

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 12 October 2022**

There were present:

Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, SBS), Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Dr Nik Cunniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Dr Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), Dr Uta Paszkowski (Plant Sciences, BBS), Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology), Dr Dee Scadden (online learning, Biochemistry), Dr David Summers (Genetics, Chair of the Faculty Board of Biology), Dr Rik van Veen (Pharmacology), Mrs Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

962. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mrs Cathy Barton (SPS Teaching Admin), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy)

963. MEMBERSHIP

Prof Uta Paszkowski replaces Prof Stewart Sage as BBS Course Organiser.

964. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

965. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS

Dr Scadden reported. The examinations carried out on Inspira had run smoothly for the Easter examinations and the September resits for medics and vets. There was an update for the platform about which a communication would be sent to departments shortly.

Some false blind grade numbers (BGN) would be generated for the purposes of testing and mock examinations.

Teaching Administrators in departments would need to engage and help spread the load of running Inspira.

Dr Scadden had met with Catherine Fage and Alice Benton at EQPO. A report would be going to these about Inspira and it would also be circulated to members of this Committee.

It was felt that recording of candidates was a valuable part of ensuring adherence to examination conditions and assisting with other processes (e.g. examination review requests). It was noted that PBS used the browser version of Inspira for remote examinations and did not invigilate candidates – this was being reconsidered for following years.

Dr Edgley mentioned that upload of examination papers for the September resits should be organised before August. There seemed to be less Central support for the resit examinations compared to the Easter examinations. In future it was anticipated that uploads could be done at the departmental level.

The University was happy so far with the Inspira pilot, but there was a need to ensure the platform was supported and resourced. Process mapping would be carried out in 2022-23, the central University would liaise with Dr Scadden for this and any broader roll-out across the University would be done with her input.

Various Inspira processes needed administrative support (e.g. timetabling), and recruitment of a person for this role was under consideration.

It was noted that running the Inspira examinations in departmental facilities worked well and added more flexibility to timetabling than if they were run in centrally managed facilities.

A new piece of software (SEAtS) was being trialled to monitor attendance – students were required to download an app onto their phones and a beacon in the teaching room would detect and allow them to register for the class. Manual registration could be done on the system for those without the app or a phone. It was piloted for medics and vets who had a diligent attendance requirement for their courses. It was noted that attendance at some NST IB lectures was poor in the last academic year so it would be useful to at least monitor levels of attendance and identify those who were routinely missing lectures/practicals. SEAtS was a pay-per student platform and therefore was currently limited to medics and vets. If the trial was successful and if a need for NST students to use the system were identified, it could be extended if departments were willing to fund it.

966. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2022 were circulated and approved.

Dr Scadden left the meeting.

967. MATTERS ARISING

967.1. Shared course rotations (945)

The proposal for shared course rotations had been forwarded to Faculty Board members for comment. It would be discussed at the Faculty Board meeting on 17 October.

967.2. Course Organiser and Senior Examiner meetings (922.3)

The Chair proposed running a session for Course Organisers and suggested a session on inclusive teaching with a guest speaker such as John Harding from ADRC. The Committee supported this and agreed to an online meeting.

ACTION: Chair and secretary to set up meeting between Course Organisers and ADRC.

968. CCTL DIRECTORS OF TEACHING FORUM

Several members of the Committee attended the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL) forum held on 21 September.

Some issues the Committee were asked to note:

- Inclusive teaching: there were lots of resources available via tableaux:
 - [CCTL webpage](#).
- Several other documents from the meeting may be of interest:
 - [Agenda](#)
 - [Combined slides](#)
 - [Summary of resources for awarding gaps](#).
 - [Mind the Gap Toolkit](#)
 - [Mind the Gap workshop series](#)
 - [Awarding Gaps Consultation Team](#)

Some members did not receive an invitation to this forum. Members can sign up to the CCTL newsletter via the links at <https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/newsletter>.

969. EXAMINATIONS FOR 2022-23

The formats of examinations proposed for 2022-23 did not deviate from any of the options in the framework for assessment and therefore were approved for the coming academic year. Longer term changes would need to be approved by the usual routes and ultimately ASEC and so departments would need to decide what the long term format of their examination papers would be.

In particular, if departments wanted to retain the current 5 hour format they would need to update their regulations as soon as possible. Clarification was requested on whether examinations were specified as closed or open book in regulations.

It was noted that form and conduct notices were not needed for 2022-23. However, departments will still need to keep students informed of any changes to form and conduct (e.g. via websites or Moodle sites). Long-term it was not known whether the form and conduct notice process would be retained, if not consideration would need to be given on how a formal record of changes could be maintained.

ACTION: secretary to contact Course Organisers

970. PRACTICAL ALLOCATIONS FOR PART IA AND PART IB

The University Information Services (UIS) had developed a new system for allocating Part IA although the user interface would likely remain the same for a number of years. A meeting to discuss how the process ran and future plans would be held in November. It was anticipated that improvements would be made in communications to students and colleges, especially relating to how lecture series were labelled.

Part IB practical allocations were now permanently to use an online system in place of the in-person event run in the Senate House. Alternatives to the current Moodle site would be explored. An advantage of the online system was that information on student choices could be shared easily across departments.

