

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 12th October 2010** in the Greaves Room, Pathology, Tennis Court Road.

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chairman), Professor T W Clyne, Dr P Duffett-Smith, Mr F Floether, Professor H Griffiths, Professor R Horgan, Dr M Mason, Professor A Mycroft, Dr R Padman, Professor S Redfern, Professor D Ritchie, Dr S Russell, Dr C Schwiening, Professor J Secord, Dr Ian Wilson and Mrs E Oliver (Secretary).

Apologies: Mr N Donnelly, Professor P Dupree.

552) MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

At the June meeting of the Committee Dr Keeler had agreed to Chair the October meeting in the absence of Dr Holmes who would be on sabbatical. Volunteers had been sought to take over the Chair position but as none were forthcoming Dr Keeler volunteered to act as Chair of the Committee of Management for a 12-month period. This was unanimously agreed.

A current list of members was circulated (**CM.640**). It was noted that several members would complete their terms in December 2010 and that the relevant Schools would be approached.

Dr Keeler welcomed Dr Ian Wilson in place of Dr P Barrie and thanked Dr Sandra Fulton for her contribution in place of Professor Dupree during the 2009-10 academic year. As yet no replacement had been suggested by the Faculty of Biology to replace Dr Holmes who, as Chairman of the Biological Sciences Committee (BSC), represented an important link. It was understood that Dr Mike Aitken (currently Chair of the BSC) had expressed a willingness to attend the NST Management Committee but that a formal nomination was required by the Faculty Board of Biology.

The Committee also wished to formally renew the membership of Professor Horgan as a co-opted member for Mathematics, to which Professor Horgan agreed.

553) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2010 were agreed.

554) MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

A summary sheet of action points and matters arising (**CM.641**) was circulated.

Following the request to know whether users of the Guide to Courses were current staff and students or from outside the University, the University Computing Services had been contacted and had provided a report on usage of the site which was circulated (**CM.642**). From this it was possible to infer that the Guide to Courses was used as a supplement to the prospectus from both inside and outside the University with about 20-30 visits per weekday. Access by Cambridge users showed noticeable peaks particularly at the start of the Michaelmas Term and towards the end of Lent Term. The Guide to Courses is seen as a duplication of effort by the School of Biological Sciences.

Dr Amyas Phillips had circulated the Committee and Course Organisers with a request to provide information on timetabling constraints, the results of which would inform the next stage of the project. Further information would be provided for the next meeting.

555) REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

A paper of reported business was circulated (**CM.643**). It included:

- on behalf of the Committee, the Chair had approved the inclusion of an additional book for Biology of Cells in the Preliminary Reading List.
- on behalf of the Committee, the Chair had approved a minor regulation change for Zoology Part II from 1 October 2010 where the word 'essay' had been replaced by 'critical review' in Paragraph 30. The new edition of Statutes and Ordinances contains the corrected version and the change appeared in the Reporter of 6th October 2010.
- a notice giving details of the variable subjects available in Part III Experimental and Theoretical Physics had been approved by the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry and would be published in the Reporter (**CM.644**). Following collaboration with the Board of Examinations the Minor Topics are now clearly defined as individual examinations, and paper codes have been amended to reflect this. It was possible that an additional Minor Topic would be added and it was agreed that this could be approved by Chair's action.
Action: Dr Padman to provide details.
- a Form and Conduct notice for Chemistry was circulated. Part IA gives details of the number and weighting of questions and the courses covered. Part II includes changes resulting from discontinuation of Options A and B and of a course that has not been given in recent years. (**CM.645**) **Action:** Secretary to forward to the Reporter
- at the request of the Board of Examinations the Part III 3-hour Interdisciplinary Paper which candidates sat for varying lengths of time according to how many topics were being taken, had been split into three individual examinations of 1 hour each. Form and Conduct notices would be prepared in due course.
Action: Secretary to prepare Form & Conduct Notices
- the first cohort of students have enrolled on the new M.A.St. courses (12 in Experimental and Theoretical Physics and 1 in Materials Science – Astrophysics hope to enrol students in October 2011) . These students follow the same course as the Part III M.Sci students. Arrangements have been made for additional information and induction sessions to be provided, and consideration is being given to the Examination process. Once approved by the Faculty Board the marking scheme and criteria will be reported to the Management Committee. It was noted that this was relevant to the Management Committee as modules were shared between M.A.St and Part III and the Examiners were also shared. Details of the Examination process would be discussed and agreed by the Physical Sciences Education Committee (PSEC) who would report back to the Management Committee. It was felt that the lines between undergraduate and postgraduate provision across the University were blurred and it was hoped that proposed changes in administrative structures would improve the situation.
- the NST website had recently been updated with the exception of the pages referring to Examinations and the Part II subject allocation procedure. A copy of the page which details additional course costs was circulated for information. (**CM.646**) Since the publication of this document Plant Sciences had requested to increase the contribution to the cost of the Part IB and Part II field course to £120 from £100. This was agreed and the website would be amended.
Action: Secretary to arrange for website to be updated.

