

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

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 12 July 2023**

### **MINUTES**

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

Dr Dee Scadden (Chair, online learning, Biochemistry), Dr Nik Cuniffe (Plant Sciences). Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Dr Christine Farr (Genetics), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Dr Sandra Fulton (SBS), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), Dr Uta Paszkowski (Plant Sciences, BBS), Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology), Dr Rik van Veen (Pharmacology), Mrs Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

**In attendance:** Dr Matthew Harper (Pharmacology), Ms Funmike Ifie (Biological Sciences Library), Dr Claire Michele (Faculty Office).

#### **1016. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy).

#### **1017. MEMBERSHIP**

Dr Matthew Harper replaced Dr Rik van Veen as Pharmacology representative from Michaelmas 2023, and attended this meeting. The Committee expressed its thanks to Dr van Veen for his service on the Committee.

#### **1018. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **1019. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023 were circulated and approved.

#### **1020. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **1020.1. Admissions for NST and project places (1000.2)**

A working group had been established and had met on 16 May and had discussed items such as:

- marks weighting for projects and other components.
- Inclusion of posters in assessment.
- How projects should be done – should data analysis and experimental design be included?

- Guidance that should be offered to students including avoiding plagiarism.
- How project work fitted in with intended learning outcomes, study skills, general skills and scientific ethics.
- Feedback and formative assessment.
- Guidance should be offered to staff e.g. on use of viva voce examinations. It was noted that there was guidance available for BBS dissertation supervisors.
- Possibility and desirability of having consistent project formats across departments.
- Shared projects – how to assign credit for different individual contributions for these.
- How to prioritise allocation of projects e.g. should transfers in have the same chance as an NST entrant?

A further meeting would be held if possible in the long vacation, notes of the first meeting would be circulated with the minutes of this BSC meeting.

#### 1020.2. Science Communication minor subject (1006.2)

The Course Organiser Jane Gregory had been in contact with the Department of Zoology, a meeting will be arranged. Members of the Committee who wish to attend this meeting should contact the secretary.

Amy Orben at the MRC was suggested as a possible contact.

***ACTION: secretary to arrange meeting with Jane Gregory.***

#### 1021. **BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES LIBRARIAN**

Funmike Ifie had recently been appointed as Biological Sciences Librarian and attended the Committee to introduce herself and her work.

The principle aims of the team were to support research. It aimed to do this by looking at changing working practices in response to changing practices in how information was accessed. For example, there was more information being accessed online, and there was a lot more information out there. There were challenges in being able to find information relevant to research and study.

- Training in how to locate relevant information.
- Archived material and the need to digitise this so it could be made available online.
- Scientific ethics, plagiarism, use of cutting and pasting.

The School of Biological Sciences had nine departments, and six libraries in them. There was a need to coordinate and ensure access to all these libraries for all working in the School.

The School Libraries team would be happy to talk to staff and students about information access. The team would also be finding out what activities were going on in departments and what additional assistance was needed. Other school's processes would also be looked at to see if there was anything that could be applied to SBS.

Rights retention and self-archiving policies were unique to the University of Cambridge, and the team would be looking into how this influenced teaching and research.

The Department of Biochemistry had a library, but no librarian. It was included in the consideration and would be supported.

Members of the Committee were urged to contact Ms Ifie for any further information they needed ([yoi@20@cam.ac.uk](mailto:yoi@20@cam.ac.uk)). The Committee thanked Ms Ifie for attending.

#### **1022. MARKING AND ASSESSMENT BOYCOTT**

The timeline for processing and reporting examination marks following the end of the marking and assessment boycott (due at the end of September, assuming this was not extended) was not clear. It was not clear at what stage of marking different papers were, or how long it would take to organise final meetings of Examiners and draw up class lists during a busy Michaelmas term. Departments would need to be mindful of the demands on the time of Teaching Administrators and Examiners.

The Department of Psychology felt they would be able to have results published by November. PDN had done all marking. Pathology would need to ratify its 2<sup>nd</sup> MB/Vet MB results which were at present provisional.

It was not certain when it would be confirmed that the marking and assessment boycott had ended, and this probably wouldn't be known until September.

It would be good to have some consistency in release of marks across departments, but given the many variables this might be difficult to achieve.

#### **1023. BNSCR REPORT**

Dr Michel updated the Committee.

There were three main elements to the review of education in biological sciences:

- 1) The review of the preclinical medical and veterinary courses.

- 2) The review of biological NST teaching.
- 3) Support for undergraduate teaching.

Areas within these were looking at course structure, assessment, student development and education delivery.

