

FACULTY BOARD OF BIOLOGY - BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES COMMITTEE

There was an online meeting of the Biological Sciences Committee at **2 pm on Wednesday 6 July 2022**

MINUTES

There were present:

Dr Sandra Fulton (Chair, SBS), Dr Holly Canuto (from item 942.1, Director of Medical and Veterinary Education), Dr Nik Cunniffe (Plant Sciences), Dr Steve Edgley (PDN), Paul Elliot (College admissions), Dr Gillian Fraser (Pathology), Jess Gwynne (Physical Sciences), Dr Mairi Kilkenny (Biochemistry), Dr Nick Mundy (Zoology), Dr Stuart Sage (BBS, PDN), Miss Vianca Shah (Student representative), Dr David Summers (Genetics, Chair of the Faculty Board of Biology), Dr Rik van Veen (Pharmacology), Dr Tim Weil (Deputy Head of School, Undergraduate Strategy), Prof Alun Williams (from item 942, Veterinary Medicine), Dr Chad Pillinger (secretary).

938. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Dr Kate Plaisted-Grant (Psychology), Dr Dee Scadden (online learning, Biochemistry), Leanne Wilson (NST Administrator).

939. MEMBERSHIP

Vianca Shah joined the Committee as the Faculty student representative.

940. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

941. MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2022 were circulated. A correction was requested for item 924 to rephrase such that it was clear the proposed Part II for medics and vets was optional, not compulsory.

942. BNSCR REPORT AND AWARDING GAPS

Dr Claire Michel attended the meeting to discuss the BNSCR report (**BSC.22.17**). A report on awarding gaps was also circulated as **BSC.22.17a**.

The first year discovery phase was now complete. Working groups had been set up to discuss:

- 1) Course content.
- 2) Course management.
- 3) Teaching delivery.
- 4) Assessment.

The focus was on Part I at the moment, and in particular Part IB. Nine recommendations had been made in **BSC.22.17**.

In considering course structure there had previously been no consensus on this. It was noted that there was some overlap with some elements of the MedST/VetST course. It was also intended to map Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) against the teaching delivered. The task is more complex than MedST/VetST as not all students will be taking the same courses.

Practicals and field courses, progression of skills, assessment (including awarding gaps and online assessment), leadership structures, communication, equality and engagement with colleges would all be looked at in due course.

Volunteers were needed for these working groups which may merge with relevant groups from the medical and veterinary curriculum review. It was hoped to form the groups over the summer.

Prof Alun Williams joined the meeting.

The size of courses would be looked at as part of the review, in addition to considering the workload of students and staff.

It was acknowledged that there were a lot of working groups and not all of these would have representation from all departments. It would be seen how the process worked and adjustments to the structure of the review working groups made if necessary. Any member of staff would be welcome to join any of the working groups.

There was discussion as to whether the examinations should be earlier so that the course structure/content reflected the examinations, or if it should be the other way around but no consensus was reached.

942.1. Awarding gaps

Dr Liz Hook presented a report (**BSC.22.17a**) on awarding gaps within the MedST, VetST and NST courses. It was acknowledged that there were some limitations to the data with some sets having only small numbers for certain categories e.g. black students. Categorisation of disability depended on a self-declaration on admission and did not capture later declarations. It was also not possible to capture overlaps between different categories, and only ethnicity, gender and disability were considered separately in the report. These limitations notwithstanding the results reflected those obtained from University and sector-wide studies.

Overall, those from a BAME ethnicity, and females tended to obtain a lower percentage of firsts. Within the vet cohort where females were in the majority females did better than males. Gaps tended to narrow by the Part II.

Focus groups with students from relevant groups would be run by people independent from the School to reduce the chance of bias.

It was queried whether the Part II subjects for the NST should be treated as a homogeneous whole or treated separately. This may allow some inferences as to why awarding gaps apparently narrowed or reversed by the Part II. Knowledge from other sources should also be utilised e.g. Athena SWAN submissions. However, the data was based on the status of students on admission, there was no information on whether a student went on to study NST biology or physical sciences.

For gender, it was possible to drill down further for individual Part II subjects, but unfortunately this was not the case for BAME or disability. Data on socio-economic status was not available. The data that was used in the report was obtained from HEAT and there were limits on what data could be kept or taken forward - Paul Elliott offered to look into this. Some requests for data had been declined.

There had been a brief analysis of individual Part II subjects and this indicated that there was a bias towards males taking subjects that had a tendency to award higher marks.

It might be useful to look at the medic and vet data as the courses these students took were similar to biology NST subjects, plus all students took the same subjects for Part IA and IB.

Mentorship was an opportunity to look at how general study skills could be encouraged and focussed on, framing of University life and ensuring emotional wellbeing. Mentorship would necessarily be flexible depending on the student and their individual background, circumstances and needs.

Dr Holly Canuto joined the meeting.

