

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 16 October 2024**

MINUTES

There were present:

Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, SBS), Dr Nik Cuniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Lee De Wit (Psychology), Prof David Bainbridge (PDN), Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Christine Farr (Genetics), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Matthew Harper (Pharmacology), Prof Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology, BBS), Dr Ed Turner (Zoology), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy) and Dr Chad Pillinger (Faculty of Biology, secretary).

In attendance: Prof Colin Crump (representing Pathology for Suzanne Turner), Dr Sonja Dunbar (Plant Sciences), Dr Funmike Ifie (Biological Sciences Librarian), Dr Claire Michel, Mrs Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator).

1083. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr James Bainham (Student Representative), Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Prof Helen Mott (Biochemistry), Prof Dee Scadden (FBB Chair), Prof Suzanne Turner (Pathology).

1084. MEMBERSHIP

Prof David Bainbridge replaced Prof Steve Edgley as PDN representative.

Prof Helen Mott replaced Prof Kilkenny as Biochemistry representative.

Prof Kate Plaisted-Grant replaced Prof Uta Paszkowski as BBS Course Organiser.

The Committee thanked Profs Edgley, Kilkenny and Paszkowski for their contributions.

ACTION: secretary to pass on the thanks of the Committee to Profs Edgley, Kilkenny and Paszkowski.

1085. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

1086. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES (ILOs)

Dr Sonja Dunbar attended and made a brief introduction to the topic. Paper **BSC.24.22** was circulated with proposals for ILOs for students graduating with a BA in a biological NST subject. After consultation with the departments 25 ILOs had been agreed, and the Committee was asked for its view on whether these could be taken to the Faculty board.

The committee accepted the proposal with the suggested addenda below.

It was queried whether these would apply to students who transferred in to the NST at Part II, e.g. medical and veterinary students. For medics and vets ILOs for these subjects should be in place for Part IA and IB.

It would need to be made clear who in departments and the Faculty would be responsible for ensuring delivery of ILOs for all Parts of the course and its subjects.

The assessment working group should considering addressing the proposed ILOs soon, perhaps by working backwards from the aims. Some of these were being done already albeit informally.

The section on 'coping strategies' could perhaps be given a more positive spin – the working group would consider this and reword if there were strong feelings about this.

It was proposed that learning outcomes should be embedded before formally confirming, which would allow an assessment of how best they can be delivered or if there are any that are undeliverable.

As there were no student members, the item of reserved business was taken at this point in the meeting. This is recorded in the reserved minutes. Following reserved business Dr Dunbar left the meeting.

ACTION: working group to consider points above

1087. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of reference for the BSC were circulated as **BSC.24.21**. Some adjustments were requested to the departmental responsibilities for shared subjects.

1088. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024 were circulated and approved.

1089. MATTERS ARISING

1089.1. *Part II projects working group*

The Part II projects working group met on 16 September. The Chair reported on the discussions. The Committee agreed there should be clarification on what was a supervisor? This could be applied to a project/dissertation supervisor at Part II or a person who took supervisions in colleges amongst other things. What were the distinctions between these different supervisors and how could these be made more clear so that there was no confusion to those outside of the School. This might involve changing some of the terminology, for example a Part II project supervisor could be called something along the lines of 'project academic lead'.

Another meeting will be scheduled sometime in late October/early November, as needed, to discuss a paper to bring to the Committee's late November meeting. It would also discuss the ILOs outlined in item 1086.

1089.2. *Deadline for BBS dissertation outlines (1060.1)*

Departments had been reminded of the need to ask students to submit a one page dissertation plan by the end of the Michaelmas term. These were intended to be looked at by supervisors to gauge a students' progress, not for departments to use for assessment. The need to submit an outline would also prompt students to start work on their dissertation.

It was suggested that it would be useful for departments to have some more flexibility in gathering outlines – this should be possible as long as the overall aim of ensuring students didn't 'slip under the radar' was achieved.

1089.3. *Report of a Faculty Board discussion of BNSCR proposals (1071.4)*

The Chair reported that a group would be convened shortly on further developments regarding BNSCR proposals over the long vacation. No firm decisions had been made other than that the Faculty Board had agreed seven to eight subjects should be offered for Part IB.

1072. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS

Prof Scadden would report at the next meeting.

1073. REVIEW OF EXAMINATIONS

The Chair reported on the examinations that had occurred in Easter 2024. There were several hitches that had appeared in the NST Part IA and Part IB mark books due to many late corrections that had been provided by subject Senior Examiners. There had been a longer delay between the final meeting of Part IB Senior Examiners and the release of marks and the Part II allocations. The NST Management Committee had been asked to send examination related feedback to ExamOps.

It was queried whether it would be possible to release results to DoS before they appeared on CamSIS – it was thought not, due to the very constrained timelines for examination processes.

Some papers were reverting to hand-written, to reduce the pressure on the Inspira scan process.

It was requested that a draft response to ExamOps be circulated.

ACTION: secretary to circulate draft response to ExamOps.

1074. PART II BBS

1074.1. BBS Course Organiser

Prof Kate Plaisted-Grant will be taking over as Course Administrator and Senior Examiner from October 2024, for two academic years. Dr Plaisted-Grant noted that the welcome event run for BBS students was very good at giving BBS students a sense of belonging and ideally there should be a similar event later in the year. This could be raised at a BBS Student Consultative Committee run later in the term.

