

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

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 13 October 2021**

### **MINUTES**

#### **There were present:**

Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, Director of Education NST Biology), Dr Holly Canuto (Director of Education, MVST), Dr Nik Cunniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Dr Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), Catherine Ngai (Student representative), Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology), Dr Stuart Sage (BBS), Dr David Summers (Chair Faculty of Biology, Genetics), Dr Rik van Veen (Pharmacology), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy), Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

#### **901. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Dr Dee Scadden (Director of Technology Enabled Learning), Prof Alun Williams (Veterinary Medicine).

#### **902. MEMBERSHIP**

Dr Jess Gwynne replaces Dr Deborah Longbottom as the School of Physical Sciences representative. The Chair welcomed Dr Gwynne to the Committee.

#### **903. MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021 were circulated and approved.

#### **904. BIOLOGICAL NATURAL SCIENCES CURRICULUM REVIEW (BNSCR)**

A review of NST Part IB biology teaching and examination had started in April 2021. Dr Weil reported to the Committee, members were invited to view the review website at:

[https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/sites/SBIOS\\_Intranet/SitePages/Biological-Natural\\_Sciences-Curriculum-Review1.aspx](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/sites/SBIOS_Intranet/SitePages/Biological-Natural_Sciences-Curriculum-Review1.aspx).

The BSC and other bodies would be continuously updated on the progress of the review. The review group was conscious that students should not be overlooked. Things that would be looked at included:

- 1) Course Management and Course support structures.
- 2) Diversity of teaching methods.
- 3) Assessment

The expected timelines were that the review would be complete by December 2022, but that implementation was unlikely to occur earlier than 2024-25. Several workshops were currently meeting and there was an overarching Steering Group Committee. There would be discussions on course content and structure, teaching and assessment delivery. Standardisation of processes across different courses would also be looked at to facilitate running of courses across years.

Reports on the progress of the review were currently only available to members of the review groups. It was anticipated that by the end of term these should be available to all. Members were encouraged to contact Dr Weil or Dr Michel if they wanted any information on the review.

## **905. MATTERS ARISING**

### **905.1. Proposal for new IB Course –Mathematical and Computational Biology (876.1)**

This was considered and approved at a meeting of the NST Management Committee on 12 October 2021. The Faculty Board of Biology will consider the proposal at its meeting on 18 October. It was noted that for NST as a whole a recommendation that students bring their own computer to University had been approved by the NST Management Committee and put into regulations and the Programme Specification.

### **905.2. Framework for assessment 2021-22 (892)**

Proposals from the School had been submitted to GBEC.

Dr Weil reported on progress of the pilot using Inspira software to assess Parts IA and IB of NST biology, PBS and MedST/VetST. The Education Quality and Policy Office (EQPO) were enthusiastic and might look at making the platform available across the University depending on the pilot.

Training of Senior Examiners and others involved in the examination process would be made available with personnel from Inspira and the School's Learning Technologists delivering the training. Timelines e.g. for submission of papers should be more flexible than the previous system of paper examinations.

Mock examinations would be available for students so they could get used to the examination environment that Inspira provided. Staff would also be able to access these.

In terms of timelines, students would be informed pending formal legal sign-off by the University – it was hoped that this would be done in the week following this meeting.

The NST Part IB and MedST/VetST Parts IA and IB would be run as closed book examinations.

The Committee were concerned that GBEC had been slow in previous years to approve courses of action, and that this might delay the roll out of Inspira.

It was not yet known how examinations would be uploaded to Inspira, and whether it would be possible to upload different paper formats, but this would become clear in time. It probably would not involve coding reassignment, although it was understood that it was possible to use this method.

It was noted that examinations using Moodle required a lot of checking – Inspira should be less time-consuming in this regard.

The team looking into implementation of Inspira were conscious of the time pressure and were pushing to have the system set up ASAP.

### **905.3. STEM SMART Support programmes (892)**

Paul Elliot reported on obtaining some wording for a support role for STEM SMART. It was now too late to get in on the first run, so the next years' run would be looked at. There was a need to find people who would be prepared to write modules over the next year. There was funding to resource this at the department/Faculty level.

Alternatively, biology could attempt something independently of STEM SMART. However, this would run the risk of looking like the NST was being split along Physical Sciences/Biological Sciences lines, so it would probably be better to work within the STEM SMART system.

Sampling sites may be useful for each biology course to allow students to get a feel of what each course could offer. Representatives for each 1<sup>st</sup> year course could be appointed from amongst post-graduate students or other roles, these could be paid positions.

Material was available from other courses (e.g. Outreach) – these could be repurposed for STEM SMART. Quite a lot of content would be required – lectures, problem solving and associated supervisions, so it was potentially quite a heavy load.

It was urged that the IA Mathematical Biology module should not be forgotten, nor seen as a weaker cousin of the IA Mathematics module.

It was proposed that a small group of interested people be assembled and meet with Lisa Jardine-Wright to discuss funding, structure and timelines.

Committee members were urged to contact Paul Elliot with names of individuals who would be interested in being involved. It was emphasised that people involved would need to allow for at least a year-long commitment for 2022-23 and associated planning and discussions.

***ACTION: Committee members to contact Paul Elliot with names of people interested in being involved***

#### **906. DIGITAL TEACHING**

Dr Scadden was unable to attend the meeting but will report at the next meeting.

#### **907. PART II ALLOCATIONS**

A report of the part II allocations process was circulated as **BSC.21.18**. Also circulated was a proposal from Dr Claire Michel for a revision to the Part II allocations process (**BSC.21.19**).

It was noted that PDN had a large increase in applications. The department was reviewing its Part II provision – there were a lot of shared courses which made the course unwieldy – streamlining some of these may reduce the numbers of students applying for the course.

