

## **FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE**

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 15 March 2023**

### **MINUTES**

#### **There were present:**

Dr Dee Scadden (Chair, online learning, Biochemistry), Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Dr Nik Cunniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Christine Farr (Genetics), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair of the Faculty Board of Biology), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology), Dr Rik van Veen (Pharmacology), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy), Mrs Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

#### **996. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Dr Uta Paszkowski (Plant Sciences, BBS), Professor Alun Williams (Veterinary Medicine).

#### **997. MEMBERSHIP**

Dr Dee Scadden has been appointed as Chair of the BSC whilst Dr Fulton is Chair of the Faculty Board of Biology.

Dr Sandra Fulton joins the Committee in her capacity as Chair of the Faculty Board of Biology.

Miss Vianca Shah steps down as NST student representative to be replaced by Mr Yusuf Adia from 1 January 2023 to 31 January 2023.

#### **998. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **999. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2022 were circulated and approved.

#### **1000. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **1000.1. Modularisation of Part II Pathology (986)**

This had been discussed and approved at the Faculty Board. The revised proposal that went before the Faculty Board was circulated as **BSC.23.01**.

#### 1000.2. Admissions for NST and project places (992)

Some departments were struggling to resource research projects for their Part II courses. Extended practicals were used by some School of Physical Sciences (SPS) Part II courses, but these generally led to a Part III with a research project which could prepare a student for a PhD.

Some ideas/proposals should be brought to the Faculty Board. It was agreed to form a working group with the following:

Dr Dee Scadden  
Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant  
Dr Gillian Fraser  
Dr Sandra Fulton  
Dr Claire Michel  
Dr Tim Weil  
Dr Steve Edgley

There was a need for information on all possible options and for consistency in approach across departments.

***ACTION: secretary to organise working group meeting.***

#### 1000.3. Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour (PNB) teaching from 2023-24

A reorganisation of neuroscience teaching from academic year 2023-24 was recently discussed at the Faculty Board; the proposal was circulated as **BSC.23.02**. The Faculty Board asked that student feedback be provided before forwarding to Academic Standards Enhancement Committee (ASEC); this had now been done.

Ten extra project places were being made available in Part II Psychology and Part II Zoology, and five more places in Part II PDN to accommodate those students who might have taken PNB. BBS places in the corresponding major subjects had also been increased. This needed to be made clear to college DoS so they could advise their students accordingly. An email already sent to DoS had alluded to this, but it was felt it should be stated more explicitly; it was agreed to send a follow up email for this purpose.

Numbers of places had been made clear on the NST website, along with the selection criteria for each Part II. This information would also be available at the subjects fairs held at the end of Lent.

The Committee thanked Dr Plaisted-Grant and Dr Edgley for dealing with this, as well as the Course Organisers in PDN, Psychology and Zoology.

***ACTION: Secretary of the NST Management Committee to send follow up email with details of extra project/BBS places.***

## **1001. BIOLOGICAL NATURAL SCIENCES CURRICULUM REVIEW (BNSCR) REPORT**

Dr Michel reported that a series of recommendations had been made and many working groups had been set up.

The working group on course structure had looked at five models for teaching at Part IB and were intending to release one of these for consultation as soon as possible. The only information disclosed at this time was that each module taken would be one term only.

The working group on intended learning outcomes (ILOs) were identifying core ILOs of the programme and those for different Parts and linking activities to these ILOs.

The core academic skills working group was discussing a list of skills that graduates should ideally have obtained. Further work was being carried out on assessments, resourcing and timing.

Teaching staff support was being looked at jointly with the Medical and Veterinary Medicine Curriculum Review (MVMCR). Good practices were being identified along with needs for training, communication and support.

Other activities included the consultation on course structure, communications, roadshows and consideration of further working groups as needed.

The Committee agreed that it was good that learning objectives should be focussed on. Further information on the proposal for course structure would be available in the next month. It was appreciated that this would generate a lot of discussion.

It was requested that dates for the roadshows be scheduled soon, so that they could be put in the diary and avoid any clashes.

Committee members who wished to be involved in any of the working groups should contact Dr Claire Michel ([claire.michel@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:claire.michel@admin.cam.ac.uk)).

