

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was a meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Tuesday 14 July 2020** via Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

834. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Jasvin Kaur (Student Representative).

835. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2020 are circulated for approval.

836. MATTERS ARISING

836.1. BBS Student Consultative Committee (supervisions, 824.1)

The supervision guidance for dissertations did not specifically mention remote supervisions but could be updated to reflect the likely situation in the academic year 2020-21. It was agreed that it should be made explicit that online supervisions were an acceptable (and in some cases desirable) alternative to face to face supervisions.

ACTION: secretary to update supervisions guidance website.

836.2. PBS and Psychology changes (829)

This was recently discussed at the Faculty Board of Biology. The Chair reported that the proposal was being worked on over the long vacation and a further report would be made at the October meeting of the BSC.

837. DIGITAL TEACHING IN 2020-21

The Chair invited discussion how Heads of Teaching could assist their departments in delivery of teaching online for 2020-21 and the support that would be available for this.

Dr Scadden circulated a paper to the Committee with information on resources available for various types of online teaching.

Some departments had started to consider delivery of online teaching. The Department of Psychology had developed a plan and were currently consulting with students. This encompassed a guidance document for the department and lecturers with training. Although some elements of this were department-specific, the Department of Psychology would be happy to share with other departments. The philosophy was for the Course Organiser to start with the learning objectives and then discuss with the lecturers how these could be accommodated by the 'blended learning' envisaged for 2020-21.

The vets had used a question and answer session as part of their online lectures which were recorded for those who could not attend.

The current aspiration was that all students should be back in Cambridge for the start of Michaelmas term, but allowance should be made for those who for various reasons may not be able to be in Cambridge.

It was noted that some overseas students in their home countries might encounter issues using certain types of software that were not allowed in their countries. It may be necessary for some students to demit if they could not access online teaching.

There were many different platforms available for online teaching and it was agreed that it would be useful to have a forum to discuss these, and provide some centralised comparison of their pros and cons. From this it may be possible to have a consensus on which platforms were suitable for different types of teaching, although ultimately lecturers would need to make that decision. Dr Scadden would be running some sessions in late July to discuss the various platforms. It was noted that students might be overwhelmed if too diverse an array of platforms were used, so some level of consistency might be desirable although most students had proved very adaptable.

The Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience had run question and answer sessions in Easter 2020, but these had been poorly attended. For large classes it would probably be necessary to allow questions to be posted online rather than run them as live sessions – the interactivity would be lost but live sessions with large groups could be chaotic. Most courses were planning question and answer sessions after a block of lectures on a particular topic rather than after each lecture. These would be less time-consuming for students; a more structured question and answer format might also help make the sessions more useful.

Communication with supervisors should be encouraged as they could help with many aspects of online teaching.

Some staff were not entirely comfortable with technology. Whilst Dr Scadden had offered excellent support so far it would not be possible for her to help everybody with everything. Dr Scadden felt that the Panopto system offered the best solution for many courses – and it had been considered by the DRC as being accessibility-friendly for students needing adjustments. It was also compatible with Moodle, although other platforms could also have this feature. Departments should ideally at the least ensure their teaching staff were familiarised with Panopto before the start of term. It was also advised that in constructing online teaching that the temptation to over-edit material was resisted.

For the Department of Pathology's practical classes there were some staff members who would find it difficult to engage with technology for online teaching. However, staff from the School of Clinical Medicine had been identified who would be able to assist with translating material from 'off-line' to online formats. UIS also had personnel who could do this but may be overwhelmed with the University-wide demands upon their expertise and time.

Dr Scadden would be happy to investigate and produce guidance for any other online teaching platforms if there was sufficient interest.

A new group of individuals was being established at the central University level to provide advice, guidance and training to Schools in the use of online teaching. It was anticipated that each School would have one advisor assigned to them, which was probably not going to be enough but was probably all that could be realistically expected under the current circumstances. Some self-help/training would be necessary from departments and teaching staff. The University would also take on some shared licences, which should reduce costs.

Those who were prepared to host webinars should feel free to use assistance available within colleges.

Course Organisers and lecturers would need to think about how long online lectures should run for, and when their recorded versions should be released – immediately after the lecture or in batches with other cognate lectures once a topic had been completed?

838. TEACHING IN 2020-21

The Chair invited short updates on departmental plans for how teaching will be delivered in 2020-21.

The Department of Psychology planned to run all projects with human testing only, no animal work would be accommodated for health and safety reasons. The projects would be carried out online or using analysis of pre-existing datasets. For practical classes there was a question of how much face-to-face teaching the University wanted, and this view was likely to change over time. Practical online sessions were being prepared but the Department was also able to switch over to face-to-face teaching if it became an option later in the year.

