

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos held at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 15 October 2019 in the Greaves Dixon Room, Department of Pathology, Tennis Court Road.

Present: Dr Nick Holmes (in the Chair), Dr David Summers, Dr Deborah Longbottom, Dr Tim Weil, Dr Nick Butterfield, Dr Daniel Margocsy, Professor James Elliott, Dr Ulrich Schneider, Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant, Professor Harvey Reall, Ms Victoria Chris, Mr Jacob Rowlands and Miss Jo Overhill (Acting Secretary).

Dr Lisa Jardine-Wright (Physics) and Dr Deirdre Cijffers (CUP) attended for item 3.

Apologies were received from, Dr Sandra Fulton, Dr Bill Nolan, Dr Dee Scadden, Dr Eric Rees, Dr Jess Gwynne, Dr Julia Davies and Jane Clare.

981) Minutes

The unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 7th May 2019 were approved, subject to a minor correction to minute 973(i).

982) Membership

A current list of members was noted.

Of those members whose term ends in December 2019:

Class (a)

Dr David Summers (awaiting advice from the School of Biological Sciences)

Class (b)

Dr Sandra Fulton (awaiting advice from the Faculty Board of Biology)

Dr Stewart Sage (awaiting advice from the Faculty Board of Biology)

Dr Nick Butterfield (awaiting advice from the Faculty Board of Earth Sciences & Geography)

Dr Daniel Margocsy had been nominated to replace Dr Helen Curry.

Professor James Elliott had been re-nominated.

Class (e) (co-opted)

Professor Harvey Reall (Maths) had again been co-opted to the Committee.

Dr Nik Cunniffe would be replaced by Dr Julia Davis (both Plant Sciences)

Dr Jess Gwynne (Materials Science) had been co-opted to the Committee

The Committee agreed that Dr Holmes would continue as Chair for the academic year 2019-20.

983) The STEM Start programme

Dr Lisa Jardine-Wright (Physics) and Dr Deirdre Cijffers (CUP) gave a talk on the programme which was offered to students via Moodle for the first time this year. The programme was intended to smooth the transition between school and university for new students, and to address issues such as widening participation and workload management anxiety. There was no residential cost and the programme was available to all students irrespective of background or college.

The programme of activities aimed to allow students to experience different methods of teaching and learning and put everyone on a level playing field at the beginning of

term. It also introduced the supervision system, which would probably be an unfamiliar concept to most students.

Of 617 students accepted onto NST, only 10 did not access the programme via personal email. Although not all students who accessed the course completed it, the attrition rate was better than expected for online courses in general.

Feedback from students so far is positive. There is evidence that some student concerns and anxieties were allayed.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- Does the course count as working before the beginning of term? Does it indicate the gradual creeping forward of the University term?
- Is the role of college Directors of Studies being displaced?
- Could students find the work too easy, giving them a false idea of what is to come?
- How are students supported if they have tutorial issues?

All NST Directors of Studies had agreed to meet in order to discuss the impact of the programme and decide whether it should be re-run, perhaps with some changes. A survey would be forwarded to Directors of Studies in week 5 to ascertain what, if any impact the programme had effected on students.

In general, the Committee felt that the results had been good and thanked the organisers for the clearly considerable effort they had put into this programme.

984) Reported and Straightforward Business

The following were noted:

- i. A Part II Zoology regulation change: to replace the Research Paper Review with a Research Paper Proposal.
- ii. Minutes of the meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee held on 3 July 2019.
- iii. Updated Calculator Notice. (**Post meeting note:** the notice requires the addition of the sentence 'Calculators are not permitted in the IB Mathematics paper or Mathematics papers borrowed from the Mathematical Tripos'.)
- iv. Part III Entry Requirements 2020-21
- v. Part III Interdisciplinary Notice 2019-20
- vi. The updated table of additional costs for individual courses can be found here: <https://www.natsci.tripos.cam.ac.uk/prospective-students/costs>
- vii. Part III Physics and Master of Advanced Studies in Physics, 2019-20 Notice
- viii. NST website 2019-20: updates have been completed.
- ix. Open Days: the University Open Days were held on 4 and 5 July. This year NST was housed on the ground floor of the Student Services Building, a much nicer and cooler space. There was an excellent turn out of staff and students to man the stalls and potential students particularly enjoyed talking to current students about their experience of the course and Cambridge in general. Feedback received so far has been much more positive than recent years.
- x. Part IA Allocations: numbers were again down on previous years. 609 students were allocated places, down from 627 in 2018 (644 in 2017). A further 163 students were allocated manually (Computer Science

Tripas, Maths Tripas, PBS Tripas students). A report from UIS would be circulated at the next meeting.

