COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Minutes

A meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos was held at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 26th January 2021 via Teams.

Present: Dr Nick Holmes (in the Chair), Dr Jim Haseloff, Dr Ulrich Schneider, Dr Helen Curry, Dr Tim Weil, Prof James Elliott, Dr Nik Cunniffe, Dr Patrick Barrie, Dr Nick Butterfield, Dr Deborah Longbottom, Prof Harvey Reall, Dr Sandra Fulton, Prof Bill Nolan, Dr Alexandra Turchyn, Raymond Ramm, Catherine Ngai, Jane Clare (Secretary).

Apologies were received from Dr Hannah Clarke.

1044) Minutes
The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2020 were approved.

1045) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda
i. Minute 1026, iii) 13th October 2020 refers: Amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos
The Committee noted that the removal of 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 would be graced on 29th January 2020.

ii. Elevated IB student numbers in 2021
There was a discussion about the possibility of elevated IB student numbers in 2021-22.

Action: the Chair to write to IB course organisers to elicit plans.

1046) Membership
i. The Committee welcomed the new student representatives, Catherine Ngai (F) representing the School of Biological Sciences and Hayden-Raymond Ramm (T) representing the School of Physical Sciences.

ii. The Committee noted that Dr Jess Gwynne had returned from maternity leave and that Prof James Elliott, who had been attending on her behalf would now step down.

1047) Reported and Straightforward Business
The Committee noted the minutes of the Biological Sciences Committee meeting held on 2nd December 2020.

There had been significant concern about the proposal that the new IB Math Bio course would impose a cap on student numbers, a departure from NST policy which allows free choice to all IA and IB students.

The Committee noted that the course was now planned to begin in 2022, rather than 2021 and agreed to hold further discussions when a reworked proposal was available.
The Committee gave the course a warm welcome.

1048) Proposal for a new IB NST course: Quantitative Environmental Science
Dr Sasha Turchyn (Earth Sciences) introduced the proposal.

Students have indicated that they would like a climate science course, and there is a gap in the curriculum for such a course. The proposal is very much in the initial stages, but would the Committee agree that there is enough enthusiasm for the idea to develop a full curriculum? Dr Turchyn suggested that the new course would not require specific feeder courses at IA, as long as potential students had taken Mathematics rather than Mathematical Biology.

The School of Physical Sciences had been supportive.

There was a discussion about how the course would fit with the current IB offering and it was agreed that students who took this course would require a clear pathway of continuation into Part II. It was noted that a new Earth Sciences course would give the subject three IB options, although it was argued that the course is not necessarily an Earth Sciences option, rather than it actually steers away from specific Earth Sciences topics.

The Committee agreed that the subject of the course was an important one, but that further consideration would need to be given to how it would link to Part II subjects.

Dr Turchyn would present further proposals to the Committee in due course.

1049) Cases of Incuria
The Committee noted that the following requests had been approved via Chair’s Action since the last meeting:

i. Two students requested allowances to take Chemistry A and Neurobiology together
ii. One student requested an allowance to take Biology of Disease and Ecology, Evolution and Conservation together.

1050) Lent Term On-line Teaching
Updates on the progress of on-line teaching within departments.

Mr Ramm commented that Materials Science and Physics in person practical sessions had been excellent, but that it was unfortunate that Chemistry had not been able to provide any and had not recorded new lectures. He further commented that some students felt that Materials Science and Physics had put in lots of effort to engage students, but that Chemistry had fallen short.

The Committee heard that the required social distancing in laboratories meant that Chemistry was simply unable to fit all students into the labs. Very careful thought had been given to prioritising 3rd year students so that they could complete their work and graduate. Chemistry records all lectures and online teaching is working well. It had not been considered a good use of time to re-record content. Physics students had been accommodated because the department does not have the space issues that Chemistry does and has recently fitted a new ventilation system. Materials Science were able to run some practical sessions by reducing the numbers in each class and had also benefitted from updated ventilation. It was noted that Earth Sciences students had also been taking online practical sessions and seemed content.
Ms Ngai commented that there had been much disruption of biological teaching and that students were upset not to be able to practice lab techniques. She also mentioned the many other problems that students had had to face and the impact on their mental health.

The Committee noted that it had been a university decision not to offer live in person lectures or lab sessions, following Government guidelines. There were plans for exam mitigation and colleges were trying hard to meet students’ needs.

1051) **Any Other Business**
Classing at IA and IB
There was a general discussion during which both student reps reported that students would prefer that first and second year exams were not classed this year. The Chair confirmed that final year students would be classed.

Further discussions on classing would take place at Senior Examiner meetings and the issue would be discussed again at the next Management Committee meeting.

1052) **Date of next meeting**
The Committee noted that the next meeting will take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 23rd February 2021 via Teams.