There was a problem with admissions and those who managed to get a Part II project. Currently £500 was allowed for PDN's Part II project costs but this had been agreed some 30 years ago and was not enough for most of the current projects. Research grant money could no longer be used, and there was a lot of pressure on people and consumables.

The Faculty of Biology and its departments were not in control of numbers of biology students – this was the responsibility of the colleges. Departments could advise and issue guidance but it was not known what form this could take. The Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos had experienced problems with admissions.

Too many admissions could lead to some NST students not getting their first choice or a project – was this fair? In some departments there was a lot of competition for what were perceived to be the 'best' projects. The fees for students should in theory be able to cover project costs, but in practice these were not allocated to departments in an accessible way.

A big problem was finding sufficient supervisors. It could be that the way projects were run needed to be reconsidered, such as having more than one student per project/supervisor. The purpose of the project also needed to be thought about – what were the teaching aims and learning outcomes. Also

were the outcomes for medics/vets the same as for NST students? It was also queried whether projects were too narrowly focussed. Should they perhaps be focussed on more generic skills, and should these be taught earlier than present?

Part II Pathology did offer projects that were supervised by researchers in the School of Clinical Medicine, this could reduce some pressure on biology departments.

On the proposal to change Part II allocations the NST Management Committee were supportive – the BSC were also supportive and would be interested to see a report into the proposed change and modelling of the possible effects of the new system.

#### **908. SENIOR EXAMINERS REPORTS 2020-21**

A summary of NST biology Senior Examiner reports would be circulated at the next meeting.

#### **909. PART II BBS**

##### **909.1. Student Consultative Committee**

A meeting would be held at the end of the Michaelmas term once members have been appointed.

##### **909.2. BBS course general update**

There are 134 BBS students on the course. An introductory session was held with Dr Sage and the University Library on 5 October which was attended by at least 110 students.

#### **910. COURSE ORGANISER AND SENIOR EXAMINER MEETINGS**

Several meetings had been held a few years ago for biology NST Course Organisers. These covered topics such as how to operate a Moodle site and other common issues that might concern Course Organisers, and in particular be of use for those new to Course Organisation. The Chair asked the Committee for its thoughts on reviving this.

Also suggested is an annual ‘training’ meeting of Senior Examiners to discuss how the examinations will be run and what Senior Examiners can expect in terms of support and what they need to deliver. This may be of particular use for those new to the Senior Examiner role, but it would be useful for more experienced Senior Examiners to attend to lend their advice and share experiences. It would be run by someone experienced in the role, plus representatives from the School/NST Management Committee/MVST Part I Committee.

The Committee were supportive of the concepts of meetings for Course Organisers and training courses for Senior Examiners.

***ACTION: Chair and secretary to organise meetings.***

#### **911. EXAMINATIONS – FORM AND CONDUCT NOTICES**

Committee members were asked that if any courses intended to make minor changes to their examinations they would need to submit a form and conduct notice to the Secretary of the NST Management Committee by early November to be implemented in time for the Easter 2022 examinations. More substantial changes that needed a regulations change would only be implemented by the Easter 2023 examinations at the earliest.

***ACTION: Committee members to check their departments' courses and inform the NST Administrator of any form and conduct notices.***

#### **912. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

There were no minutes to present – a meeting had been held on 12 October and the minutes of this would be circulated to the next meeting.

#### **913. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

There are no further minutes of the PNB Management Committee since the last meeting held on 26 April 2021. The next meeting would be held later in the Michaelmas term for which the minutes would be circulated to the next meeting of the BSC.

#### **914. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

The last set of minutes available for this Committee was from 18 February 2021. Further meetings' minutes may be available for circulation at the next meeting.

#### **915. REPORTED BUSINESS**

##### **915.1. Transition and bridging project board - information about new board and request for representative**

Dr Alex Pryce, the Foundation Year Course Director, had been in touch with the School asking if anyone would be interested in joining the new Transition and Bridging Project Board (formerly the Foundation Year Project Board) that will be running for the first time in the 2021/22 academic year. The terms of reference could be viewed [here](#).

Dr Holly Canuto was nominated to join the Board for Biological Sciences, anyone else interested in joining should contact Tim Weil.

## **916. A.O.B.**

### **916.1. Examination rotations for shared courses**

There was some concern from the IA Mathematical Biology Management Committee about departmental commitments to examination. At the outset of the newly formatted course all departments in the Faculty of Biology had agreed to take on equal responsibility for examination on an agreed rota. However, there was now some disagreement on which departments should be providing a Senior Examiner, which had increased the pressure on other departments.

The Committee felt that the rolling programme of departmental responsibilities should be brought forward to even the spread of responsibilities across years – this was a particular concern for PDN.

Streamlining the biology courses at Part IB might alleviate the burden, but until the review of Part IB biology teaching was complete the current rota would have to be borne by departments as agreed. It was noted that in some cases local agreements had been reached to adjust rotas to accommodate staff availabilities.

For the IA Mathematical Biology Senior Examiner rota this would need to be considered outside the Committee meeting. A general question was if a department did not teach on a subject should it be required to examine it? In any case if previous agreements had been made these should be adhered to. In the case of the Department of Pharmacology teaching was carried out by an external lecturer and therefore at the inception of the new module it was anticipated that they would contribute to the examination.

### **916.2. Admissions**

The numbers of NST applicants were down compared to previous years, by 50. There needed to be a discussion about ideal numbers so colleges could be advised accordingly. There needed to be some data on deferrals for the current academic year so that this could be accounted for in next years' admissions figures.

***ACTION: Paul Elliot to update the Committee on admissions statistics at next meeting.***

## **917. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**

The next meeting was scheduled for 1 December at 2pm. Further meetings were scheduled for the following dates:

16 March 2022

6 July 2022