## **1002. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS**

The first substantive examinations using Inspira for 2023 were going to be run on 16 and 17 March for medics and vets. Bootcamp sessions had been run to which MedST/VetST students, along with NST and PBS students for the final session, had been invited but attendance was patchy.

Examination Operations would gradually be taking on more responsibility for delivery of Inspira examinations. A Digital Assessment Programme Board had been established and would consider options for online examinations,

taking into account the needs and wishes of other Schools and Faculties. Other Schools were interested in using Inspira as part of the ongoing pilot, but if its use were to go beyond the pilot period it would need to go to tender.

Dr Scadden was grateful for the support of departments in lending their laboratories and other spaces to run the examinations, as well as the time of their technicians and other departmental staff.

Examiners and departments were encouraged to get onto the Inspira Moodle site for Examiners and Administrators that could be accessed from <https://www.vle.cam.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=251869>.

A new Inspira administrator had been recruited in the School of the Biological Sciences, Ms Shagufta (Shaggy) Bargir.

### **1003. SHARED TEACHING OF PART II DEVELOPMENT MODULE**

Paper **BSC.23.03** was circulated on the subject of shared teaching of a Part II Development module by the departments of Genetics, PDN and Zoology. The proposal would rationalise the teaching of developmental biology. The new module would deliver the same material currently offered by the three departments, who already share teaching and examination duties.

The Committee queried how examinations would be conducted, in particular if there would be differences in marking across the three departments involved. Candidates would not see any differences at the individual question level; students taking a question from one department would be marked in the same way as questions from the other two, using equivalent criteria.

***The Committee approved the proposal.***

### **1004. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)**

A paper was circulated with comments from the National Student Survey by final year NST biology students (**BSC.23.04**). The Committee was asked if any action was required in response to this feedback.

The Committee felt that there was not enough data to make an informed comment. A response would be considered for the next meeting and should probably include a statement that more encouragement should be given to students to complete the NSS.

***ACTION: Members send comments on the NSS to the secretary before the next meeting.***

## **1005. CHANGES TO EXAMINATIONS 2024-25**

It was noted that a 'Framework for Assessment' had been published and this was circulated as **BSC.23.05**. Any modifications to courses now needed to follow the process detailed at:

<https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/new-modified-courses/taught-course-modifications>.

The secretary should be contacted in the first instance for any proposed changes to courses.

The Committee felt that the Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO) needed to take account of the peculiarities of the NST when setting policy.

The current framework allowed Inspira to be used for all examinations held in SBS as it was assumed that all subjects were part of the pilot. The Head of Education Services and the Student Registry were looking at the resource needed if online examinations were to be rolled out across the University.

For Part II, there needed to be a discussion on which papers would move to Inspira. This year, Inspira would be 'locked down' (i.e. increased security) so that only websites that had been pre-approved could be accessed during the exam. Where relevant, a list of permitted sites would be made available to students. The History and Philosophy of Science papers were currently invigilated on Moodle and there was no news yet on whether they were included in the pilot.

## **1006. PART II BBS**

### **1006.1. Student Consultative Committee**

A meeting was held on 2 March. The Committee was disappointed to note that only one student representative attended this meeting, and it was hoped a way could be found to encourage better attendance. It was also noted that the recent Education Monitoring Reviews had asked how student representatives were supported.

Other individual subjects' student consultation groups were well attended by students, including BBS student representatives. Was it possible that students were less interested in higher level discussions? It was noted that the current meeting was missing its student representative and the NST Management Committee had also experienced issues with student attendance. It was possible that course representatives felt that individual subject committees were more immediately useful to them than higher level bodies.

Faculty representatives were always invited to the Faculty Office for an informal chat with the Secretary of the Faculty Board and the relevant teaching committee secretaries. The Student Consultative Committee for medics and vets was well attended and it was noted that in contrast to the BBS Committee the meetings were run online.

It was possible that higher-level committees were intimidating to student representatives, or that given the number of meetings involved there were simply too many for the representatives to attend.

#### 1006.2. Science Communication minor subject

The minor subject in Science Communication could no longer be run from the Institute for Continuing Education (ICE). Departments had been approached to determine if any are prepared to take on the subject to offer to BBS students in 2023-24.

It was clarified that the course could be run with the involvement of several departments. The Committee requested further information about the module and suggested a meeting with the current organiser, Dr Jane Gregory.

