

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 22nd November 2011** in the Todd–Hamied Room, Chemistry Department, Lensfield Road.

Present: Dr R Padman (Acting Chair), Dr M Aitken, Dr A Alexandrova (representing Professor J Secord), Dr P Barrie, Professor M Carpenter, Dr S Fulton, Professor H Griffiths, Professor R Horgan, Professor J Morton, Professor A Mycroft, Professor S Redfern, Professor D Ritchie, Dr S Russell, Dr N Rutter, Dr T Tiffert, and Mrs E Oliver (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr J Keeler, Mr J Norris, Mr T Towers.

613) MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

This would be the last meeting for several members of the Committee and Dr Padman thanked Professor Secord, Dr Russell, and the student members Mr Norris and Mr Towers, for their contributions, and welcomed Dr Alexandrova in place of Professor Secord.

614) MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2011 had been circulated and were agreed.

615) MATTERS ARISING NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

A summary sheet of action points and matters arising from the meeting of 11th October **(CM.729)** had been circulated.

Minute 605.

An update on the trial of electronic devices in lectures had been provided by Dr Schwiening. **(CM.730)** The Committee noted that the trial would now commence in the Lent Term and would include some NST students.

The requirement of A Level Chemistry for Part IA Biology of Cells had been discussed at the meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee on 18th October, and following confirmation by the Course Management Committee it had been agreed that the 2013 prospectus would define A Level Chemistry as 'Highly desirable' for Biology of Cells. A document had been prepared showing the various amendments needed to existing documentation and web information to reflect this. **(CM.731)** It was agreed that this change reflected current practice although it was thought likely that some Colleges would retain the current policy. There was concern amongst some supervisors at the lack of Chemistry knowledge amongst students and it was felt that the documentation for prospective applicants should emphasise the advantage of having Chemistry for specific named subjects in later Parts of the Tripos.

Action: Secretary to amend documentation.

CamSIS will work with the Secretary to trial all aspects of the Part II Allocation process with a view to ensuring that the current functionality is operating correctly. The development team within the Student Experience project will change the look of the interface but not the functionality of the process.

Discussions are ongoing with the Disability Resource Centre and the relevant Departments with regards to extra time in practicals.

Minute 606.

Discussion regarding the issue of scheduling of examinations and lectures outside of Full Term is ongoing.

No further changes to the prospectus were received and the Admissions Office is awaiting receipt of the proof version. This will be circulated to Management Committee members within the next month.

The final version of the table of target admissions data was obtained from the Planning Office. **(CM.732)** The figures for NST were explained. The table will be updated for the 2011 planning round shortly. Committee members were asked to refer any questions to their respective Schools. It was noted that the table would need updating to take account of the introduction of the two new Triposes.

Minute 607.

A progress report on Scientific Computing was circulated. **(CM.733)** The Committee felt that the course was generally running much better than the previous year. Feedback would be obtained in the Lent Term and a full report would be provided to the Committee. It was noted that some Colleges had not installed Matlab on non-PWF machines, and that some College computer officers were unaware of the availability of a student site licence. Communication with colleges might usefully be improved for next year. The reference in the report to variation of level of previous ability was noted and discussion ensued on whether this was an invitation to run two parallel courses leading to the same assessment. It was agreed, however, that a faster rate of completion was acceptable in the current scheme as a minimal level of achievement was being sought. It was reported that earlier allocation of practical sessions would be helpful so as to avoid clashes with supervisions.

Action: Secretary to note for Part IA Allocation process.

Minute 608.

The Committee's response on the question of a Mathematics Review had been forwarded to the Faculty Board of Physics and Chemistry. It was noted that the Report on the Learning & Teaching Review of Physics should be considered by the General Board's Education Committee on 14th December.

Minute 609.

The timetable changes under consideration for Part IA Computer Science were still at an exploratory stage. There had been some interaction by email. The Department of Earth Sciences felt that it would be regrettable if Part IA Computer Science students lost the opportunity to take Part IA Earth Sciences.