The Department of Biochemistry were intending to place Part III students into research laboratories but for reduced amounts of time compared to normal years. Part II students would be put into practical laboratories for mini-projects. This would ameliorate supervision and social distancing issues. At Part I it was

intended to run intensive practical workshops which would provide some hands-on practical experience for students. It may be possible to use some lecture room space for practical teaching. Opportunities for Part II and Part III students were being prioritised.

The Department of Pathology had a working group looking at possibilities for projects. Part II projects would use the Part I teaching space, and/or Part II students could be paired up with postdocs to carry out a project using their data. At Part IB there were 480 students to accommodate, so practical classes would probably not be run in laboratories and would instead be run online. It may be possible to run one or two face-to-face practicals per term for Part IB students.

The Department of Pharmacology would run online lectures for its Part IB course; these would be for Part IB NST, Part IB MedST and Part IB VetST students. The Part IB practical classes in Michaelmas would be partly shared for NST, MedST and VetST students and would be run online. There was some hesitancy in running any practical classes in Michaelmas as it was not possible in the time available to get animals in, nor properly assess risks to demonstrators. It was hoped to get an idea of what could be put on in Lent term but for this a clear decision was needed on what the University would deem possible by the end of July as significant lead time was required to order materials necessary for the practical classes, particularly animals. The department would aim to provide wet-lab Part II projects in the Lent term with the option of dry-lab projects as a backup.

The Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience had 12 Part I courses with many of these needing to accommodate over 100 students, plus the Part II courses. All lectures would be run online using Panopto alongside Zoom and other platforms, with question and answer sessions of which there would be different approaches used. Practical classes would be run at 25% capacity with the possibility that some of these (e.g. data analysis) could be run in lecture theatres. The current thinking was that students would be able to come in for one hour per week. For Part II the plan was similar to Pharmacology's – there would be no wet lab work as this could only be offered to limited numbers of students and it would not be fair if some had to be excluded. There was recognition that dry projects had to be distinguishable from BBS dissertations.

The Department of Zoology planned to adopt a similar plan to other departments and would prioritise Part II.

With respect to practical classes the University was expected to release educational health guidelines. Assessments of safe capacities for practical teaching spaces would be the responsibility of the owning department. There would be no single central figure for what the percentage capacity should be,

nor would departments be forced to do practical classes. Some flexibility would be needed to account for changes in policy.

There were some uncertainties over shared spaces for shared/borrowed courses – for example the Department of Zoology’s teaching laboratory was used by other departments. There needed to be some clarity over who ultimately should make decisions on how these sorts of spaces would be used.

There was a meeting to discuss Part II/III projects on 15 July. Ultimately it would be for departments to decide on how much capacity they could offer for practical classes and other face-to-face teaching. There were many variables involved, particularly how responsive students and staff were to changed practices, and also vulnerabilities of staff and students and how these could be catered for. There also needed to be careful communication to the students about what they could expect in terms of teaching in 2020/21. The Directors of Biological Sciences could be used to assist in communication to colleges and students, and it would be useful to meet with this body soon.

Dr Weil left the meeting.

In managing student expectations, it needed to be borne in mind what the learning objectives were.

Online teaching would mean that students would spend most of their time in college. Colleges could assist in disseminating information and supervision teaching will continue.

Dr Scadden and Dr Plaisted-Grant left the meeting.

839. PLAGIARISM AND CONSISTENCY OF TURNITIN POLICY ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

A high number of suspected plagiarism cases had been reported following submission of open book examination scripts to Turnitin. The Chair of Part II NST Examiners recommended some procedures for dealing with plagiarism in the NST. A draft of these was circulated as **BSC.20.07**.

The departmental Teaching Leads were asked to return to their departments and discuss these with their examiners. The BBS course was a particular issue as some departments had no cases whereas others detected many. There needed to be consistency across departments in communicating to students what the expectations, risks and potential consequences were with respect to plagiarism across all the Part II subjects. It was possible that the use of the ‘safety net’ had exacerbated the situation.

For Part II and III it was queried whether the Senior Examiners should be expected to take more of a role investigating plagiarism cases. This year the Chair of Senior Examiners had carried out a lot of the work and was happy to do this. However, it was possible that future Chairs of Senior Examiners may find this too much. Clear guidelines on demarcation of responsibility of Senior Examiners and Chairs of Examiners would be helpful

840. PART II BBS

840.1. Cohort for 2020-21

It was noted that following the Part II allocations round 160 students were registered on the BBS course to date.