***ACTION: secretary to set up meeting with Dr Gregory.***

#### 1006.3. BBS handbook

The BBS handbook that was to be circulated to prospective students at the Part II subjects fair was circulated as **BSC.23.06**.

It was queried whether specifying maximum numbers for certain major and minor subject could put some students off, and perhaps these figures should be rationalised collectively rather than leaving the decision with individual departments. In practice, the maxima were set by resource issues such as room sizes. Consideration should be given to instead publishing how many students had taken an option in previous years.

#### 1006.4. Major subject options for Plant Sciences

It was noted that BBS Plant Sciences was currently offered as two major subject options – one Cellular and one Ecological with limited combinations of modules available in each option. From 2023-24 there will be a single Plant Sciences major subject option with the same modules available as those to single subject Part II students.

### 1007. **NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for a meeting held on 31 January were circulated as **BSC.23.07**. At this meeting a split of the second class for Part IA was discussed and agreed, alongside a discussion of a mark management system. Following the Easter

examinations, question level mark data would be made available to Directors of Studies via the mark books, which this year would be published on a SharePoint site. This would include Part II BBS and Part II Physical Sciences. The site would include guidance on how to use the data, including consideration of GDPR, and it would then be up to individual DoS to decide how to distribute the data in an appropriately confidential manner. Guidance would also be provided to Senior Examiners on how to present question level data.

#### **1008. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for the Lent term meeting of the PNB Management Committee were not available at the time of this meeting and would be circulated when ready.

#### **1009. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

There was nothing to report from the most recent meetings.

#### **1010. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

The University's statement on potential use of artificial intelligence and the implications it had for assessment was circulated as **BSC.23.08**.

The Inspira system was in a relatively strong position for written examinations re: use of text generating software, due to use of lock down exam settings. Coursework was more of an issue regarding use of AI (e.g. GPT4), and it was hoped that these risks would not impact on the ongoing drive to diversify assessment. The Committee acknowledged that in mitigating the impacts of text generating software Examiners would need to be more creative in the types of questions that were set.

#### **1011. ITEMS FOR REPORT**

##### **1011.1. Revised date for SaRA report submission**

It was noted that the Chair and Senior Examiner for BBS agreed to extend the deadline for submission of the SaRA report from 25 March to 27 March. This would allow more help to be available to students during the submission process.

##### **1011.2. Coronation Bank Holiday**

In the absence of any further direction from the University, teaching and examinations would be expected to be delivered over the coronation bank holiday including Monday 8 May.

#### **1012. A.O.B.**

##### **1012.1. Cambridge Casual Workers Scheme (CCWS)**

The team running the CCWS had recently communicated that departments would be permitted to continue using the old UPS/2 forms to claim examiner payments to the middle of April.

The ability to carry out after the event (ATE) bookings was to be removed on 23 March, but it might still be possible to do ATE bookings via the CCWS form.

The intention was to forge ahead with requiring Examiner payments to be made via CCWS. Where it was not certain how many hours would be required departments would have to over-allocate hours and reduce to the actual amount was known. It was confirmed that overstating the number of hours in a CCWS booking did not constitute a contractual obligation to pay for those hours.

The CCWS team would be running further drop-in sessions and information about these would be circulated to departments soon. There had been some confusion about the payments calculator that was introduced last year, Amy Bains in the Department of Genetics would send some feedback to the Student Registry soon.

#### **1012.2. Part IB and Part II subjects fairs**

It was proposed to run the Part IB and Part II subject fairs at the start of the Easter term instead of the usual times at the end of the Lent term. This was facilitated by the moving of the deadline for students to specify their Part II choices from May Day to the middle of May. It would remove the current clash with medic and vet examinations at the end of Lent and may permit the use of more suitable rooms to accommodate the fairs. It would also allow a stand to be occupied for the Inspera examination platform as relevant staff would not need to be away looking after the examinations at the start of the Easter term.

The Committee indicated it was supportive of this in principle and that the Faculty Office should look into its feasibility.

#### **1013. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

Further meeting dates for the 2022-23 academic year were:

2pm on Wednesday 12 July 2023.

Dates for the 2023-24 academic year were:

2pm on Wednesday 11 October 2023

2pm on Wednesday 6 December 2023

2pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024

2pm on Wednesday 10 July 2024



**1014. RESERVED BUSINESS**

Discussion of an item of reserved business was minuted separately.