616) REPORTED AND STRAIGHTFORWARD BUSINESS

A paper of reported business had been circulated **(CM.734)**. It included:

i. Faculty Board of Biology, Biological Sciences Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18th October 2011 **(CM.735)** were noted and it was reported that the actions had been followed up with the various parties.

ii. **Physical Sciences Education Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th October 2011 **(CM.736)** were still in draft form and would be circulated for the next meeting.

iii. **Cambridge Subject Films**

The Cambridge Admissions Office was producing a series of films aimed at prospective undergraduate applicants in order to demonstrate the positive transformative effect that studying at Cambridge can have. The films fall into four categories: Inspire, Promote, Support, Reassure. The Inspire and Promote strands were now complete, and the films could be seen at <http://www.becambridge.com>

The third stage of the project was the production of a series of films to support students through the higher education research and application process. As part of this series, they intended to produce a 2-3 minute film about each undergraduate course at Cambridge. The objectives of these individual subject-focussed films were to support existing information about courses and to identify the strengths of each Cambridge course. The films would be produced in phases over the next 6 months with the material published on the University website in March 2012.

Filming for Natural Sciences would be on 22nd or 23rd November and Course Organisers had been asked to suggest appropriate sessions on those days. It was intended to film a lecture, some smaller group teaching and some practical classes, across a range of subjects and levels, and to include some facilities such as libraries and computer rooms. Some students and members of staff would also be interviewed.

iv. **Form and Conduct Notices**

A list of Form and Conduct notices for submission to the Reporter was circulated. **(CM.737)** Members were asked to check their own entries; it was noted that a change of text in the heading would be helpful to ensure that changes to the Form and Conduct of Part IA Computer Science would not be overlooked.

Action: Secretary to amend before forwarding to the Reporter Editor.

v. **Notices:**

Part III and M.A.St, Astrophysics

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman had approved the Notice listing the Courses available for examination in 2012. The Notice had been published in the Reporter of 2nd November. **(CM.738)**

Part III Experimental and Theoretical Physics and M.A.St in Physics

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman had approved the Notice listing the Major Topics, Minor Topics and types of further work available for examination in 2012. The Notice had been published in the Reporter of 2nd November. **(CM.739)** It was noted that a correction to the list of Further Work may be necessary.

Action: Departments concerned to provide details and Secretary to arrange correction.

vi. **Dissemination of Disability Documents**

The Committee noted that Student Support Documents and Lecture Recording Agreements for NST students were now being sent by the Disability Resource Centre to the NST Secretary at the same time as to Colleges. These were being forwarded to Course Organisers and key Administrators for onward dissemination to individual teaching staff. Each Part required a

slightly different process and numbers seemed to be increasing. For Part IA, an initial list had been received of successful applicants in September and information had been distributed once a choice of subjects had been made. Part IB students had been emailed individually and asked to provide their IB choices. Part II students had been identified via the Part II allocation process. A process would be needed for Part III in the future.

vii. Key Information Sets (KIS)

The Committee noted that the Education Section was preparing for the collection of the data which would be required for the Key Information Sets and wished to use Natural Sciences as a pilot. Work would commence towards the end of Michaelmas Term and an initial overview would be prepared in time for the January meeting of the Management Committee.

617) ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BY GENDER

An Executive Summary of the findings of the General Board's Education Committee's Working Group on Gender Attainment was circulated. **(CM.740)** The Group had identified a range of practical initiatives to help reduce discrepancies between men's and women's performance in the Tripos and had requested that the recommendations be considered and a brief response provided by the start of the Lent Term. The Committee noted the recommendations contained in the accompanying letter and felt these to be examples of good practice and inclusive teaching. It was suggested that this could be circulated separately to Part II subjects with a recommendation that candidate gender was included on examination spreadsheets. Gender issues had been discussed by the Committee previously and were included in the report on the examination process for IA subject. It was not felt that there were any Tripos-wide issues that merited further action at this point but that the Committee should continue to keep the topic under review.

Action: Secretary to forward the Committee's response to the Education Section.

Action: Secretary to write to part II Course Organisers.

