

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 11 October 2023**

MINUTES

There were present:

Dr Matthew Harper (Chair, Pharmacology), Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Dr Nik Cuniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Lee De Wit (Psychology), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Christine Farr (Genetics), Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, SBS), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Uta Paszkowski (Plant Sciences, BBS), Dr Ed Turner (Zoology), Mrs Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

In attendance: Mr John Harding (ADRC), Mr Kenneth Ewing (ADRC), Ms Emily Williams (ADRC), Ms Rachel Demery (ADRC), Dr Catrin Darsley (Cambridge Zero), Dr Claire Michele (Faculty Office).

1037. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Dee Scadden (online learning, Biochemistry), Prof Suzanne Turner (Pathology).

1038. MEMBERSHIP

Dr Matthew Harper replaced Dr Rik van Veen as representative for the Department of Pharmacology, and also kindly agreed to Chair the Committee for the Michaelmas term meetings.

Dr Lee De Wit replaced Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant as representative for the Department of Psychology.

Dr Suzanne Turner replaced Dr Gillian Fraser as representative for the Department of Pathology.

Dr Ed Turner replaced Dr Nick Mundy as representative for the Department of Zoology.

1039. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

1040. ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTRE (ADRC)

John Harding, Kenneth Ewing, Emily Williams and Rachel Demery attended the meeting to brief the Committee on a new set up for the ADRC. There were

now two advisory teams, one for neurodiversity and one for disability. Teams were now based on colleges rather than colleges.

Kenneth Ewing was a team member with responsibilities for neurodiversity e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia.

Rachel Demery was involved in disability and worked with students who had conditions other than specific-learning disorders (SpLDs); Rachel would be happy to discuss any student issues departments had.

Emily Williams was also on the disability team working alongside Helen Duncan, and was happy to be contacted directly by departments.

It was hoped that the new set up would allow for a consistent set of advisors to be available across the School, and that there could be two advisors for a particular student depending on their needs.

The Committee were glad to have the opportunity to put faces to names. It was emphasised that departments would still be able to contact the ADRC to consult on short term conditions.

It was noted that many student support documents (SSDs) had the same recommendations that were already being carried out in a department – did this make it unnecessary for some sorts of advice to be included in an SSD? The ADRC were looking at this issue and would include advice on standard practice, where this indeed was standard practice that was being carried out.

It had been suggested at the NST Management Committee that there could be appointed a person to oversee all ADRC recommended adjustments across the NST, which could be useful given the variability of subjects (and hence departments they were based in) taken by students. Such a role could then liaise with all relevant departments and colleges to ensure information was disseminated where it was needed.

The ADRC would be looking at the cohort summaries to determine what information could be sent to departments in advance of students arriving at the University.

In all case the joint nature of the NST course between the School of Physical Sciences and the School of the Biological Sciences would be taken into account.

The Committee thanked the members of the ADRC who had attended the meeting.

1041. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were circulated and approved.

1042. SUSTAINABILITY TEACHING

Dr Catrin Darsley had been intended to attend the meeting but was off sick. In her absence she provided a brief update via email.

Students had been met to talk about sustainability and review what relevant taught material was available. This was at the level of the subject/module for now – some academic staff could be involved but at the moment it was limited to students.

Departments could start to consider looking at their subject content and identify appropriate content e.g. health effects, effects on plant growth.

A University-wide report would be released, the Committee asked if it would be possible to have a preview of this. The Chair would contact Dr Darsley.

ACTION: Chair to contact Dr Darsley for a preview of the report.

1043. MATTERS ARISING

1043.1. Regulation of the methods and modes of assessment in University examinations (1025)

It was noted that the NST Management Committee had put together a process for reporting changes to examinations in the absence of form and conduct notices. Circulated as **BSC.23.16** is the text of an email sent to Course Organisers and Administrators on 28 September detailing a process to follow for changing examination formats.

1043.2. Departmental rota (1031.1)

The rotation of departments for shared courses had been updated and was available to view at <https://www.biology.cam.ac.uk/exams/nst-exams/department-rota-responsibilities-2023-27>. This had been circulated to departments. The Department of PDN felt that it had a crippling burden for teaching and asked if other departments would be available to help.

This would be raised at the next Faculty Board meeting.

1044. BNSCR REPORT

Dr Michel reported. So far there were nine recommendations, of which three were focused on for this meeting.

For NST Part IB a new course structure had been proposed, with 15 termly modules each with 24 hours of lectures plus practical classes. Students would take three modules in each of Michaelmas and Lent terms. Feedback on this had been received from most departments and the working group would meet

soon to discuss this. Most feedback was positive but the working group wanted to wait for all departments to respond before publishing.

