

## COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE NATURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Committee of Management for the Natural Sciences Tripos at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019 in the Greaves Room, Department of Pathology, Tennis Court Road.

Present: Dr Nick Holmes (in the Chair), Dr David Summers, Dr Deborah Longbottom, Dr Sandra Fulton, Dr Tim Weil, Dr Nick Butterfield, Dr Ulrich Schneider, Dr Stewart Sage, Dr Jessica Gwynne, Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant, Professor Harvey Reall, and Jane Clare (Secretary).

Apologies were received from: Dr Bill Nolan, Dr Daniel Margocsy, Professor James Elliott and Victoria Chris.

### 993) Minutes

The Committee approved the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019 with two minor corrections: both Dr Stewart Sage and Dr Bill Nolan had been present.

### 994) Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

#### Minute 5, 15 Oct 19 refers

The Chair gave an update on the collaborative undergraduate admissions scheme with Hong Kong University (HKU).

The University has now signed a Memorandum of Understanding with HKU and it is anticipated that the first cohort of students will join NST Part IB in the academical year 2022-23. Dr Holmes, Dr Fulton, Dr Longbottom and Dr Weil had met with Professor Alice Wong from HKU and were assured that HKU are very willing to undertake whatever work is required in order to ensure that their students thrive at Cambridge. It is hoped that this collaboration will encourage good quality students from the Chinese mainland to apply to HKU. Around 15 students will come to Cambridge, but the majority will stay at HKU. These students are likely to come from less privileged backgrounds than the Chinese students that usually come to Cambridge.

There are still details to iron out regarding curriculum content at HKU, but discussions to date have been constructive and reassuring.

### 995) Reported and Straightforward Business

The Committee noted and approved the following:

- Minutes of the Biological Sciences Committee meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019;
- Form and Conduct Notices for Easter 2020 Tripos examinations;
- Proposed change of Regulations for Part II Genetics;
- Proposed new BBS minor subject in medical law and ethics.

**Action: The Secretary to arrange publication of the appropriate notices.**

### 996) Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach Review Consultation

The Committee noted that the University Council and Colleges' Committee have established a Strategic Review of Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach to incorporate the full admissions lifecycle from outreach to matriculation. The consultation framework

had been circulated. It included a set of questions that the Committee were invited to respond to.

After discussion it was decided that the nature of the Committee ('to co-ordinate the administration of the Natural Sciences Tripos') precluded comment on Admissions processes. However, members of the Committee were free to contact the project co-ordinator with individual views.

**Action: The Secretary to circulate the project co-ordinator's contact details to Committee members.**

#### **997) IA Scientific Computing working group**

The Committee had received meeting notes and a proposal from the Working Group. In the absence of Professor James Elliott (Chair of the Group), Dr Ulrich Schneider gave an update.

There was still work to be done on the syllabus but it was anticipated that the course would be ready for implementation in 2020-21 (replacing the current Scientific Computing course). Two Physics lecturers deliver the current course, but one would be unavailable next year so another physical sciences lecturer (perhaps from Chemistry) would be required. There was some discussion about a similar course for biological sciences students. Dr Schneider felt that it would be possible to adapt the course, either to apply to both physical and biological scientists, or for a dedicated biological course to be developed (not in the first year however).

The Committee approved the course for implementation in 2020-21.

#### **998) Annual Report 2018-19**

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

**Action: the Secretary to circulate the Annual Report to the relevant bodies.**

#### **999) Part IA Practical Allocation Report 2019**

A report on the Part IA Practical Allocation containing subject choice statistics and a summary of the 2019 allocation process was noted and approved.

It was noted that University Information Services (UIS) were no longer engaging with the possibility of a new Part IA Allocator system, citing the complexity of the Natural Sciences Tripos. The Chair indicated he would discuss the matter with the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education.

#### **1000) Part II Subject Allocation Report 2019**

A report on the process was noted and approved.

Four subjects were oversubscribed for project places, however it appeared that more medical students were choosing BBS as their first choice.

Many department find that every year a few students withdraw from their projects and switch to BBS. It had also been reported through the Biological Sciences Committee that some Directors of Studies were not advising their students appropriately, for example encouraging them to choose a research project when they may prefer to study BBS. Other DoSes are advising their students against taking BBS altogether.

This is not helpful to the efforts to ensure that all those who really wish to do a research project have the opportunity to do so.

### **1001) Tripos Examinations 2018-19**

#### **i. Part IA**

As Dr Dee Scadden was unable to attend the meeting, consideration of her report as Chair of Examiners for Part IA in 2018-19 would be postponed until the next meeting.

#### **ii. Parts IB, II, III**

Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant's report in her capacity as Chair of Examiners in Parts IB, II and III in 2018-19 had been circulated.

There was a discussion around the attainment of students at IB, particularly the unusual pattern of male attainment in Physics and Maths, and the gender attainment gap in these subjects. Dr Schneider indicated that there was already work going on in Physics addressing the attainment gap and Dr Plaisted-Grant said she would be interested in talking to the relevant people and to look into this further.

#### **iii. Exam statistics**

The Committee noted:

- a) Tables showing class distributions for candidates for Parts IB, II and III relative to their performance in Tripos examinations in 2018 and
- b) Parts IB, II and III class distributions by subject.

#### **iii. Reports of External Examiners for the Tripos**

The Committee noted that the majority of the reports had now been received by the Secretary and distributed to the Departments for their comments; in general, External Examiners are happy with departmental processes. Departments were reminded that External Examiner reports must be made available to students unless cohort numbers mean individual students are identifiable.

### **10. Any Other Business**

The Chair reported that he had received a letter from the Examinations and Assessment Committee (EAC) about errors in NST exam papers in 2018-19. The Chair had sought information from Senior Examiners on proofreading and checking processes. Their replies had reassured him that robust procedures were in place, and he would respond to the EAC accordingly. The Committee agreed that the EAC had over interpreted the data as showing a rising trend and that they felt that EAC had failed to fully grasp the volume and nature of the exam material within NST.

### **11. Date of next meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting will take place at 2:15 pm on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in the Greaves Dixon Room, Department of Pathology, Tennis Court Road.