618) ON-LINE LECTURE LISTING

A summary report on the Lecture Listings was circulated. **(CM.741)** The replacement of the Reporter style Lecture List had included a pilot Google-style calendar for NST Part IA and IB. An overall report would be considered by the Education Committee at its December meeting. The Management Committee felt that the pilot for NST had been extremely successful and were overwhelmingly positive in their support for additional development to enable the facility to be made available to all NST Part II and Part III subjects. Those Part II and III subjects who had trialled the calendar were enthusiastic; both staff and students had been appreciative of the development.

The Committee also wanted to record its formal thanks to Mr Dan Sheppard for his work on this project and for his help and support to Departments which had been much appreciated.

Action: Secretary to relay the Committee's response to CARET and to the Education Section.

619) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2010-11

The Committee noted the contents and approved the Annual Report **(CM.742)** for circulation to the Education Committee of the General Board and to Faculty Boards.

Action: Secretary to circulate the Annual Report.

620) PART IA PRACTICAL ALLOCATION 2011

A report on the Part IA Practical Allocation was circulated; **(CM.743)** it included data on numbers taking each subject and combinations of subjects. A summary of this year's allocation

together with suggestions for the 2012 process were included for the Committee's consideration. It was noted that the changed time of Physics practical sessions for Computer Science students had helped but that the overall process remained lengthy. Changing the entry deadline was not an option and other possibilities to shorten the process therefore merited discussion. The Committee discussed and agreed the suggested proposals including: improving the inclusion of Mathematics with Physics students by contacting the Faculty Office with a request to relay the information at the appropriate time to Directors of Studies who could either enter data or pass the information on to NST Directors of Studies; informing students, via Directors of Studies, that specific unusual subject combinations could provide a complex timetable – this information would enable a more informed choice without restricting subjects (this could be done by forwarding examples to Directors of Studies by email ahead of the allocation); removing generic information and improving the timetable text which would simplify the information provided to students; providing a better explanation of the post-allocation subject change process, and improving and disseminating contact information, which would help College involvement at this stage of the process.

Action: Secretary to liaise with CARET and include the changes to process at the time of the annual update.

621) PART II SUBJECT ALLOCATION 2010-11

A report on the process was circulated. **(CM.744)** Overall numbers (NST and MVST) had been slightly lower and this together with some minor changes in process had helped with allocations. 89.2% of 926 students had been allocated their first choice in the first round, only 5 remained unplaced after the inter-departmental meeting and all were placed during the summer. Some issues remained under discussion with CamSIS and some minor changes to process would be introduced next year. The Committee approved the suggestion of a name change to 'Part II Subject allocation' if this change could be made in CamSIS, and for a review of the student information sheet before the start of the process.

Action: Secretary to continue to liaise with CamSIS and review documentation in due course.

622) TRIPOS EXAMINATIONS 2010-11

i. Part IA

Dr Peter Duffett-Smith's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Part IA in 2010-11 **(CM.745)** was circulated for discussion. The Committee was pleased to note that the Examination process had passed smoothly. Disquiet was expressed at the continued large number of students taking examinations in College and the resulting effect on receipt of scripts and marking. The collection and delivery of scripts from Colleges would benefit from being regularised with a specified delivery time to the Examinations Office, and a clearer definition of the opening and closing hours of this office for delivery and collection. It was understood that there had been some talk of the secondment of the University Messenger service for the examination period which would be very helpful. The issues and recommendations were addressed individually. It was noted that there were several topics that would be of interest to the Board of Examinations and suggested that a copy of the report was forwarded with relevant paragraphs highlighted. This was particularly relevant to: the process of storing scripts and recording where these are archived; the use of CRSids in Candidate Lists in addition to USN numbers; and to additional announcements in the examination room. The maintenance of examination software remained a concern and was also referred to in the IB report. It was suggested that CARET be asked to survey current practices within the NST and give an estimate of work required to produce centrally managed software which would provide what was needed, and/or explain what compromises would be needed to allow a standard template

to be used. This would then enable a decision as to whether this was a real option or whether current practices would need to remain for some time yet.

