

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 31st January 2017 in the Todd-Hamied Room, Ground Floor, Chemistry Department, Lensfield Road.**

Present: Dr J Keeler (Chair), Dr D Summers, Dr S Fulton, Dr N Mundy, Dr H Curry, Dr J Elliot, Dr D Greaves, Dr R Harrison, Dr N Holmes, Professor J Richer, Dr N Rutter, Dr S Sage, Dr F Leeper, Ms D Bogusiewicz, (School of Biological Sciences student representative), Mr H Holmes (School of Physical Sciences student rep), Jane Clare (Secretary) and Miss I Starkey (in attendance).

Apologies were received from Professor H Reall and Dr P Barrie.

The Chair welcomed the two new student representatives, Dominika Bogusiewicz, (Biological Sciences) and Henry Holmes (Physical Sciences); all those present introduced themselves.

857) Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November 2016 were approved with the following amendments:

Minute 845(ii)

Consequent to the meeting it was noted that as Dr Sandra Fulton had already been named as Chair of the PBS Management Committee her nomination for NST representative on the Committee was withdrawn and replaced by that of Dr Nik Cunniffe.

Minute 853

Prof Reall had requested it be made clear that the Faculty of Mathematics had not requested a different venue for the examinations, but that the venue be equipped with boards for announcements regarding errors in the papers.

858) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

(i) A summary sheet of action points and matters arising from the meeting of 22nd November 2016 (**CM.1067**) had been circulated.

(ii) Dr Curry reported that she had liaised with the Secretary and emails had been sent out to first year NST students inviting them to one of four short talks introducing the subject of History & Philosophy of Science to be held at lunchtimes during Lent Term weeks 5-8. The lectures will also be recorded and be available via Moodle.

859) Reported and Straightforward Business

A paper of reported business had been circulated.

i. Minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Directors of Studies in Natural Sciences (Biological) held on 19th October 2016 were noted.

ii. Documents prepared in relation to the Part II subject allocation process were noted and approved.

iii. The proposed amendments to NST Part II Psychology regulations were approved.

iv. The removal of NST regulation 4, relating to MIT exchange students, was approved.

Action: The Secretary to take amendments to the NST Part II Psychology regulations to the General Board's Education Committee for approval.

860) Student Transfers to Veterinary Medicine

Dr David Bainbridge, Chair of the new Veterinary Admissions Strategy Committee, had requested permission for an email to be sent to all IA NST students pointing out that it is possible to transfer to the Vet Med course after completing the first year in another Tripos. At present about one student per year makes such a transfer and any transfer is, of course, subject to the approval of the student's College. Dr Bainbridge proposed the following wording for their website:

Transfer applicants already studying another science course at Cambridge

If numbers permit, we may also admit students onto the Veterinary Medicine course who have already embarked on another science course at Cambridge. In the past, this has usually happened after those students' first year is completed.

It is important to realise that this process is not really a 'transfer'— it is more like a new 'admission' and involves re-starting the vet course in the first year. Thus, potential re-starters should contact their funding body to ensure they will have funds for the whole course.

If the move is made after one year, then this will mean a total stay of seven years at Cambridge. This is the same as the minimum time in which a Cambridge scientist could graduate and then complete the very fastest-track graduate vet courses elsewhere. However, the Cambridge 're-start' route comes with the certainty of a Veterinary Medicine place after just one year at university.

Students interested in taking this route should contact (1) their college tutor, (2) the Admissions Convenor in Veterinary Medicine (db125@cam.ac.uk) and (3) their source of funding as soon as possible. Instigation of any 'transfer' would require the approval of the applicant's college Senior Tutor and DoS in Veterinary Medicine (where one exists). An 'admissions-like' process will then be arranged. You can apply to 're-start' in Veterinary Medicine without prejudice to your place on your current course.

Many Cambridge science students will find that they satisfy the academic requirements for Veterinary Medicine, as long as they have taken A-level Chemistry, or equivalent.'

The Committee approved the request.

Action: The Secretary to liaise with Dr Bainbridge over the email to NST IA students.

861) Degree Classification and Ranking Consultation

A paper received from Alice Benton at Educational and Student Policy had been circulated. It set out proposals for the introduction of a scheme for overall classification of the BA (Honours) degree and a consistent approach to ranking (**CM.1073**). The Management Committee were asked to discuss and provide a response to the questions

set out on the accompanying sheet (**CM.1074**). The response provided by Materials Science had also been circulated for information (**CM.1075**).

