

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was a meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 14 October 2020** via Microsoft Teams.

MINUTES

There were present: Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair), Cathy Barton, Jane Clare, Dr Nik Cunniffe, Dr Steve Edgley, Paul Elliot, Dr Gillian Fraser, Jasvin Kaur (student representative), Dr Mairi Kilkenny, Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant, Dr Stuart Sage, Dr Dee Scadden, Dr David Summers, Dr Rik van Veen, Dr Tim Weil, Professor Alun Williams, Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

848 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Dr Holly Canuto, Dr Deborah Longbottom.

849 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2020 were circulated. A slight change was requested to item 838 regarding teaching plans for Pharmacology; the text was changed to:

'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'

Following this amendment the minutes were approved.

850 MATTERS ARISING

850.1 BBS Student Consultative Committee (supervisions, 836.1)

It was noted that the supervision guidance for dissertations had been updated to reflect the likely situation in the academic year 2020-21. This could be viewed at <https://www.biology.cam.ac.uk/colleges/supervisors/supervising-dissertations>.

850.2 Examinations in 2020/21 (841)

A working group had been established to discuss online examinations. It The University expected most examination papers to be conducted online and had requested submission of plans by 16 October. Departments and Course Organisers had been asked to submit plans by 9 October and a plan for NST biology would be submitted to GBEC for approval on 16 November.

The working group wished now to consider longer term considerations for online examinations.

Dr Plaisted-Grant asked to be involved in the online examinations working group and noted a survey asking departments about the use of online examinations asked some useful questions.

ACTION: secretary to add Dr Plaisted-Grant to the online examinations working group.

A further report on online examinations would be made at the end of Michaelmas meeting.

850.3 Examinations data retention policy (842)

It was noted that a request had been sent to the Faculty Board asking for the BBS data retention policy to be amended such that examiner's comments were destroyed immediately following contributing papers' final meetings of examiners.

850.4 Part II – Transferring between Tripos (843)

It was noted that the NST Management Committee had requested input from its members to feed into a discussion on setting up a procedure for managing transfer of students to the NST.

850.5 Part IB mathematics course

There had been a further meeting to discuss the proposed course in Computational Biology. The block structure was agreed and appeared well balanced. Although originally intended to be run from October 2020 events had meant this could only potentially be run from October 2021 at the earliest. It was agreed that a properly considered course introduced later would be better than a half-ready course brought in earlier. There was some uncertainty at this stage as to what Zoology's role in this would be, but it was hoped that this would be resolved by the time of the next Committee meeting.

851 PART II BBS

851.1 Major and minor subjects for 2020-21

It was noted with regret that the following subjects had been withdrawn from the BBS course for the academic year 2020-21 by their host departments:

- ETECH (minor subject)

852 CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR PART II PATHOLOGY

The Department of Pathology had requested some changes to their Part II course, which were circulated as **BSC.20.10**. These had already been approved by the higher level Committees (including GBEC) and would be effective from October 2021

853 ADMISSIONS

Members were asked to comment on plans for admissions for 2021-22.

For the 2020-21 academic year 269 NST students stating biology as their preference had been admitted. The intention was to revert to normal admissions numbers in 2021-22. The committee requested data on numbers for past years

The increased admissions for 2020 would have implications for Part II project places and for Part IB practical allocations. Departments would need to think about how they will address this issue.

ACTION: Paul Elliot to bring admissions data to next meeting of the Committee

854 NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 6 July 2020 were circulated as **BSC.20.11** and noted.

855 PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the PNB Management Committee meeting held on 27 April 2020 were circulated as **BSC.20.12**. It was noted that some PNB students were selecting all their modules from PDN.

PDN were currently oversubscribed and therefore they felt that this was a problem for them. Two PDN modules had been removed as choices from the PNB course, which was hoped to reduce the opportunities for students to take all-PDN modules.

The Committee thought it would be useful to see data on module choice by students over the years – Dr Plaisted-Grant agreed to provide this for the next meeting.

ACTION: Dr Plaisted-Grant to provide PNB module choice data for the next meeting of the BSC.

There was a concern that some students were using PNB as a ‘back door’ to PDN – this was not what the course was for and there was some discussion on whether it should be allowed.

It was agreed that the BSC should recommend to the PNB Management Committee that students be prevented from taking all their modules from a single department.

ACTION: Chair to take BSC recommendation to the PNB Management Committee.

It was noted that a review for the PNB course had been planned and a Chair had been appointed. There had been an enforced hiatus, but the review should now be picked up and taken forward as soon as possible.

ACTION: Chair and secretary to take review forward.

856 DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Minutes of the DoBS Management Committee meeting held on 22 September were circulated as **BSC.20.13**. There was note of the efforts to gather information on effects of online teaching on the student experience. It was also noted that some colleges were struggling to find supervisors who were prepared to do supervisions in person.

857 ITEMS FOR REPORT

857.1 Form and Conduct notice for BBS minor subject in Surgical and Radiological Anatomy (840.2)

The form and conduct notice has been forwarded to Education and Student Policy.

858 A.O.B.

858.1 Online teaching for 2020-21

Most members, including the student member, reported that online teaching was going o.k. from the student perspective so far but would need to await further feedback.

Plant Sciences had looked at engagement with Moodle teaching and found that 20% of students had not engaged with any online teaching, and that most had not engaged with all online teaching at Part I.

PDN were trying to monitor engagement with online teaching and were planning to have more in-person teaching in the Lent term.

There would not be a Faculty-wide policy on in-person teaching as the responsibility for determining how many students could be safely accommodated had been devolved to departments. Departments were responsible for producing risk assessments for their own facilities.

It was noted that there was a central University website that reported on numbers of student and staff who had tested positive for Covid. These figures did not break down by college or department.

The IA vets had not been engaging with online teaching – the Department of Veterinary Medicine felt that this was at least partially due to the lack of structure which did not help new students adapt to University learning.

Some colleges had organised spaces where their students could attend lectures together on one computer/login ID – this could give misleadingly low figures for attendance of live online lectures.

Other departments and courses reported good attendance and engagement with their online courses. There would be a need to continue monitoring student feedback and engagement throughout the term, and this should involve supervisors.

ACTION: Departmental representatives to report on student feedback/engagement with online teaching at the December meeting.

Some issues were noted with the live Q&A sessions – some of these were going on much longer than planned which was a good indication of student engagement but also meant lecturers had to spend yet more time per lecture. The Q&A sessions were however perceived as being very useful, as were online chat/text Q&A sessions.

858.2 Changes to Bioinformatics module examination

Proposed changes to the examinations for the Bioinformatics module (available as part of Part II BBS, PDN and Zoology) were circulated as **BSC.20.14**.

It had been requested that the changes be brought in for the Easter 2021 examinations as part of the emergency adjustments to examinations being requested by the University. However, the Committee were concerned that a change from a written examination paper to submitted work would be too big a change for students who had already been told what the format of the examination would be. In addition there were concerns about the timings of submission of the written work and whether this would clash with dissertation/project report writing over the Easter vacation. Perhaps the course could be taught in the Michaelmas term

If there were concerns about how well written papers discriminated between candidates it needed to be considered how well submitted essays would address this.

ACTION: secretary to feedback to Bioinformatics Course Organiser.

859 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting would be scheduled for 2pm on Wednesday 2 December.