Action: Secretary to forward report to the Board of Examinations and contact CARET.

ii. Parts IB, II, III

Dr Christof Schwiening's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Parts IB, II and III in 2010-11 (**CM.746**) was circulated for discussion. The Committee was pleased to note that there had been very few problems in IB this year. The matters for consideration were discussed. The suggestion of a CamTools site as a repository for examination guidance was supported so long as information was secure. The incoming Chairman of Examiners favoured individual communications with Senior Examiners with the CamTools site being used as an additional resource. It was agreed to have the site running in time for the interim meetings. The method of adherence by subjects to the agreed targets was considered. The current process had been discussed at length and following a working party outcome it had been agreed that it should run for 2-3 years. This was the third year of running. A suggestion of providing a ranked percentile list was discussed and was felt to be worthy of further consideration. This would need to be trialled against results obtained from current practice and would therefore benefit from a small group working on data from previous years. Dr Aitken, Professor Morton and Professor Ritchie agreed to form a working group to investigate the various proposals made by the examiners, so that the Committee could be informed in time to make changes for the 2013 exams, if they were felt to be necessary. It was also noted that the request for changes to examination timetables for some IB subjects was in hand.

Action: Secretary to set up CamTools site, forward report to the Board of Examinations and to liaise with the Board of Examinations over changes to the IB examination timetable.

iii. Statistics

A paper showing classes of candidates in Parts IB, II and III of the Tripos compared with classes obtained in the previous year's examinations (**CM.747**) was circulated and the content discussed. The Committee was happy for this to be included with the Annual report for circulation.

Action: Secretary to include in the Annual Report circulation.

iv. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos

The majority 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 would be prepared for the next meeting. The Biological Sciences Committee also considered the reports although responses were usually left to Departments.

623) NST EXAMINATION WEB PAGES (CM.748), GUIDES FOR SENIOR EXAMINERS FOR PART IA (CM.749), PART IB (CM.750), PARTS II AND III (CM.751), AND ADMINISTRATION TIMETABLE (CM.752)

The revised Guides, webpages and administration table were circulated. The web pages had minor corrections relating to the method of receipt of marks by students and to changes of staff and location. The Guides for Examiners for all Parts of the Tripos had been updated where necessary for clarification and changes in process but there were no significant changes. The guides had undergone major revision recently and further revision was not needed unless there were concerns. The content of the Examination Administration table was noted. The Committee

approved the web pages, Guides and Appendices which would be made available to incoming Senior Examiners at the interim meetings in January and updated on the website.

Action: Secretary to finalise documentation and update website.

624) NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2011

Data and anonymised student comments specific to Natural Science Tripos subjects were circulated. **(CM.753)** The General Board's Education Committee had requested that the data be considered and a brief response provided. A brief explanation of the process was provided. The removal of MVST students from the NST data had resulted in some subjects being unreported as numbers were too low to return. It was likely that numbers next year would also remain separate and it was suggested that it may be helpful for Departments to encourage their students to return the survey. Information from the NSS survey would also be included in the KIS data and details of how the NSS data would be collected would be included in the report in January. The Committee was pleased to see that the University as a whole had come top in the survey and that NST results were positive overall. The findings were felt to be consistent with departmental data. The Committee felt that comments were not always applicable to the subject to which they were attached as they referred to earlier years of the Tripos and would be interested to know if this could be addressed by additional questions within the survey. Responses to questions regarding marking criteria remained low despite efforts to address the topic and it was suggested that Colleges should be encouraged to make sure that students understood what was expected. It would be useful if Departments asked their Directors of Studies to look at this more carefully and to ensure that DoSs knew where the relevant information could be found. It was noted that results for feedback remained low but that students received feedback from supervisors and Departments, although not for examinations which was in line with University policy. It was not felt that there were any Tripos-wide issues that merited further investigation.

Action: Secretary to forward the Committee's response to the Education Section and obtain further details on the breakdown of data to be collected for next year.

625) VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED TO ACT AS REVIEWERS IN UNIVERSITY COMPLAINT AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

The Deputy Academic Secretary had asked for volunteers to populate panels of potential Reviewers for Student Complaints, Application Committee Decisions and Board of Graduate Studies decisions on examination allowances. Interested members of the Committee were asked to contact the Students Appeals and Complaints Office via the number given in the circulated letter. **(CM.754)**

626) ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

627) DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place at 2:00 pm on Tuesday, 31st January 2012, Todd-Hamied Room, Ground Floor, Department of Chemistry.