Guidance on Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) was being drafted, covering all three years. Recommendations were being made for skills, assessment, Course Organisers and supervisors. A document would be drafted and Course Organisers would be consulted on this. A draft version of common aims for all biology subjects (**BSC.23.17**) was circulated.

Core skills were being identified and at what stage these would be taught, and whether they should be embedded in core subjects or taught separately. A draft paper would be circulated at a later date summarising the working group's discussion.

With respect to **BSC.23.17** it was felt by some that some overlap in teaching access to research literature might be useful. This should be deliberate and considerations should be high level for now, granularity could be increased later. It was important to tell students what they have learnt.

Point three ('Communicate complex scientific ideas clearly and accurately, taking account of ethical and moral implications of research') – would this be applicable in all circumstances? Perhaps phrases such as 'impacts' and/or 'socialised effects' could be incorporated.

The Committee would welcome inputs from the School of Physical Sciences and from the organisers of the Psychological and Behavioural Sciences course, but not all would need to be incorporated.

It would need to be considered how aims would map on to assessment.

The Committee was broadly happy with the aims presented in **BSC.23.17**.

A discussion draft would be brought to the next meeting.

1045. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS

Dr Dee Scadden could not attend the meeting and would be asked to report at the next meeting.

1046. PART II BBS

1046.1. Examiner rota

The current Examiner rota for BBS previously approved in 2014 was due to finish in 2024-25. A proposed rota for 2026-35 was circulated as **BSC.23.18** and approved by the Committee.

It was possible that the Department of Psychology may be able to offer dissertations after their withdrawal from the NST. Prof De Wit would check and report back to the Committee.

1046.2. BBS Welcome event

The BBS welcome event was run for new BBS students on 5 October at 4pm. The event was well attended by students but no major/minor subject Course Organisers were present which was somewhat disappointing.

1047. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes for meetings held on 11 July were circulated as **BSC.23.19**.

1048. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the DoBS Committee was due the day after this meeting and would be reported on at the next meeting. Admissions were due to be discussed, there had been a drop in students applying for biology NST.

1049. ITEMS FOR REPORT

1049.1. Changes to the Surgical and Radiological Anatomy (SaRA) examination

The live oral presentation component of assessment for the BBS minor subject in SaRA was to be replaced by uploads of presentations to Moodle. It was noted that due to Covid no oral presentations had been made for the lifetime of the subject. All presentations had been submitted via Moodle and students preferred this method and thought it less stressful than making live oral presentations. The Committee had agreed to these changes via circulation prior to this meeting.

1049.2. Fellowship of HEA

Dr Fulton reported that Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning were running workshops on how to apply for this Fellowship and other general guidance. The Committee felt that this should not be explicitly promoted by the Faculty. While the Fellowships were useful for early careers academics there were some reservations about compulsory membership in some institutions.

Dr Fulton would feed back the comments of the Committee.

Prof Weil joined the meeting.

1049.3. Marking and assessment boycott

The marking and assessment boycott had been discontinued from mid-September. The University now expected all examination results from Easter to be submitted to the Student Registry by 16 October. The BBS

examination results would be submitted after its final meeting of Examiners on 16 October.

Resource was available for departments that needed it. The worst problems would come when students failed examinations. Any issues arising from this (e.g. appeals) should be taken up via the college. An appeals meeting was being held in mid-November which was past the formal date of withdrawal and recovery of funding. The latter aspect was being dealt with at a higher level.

1049.4. Self-certification for extensions for coursework

It was noted that the University had recently introduced a policy allowing students to self-certify for extensions to coursework deadlines of up to one week (**BSC.23.20**). The NST Management Committee had recently discussed this and drafted a policy for NST Part IA and Part IB subjects, circulated as **BSC.23.21**. For Part II subjects Departments and Faculties had been asked to come up with local policies for their courses.

1049.5. Education Monitoring Review – feedback from 2022-23 exercise

Feedback from the 2022-23 Education Monitoring Review (EMR), which covered Part II subjects, was circulated as **BSC.23.22**.

For 2023-24 it had previously been intended that EMR would cover Part IA and Part IB subjects. However no further information had been received to date. It was likely to be asked for in the Lent term, which was not considered to be good timing. The Committee agreed that if the data provided for the EMR was not accurate departments should not agonise over this. The NST and MVST submissions were likely to be done at the overall course level and should not involve too much input from individual departments.

A SharePoint site had been created for departments to add their EMR submissions so departments could compare with their own. Departments were urged to check they had uploaded their documents to this site. The NST Administrator could be contacted for access to the SharePoint site.

In response to the EMR response to the last NST submission, an NST-wide survey of students would be carried out soon.

1050. **A.O.B.**

There was none.

1051. **DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

Further meeting dates for the 2023-24 academic year were noted as:

2pm on Wednesday 29 November 2023

2pm on Wednesday 6 March 2024

2pm on Wednesday 10 July 2024