the separation of MVST from NST in Part II subjects. Departments were thanked for their efforts in encouraging students to respond.

xi. Update from CARET on the Examination Marking Software project

The Committee were reminded of the scoping project that had been taking place with CARET who were investigating the process used both for the gathering of initial subject marks for IA and IB, and for their compilation into an overall spreadsheet which is used for the final Senior Examiners' meetings and for the transfer of data into CamSIS.

CARET had consulted with various NST departments to learn how subject marks are entered and processed. They had investigated and produced diagrams to map the Part IA process in detail and were doing the same with the Part IB process. They had observed a 'dummy' run of the existing IA process to help provide support for this year's spreadsheet.

CARET aimed to produce a prototype to be run after the 2012 examination period to verify their understanding of the process. They wanted to be able to ensure that, given the same inputs, the same outputs were produced. To achieve this aim, they wished to:

- gather a collection of 2012 Part IA and Part IB examination marks data originating from when a mark is first entered electronically, which may well be at question level;
- understand how marks get from the marking of scripts up to the point of electronic entry on a spreadsheet, for subjects in Parts IA and IB.

The more information obtained on how each subject works, the more likely they would be able to accommodate individual ways of working in any replacement system.

CARET sought the support of the Committee in requesting this data from Subject Examiners on the understanding that it would be anonymised appropriately within a month in accordance with the NST guidance on data retention. In addition CARET sought the collaboration of Part IA and Part IB Senior Examiners after the examination period in answering any questions they may have about the data and how it had been processed.

CARET had prepared a detailed Project Plan and would prepare a report on the feasibility and cost for the meeting of the Management Committee in October 2012.

The Committee were content to support the request to obtain more detailed data from Senior Examiners. There was some concern, however, that the project might be broadening in scope. The Committee felt that there was generally less concern with regard to the processes at departmental level and that the project should not be diverted from its chief aim of supporting the most vulnerable aspects which were the combined subject spreadsheets for IA and IB.

xii. 2012-2013 Committee Meeting dates

Suggested dates for meetings of the Committee for the next academic year had been circulated. It was agreed that meetings would take place on Tuesdays at 2pm on the following dates:

9 th October	29 th January	30 th April
20 th November	26 th February	2 nd July

The meetings would take place in the Todd-Hamied Room, Department of Chemistry.

It was noted that the 2nd July meeting may not take place due to the examination period and possible lack of business. Matters would be dealt with by Chair's action or circulation if necessary.

646) PART IA MATHEMATICAL BIOLOGY – TIMETABLE CHANGE

Dr Nik Cunniffe, Course Organiser for Part IA Mathematical Biology attended for this item. A brief discussion had been held at the meeting in February and a paper had been circulated (**CM.781**), which explained the rationale behind the request from the Course Management Team for Mathematical Biology to move the lectures for their subject from 9am Tu-Th-S to 9am M-W-F. It was queried whether possible changes to class numbers in the Mathematics subjects had been taken into consideration. It was not felt that this change would impact greatly on numbers but the Mathematical Biology class was likely in any case to move to a larger lecture theatre. It was thought that numbers were likely to stabilise within the first few weeks of the Michaelmas Term. The timing and organisation of the practical classes would not change. The Committee had no concerns about the proposal and felt that allowing students additional time to decide their mathematical subject in Part IA was educationally positive.

The Committee were content to approve this proposal for commencement in October 2012, subject to the agreement of the Biological Sciences Committee which would meet on 10th May. Directors of Studies would need to be informed of the change and the reasons for it, which could be undertaken by the Biological Sciences Committee.

647) EXAM PAPERS ONLINE PROJECT

A paper was circulated (**CM.782**) which outlined the proposals for the second stage of the Exam Papers Online project. The Committee was reminded that it had approved the inclusion of NST papers in the first phase of the Arcadia project. The pilot had resulted in digitised copies of the majority of undergraduate papers being made available online via a single website hosted by the University Library. The Committee was asked to comment on proposals for the second stage. The following points were made:

- It was important that the final version of the paper was captured, preferably in PDF form and thought likely that this could be supplied by Senior Examiners after the examination period. A method for Departments to check content would be needed, as would a process to allow for any further corrections at a later date.
- It was felt that the main purpose of the resource should be to allow students to access papers in their particular subject from previous years, in which case a PDF should allow adequate searching. Any additional referencing of content, e.g. keywords, was not thought to be necessary or educationally useful. It was thought important that potential candidates saw the paper as a whole so that questions were within the appropriate context.
- The current interface needed improvement to ensure ease of access to correctly titled papers. There had been a suggestion that an existing database might be used rather than reliance on reproducing the titles appearing on actual papers.
- Some Departments did not publish all papers and any process should make allowances for any exceptions.
- Whilst the central resource was intended to provide easier access, it was felt that many Departments would continue to provide papers on their own websites or within CamTools. It was appreciated that a central resource would be particularly beneficial for students taking borrowed papers.

648) PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS

A letter from Educational & Student Policy had been circulated (**CM.783**) which discussed proposals on an amendment to the regulations covering Preliminary Examinations. The Committee had been asked to comment on the specific questions raised. A copy of the regulations covering the Preliminary Examinations for Natural Sciences had been circulated to aid discussion (**CM.784**).

The Regulations for Preliminary Examinations for Part II of the Natural Sciences Tripos included six subjects, although in practice they were rarely used. Psychology had the most candidates, usually one or two every year. These were specific cases where candidates had not taken Part IB Experimental Psychology and were therefore unable to obtain accreditation on completion of Part II.

The Committee felt that where a Preliminary Examination to Part II was taken, a pass should be compulsory. Normal progression through the Tripos would not require a Preliminary Examination.

649) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

650) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting which was to have taken place on Tuesday 26th June would be cancelled as it fell within the examination period. Any matters requiring action would be dealt with by Chair's action or circulation.