

## **FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE**

There was a meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 11 March 2020** in meeting **room A, 17 Mill Lane**

### **MINUTES**

There were present: Ms J Clare, Dr J Davies, Dr S Edgley, Mr P Elliot, Dr G Fraser, Dr S Fulton (Chair), Dr K Plaisted-Grant, Dr D Scadden, Dr R van Veen, Dr T Weil, Dr C Pillinger (secretary).

#### **821. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Dr H Canuto, Prof N Gay, Prof C Howe, Miss J Kaur, Dr D Longbottom, Dr D Summers, Prof A Williams.

#### **822. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2019 were circulated and approved.

#### **823. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **823.1. Project and dissertation supervision (808)**

The Chair reported that Sarah d'Ambrumenil had recently spoken to the Faculty Board of Biology Papers tabled at the Faculty Board meeting were circulated as **BSC.20.01**. The guidance had been reformatted and it was made clear that departments could push back against complaints they thought were unjustified. However, some additional clarity was still desired on communications, and specifically whether anything had been done to reduce the impact of individuals being contacted by OSCCA directly – for example contacting via the HoD.

Departmental representatives were urged to forward further queries to the Chair or to Sarah d'Ambrumenil, Head of OSCCA

#### **824. PART II BBS**

##### **824.1. Student Consultative Committee**

A meeting was held on 9 March. In Prof Gay's absence the Chair reported that students had raised issues on the dissertation title allocation method. The current feeling was for departments to keep their existing systems as it was not desired to have a single method across departments. The system for BBS posters and presentations should be retained. In principle there was no opposition to remote supervisions, but it should be seen if face-to-face supervisions were preferred and the wording on the supervision webpage changed accordingly.

Post meeting note: There will need to be revision to take account of COVID related advice on social distancing.

***ACTION: secretary to check wording on supervisions webpage.***

#### **825. PAYMENT FOR PROJECT AND DISSERTATION SUPERVISION**

It was noted that the Senior Tutors Committee (STC) had made clear, following a series of meetings in 2018, that colleges were prepared to pay for supervisions for Part II projects and dissertations to a maximum of one hour per week per student (or in the case of BBS dissertations up to 4 supervisions), provided a report was submitted via CamCORS. Concern had been expressed at the STC that not many reports were being received.

The BSC asked that departments remind all involved with providing supervisions (both UTOs and non-UTOs) that they are entitled (although not required) to claim payments for supervisions. Further, supervision reports are vital to colleges in tracking their students during their Part II studies and therefore the STC would greatly appreciate supervisors submitting reports on CamCORS.

***ACTION: Departmental representatives to circulate information on supervision payments within their departments.***

#### **826. REVIEW OF PART II PSYCHOLOGY, NEUROSCIENCE AND BEHAVIOUR**

Professor Barry Everitt (FRS) has been appointed Chair of the review panel for Part II PNB.

#### **827. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting held on 13 January 2020 were circulated as **BSC.20.02**. Members are asked to note that minute 8b is no longer due to be actioned – all departments currently contributing to the course would continue to do so. There were concerns that too high a proportion of projects were taken in the Department of Psychology and that students saw this as an opportunity to take Part II Psychology through the ‘back door’. The Management Committee intended to review its teaching and perhaps provide grouping of modules in cognate areas – this would need to be done bearing in mind the needs of courses sharing PNB modules. There needed to be some balance between student choice and course coherence, a broad versus a narrow focus.

Neuroscience had struggled with cross-departmental issues for many years – this still needed to be addressed but there was some will to get this done now.

***ACTION: Chair to feedback Committee's comments to the PNB Management Committee.***

**828. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting held on 26 November 2019 were circulated as **BSC.20.03**. Unconfirmed minutes of a meeting held on 28 January 2020 were circulated as **BSC.20.04**. The Cambridge Admissions Office should be asked about numbers of students attending the NST lectures – they were likely to be high. It was noted that the changes to NSTIB examinations had been approved and would be published soon.

**829. PROPOSED CHANGES TO PBS AND PSYCHOLOGY NST TEACHING**

A proposal for changes to the PBS course was circulated as **BSC.20.05**. Proposals for changes to Psychology teaching in the NST was circulated as **BSC.20.06**. Educational and structural issues were making it difficult to teach and deliver across PBS and NST.

KPG presented the following proposal. In PBS there was a focus on the curriculum with a proposal to add papers to Part IA (PBS3) and Part IB, making more NST-style teaching available to PBS students. There would be greater harmonisation between NST and PBS teaching, more lectures per week (three up from two) and practical classes.