- the Royal Society of Chemistry had recently confirmed that the M.Sci with Part II and Part III in Chemistry had been accredited for fulfilling the academic requirements for the award of Chartered Chemist for holders of first and second class honours degrees. Their letter and a response from the Department was circulated (**CM.647, CM.648**).
- the Open Days on 1st and 2nd July were well attended with 1,010 visitors registering their interest in Natural Sciences. There were displays on all Part IA subjects in the central marquee and most departments participated by offering tours, giving talks or mounting additional displays. Staff and students were present throughout at the central display but it was proposed to encourage departments to provide additional students (preferably ex NATSCI postgraduates) or staff to respond to enquiries from potential students in the central marquee.

556) PART II SUBJECT ALLOCATION PROCESS

A report on the Part II Allocation process was provided (**CM.649**). A number of suggestions for improvement had been made together with points for consideration and the Committee was asked to comment.

- Following discussion it was agreed that CamSIS should be approached with regard to including decimal places in the markbook and whether some reports could be improved.
Action: Secretary to contact CamSIS.
- It was also agreed that the guidance could be updated to improve information for students changing Tripos and that information provided to Colleges should include a reminder concerning students who had degraded. Marks for these students together with an explanatory note could then be provided to relevant Departments.
Action: Secretary to amend documentation
- It was also agreed that guidance to Departments should be improved with regards to their options in the first round and that students who had requested Project Only should not be offered BBS at this stage.
Action: Secretary to amend documentation
- Places for projects and BBS in the biological sciences had been under pressure this year and it would be helpful if biological subjects could increase the number available in time for the 2010-11 allocation.
Action: Dr Russell agreed to take this forward to the Biological Sciences Committee and the Faculty Board for review.
- Clarity was needed on the interpretation of the 10% of places that were held over until round 2; specifically as to whether this should mean 10% of projects and 10% of BBS places or 10% of all available places. If the two-round process is to fulfil its original objective, subjects need to keep back project places.
Action: Dr Russell agreed to refer this to the Biological Sciences Committee for further discussion.
- Different practices existed within departments in dealing with students who were unplaced or wished to change their choice during the summer and there had been a request for additional central support to manage this. It was agreed that this part of the process was better left flexible and within the control of Departments and that further changes should be left in abeyance in the hope that changes to the previous two points would ease the situation.

Further discussion took place on: number limits within subjects; the constraints under which Departments operated; whether preference should be given to those students who had tried a precursor subject at IB level (i.e. in essence to give preference to NST candidates); whether BBS numbers should be unlimited; the requirements of NST and MVST students, noting that many Departments had an obligation to teach MVST students; whether students should be

made more aware that performance mattered and that their expectations should be realistic. It was agreed that Departments had an obligation to take students who had passed at IB and that a mechanism was required to ensure that places would be available.

The Committee noted that when BBS was introduced the expectation was that this would provide a way of offering, albeit without a project, a way for all students to study the Part II subject of their choice. It was agreed that the first step in trying to resolve these matters would be for discussion to be held within the biological sciences, and in the first instance Dr Russell was asked to raise this at the Biological Sciences Committee and the Faculty Board. The Committee requested that the specific issue of whether or not there was a limit on BBS numbers be addressed explicitly.

557) DECISIONS NOT TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO PROGRESS FROM PART II TO PART III OF A TRIPOS

Following a recommendation by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the review procedure for examinations has been amended to allow for such representations and the Deputy Academic Secretary has asked for clarification on how decisions are made for Part III subjects in the Natural Sciences Tripos (**CM.650**). This had prompted preparation of a brief procedure notice (**CM.651**) and a review of the Part III Entry notices with a view to improving consistency of terminology (**CM.652, CM.653**). The Committee accepted that a procedure had become necessary which would demonstrate that a process had been followed and an appropriate decision made on special cases, by a Committee with delegated authority from the Faculty Board. There was something of a grey area in regard to medical evidence which it is only proper for the Applications Committee to take a view on. Following Duncan McCallum's guidance, it was agreed that this interaction between the Faculty Board appeals panel and the Applications Committee be left as an ad hoc process for the moment. With this provision, it was agreed that the process, as proposed, should be tried for this year. Faculty Boards would therefore need to be advised of the proposal.

Action: Secretary to write to Faculty Boards.