A consultation on a proposal for a new NST Part IB biology structure was underway in departments. This proposed that there would be 15 termly modules, each taught over a single term with 24 lectures. Students would take three modules in Michaelmas and three in Lent. All the modules would be offered by a single department, but collaboration between departments for teaching on a given module would be encouraged. Teaching in the Easter term would be focussed on skills development. The proposal acknowledged the different structures of Mathematical and Computational Biology, HPS and the physical sciences modules.

Some feedback from departments had been received, more would be appreciated. All information about the proposal was available on the SBS information hub.

Some aspects of the NST biology review crossed over with MedST/VetST, particularly the high-level. There were several draft areas were presented and feedback on these were welcome. Workshops were being arranged for Michaelmas term.

As part of the education delivery role descriptions were being drafted for Course Organisers and Senior Examiners among others. Further work to be done before a full consultation included diversifying assessment, online resources and sharing of best practice. The Committee queried whether the concepts for scientific debate should be included in the review's consideration, such as questions after presentations and training where students took on two sides of a scientific argument.

The Committee thanked Dr Michel and all involved in the review process.

#### **1024. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS**

Dr Scadden reported. Responsibility for Inspira was gradually being transferred to the Student Registry. It was expected that many Part II and III papers would move to Inspira from Moodle. Some other faculties were also considering moving to Inspira, including the clinical course for Veterinary Medicine.

In Easter 2023 the Part II papers were all open book. Papers for Part IA and IB were closed book with computers running Inspira locked down to prevent any other software being used. It was being considered whether screen

recording was necessary – it was useful to have even in a closed book examination (e.g. for checking review request claims or where an error in a paper had been reported), but it was also a financial cost to the University. Time stamps for starting/finishing a paper would still be available.

There was confidence that there would be sufficient space and time in the examination timetable to accommodate the additional Part II and III papers. Some Part II papers had small numbers of candidates that could be accommodated in small rooms or alongside other papers. Candidates with extra time were usually accommodated in the Titan suite or another single place where all candidates with exam adjustments could sit papers – this helped considerably with invigilation.

## **1025. REGULATION OF THE METHODS AND MODES OF ASSESSMENT IN UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS**

The 14 June edition of the Reporter gave details of a proposal to amend the way methods and modes of assessment are regulated. The relevant edition can be viewed at <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2022-23/weekly/6704/6704.pdf>, and an excerpt of the proposed process was circulated as **BSC.23.13**.

Faculties needed to come up with a route of approval for changes. To start with the previous methods would be preserved as far as possible. Given the disruption over the past three years to the formal reporting of changes, it might be best to declare what the current formats of all papers were for clarity, then further changes could be notified on the basis of these. Rubrics could be used as a ‘reference point’.

There was comment on how long some changes took to implement.

***ACTION: secretary of this Committee and the NST Management Committee to come up with a proposal for reporting changes.***

## **1026. PART II BBS**

### **1026.1. Student Consultative Committee**

A meeting was held on 15 June. The marking and assessment boycott was discussed along with the generally good feedback on the course. The situation with PNB for 2023-24 and onwards was clarified.

## **1027. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for meetings held on 14 March and 9 May were circulated as **BSC.23.14** and **BSC.23.14a** respectively.

It was desired that the Education Monitoring Review (EMR) submissions be shared across departments so members could see how submissions were made for different subjects. This would allow best practice to be shared and allow more consistency across departments for future submissions. The Committee supported this, and Leanne Wilson would set up a SharePoint site for this. It was likely that EMR would change following its first iteration.

The proposals for a reading week would be voted on at some point in the near future. Members of the Committee were urged to vote on this issue.

***ACTION: Leanne Wilson to set up SharePoint for sharing of EMR reports.***

## **1028. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes for the Lent term meeting of the PNB Management Committee were circulated as **BSC.23.15**. This was the final meeting of the PNB Management Committee following the dissolution of the subject. The Committee thanked all those who had contributed to the subject over the years.

## **1029. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING**

The Library Manager, George Cronin, gave a talk on induction sessions and a paper suggesting a review to these was circulated to DOBS. Sandra Fulton and Jess Gwynn were producing papers, and there was a need to consult with colleges and courses to ensure there was no duplication of effort.

## **1030. ITEMS FOR REPORT**

### **1030.1. Changes to the SaRA examination**

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.

## **1031. A.O.B.**

### **1031.1. Departmental rota**

The current rota had been approved to the end of the 2023-24 academic year – further years would need approval from the Faculty Board. It was requested that all other subjects (including MedST/VetST subjects) be included on the webpage, alongside PBS.

***ACTION: secretary to ask the Faculty Board to consider approving an extended departmental rota beyond 2023-24.***

***ACTION: secretary to update rota webpage to include MedST/VetST subjects and PBS.***

**1032. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

Further meeting 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

**1033. RESERVED BUSINESS**

Discussion of an item of reserved business was minuted separately.