It may be useful for someone to brief Directors of Studies on these changes.

971. PART II BBS

971.1. BBS cohort for 2022-23

A total of 167 students had been allocated a place on the NST II BBS course for 2022-23. There were more issues than usual in allocating students to their preferred minor subject choice, but the vast majority of students now had a minor subject and a major subject.

971.2. Welcome event for BBS students

This was run on 4 October. The BBS Course Organiser (Prof Paszkowski) reported that the event ran well with many students attending.

971.3. Student Consultative Committee

Student reps were being recruited and a meeting would be organised for close to the end of Michaelmas term.

972. UNIVERSITY OPEN DAYS

The University open days ran on Thursday 7 July and Friday 8 July as an in person event, with supporting information available online. The NST had an information stand in the Student Services Centre and was staffed by academics from different departments across the two days.

It was noted that there were a lot of members of the public trying to talk to small numbers of staff, and it was likely that some did not have time to wait. Sample lectures and other activities that would usually be run in departments were in most cases not running in 2022. If these could be revived it may give attendees more opportunities to talk to someone face to face.

The Committee recalled that in 2018-19 a working group had been set up to improve the biological sciences' profile at the open days. It was agreed to revive this group.

ACTION: Committee members to ask within their departments to contact the secretary if they want to be involved in an open day group.

973. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes for a meeting held on 15 March 2022 were circulated as **BSC.22.22**.

Minutes for a meeting held on 10 May 2022 were circulated as **BSC.22.23**.

At its meeting on 11 October the Committee agreed to amend the weighting of Part IA such that the mathematics subjects would contribute 100% compared to 75% in previous years. The change should be implemented in time for the 2023-24 academic year. A new scaling system was also proposed and agreed. This normalised percentages in place of the piece-wise scaling currently in use. It was also agreed that individual essay marks would be reported to college DoS via the college mark book.

The BSC noted the minutes and suggested that a meeting be held with DoS to explain the changes to scaling, weighting and marks reporting. There may be some apparent discrepancies between marks and classes for some candidates that would need to be well explained ahead of publication/release of results.

974. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

It was noted that the next meeting of the PNB Management Committee was due to be held on 14 October.

975. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Members of the Committee would report on the business at the next meeting.

976. A.O.B.

976.1. Admissions

Admissions for NST (Biology and Physical Sciences) were down on the planned intake by 47 students – this may be an artefact caused by the bulge in admissions in 2020 and associated caution when colleges made offers. More thought needed to be given to the correct cover ratio, and Cambridge Admissions Office (CAO) were being consulted on this. It had been suggested that DoSes should meet with their admissions tutors and confirm their planned intake with the convenor in advance of the round.

There were indications at the time of the meeting that applications in 2022 might be higher (but following the meeting application rate dropped, leading to an overall reduction in applications)

For 2024, at a DoS meeting on 13 October 2022 the admissions requirements were discussed. It was agreed that there should be a recommendation for maths, and recommended subject requirements would be mathematics plus two other science subjects. The wording for exceptions to these requirements needed to be very carefully thought about.

Dr Cunniffe left the meeting.

976.2. Medic and vet timetable

This was not yet available in a format that could be accessed other than by downloading particular students' timetables. An add-on had been purchased that should allow access but it was found to be incompatible with the University's Thursday to Wednesday academic weeks, and UIS did not yet have the resource to address this.

976.3. Neurobiology teaching

Some issues were anticipated in resourcing of Neurobiology teaching. Several key members of staff were due to leave and there were no immediate replacements for them. The Department of Physiology, Development and Neuroscience had tabled a paper at a recent meeting of the NST Management Committee setting out the problems with some suggestions. The NST Management Committee and the BSC felt that this paper should be discussed and agreed with the PNB Course Management Committee before coming to these Committees.

The Chair, Dr Edgley, Dr Plaisted-Grant and Dr Summers would meet to further discuss the process.

ACTION: Chair to meet with selected members to discuss further action.

976.4. Education Monitoring and Review

Two papers **BSC.22.24** (Overview) and **BSC.22.25** (Education Monitoring and Review) were circulated with details of a possible replacement for the Learning and Teaching Reviews (LTR) and the Annual Programme Reviews (APR).

The proposal was for all courses to be reviewed once every two years. The approach would be data-driven and was intended to be light-touch. Although it wasn't clear yet what data would be requested, the aspiration would be that it would draw on existing data sets. The Education Quality and Policy Office would then assess this information and decide whether any further action was necessary. There were three levels:

- Standard monitoring; for courses that were running in an acceptable way.
- Enhanced monitoring – for courses with some issues identified.
- General Board action – for courses with severe problems.

The overview suggested that individual departments would be asked to provide the relevant data on their courses. It was unclear at this time what the process would be for the NST given it was multi-departmental at the whole course and individual subject level. This consideration had also to be given to the MedST/VetST, and for these the requirements of external bodies (GMC/RCVS) would also have to be accounted for.

Post meeting note.

EQPO will draft an amended form for NST to facilitate a response

977. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Meeting dates for the 2022-23 academic year were confirmed as:

2pm on Wednesday 30 November 2022

2pm on Wednesday 15 March 2023

2pm on a date in early July to be confirmed.

Depending on room availability these meetings may be held in person.