- xi. National Student Survey: Due to the continuing boycott led by CUSU, no NST subject met the response threshold.
- xii. Dr David Summers has been appointed as the NST representative on the PBS Committee until December 2022.

985) University of Hong Kong NST Proposal

The Committee noted a proposal from Professor David Cardwell, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Strategy & Planning), to extend the collaborative undergraduate admissions scheme with the University of Hong Kong for Engineering and Computer Science to the Physical and Biological Sciences.

The background and context was provided by the Chair. The proposal had already been discussed at both the Admissions Forum and the Undergraduate Admissions Committee – both had been in favour.

The students admitted through the scheme (a maximum of 30, 15 physical and 15 biological) would be additional to those admitted in the usual way. The University would accrue additional resource through overseas fees. The Committee felt that it would be a bigger challenge to prepare students for NST compared to Engineering, given the large degree of choice in NST IB. It was understood that Hong Kong University would do whatever was necessary. There was also the question of whether colleges would have room for these extra students – they would be under no obligation to accept them.

There was a discussion as to whether the scheme was in the spirit of widening participation, and whether subject choice would need to be limited for these students.

The Committee remained cautious about the proposal but not opposed to it. It was clear that a good deal of detailed work would need to be done to identify what courses at HKU were necessary to prepare students for entry into NST IB and whether any modifications would be needed to those courses. It is not clear who will undertake this work and this issue should be addressed up front. Mathematics preparedness has been identified as a key issue for physical science courses, work to identify issues in biological courses has not yet been initiated.

986) Part IA Scientific Computing Working Party

Notes from the first meeting had been circulated. Professor James Elliott, Chair of the Working Party told the Committee that he was content with the work that had been done so far.

Further updates would be brought to the Committee in due course.

987) New Major BBS subject

The Committee approved a proposal for a new major option for Part II BBS: History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine, to be introduced in 2020.

988) Allowances for assessed practicals

The Committee noted that during the exam period of 2019 there was some confusion about allowances for assessed practicals. Whilst the Exams, Access and Mitigation Committee (ex-Applications Committee) will consider and approve extra time/breaks etc for candidates taking written exams and practicals during the main Easter exam period, they do not do so for candidates taking assessed practicals in either Michaelmas or Lent terms. The EAMC intend to collate information on the format of University-wide practicals with the aim of producing general guidelines (although there is currently no timeline for this exercise).

The Committee requested the Secretary to collate guidelines which have been produced by Departments, with a view to seeing if a common set can be produced.

989) Student Barometer

The Committee noted the comments made by NST students to the Student Barometer survey.

The Chair summarised the main points: a) a significant number of the comments indicated that students are satisfied or very satisfied with educational provision; b) a significant number think the workload is excessive and c) a small number are dissatisfied with educational provision.

The Chair suggested that Physics might wish to pay particular attention to comments about IA. Dr Schneider responded that they had already reviewed the comments and that the majority related to an unfortunate computer failure, which has been addressed.

The Committee discussed the gap between the end of teaching and exams, particularly in second year. Dr Summers reported that the Faculty Board of Biology were aiming to give students more time for revision in NST IB by slightly trimming the numbers of lectures. The constraints on starting the exam period in second year were well known and have been discussed on numerous previous occasions.

990) Proposed Entry for 2021 Prospectus

An updated version of the proposed entry was noted and approved.

991) Any Other Business

There was none.

992) Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting will take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 26th November 2019 in the Greaves Dixon Room, Department of Pathology, Tennis Court Road.