The University collected a large amount of data on the background of its students but it was very hard to access this. In particular for SpLDs many students were diagnosed fairly late in their University career, and it was not possible to identify which students were affected by this currently.

943. MATTERS ARISING

943.1. Admissions (922.2)

A draft paper regarding a requirement for A level mathematics had been sent to Cambridge Admissions Office. The proposal was that normally A level mathematics would be expected, but that exceptions were possible. The colleges had tried to steer a compromise course to accommodate those departments who did not want a requirement for A level mathematics.

The proposal would be circulated to the Committee once it had been finalised along with the accompanying data.

944. DIGITAL TEACHING AND EXAMINATIONS

In Dr Scadden's absence it was reported that several debriefing sessions had been held with examiners to discuss the Inspira online examination system. Feedback from students was also being collected. The feedback was generally positive, any further feedback should be sent to Dr Scadden, Dr Fraser, Dr Weil or Dr Kilkenny. Further meetings with Examiners were scheduled over the long vacation.

A decision about whether to make the examinations open or closed book would be made next week, although this was a decision discrete from Inspira considerations. Course Organisers would make the decision, but there was a desire for consistency across NST biology subjects. Any decision would not be imposed by the University Centre, but was for the Faculty of Biology to agree. Some Part I subjects wanted to be closed book, but the situation for Part II was more complex. It was clarified that 24 hour examinations were not under consideration and would not be used.

945. SHARED COURSE ROTATIONS

A proposal for distributing Course Organiser and Examiner responsibilities for NST biology courses shared across departments was circulated as **BSC.22.08**. The rota had been put together bearing six principles in mind. Although discussion was welcome there was a pressing need to have the new rotation approved and published as soon as possible so departments could start planning for the next academic year.

The rota had been put together with a five year limit to accommodate any changes arising from the review. PDN was noted as having many shared courses where sabbaticals could sometimes disrupt rotas. Flexibility would be needed in response to various unforeseen departmental pressures.

Heads of Departments would need to enforce compliance with the rota and lead any negotiations for changes/swaps to responsibilities.

The Committee agreed to the adoption of the new rota, pending approval by the Faculty Board.

ACTION: secretary to forward to Faculty Board for approval.

946. CHAIRS OF EXAMINERS FOR NST PART IB/II/III

The NST Management Committee had recently agreed that the role of Chair of Examiners at that time responsible for Part IB, Part II and Part III examinations be split into two roles. One of these would have responsibility for Part IB examinations only, the other for Part II and Part III examinations.

The NST Management Committee proposed a rota for the new Chairs; this was circulated as **BSC.22.09a**. A consultation document was circulated as **BSC.22.09b** along with data on departmental responsibilities for the role as NST Chair of Examiners from 2002-2021 (**BSC.22.09c**).

These documents were circulated to departments on 25 May and responses to the consultation requested by 5 July.

The Committee were happy with the general principles of the proposal. It would remain for individual departments to liaise with the NST Management Committee if they wanted to put a case together for alterations. In particular the Committee supported Pharmacology's request to swap their assigned role for another year.

ACTION: Pharmacology to liaise with NST Management Committee to negotiate their turn on the rota.

947. PART IB AND PART II SUBJECTS FAIR

Feedback had been sought after the NST Part IB and Part II subjects fairs on 17 and 18 March. A summary of the feedback was circulated as **BSC.22.10**. The Committee noted that the feedback was generally positive.

948. PART II BBS

948.1. Student Consultative Committee

A meeting had been held on 22 June, notes from the meeting are circulated as **BSC.22.11**; the BBS Course Organiser will report. Students felt that the timing of the Part II papers was not ideal (starting at 11am ending at 4pm) as this meant there was no lunch break which could be an issue for candidates with particular dietary requirements or candidates with other health issues. An earlier start might alleviate this. The Committee noted that the current format was for a three hour examination taken in a five hour window.

949. UNIVERSITY OPEN DAYS

The University open day were run 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 which was staffed by academics from different departments across the two days. Academics were

encouraged to attend even if only for an hour or so – it was expected to be very busy with members of the public.

950. NST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes for a meeting held on 15 March 2022 were circulated as **BSC.22.12** and noted.

951. PNB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

There was a meeting of the PNB Management Committee on 29 April 2022; draft minutes were circulated as **BSC.22.13**. Several retirements in the Departments of Psychology and PDN would force changes to be made to the subject. It was unlikely that the people leaving could be replaced directly.

It was requested that the PNB Management Committee provide information on their plans for the next meeting.

ACTION: secretary to seek information from the PNB Management Committee.

952. DOBS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

There was no significant business to report from meetings of the DoBS Committee.

953. A.O.B.

There was none.

954. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

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

2pm on Wednesday 12 October 2022.

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.

RESERVED AGENDA

For the information of student members of the Committee a reserved agenda will be discussed after the open agenda has concluded.