COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 13th October 2020 via Microsoft Teams.

Present: Dr Nick Holmes (in the Chair), Prof James Elliott, Prof Harvey Reall, Dr Helen Curry, Prof Jim Haselhoff, Dr David Summers, Dr Bill Nolan, Dr Nik Cunniffe, Prof Nick Butterfield, Dr Ulrich Schneider, Dr Tim Weil, Dr Sandra Fulton, Dr Deborah Longbottom, Katie MacLeod (student representative), Jasvin Kaur (student representative), Jane Clare (Secretary).

Apologies had been received from Dr Hannah Clarke and Dr Patrick Barrie.

1026) Membership of the Committee
   i) The Committee approved the current list of members.
   ii) Election of the Committee Chair: Dr Summers proposed that Dr Holmes be elected Chair for the academic year 2020-21. Dr Schneider seconded the proposal and Dr Holmes was duly elected.
   iii) The Committee agreed to an amendment of the regulations to remove the requirement for a representative from the Faculty of Computer Science and Technology in class (b) to be replaced with a representative from the Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos.

   Action: The Secretary to make the necessary arrangements to amend the regulations.

1027) Minutes
The draft minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 7th July 2020 were approved with a clarification to minute 1022, to specify that Part II Genetics did not have any cases of plagiarism, although plagiarism had occurred in other Part II courses.

1028) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda
Part II Allocations, Minute 1018 6 July 2020 refers
The Committee noted that the 2020 Part II Allocation report will be presented at the next meeting.

1029) Reported and Straightforward Business
I. The Committee noted that COVID-19 related temporary regulation changes for 20-21 had been approved by the General Board’s Education Committee for the following subjects:
   i. Earth Sciences Parts II and III
   ii. Biochemistry Parts II and III

II. The Committee approved a permanent regulation change for Part II Pharmacology, as follows:
The regulations for Part II Pharmacology to be amended in order to create an exam that
(a) tests a broader range of skills than at present; and
(b) tests those skills in a way that promotes greater student engagement with the course aims and learning objectives.

The current requirement for
(a) four written papers of three hours each and
(b) a report of a research project, to be replaced with:
(a) four written papers, three papers (Papers 1, 2, 3) of three hours each and one paper (Paper 4) of three and a quarter hours (the first quarter of an hour of which shall not be used for writing answers to questions); 
(b) one essay of not more than 2,500 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography, with a lay summary of not more than 500 words;
(c) a report of a research project.

Action: The Secretary to take the amendment to ASEC for approval and arrange for publication in the Reporter.

1030) Teaching in 2020-21
The Committee noted that, in line with University guidance, all NST lectures would be offered online during the 20-21 academic year, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Chemistry will not be running in-person practical sessions for IA students, but other departments will offer a hybrid model of in-person (although reduced in number) and virtual sessions.

Physics: Part III teaching is currently taking place in person and lectures for all Parts are also online; supervisions are being held in person; practicals for Parts IA-II are online and in person for Part III. Provision for students working remotely is working well.

Chemistry: Part III projects are running as usual, Part IB and Part II practicals are running in socially distanced labs. Part IA practical sessions have been replaced with online exercises. There are in-person supervisions taking place in the department and most students are content with that.

Materials Science: In person practicals are running for first years, although each practical session class has been split in two to accommodate social distancing. IB classes are running more or less as usual, Lent term practicals for Part II and Part III projects are becoming backlogged as students wait to attend safety courses. All lectures and supervisions are currently online.

Zoology: All lectures and practicals are being offered online for Michaelmas term, although there are some IB practical sessions taking place in person and some IA courses are providing online chats after lectures. Projects are being allocated for Part II and Part III students, although it is still unclear whether they will be able to use the labs. The students seem to be dealing with everything well.

Earth Sciences: IA lectures are online, but a full set of in-person practicals are running and all seems to working well; one set of IB courses are being taught live for 35 students; IB practicals are going ahead in person and online; all practicals for Part II and III will go ahead in person and there is even a fieldtrip planned. Students seem to be coping well.

Both student representatives commented that some students prefer having lectures recorded, and that when in person teaching returns, many will have the expectation that
recording of lectures will continue. The Committee agreed that some thought would need to be given to this and that other factors would need to be taken into account, specifically whether the University would have the resources, human and technical to record all lectures every year.

1030) Assessment plans for 20-21
The Committee noted that NST assessment plans for 20-21 were being considered by the Education Quality & Policy Office for approval by the General Board’s Education Committee on 20th October 2020.

Plans for Physics to hold in-person examinations on-site for Part III students had been approved by GBEC on 2nd October 2020. If holding examinations in-person becomes impossible due to further COVID-19 restrictions, they will be held online under strictly timed conditions (i.e. the length of the proposed in-person exam plus 30 minutes).

There was some discussion around remote proctoring, which is being investigated by the University, but there is no assurance that it will be in place by Easter 2020.

1031) NST 2020-21 Part IA Allocations
The Committee noted that Part IA Allocations were completed on 6th October 2020, concluding at 1.30am: 639 students were allocated to practical sessions. A full report would be presented at the next meeting to inform further discussion around whether or not face to face meetings between students and DoSs continue to be necessary or whether STEM Start data could be used.

1032) Any other business
The Committee discussed the issue of departments providing students with printed handouts and whether there should be a Tripos-wide policy. It was decided that each dept should take its own view, and that communication with students and DoSs was important so that students are aware of departments’ intentions in advance.

1033) Next Meeting Date
The Committee noted that the next Management Committee meeting will be held at 2.15pm on 10th November 2020 via Teams.