

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 21st November 2017 in the Todd–Hamied Room, Ground Floor, Chemistry Department, Lensfield Road.

Present: Dr Nicholas Holmes (in the Chair), Dr D Summers, Dr T Weil, Dr D Margocsy, Professor Richard Harrison, Professor John Richer, Dr David Greaves, Dr Patrick Barrie, Dr Stewart Sage, Professor Harvey Reall, Dr Dee Scadden, Jane Clare (Secretary) and Miss Isabel Starkey.

Apologies were received from Professor James Elliott, Dr Noel Rutter and Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant.

886) Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2017 were approved.

887) Membership

(i) The Committee noted that the Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology Syndicate had confirmed their nomination for class (b) membership of the Management Committee as Dr Eric Rees whose term would begin on 31st January 2018.

The Committee was advised that the General Board's Committee for the Membership of Committees was keen that the NST Management Committee should keep the gender balance in mind when making future nominations. Three current (male) nominations were still being considered by the CMC.

888) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

(i) Definition of a student

It was noted that a report which proposed the introduction of a new definition of a student for certain purposes had been circulated during October. No comments had been received by the Secretary.

(ii) Consultation on exam reading time (Minute 869, 2 May 2017 refers)

It was noted that the Board of Examinations had considered the responses to the consultation at its meeting on 27 September and made the following recommendations to the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC);

That reading time may be formalised within the Regulations for all subjects that require it, and that such reading time be displayed on the question paper within the start and end time for that examination; that reading time should be no more than 15 minutes for a 3-hour examination, but appropriate times should be determined within the department when setting their Regulations; and that reading time may be added to the end of the examination, which would require standard, and later start time for afternoon examinations to provide students with appropriate break (where sitting more than one examination per day) and to allow rooms to be turned around.

This was considered by GBEC at their meeting on 11 October and the Committee approved the recommendation that reading time should be added

at the start of 2017-18 and approved the request to consult on the proposal that for the next academic year (2018-19) the start time of afternoon examinations be moved from 1.30 to 2pm.

The Committee noted that therefore, for this academic year, all reading time would be set at the start of the examination and the additional time would be given at the end of the examination. For example, in previous years, an examination scheduled for 9am – 12pm would allow students in from 8.40am, reading time from 8.50am and candidates writing from 9am, so the reading time would start at 9am, writing time from 9.10am and the examination would finish at 12.10pm.

The extra time would be built into the draft timetable that will be sent out in the usual timeframe.

There would be further consultation on a later afternoon start time.

- (iii) Use of the Cockcroft Lecture Theatre (Minute 882 10 Oct 2017 refers)
The Secretary had discussed the future use of the Cockcroft lecture theatre with Student Registry. The venue will be out of action from the beginning of the academic year 2018-19. Proposals for relocating the teaching currently delivered in Cockcroft have been formed but are still the subject of discussion.

Action: The Secretary to keep in touch with Student Registry and report back to the Management Committee as appropriate.

889) Reported and Straightforward Business

A paper of reported business had been circulated. The Committee approved the following:

- Form and Conduct Notices for Easter 2018 examinations
- Subject Notice for Part III and M.A.St, Astrophysics
- Regulation change for Part III Earth Sciences

890) Computer Science within NST – allocation of students

A paper from the Department of Computer Science and Technology had been circulated along with the relevant minute from the Senior Tutor's Education Committee meeting relating to the above.

There was general discussion around the capping of an NST IA subject, which was perceived to be against the ethos of the Tripos. Dr David Greaves, the Computer Laboratory representative on the Committee explained that the decision had been taken due to the pressures the Laboratory was under amid issues of increased student numbers, poor general infrastructure (i.e. students having to travel back and forth from the Sidgwick site for lectures) and a lack of supervisors and lab space.

The Committee expressed sympathy with these issues but expressed concern about the capping of student numbers. Further discussions would be held within the Computer Laboratory and with the Chair of the Senior Tutors' Education Committee. Some members expressed the view that Computer Science might be lost from the NST IA choices rather than accept a situation where individual NST IA students were not permitted to take this subject. Given the proposed 'cap' is close to the maximum number of NST historically taking this course, its necessity was questioned. The Committee recognised sound educational arguments for retaining Computer Science. The NST Management Committee requested that it be kept informed.

891) Regulation change

The Committee approved a proposal by the Department of Earth Sciences Teaching Committee for the introduction of the degree of Master in Advanced Studies in Earth Sciences. Professor Harrison confirmed that there would be no impact on the number of students taking Part III.

Action: The Secretary to forward this request to the General Board's Education Committee for approval.

892) Annual Report 2016-17

The Committee noted and approved the Annual Report for circulation to the Education Committee of the General Board and to Faculty Boards.

893) Part IA Practical Allocation Report 2017

Two reports on the Part IA Practical Allocation had been circulated, the first detailing subject choice statistics and a summary of the 2017 allocation process. The second authored by Richard Hey, Acting Deputy Director for Education, Administration and Student Services, was an update on the progress of the creation of a new allocation system.

The first report was noted and approved.

There was some discussion around the second report. It was felt that simplifying the NST IA timetable, as requested by UIS before they would progress work further, was not appropriate.

Action: The Secretary to reply to Richard Hey of UIS, explaining that the Committee could not recommend simplifying the NST IA timetable.

894) Part II Subject Allocation Report 2017

i) A report on the process had been circulated. There was some concern around the perceived inequality of NST students being measured against MVST students, given the divergence of mark distribution between subjects. The Chair mentioned that he would be discussing the same subject at the Biological Sciences Committee meeting on 29th November and would report back anything useful to the Management Committee.

ii) It was noted that errors within the CamSiS system had caused problems during the allocation, necessitating a considerable amount of extra work manually checking lists. The CamSiS team were working on a solution, but there had been little communication.

Action: The Secretary to write to the CamSiS team on behalf of the Committee, to seek details on progress and confirmation that the allocation system would be working correctly by next June.

895) Tripos Examinations 2016-17

i. Part IA

Dr Finian Leeper's report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Part IA in 2016-17 had been circulated and was noted and approved.

ii. Parts IB, II, III

Dr David Summers' report in his capacity as Chairman of Examiners in Parts IB, II and III in 2016-17 had been circulated and was noted and approved.

The Chair extended the Committee's thanks to Dr Summers.

iii. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos

The Committee noted that the majority of the reports had been received by the Secretary and distributed to the Departments for their comments; in general, External Examiners were happy with departmental processes bar a few minor issues. A summary had been circulated and was noted and approved.

In response to a query, Dr David Summers confirmed that Part II Genetics examinations were single marked (and consequently moderated), but that this process was in line with University guidelines and was felt by the Department to be appropriately robust.

iv. Statistics

Two papers showing classing of candidates in Parts IB, II and III of the Tripos and the classing compared with classes obtained in the previous year's examinations had been circulated and were noted and approved, bar a slight calculation error that the Secretary would amend.

896) Any Other Business

There was none.

897) Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting would take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday, 30th January 2017 in the Todd Hamied Room, Ground Floor, Department of Chemistry.