COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Minutes

There was a meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos on Tuesday 23rd February 2021 via Teams.

Present: Dr N Holmes (in the Chair), Dr Tim Weil, Dr Bill Nolan, Dr Sandra Fulton, Dr David Summers, Dr Hannah Clarke, Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant, Dr Ed Tipper, Dr Sasha Turchyn, Dr Ulrich Schneider, Prof Harvey Reall, Dr Nik Cunniffe, Dr Jess Gwynne, Dr Deborah Longbottom, Dr Lisa Jardine-Wright, Dr Patrick Barrie, Mr Raymond Ramm, Ms Catherine Ngai, Helen Averill, and Jane Clare (Secretary).

Apologies were received from Prof Nick Butterfield.

1053) Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2021.

1054) Membership
The Committee welcomed Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant as the new Faculty of Biology/PBS Teaching Committee representative.

1055) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda
i. Update on the IA Allocator – The Committee heard that Dr Lisa Jardine-Wright and Dr Ulrich Schneider had agreed to supervise a summer student to write software for a new allocator. Discussions were ongoing with UIS but it was hoped that an advert would be out soon.

ii. The Chair told the Committee that Part IB Course Director responses to the prospect of elevated student numbers in 2021 had reported no serious concerns.

1056) Reported and Straightforward Business
The Committee approved the following notices:

   i. Form and conduct notice for Part IB Plant and Microbial Sciences
   ii. Form and conduct notice for Part IB Experimental Psychology
   iii. Regulation change for Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour

Action: The Secretary to arrange approval at ASEC and publication

1057) Proposed IB NST course: Quantitative Environmental Science
Dr Sasha Turchyn introduced an updated proposal for the QES course and the following points were noted during discussion:

- The requirement for students to have taken IA Maths had been removed.
- Results of a student survey on the proposal were overwhelmingly positive.
- Dr Turchyn intends to approach people on the biological side of the Tripos to ensure that the course includes enough bio-oriented topics to widen appeal.
- Timetabling would be challenging. In the currently suggested slot, the course would clash with Plant Sciences. There were also concerns about the similarity of the proposed course title with EEC.
- The Committee agreed that a 2022-23 start would be preferable, allowing for the development of a well-crafted course.
Discussions around a practical component and alternative modes of assessment were ongoing.

1058) Proposal for the STEM SMART Online Support Programme
Dr Michael Sutherland and Dr Lisa Jardine-Wright introduced the proposal.

The programme would be aimed specifically at students meeting certain WP criteria, all of which would be state school pupils in order to align with the terms of the University’s Access and Participation Plan. The programme is separate from, but dovetails with the STEM START programme.

The Committee welcomed the programme as an exciting development linking the sciences with the APP.

1059) Classing of IA and IB
The Chair led a discussion on whether Parts IA and IB of the Natural Sciences Tripos should be classed in 20-21.

The Committee agreed that a request would be put to GBEC that Part IA not be classed (neither by subject, nor overall). Part IB would be classed as usual.

Action: Secretary to make the necessary arrangements.

1060) Student Survey
Raymond Ramm introduced the results of the survey he had conducted amongst NST students. It provided clear evidence of students’ experience of learning during the pandemic restrictions.

The Committee acknowledged the difficulties that students had faced this year, and there was a lengthy discussion about the mitigating measures that were possible including those already put in place.

Mr Ramm was congratulated on an excellent piece of work, which should be considered in future discussions about teaching methods.

1061) Revisions to the Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos
Dr Plaisted-Grant was to have introduced the proposal for revisions to the PBS Tripos and explain the impact on the Natural Sciences Tripos.

Discussion of this item was deferred to the next meeting.

1062) Any Other Business
Return of students for in person teaching
Departments had received an email from Alice Benton, Head of Education Services, regarding the return of students for in person teaching during Lent Term, particularly for those with practical elements to their course.

The Committee agreed that at this stage in the term it would be disruptive to ask students to return to Cambridge. It was acknowledged that Part III Physics students were an exception as they were likely to be in Cambridge anyway after the January exams.

1063) Date of next meeting
The Committee noted that the next meeting will take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 11th May 2021 via Teams.