840.2. Form and Conduct notice for BBS minor subject in Surgical and Radiological Anatomy

The Course Organiser for BBS Surgical and Radiological Anatomy asked for the following change via a form and conduct notice:

"For the Part II BBS Minor Module in Surgical and Radiological Anatomy, we would request that the date of submission of the written report based on their practical session be changed from the last day of Full Lent Term to the last day of Lent Term. This is to provide the students with enough time during Lent Term to contact the clinicians involved and observe the relevant procedures which will inform the writing of their reports. *Course Organisers: Cecilia Brassett & Helen Taylor*".

In practical terms this changed the submission dates to 25 March (24 March in a leap year), from the end of full Lent Term which in 2020-21 will be 19 March.

The Committee agreed to this change.

ACTION: Secretary to ask for publication of notice.

840.3. Major and minor subjects for 2020-21

A list of major and minor subjects had been published in the Reporter (see <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2019-20/weekly/6577/section5.shtml#heading2-8>). However, since publication it was noted that there were some changes:

- A replacement for Dr Gabriella Rustici has been found and the Department of Genetics confirms that the Bioinformatics minor subject will run in 2020-21.
- NST II BBS Major: History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine – this course was due to run for the first time in 2020-21 but has now been withdrawn by the Department of History and Philosophy of Science. Reasons given were that uptake was low in the Part II allocations, and 'circumstances were unusual'. Students who had

chosen this as a major subject were offered a place on the single subject course instead.

840.4. BBS Student feedback

Feedback from BBS students is circulated as **BSC.20.08**. The feedback related to the changes to the examination processes made for Easter 2020. In general, the feedback was positive and students seemed to like the format of the online examinations.

841. PART II EXAMINATIONS

The changes to Part II examinations over Easter 2020 had prompted some departments to express an interest in changing how examinations are conducted in future. The Chair invite expressions of interest to take part in a small working group to discuss on how this can be applied practically and consistently across NST biology subjects.

Nominations were:

Prof Clare Baker (PDN)

Dr Nick Holmes (Pathology) – Dr Fraser would confirm.

Dr David Summers (Genetics)

Dr Dee Scadden (Biochemistry)

Ideally a meeting of this group could be held before the next meeting of the Committee.

ACTION: secretary to check with nominees.

842. EXAMINATION DATA RETENTION

The current Faculty data retention policy could be viewed at <https://www.biology.cam.ac.uk/exams/MedVetSTexams/exam-retention-policy>. This covered MedST, VetST and BBS examinations.

At the 3 July 2019 meeting of the BSC Departmental Teaching Leads were asked to ensure that the data retention policies for their Part II subjects were compatible with the Faculty data retention policy for their BBS students. A subsequent Faculty Board meeting endorsed this position. However, several departments have requested clarity on this following the Easter 2020 examinations and the Faculty Board will be discussing at its October meeting.

Of particular concern was the requirement to retain examiner's comments for one month after the examiner's meeting for BBS examinations. For most Part II examinations the policy is to destroy examiner's comments immediately after the final meeting of examiners.

The Committee agreed that the Faculty policy should be amended so that examiner's comments were destroyed immediately after the meeting.

There was some uncertainty about question level data and how long this should be retained for – practice on this varied across departments

ACTION: secretary to contact Faculty Board with Committee's recommendations.

Dr Summers left the meeting.

843. PART II - TRANSFERRING BETWEEN TRIPOS

As of the date of this meeting there was no published procedure for transfer in from other Tripos, other than to email the NST administrator. These were put forward at different times and dealt with on an *ad hoc* basis.

There were potential issues to deal with students transferring from PBS potentially having taken 3 NST subjects in their second year. In a normal year they could present with marks that would rank them above NST students. Did the Committee consider it reasonable that such students could displace a student applying from NST should the Part II they have chosen be oversubscribed?

It was agreed that there needed to be some consideration as to when transfers were placed into the allocations round. It also needed to be borne in mind that many MedST and VetST students transferred into the NST.

The Committee agreed to request the NST Management Committee set up a procedure.

ACTION: Chair to take request to the NST Management Committee.

844. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 8 April 2020 were circulated as **BSC.20.09**.

845. ITEMS FOR REPORT

845.1. Part IB regulations changes (831.1)

It was noted that the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC) had approved the changes. The changes to regulations had not yet been published in the Reporter due to the disruption to operations.

845.2. Part II Pharmacology regulations changes (831.2)

It was noted that these had been approved by ASEC but not yet published in the Reporter.

845.3. New BBS minor subject - B4 Comparative Human Biology

The inclusion of this Biological Anthropology module as a new minor subject for NST Part II BBS had been approved by circulation. This would appear in the list of available minor subjects from the 2020-21 academic year.

846. A.O.B.

To prepare for the possibility of online examinations ideally a paper should be prepared for the October meeting. There also needed to be some central guidance and advice for departments.

847. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting would be scheduled for October – an earlier meeting could be held if members wished.