It was hoped that these changes would bring all students, irrespective of their background, up to specifications required for taking Part II Psychology. At the moment it was particularly difficult to get students from different backgrounds up to speed, with students coming from PBS, NST, MedST and VetST. The intention therefore was use PBS courses to bring NST, MedST and VetST students up to speed. In MedST there was currently quite a bit of psychology teaching, but it was scattered throughout the curriculum and was missing statistics. This year online training of statistics was being trialled over the long vacation for students entering Part II – unfortunately there had been very little engagement in face-to-face provision offered previously. This resource would also be made available to PBS and NST students, but it was noted that most NST students should be adequately prepared having taken the IA Mathematical Biology course.

The proposed changes to the NST routes were that the Part IB course 'Experimental Psychology' would instead be offered at Part IA as PBS4, NST students could then use this as a means to enter PBS Part II which in turn would replace NST Part II Psychology. The Management Committee for NST Part IB Neurobiology would need to be consulted closely on this proposal as it

may have implications for their teaching – students taking this course would need some training in Psychology.

Some account would need to be taken of the changing cohort for PBS, and there could be issues incorporating any changes into the NST timetable. There was some uncertainty about how much extra teaching would be required on the course and it was requested that the Department of Psychology provide some figures for this.

Demand for the PBS course was generally higher than for NST Psychology, but PBS students wanted more science, in particular more neuroscience and they wanted this earlier in the course. Under the proposals the PBS course would be the only British Psychological Society accredited course at the University of Cambridge.

An estimate of numbers needed to be provided. Currently the Department of Psychology took on 150 Part II projects per year, of which 80 were PBS and the rest NST/MedST/VetST in either the Part II Psychology course or the Part II PNB course. The Committee requested some firmer figures for these over years so that the potential impact of the proposals could be assessed.

The Department of Psychology wished to emphasise that in spite of the proposed discontinuation of NST Part II Psychology they still wished to be engaged in the NST. It was noted that the PBS scored top for widening participation. Relating to student matters the Committee asked if a survey of current and past students could be carried out to see what the student views on these changes would be.

Across the wider biological NST there continued to be pressure on project places – restrictions such as not allowing animals to be used in Part II projects or not allowing use of certain items of equipment reduced the potential numbers of projects that could be offered. As numbers of project places decreased greater thought needed to be given to how they could be delivered more efficiently – for example doubling students up on certain projects would allow more places but needed to be carefully thought through. Alternatively, Part II courses might only teach via lectures and practical classes with projects being reserved for an expanded number of Part III courses. In any case it was agreed that a School level discussion was required on funding for project places.

The Committee agreed that some further information as described above would be needed before the proposal went to the Faculty Board of Biology. The NST Management Committee would also need to consider whether the PBS4 course could be accommodated in the NSTIA timetable.

It was agreed to defer a decision on the proposals until the following information was available:

- 1) Numbers of students likely to be affected by the changes to the course.
- 2) A student consultation had been carried out.
- 3) Consideration of the impact on the review of NSTIB biology courses.
- 4) A consideration of the impacts on the NSTIA timetable.

***ACTION: Department of Psychology to address above concerns before returning to BSC and Faculty Board of Biology.***

### **830. COMMITTEE OF DIRECTORS OF STUDIES IN NATURAL SCIENCES (BIOLOGICAL)**

Minutes meetings held since May 2019 were not yet available and will be circulated when ready. The Chair reported that admissions assessment would retain the section II – Physics had requested this. Cambridge Assessment were working on a different model – section I with various options and section II with bespoke questions depending on the candidate. The old-style section one currently looked the favourite. It was agreed that tests for different aspects of the course couldn't be too divergent and that a discussion on focus versus depth needed to be had. A discussion was due to be had on 13 March where it was hoped some consensus could be achieved from the inconsistent and varied views expressed so far.

### **831. ITEMS FOR REPORT**

#### **831.1. Part IB regulations changes (810)**

It was noted that these had been approved by the Faculty Board with recommendations to clarify whether some of the revised examinations had 'wet' practical papers and that 'dry' practical papers be counted as written papers for clarity. The NST Management Committee also approved the changes and these have now been forwarded to the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee (ASEC).

#### **831.2. Part II Pharmacology regulations changes (811)**

It was noted that these had been approved by the NST Management Committee and the Faculty Board and had been passed on to ASEC.

#### **831.3. 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 was approved by circulation. This will appear in the list of available minor subjects from the 2020-21 academic year.

#### **831.4. Examinations – Core Competences (818.2)**

Dr Canuto will report on the School of Clinical Medicine's core competences at the next meeting.

**831.5. Terms of Reference (805.2)**

It was noted that the revised ToR were approved by the Faculty Board.

**832. A.O.B.**

There was none.

**833. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The remaining meeting date for 2019-20 was noted as 1 July 2020 from 14:00-15:30 in Meeting Room A, first floor, 17 Mill Lane.