The Part III Notices were agreed subject to minor amendments; the inclusion of the Mathematical Tripos under Astrophysics; the removal of the reference to a class, and replacing this with a reference to a mark, in Biochemistry and Systems Biology. It was noted that there would be a change in the entry criteria in several subjects between 2011-12 and 2012-13. In order to provide clarity to students and their advisors it was thought helpful to publish the two notices together during Michaelmas Term.

Action: Secretary to arrange for publication in the Reporter following final checks.

A suggestion was made that entry to Part III could be dealt with on CamSIS in a similar manner to Part II although there was some doubt as to whether this scale of operation was required given the limited number of choices that, in practice, any aspiring Part III student could make.

Action: Secretary to contact CamSIS to discuss possibilities of a Part III allocations process, and also to arrange for references to "three- and four-year courses" to be removed from Part II process applications process.

558) UNDERGRADUATE PROSPECTUS

Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO) had recently reviewed the Undergraduate Prospectus with regards to consistency of content. Previously there was no content for NST Part IB subjects and contributions of varying length for Part IA, II and III subjects. The CAO had suggested length limits for various sections and a draft revised version extracted from the current content and that of the

Guide to Courses had been prepared. **(CM.654)** The Committee was content for the document to be sent to Course Organisers for verification of subject entries.

Action: Secretary to circulate document to Course Organisers.

559) SUPERVISION NORMS

The Committee noted the table of departmental norms for supervisions in Part II and Part III of the Tripos which had been updated **(CM.655)**. A minor amendment to the entry for Plant Sciences was required. The paper would be sent out to Tutorial Offices and forwarded to the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education, and the Education Section.

Action: Secretary to forward the paper to Tutorial Offices, the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education, and the Education Section.

560) SCIENTIFIC COMPUTING IN PART IA

A verbal update was provided on the arrangements and progress to date. Lecturers were in place; rooms had been allocated; students had been assigned to sessions, and a CamTools site had been set up which would provide support and handle the assessment. The necessary software would be available to students through the PWF system, but for the present year it would not be possible to students to obtain their own copy of the software. In future years it might be possible to offer such copies, at modest cost. This matter was under consideration and the outcome would be reported to the committee in due course.

It was recognised that further work would need to be undertaken during the forthcoming year if the mark for this module were to be separated from the IA Maths mark.

Action: Dr Keeler to consider changes to assessment and associated regulations.

561) PART IA PRACTICAL ALLOCATION PROCESS

A report on the Part IA Practical Allocation process was circulated. **(CM.656)** A satisfactory allocation had been achieved but had not been without its problems. The overall numbers were noted, together with the increase in students from other Triposes taking NST subjects. Although these numbers were statistically small they had a significant effect on timetabling. Numbers had also risen in Physics and numbers in labs were at capacity on certain days in several subjects.

Three factors have a serious impact on the allocations:

- The requirement that all Computer Science students take Physics on a Friday afternoon. The number of these students was in danger of exceeding the capacity of the lab and it was suggested that Computer Science should look at including one or two additional sessions.
Action: Professor Mycroft to discuss within the Computer Laboratory.
- Chemistry Labs start early creating a clash with lectures for many students.
Action: Dr Keeler to discuss at PSEC.
- The so-called "irregular" arrangement of Materials Science practical sessions. It was noted that this would probably change when the Department moved to West Cambridge, but that ahead of this no change is likely.

Suggestions had been made to shorten the process:

- Close the registration earlier by bringing forward the Tuesday noon deadline to midnight on Monday. This would require consultation with Colleges.

Action. Secretary to initially consult with College contacts.

- Any errors or oversights identified after registration has closed should be dealt with by Directors of Studies together with the Departments once the original allocation has been made.
- Improve the flexibility of the timetable for the Education Tripos students. It was recognised that this situation may be resolved in the near future.
- Separation of general information from lab allocation. It was felt preferable that this information remained as part of the allocation process. Much of the information is already passed on to students in different forms but this provided a set of complete information in a single source.

562) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A copy of an email regarding Part IB practical allocations was circulated (**CM.657**). A small number of students had elected to take a combination of options Pharmacology, CDB and Pathology, which were difficult to timetable. At present this was not advertised as an unacceptable combination and students therefore expected to be able to take it. It was agreed that this was for consideration by the Biological Sciences Committee and the Faculty Board of Biology but that careful consideration would need to be given if the intention was to create a non-allowable combination of subjects.

Action: Dr Russell to take this forward to the Biological Sciences Committee and the Faculty Board.

563) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting shall take place at **2:00 pm** on Tuesday, 23rd November 2010 in the Greaves Room, Pathology, Tennis Court Road.