1075. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Draft minutes for a meeting held on 9 July 2024 were circulated as **BSC.24.23**. Examination scaling and classing were being looked at, and student survey results would be looked at in due course.

1076. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING

Dr Weil and Dr Gwynne had co-chaired a meeting of all NST DoS; further separate meetings for biological and physical sciences DoS were planned along with another large meeting just before the Easter examinations. The meeting was useful for getting feedback from the DoS.

Recently agreed University terms of reference for Directors of Studies Committees were circulated as **BSC.24.24**.

1077. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Paper **BSC.24.25** was circulated summarising the results of the National Student Survey (NSS). More detailed information could be obtained by visiting the tableau website at:

https://tableau.blue.cam.ac.uk/#/site/InformationHub/views/NationalStudentSurveyNSS2024/1_1ReadMe?iid=2

The Committee considered the report and were pleased to see that the feedback was generally good. It was requested that any departmental responses to the survey be sent to the secretary – only the relevant teaching committee would be necessary.

ACTION: departmental heads of teaching to forward survey response to the secretary.

1078. ITEMS FOR REPORT

1078.1. Coding of shared and borrowed papers (1075)

It was noted that a meeting had been held with the Student Registry, changes to paper examination codes could not be done for 2024-25 but a pilot could be carried out for the following year.

1078.2. Librarian talks on accessing academic literature

It was noted that talks had been given by the School Librarians to students about how to access and process academic literature. These talks had been given to Part II PDN students and Part II BBS students. If other Part II subjects would like to have a talk for their Part II students they were directed to contact Funmike Ifie (yoi20@cam.ac.uk).

Students found the talks to be particularly useful in addressing that information has now largely moved online, meaning that searching strategies have had to be adapted to save time. The talk helped students to evaluate the many resources that were available online so that time could be saved.

1078.3. Changes to Part III Biochemistry assessment

Changes to assessment for Part III Biochemistry previously agreed via circulation were reported for information as **BSC.24.26**.

1078.4. Teaching Review Advisory Groups

It was noted that three further sessions of the Teaching Review Advisory Group had been scheduled for the following dates:

- Mon 11 Nov, 2-4pm
- Thurs 21 Nov, 2-4pm
- Mon 25 Nov, 10am-12pm

The topics and registration details would be available in early October. All of the sessions would be held in person, in the Student Services Centre. Members would be welcome to attend any or all of the sessions as they may - it would not be necessary to commit to attending all.

Interested members were directed to contact Melissa Rielly (Melissa.Rielly@admin.cam.ac.uk) for further information.

1078.5. Teaching Review survey

The Faculty of Biology had been asked to provide its assessment of whether it considers each of the Teaching Review's 14 problem/aim statements to be a problem for the Triposes it has responsibilities for, or a current aim. A copy of the survey the Faculty will be asked to fill out was circulated as **BSC.24.27** and the problem/aim statements circulated as **BSC.24.27a**.

The NST Management Committee had discussed this and agreed that for Parts IA and IB the Chair would draft a response from the NST Management Committee. For Part II individual departments would need to submit their own responses. For Part II BBS the response should come from the BBS Course Organiser.

ACTION: any comments on the Teaching Review survey to be sent to the Secretary of the NST Management Committee.

1079. A.O.B.

1079.1. Disability review

There was some planning to streamline support for offering universal design. Slides would be circulated to the Committee.

ACTION: secretary to obtain slides from Secretary of the Faculty Board for circulation.

1079.2. BBS Bioinformatics

Bioinformatics was a Part II module currently available as an option to BBS students and those taking PDN, Plant Sciences and Zoology. In recent years it had become apparent that different students were entering with different mathematics skills and experience, and this had become more so since the introduction of the Part IB Mathematical and Computational Biology subject. This led to some students being under-prepared for the subject, while others wanted more advanced content. The Department of Genetics wished to discuss the future of this subject and who it was aimed at.

It was proposed that the subject would run for 2024-25, but for 2025-26 it would be suspended pending discussions on what level to offer the course.

The Committee felt that there should be a course that taught the kind of material offered by Bioinformatics. An introductory-type module might be useful and need not be assessed, the Committee thought this might be of particular interest to medical students. The Committee agreed that some sort of Bioinformatics material should be retained, and that the current module increased the attractiveness of BBS to students.

1079.3. Student suicides

The University had noted that sadly, since 2011 there had been five suicides of NST students. It was important staff should be aware of any changes in student behaviour and knew how to follow up on this by alerting colleges, or engage with and offer support to the student if they felt comfortable doing this.

Some training for supervisors was available but was variable. Student Services were looking at training and support for staff.

Action: Committee members were asked to make their teaching committees aware

1079.4. Evolution and Behaviour

It was requested that the Part IB subject 'Evolution and Behaviour' be renamed as 'Evolutionary Biology'.

The Committee agreed to this.

1080. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The remaining meeting dates for the 2024-25 academic year were noted as:

27 November 2024

19 March 2025

9 July 2025

All at 2pm.

Members were asked to send the Chair and secretary their views on whether meetings should be conducted in-person or online.