There was a general discussion and it was agreed that NST may have particular problems in implementing an overall classification model. Principal issues included:

- i. NST subjects offering Part III may wish to use a different approach (either classing years three and four separately, or together);
- ii. it could be problematic to class students that had completed their second year in MVST whose marking criteria was altogether different to NST;
- iii. NST Part II examinations are set and assessed in a fundamentally different way to Part IB, it may be difficult to combine the two in any meaningful way.

The following conclusions were reached:

- The Committee supported the need for clarity and definition around classing, and especially the need to define the 'class of a degree'. However it felt strongly that one size could not fit all and that different triposes, and indeed different subjects within the NST, would require different models of classification.
- The first year of NST (Part IA) must be excluded from any calculation of the overall class. IA is regarded as an opportunity for students to take subjects they may not have studied before, and students are encouraged to explore other options. It would not be appropriate for students to carry forward the marks, and possible be penalised as a result, from this exploratory year
- The modelling presented in the paper shows that only Model 4 would give the same number of firsts as currently awarded (notwithstanding examiner discretion). It is already very challenging to acquire a first in NST, therefore the Management Committee would prefer this option since we see no case for a reduction in the proportion of firsts.
- Most NST subjects would prefer to be classified using only third year results, although some would consider second year marks contributing a small percentage of the overall mark.
- The Committee's inclination is that any subject with a fourth year be given an overall class that included the fourth year. However there is a case for classing twice: at the end of year three and the end of year four.
- The nature of second year examinations is that marks from very different subjects with different marking criteria are combined. For this reason second year marks are currently scaled and the Committee agreed that it would be undesirable to use scaled marks in an overall classification. Work would need to be done around this issue to identify the best way forward.

Action: The Secretary to communicate the Committee's conclusions to Alice Benton at Educational and Student Policy

862) NST Examinations

i. IA Marking Scheme

A replacement for Appendix 2 for Senior Examiners for Part IA had been circulated along with a document explaining the new classing system (**CM.1076**). Dr Leeper, Chair of IA Examiners for 2016-17 explained some recent amendments. The Committee approved the new classing system for implementation in time for the 2017 Easter examination period.

Action: The Secretary to liaise with the Student Registry and the Chair of IA Examiners in order to implement the new classing system.

ii. Examiners Guidance

Guides and appendices for Senior Examiners for Part IA, Part IB, Parts II and III and Administration Timetable (**CM.1077**) had been circulated and the Committee approved them for publication.

iii. Examination arrangements

The updated process for students requiring special arrangements for exams had been circulated (**CM.1078**) and were noted and approved by the Committee.

863) College pre-sessional courses

A letter had been received from Dr Paul Hartle, the Chair of the Senior Tutors' Education Committee (**CM.1079**). He expressed the Senior Tutors' Committee's concern over some colleges offering pre-sessional course for NST students and requested that the Management Committee clarify the position.

Two members of the Committee said their colleges ran pre-sessional courses which were mainly focused on study skills and the transition from college to university; such courses also allowed the student cohort to meet and socialise prior to the rather hectic Freshers' week.

After discussion, the Committee agreed on the following points:

- There is no academic need for a pre-sessional course before students begin NST IA;
- Pre-sessional courses should not attempt to teach course content;
- Courses aimed at improving study skills are a matter for individual colleges.

Action: The Secretary to reply to Dr Hartle outlining the Committee's position

864) Any Other Business

(i) BBS Minor Module in General Practice and Primary Care Research.

The Faculty of Biology proposed a new minor BBS course with a cap of 8 students in the first year. The Committee approved the course with the proviso that the criteria for gaining a place on the course be made very clear to students at the Biological Sciences Part II subject fair, and on their website.

Action: The Secretary to communicate with the Faculty of Biology

(ii) Rise in offers made to students applying for the Computer Science Tripos.

The Committee noted that there had been a 41% rise in offers made by the Computer Laboratory for admittance to the Computer Studies Tripos. It was possible that there may be future restrictions on the numbers of NST student permitted to take CST Paper 1. The need to advertise any such change well ahead of it being implemented was emphasised. The personnel at CAO would be able to advise over the timings for any such change.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday, 28th February 2017 in the Todd-Hamied Room, Ground Floor, Department of Chemistry.